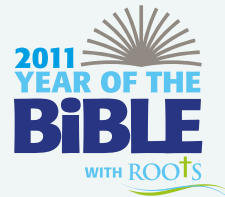


Bible heroes and villains

Flexible ideas to open up Bible characters



Introduction

The Bible is full of stories of ordinary people who became heroes by trusting and following God. The small boy who killed a mighty giant and went on to rule a nation, the young woman who saved a nation by risking her own neck, the young man who defeated a whole army with just a few men. The young leader who followed in his master's footsteps, the woman who was willing to go to extraordinary lengths in obedience, the zealous Pharisee whose life was turned around when he encountered Jesus.

We offer here a set of sessions in which we will look at their stories, and explore what we can learn from them. In this issue we look at some of the heroes of the Bible and in the next issue, for July and August, we cover some of the villains! You might use all these ideas to create a holiday club, or for a weekly club, or use two or three sessions to cover a full day, or do all the sessions over a weekend away for example.

Each of their stories can give us an insight into how God can use us, and inspire us to become heroes in our own small way. And of course we can look to the ultimate hero, Jesus, who came to save us and to help us become the heroes of faith that God calls us to be. The focus of the sessions is on how we can follow the example of these ordinary people who did extraordinary things, and what their stories can teach us about our relationship with God.

Bible heroes

In this issue we are going to take a look at **Joshua** (Joshua 5.13–6.20), **Gideon** (Judges 6–8), **David** (1 Samuel 17.1–50), **Esther** (Esther 4), **Mary** mother of Jesus (Luke 1.26–38) and **Saul/Paul** (Acts 9.1–18). These six characters are very different – old and young, male and female, from different walks of life, yet they share a common bond in their relationship with God that transforms them from ordinary people to heroes of faith. With each character you might follow a similar format.

Prepare the space

Display pictures of heroes the group will be familiar with – superheroes such as Spiderman and Superman, or heroes from film and TV like Dr Who, Ben 10 or The Incredibles. Pictures can easily be found by doing an internet search or looking at children's magazines. Over the course of the week the children could collect or draw pictures of heroes to add to the display. Alongside the well-known heroes, display pictures of the characters from each session. During each session the children could help to compile a profile of the character – their strengths and weaknesses, their relationship with God, how they became heroes.

The *Lion Storyteller Bible* has some great retellings of many of the stories and it might be worth your while getting hold of a copy – if you don't already have it, why not order it at a local library?

Gathering activities

Begin each session with this simple activity.

You will need: slips of card naming a superhero.

- Beforehand, prepare the cards with names of superheroes, ensuring you have enough cards for the numbers who may attend. The superheroes listed might be: Spiderman, Superman, Marvelgirl, Batman, Buzz Lightyear.
- Give each person a slip with their hero name and ask them to remember who they are.
- Explain that when they hear their hero name they should stand up, adopt a superhero pose and shout out their hero name. They might be asked to sing a superhero theme tune.
- Call out each of the hero names randomly. You might give prizes for the best pose, for example.

Prayer

Start or end each session with a time of worship, sing a couple of songs and pray together. Some suggestions for songs are below, along with a prayer to end with. At the end of the session, this worship time could be a chance for the children to talk about what they have learnt from the story, and what you can all learn from the example of the person whose story you have read.

For the times when we have been less than heroic,
Lord we are sorry.

For the times we have not used our hero talents,
Lord we are sorry.

Give us the courage not to hide our potential
but to be generous,

not to dismiss others but to celebrate their gifts.

Encourage us to follow the example of ____ and have a go at being heroes.

Amen.

Songs

Jesus is my Superhero (recorded on *Hillsong Live Worship for Kids* – Jesus is my superhero),

Our God is a great big God

Superhero (recorded on *The Kids Colossal Jumbo Songbook*, Spring Harvest)

Flexibility

The Heroes resources are offered in A5 format to enable easy printing and use of the material.

