

Semicontinuous
1 Sam. 8:4–11,
16–20
Ps. 138

Complementary
Gen. 3:8–15
Ps. 130
2 Cor. 4:13–5:1
Mark 3:20–35

All Are Welcome

Goal for the Session

Children will join the crowd around Jesus and celebrate that they are welcomed as Jesus' family.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 3:20–35

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Judith Hoch Wray

Jesus’ family serves as a literary tool to introduce several key themes. The antecedent of the pronoun translated as “people” (v. 21) in the NRSV is unclear, and probably indicates Jesus’ family as the ones who were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” “Out of his mind” is literally, “he has stood outside.” (Compare today’s idiom, “he is really out of it,” or the RSV “beside himself.”) The question of who is *outside* arises again and again. In verse 31 the family is standing outside, in contrast to their saying in verse 21 that he “has gone outside,” that is, out of his mind.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Wendy Farley

If we transpose this theological vision into our own time, instead of lepers and demoniacs crowding around Jesus, we might see the strange bodies of the disabled. The only ones not in the picture, the ones not pressing in at the doors and windows, desperate and aching to be near Jesus, are the ones who think they know what religion and family life is supposed to look like. Jesus, infinitely patient with the crowd, blasts away at these people. Everyone will be forgiven, except people who blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The inability to tell the difference between the power of the Holy Spirit and the demonic is an *unforgivable sin*.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Don E. Saliers

For us, however, the issue is how we now understand the relationship between discipleship and Christology. More than simply “understand” intellectually, it seems crucial for the churches today to seek to live out that understanding. Living out the form of discipleship Christ bids us follow means a new solidarity with all of humanity. It requires that we learn with him to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. It asks us to live into the densities of human joy and suffering. It calls us to find ourselves precisely in our willingness to give up our self-absorption. This is a demanding task, requiring a willingness to follow him into a new solidarity with God’s whole family.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Nibs Stroupe

We should look for the reality signified by the name “Satan.” Satan does not necessarily mean a personality with horns and a red tail, but it does name a demonic power that is actively engaged against the compassionate and reconciling love of God. This is the reality that Jesus names here, and whether we believe in a person named “Satan” is not as important as hearing about our captivity to the powers of evil signified by “Satan,” powers that continue to seek our allegiance.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 3:20–35

YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth
- Christ candle, matches
- offering basket
- Bible
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 27, 31
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- Resource Sheet 1
- heavy cardboard or clear adhesive plastic
- construction paper
- pencils
- scissors
- sticky notes
- pen

For Responding

- option 2: sturdy white paper plates; stapler; jingle bells; hole punch; self-adhesive stickers; pens; crayons; scissors; narrow ribbon; Color Pack 32; *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock, scissors, markers, thread, hole punch, small branch, container, sand, basket
- option 4: paper hearts, pens, markers, small stickers

Focus on Your Teaching

Children want to feel welcomed and know that they are accepted just as they are. Therefore, it is vital that the children experience a warm welcome from their church family each week. You can help by intentionally welcoming each learner as a valued member of the group. Addressing the children by name, asking about their week, making eye contact, and giving them your full attention when they speak all help to convey the message that you value their presence and are glad they came.

Jesus, thank you that I am welcomed into your family. As I prepare to receive the children in your name, help me to open my heart and convey your love. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, mount Color Pack 2 on heavy cardboard or cover it with clear adhesive plastic for use in each session. For option 3 in Responding, fill a container with sand and insert the tree branch.

Invite the first children to arrive to arrange the green cloth, Christ candle, offering basket, and Bible on the worship table. Display Color Pack 2 nearby. Welcome the children by name and ask about their week. Help them trace around one foot on construction paper, cut it out, print their name on it, and decorate as desired.

When it is time to begin, gather children around the worship table. Ask a volunteer to light the candle. Have the children, in turn, say their names and place their footprints on the worship table. Sing the first stanza of “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 27; track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021).

Receive the offering and pray:

God of stories, thank you for bringing us together to hear the stories of Jesus. Teach us to follow in his way and bring your love to the world. Amen.

Point to the green cloth on the worship table. Explain that this signifies the season of Ordinary Time following Pentecost, a time when the church concentrates on learning how to follow Jesus. Show Color Pack 1 and invite a volunteer to read the word. Ask:

- ✠ What does the word *welcome* mean to you?
- ✠ How does it feel to be welcomed?

Comment that in today’s Bible story Jesus helps some people feel welcome.

God, We Sing

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of hope
anew;
Light this candle, light the
way,
Bring hope into our hearts
today.
Jesus, near us as we pray,
Let hope be in our hearts
today.