Joshua – in his master's footsteps

Gather

Display some pictures of the walled city of Jericho, or images of other walls (an internet search for 'walled city of Jericho' will give you plenty).

Introduce the theme

Ask the group who teaches them how to live. Who do they live up to? Who do they want to be like?

Gathering activity

Play a game of Follow the leader.

Open the Word

- Read Joshua 5. 13–6.20. There is a great version in the *Lion Storyteller Bible*.
- You might introduce Joshua as Moses' right-hand man. Joshua had a good role model of leadership in Moses, and when he became leader he followed the example Moses had set, always listening to and obeying God's word.

■ Ask the group to identify the ritual they followed. The army marched around the walls while the priests carried round the ark and trumpets. On the seventh day the priests blew the trumpets and all the people shouted. The walls fell and they took the city easily.

Respond

Blow it!

Make trumpets like those the *priests blew*.

You will need: coloured card; sticky tape; pens; stickers.

■ Give each person a sheet of card and invite them to roll it into a cone and tape it closed to form a trumpet. They could decorate it.

■ Invite the group to walk around the room blowing the trumpets and shouting.

In his footsteps

Painted footsteps to remind us to follow the right path

You will need: shallow trays containing washable paint (those designed for finger painting are ideal), sheets of paper, wet wipes.

■ Lay a large piece of paper on the floor, and put some paint in large shallow trays.

■ Invite people to take off their shoes and socks and walk through the trays, then along the piece of paper, leaving their footprints, all following in the same direction.

■ If you have space and enough paper they could walk in a circle as the Israelites did around the city walls.

■ You will need a leader at the beginning to set people off on the paper and one at the end ready with wet wipes to clean up when they have walked!

■ When all have walked across (and washed their feet!) stand around the footprints and pray together, asking God to help you follow him however hard it might be.

End with the closing prayer from page 6.

Gideon – strength from God in weakness

Gather

Collect items from the story to display – jars, swords, torches.

Introduce the theme

Ask the group to think about times when they have felt weak, or frightened or overwhelmed.

Gathering activity

Set up some tasks that you would normally need two hands to do – tying shoelaces, wrapping a present, peeling a banana. Tell the group that they have to do the tasks with one hand behind their backs. After they have struggled for a while, suggest that they try working together. Talk about how it feels to face a task that seems impossible.

Open the Word

■ Read Joshua 6. There's a good telling of the story of Gideon in the *Lion Storyteller Bible*.

■ Introduce Gideon, who tried to hide from God when he was told he would be a mighty warrior who would fight the Midianites.

God wanted the Israelites to realise that it was his power not theirs that would lead them to freedom and seemed set on making Gideon and his 'army' as weak as possible, sending most of the men home and leaving just 300, with no weapons.

Gideon had the men blow trumpets and light torches in empty jars that they smashed so that the noise and light would confuse the Midianites.

Gideon and his mini-army were able to defeat the Midianites and bring glory to God.

Respond

Shine a light!

Make jars for the light.

You will need: glass tealight holders and glass-painting pens; tealight for each person.

■ Invite people to decorate a tealight holder. They should think about the need for the light to shine from the jar. While they are making their holders, talk about why the army broke their jars. What effect did it have? How do you think Gideon's men felt before and after the attack on the Midianites?

Build a bridge

A bridge-building competition.

You will need: art straws; scissors; sticky tape.

■ Divide the group into teams, giving each team the same amounts of straws and sticky tape.

■ The teams have to build a bridge that will span a given gap and be as strong as possible, within a time limit.

■ The art straws are not particularly strong, and one straw can't bear much weight. But when you build them together into a structure, they can be very strong. Gideon on his own was weak, but God gave him strength to do the job he was called to.

End with the closing prayer from page 6.

David – who are you calling ‘shorty’?

Gather

Display some pictures or models of sheep, some small stones and a slingshot if you can.

Introduce the theme

David was overlooked because he was only the youngest son, insignificant in the family. Ask the group whether they have ever been told they were too young or too small to do something?

Gathering activity

Divide the group into teams, and give each team a pile of junk modelling items such as empty milk cartons, cardboard tubes, cereal packets, egg boxes; sticky tape and scissors. Give a time limit in which they should build the biggest, scariest giant they can from their pile of junk.

Open the Word

- Read 1 Samuel 17.1-50. You can find a retelling in the *Lion Storyteller Bible* or many children’s Bibles will have a simple version.
- God sent Samuel to anoint one of Jesse’s sons but David was overlooked because he was the youngest. When David goes to King Saul and says he will fight Goliath, Saul tells him he can’t because he’s only a boy, David can do more than anyone thinks possible. David knows that even though he is young and small, he is going in the name of God and doesn’t need to be afraid.

Respond

Baaa

Make cardboard sheep.

You will need: cardboard tubes; cotton wool; glue; pipe cleaners; sticky tac; black paper; white chalk or correction fluid.

- Invite each person in the group to make a sheep using the cardboard tubes for the body, covered in cotton wool. Use the pipe cleaners to form legs and the sticky tac to create feet to help their sheep stand up. The black paper can be cut to create a face, with features marked on using the white chalk or correction fluid.

- As they are making their sheep, ask the children to think about why David was unimportant and what a difference he made: he was just the young boy who was only good for looking after sheep.

Bounding

Watch a film.

You will need: a copy of *Bounding*. This is a Pixar film available on YouTube or as a download from i-tunes.

- The sheep in the story thinks his importance comes from his fine coat of fluffy wool. When he loses his fleece it takes an outsider to help him see that his gifts are within.

- Even though on the outside David was too small to deal with Goliath, he had a giant’s courage. David must have been afraid when he first saw the giant. Sometimes there are things we face that frighten us, but we can face anything if we have God with us, just like David.

End with the closing prayer from page 6.

Esther – brave and true

Gather

Display pictures of local schools, shops, town centre, and so on.

Introduce the theme

Esther found herself in a place she wasn’t expecting, but found an opportunity to serve God.

Gathering game

- Divide the group into pairs and give each pair a blindfold. People take turns to be blindfolded and led around the room by their partner.
- With young children, it might be better for an adult to do the leading.

- After everyone’s had a go, talk about how it feels to trust someone else for your safety. Esther trusted God for her safety, even though she was doing something very risky.

Open the Word

The story of how Esther risked her neck to save the Jews is spread over the book of Esther, so it would be easier to read from a story book or a children’s Bible to get the whole story. There is a dramatic poem version on the [WEB](#).

Esther took a massive risk. The king could have her killed for daring to speak out of turn, simply being queen wouldn’t save her. But Esther trusted God and her relationship with God is central to the action. Esther put her faith in God and not her position in life.

Respond

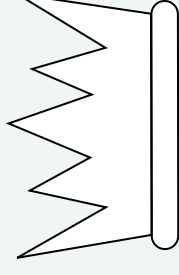
A royal event

Make crowns.

You will need: gold card and lots of jewels; feathers to stick on; stapler

- Cut out crown shapes from the card and invite the group to create their own crown. Use the jewels and feathers to decorate their creations. Help each child to secure their crown using the stapler.

- While they are making their crowns talk about what Esther did. How might she have felt when she went to the king? Why did she go? Would we have been as brave?



Personal call

Create a poster reminder of the different callings to serve.

You will need: a large sheet of paper; ink pads.

- Write ‘we can serve God in different ways’ across the paper.
- Invite people to press their fingers on the ink pad and then make their fingerprints on the piece of paper.
- Spend some time looking at the prints. They are all different. No two fingerprints are ever the same. Esther was called to serve God in a very specific situation, and we will all be called to serve in different ways, we just have to choose to say yes.

End with the closing prayer from page 6.

Mary – whatever you say

Gather

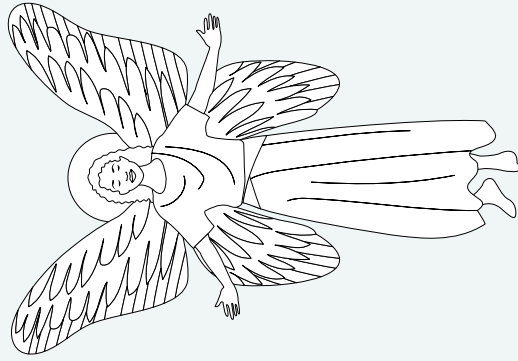
Collect and display nativity sets and pictures, and baby things such as nappies, a baby's bottle.

Introduce the theme

Mary was obedient even though God asked a lot of her.

Gathering activity

Invite the group to talk about all the things that a new baby needs, and pack up a bag of things you need. Talk about the difference a new baby makes. Maybe some of the children have baby siblings, or you might know someone with a small baby who would come and talk about what a big job it is to care for a baby.



Open the Word

- Read Luke 1.26-38, the story of the angel coming to Mary.
- Mary was a young woman with a good life. Mary was willing to be obedient, although it seemed God was asking a lot.

Respond

Get the message?

Play a game of *whispered messages*.

- Invite the group to sit in a circle.
- A leader should whisper a message to the person next to them, who then whispers it to the person next to them, and so on around the group.
- Do the messages get around unaltered, or do they get changed? To play the game well, you have to listen really carefully. We need to listen out for God's messages; we might not get visited by an angel when God wants to tell us something.

A special message

Make *clothes peg angels*.

- You will need:** old-fashioned style clothes pins, which look like a person with a head and legs; shiny paper or coloured cloth; wool; paper doilies; scissors; glue.
- To make an angel, the shiny paper or cloth should be wrapped around the 'body' of the peg. The wool or thread can be used to form hair and the doilies cut and stuck on to form wings.
 - As they are making their angels, talk with the group about how frightening the angel's visit might have been for Mary, and what she must have thought and felt.

Paul – Total turnaround

Gather

Have pictures and maps of the road to Damascus and the journey Saul was on. You could also have maps of Paul's missionary journeys.

Introduce the theme

Ask the group to think about times when they have changed their mind. What makes you change your mind?

Gathering activity

Play *sharks*.

- Put a mat or parachute in the middle of the room to be an island.
- The group are in the sea around the island, and move around in the style of whatever sea creature you call out – fish, crab, octopus, etc.
- When you call 'tide turns' they must change direction. When you call 'sharks' they have to get on the island quickly. The last on the island is out.
- People could also be out for not changing direction quickly enough.

Open the Word

- Read Acts 9.1-18, which tells of Saul's dramatic turnaround.
- Saul was destroying the early Christian Church, but God stopped him in his tracks, and his life was never the same again. Paul became the first large-scale missionary, carrying the gospel across the empire to Jews and gentiles alike. We too

can have our lives turned around when we meet Jesus, and channel our efforts into serving God rather than fighting against him.

Respond

Get the message out

Make *model boats*.

You will need: paper; card; plastic tubs and boxes; sticky tape; a bowl of water.

- Invite the group to make collective or individual boats using the items provided. Explain that their boat should be 'seaworthy'.
- Once all have completed their task (give them a time limit) have a competition to see who has made the most seaworthy craft by floating them in a bowl of water.
- Explain that Paul's new relationship with God took him all over the empire spreading the gospel. When we follow God we don't know where we will end up.

Journeying

You will need: a large sheet of paper (lining paper would be ideal); A5 sheets of paper; pens; scissors.

- Beforehand, draw a road along the sheet of paper, to represent the road to Damascus.
- Invite the group to draw or cut out pictures of themselves walking.
- On the sheet of paper write 'Help us to keep walking in the right direction'.
- Invite group members to stick their self-portrait onto the paper and pray together that God will help you walk in the direction he wants.

End with the closing prayer from page 6.