When telling the story,
maintain eye contact
with children as much
as possible. Use your
voice, facial expressions,
and body movements
to make the story come
alive.

EXPLORING

Ask a volunteer to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and open it to the Gospel of Mark. Explain that for the next few weeks the stories will come from the Gospel of Mark. Many people think that this author was the first person to write down stories about Jesus. Note that this gospel tells the story of Jesus and his disciples as they slowly make their way through the countryside toward Jerusalem. Show Color Pack 2 and observe that this is how one artist imagined Jesus. Ask:

✪ What do you think Jesus is saying?

Accept all answers and, if no one else says it, suggest that he might be saying, “Come and follow me.” Invite the group to use its imagination to join Jesus and his disciples on their travels. Turn to Mark 3:20 and place the Bible next to Color Pack 2. Tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (A Crowded House). Ask:

✪ Why did so many people want to be with Jesus?

Show Color Pack 3 and invite children to imagine that these people are in the crowd around Jesus. Ask:

✪ How did Jesus help them to feel welcome?

✪ What might they be saying to each other?

✪ Who is welcomed to Jesus’ family?

Play “Celebration Music” (track 24 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) and invite the children to dance around the learning area. Pause the music and have everyone say the phrase, “Jesus welcomes you” and shake hands with as many people as possible before the music starts again. Repeat until the music has ended. Gather in a circle and say, “We are all welcomed by Jesus.” Celebrate with a group high five.

Invite children to name some people that Jesus welcomes. Print their suggestions on sticky notes and place them around the edge of Color Pack 3. Ensure that every child is named. Ask:

✪ How does it feel to know Jesus welcomes you?

✪ How might we celebrate?

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

1. Game Freeze Tag In this active game children will affirm and welcome each other in Jesus’ name. Choose someone as “It.” The rest of the group scatters around the game area. On your signal, It chases them. Players who are tagged must stand still until another player touches them and says, “(Name), Jesus welcomes you.” After playing for several minutes, choose another It.

EASY
PREP

Give Me Joy in My Heart

Give me joy in my heart,
keep me singing,
Give me joy in my heart,
I pray—hallelujah!
Give me joy in my heart,
keep me singing,
Keep me singing till the
break of day.

Sing hosanna, sing
hosanna, sing hosanna
to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna, sing
hosanna, sing hosanna
to the king.

Repeat three times

These names might include characters from the children's favorite Bible stories, people they know at church, as well as family members and friends.

This Is My Commandment

This is my commandment
that you love one
another,
That your joy may be full.

This is my commandment
that you love one
another,
That your joy may be full.

That your joy may be full,
That your joy may be full.

This is my commandment
that you love one
another,
That your joy may be full.

Repeat

- 2. Tambourine** Children will celebrate with joyful music. Staple two paper plates together, tops facing each other. Before you finish stapling, slip a few jingle bells inside. Punch holes around the edges of plates. Help children thread lengths of ribbon through the holes. Print "Jesus welcomes me" on one side of tambourine. Decorate the other side with self-adhesive stickers and bright colors. Play "Give Me Joy in My Heart" (Color Pack 32; track 5 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*) and encourage children to sing and accompany the song with their tambourines.
- 3. Welcome Tree** Children will be affirmed that Jesus welcomes them by making a welcome tree. Give each child two figures and a heart from Resource Sheet 2 (Family Tree). Invite children to print their name on one figure and decorate as desired. Punch a hole at the top of each figure and hang them on the tree. Ask: Who else does Jesus welcome? Label the other figures and hearts with these names, decorate, and add to the tree. Display the tree where others will see it. Leave a basket of prepared figures and hearts with an invitation for others to add their names. For younger children, cut out the figures and hearts in advance.
- 4. Surprise Messages** Children will celebrate that Jesus welcomes them by spreading that message throughout the church. Distribute colored heart shapes, markers, and stickers. Help children print "Jesus Welcomes You" on the hearts and decorate them. Reserve one heart for each child. Recruit volunteers to help you place the rest of the messages in prayer books or hymnals as a surprise the next time the congregation gathers. Mail a heart to each child during the week.

CLOSING

Gather children around the worship table and light the candle.

Sing "This Is My Commandment" (Color Pack 31; track 20 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*).

Pray:

Loving God, thank you for stories that help us to learn about you, about Jesus, and about what it means to be his follower. Help us as we go out to show your love in the world. Amen.

Close with a circle blessing. In turn, each one will turn to the person on her or his right and say: "(Name), remember that you are important to Jesus and to us." The person will respond, "Amen."

Have a quick word with each child as she or he leaves. Thank them for coming and affirm positive contributions. Remind them that you will be praying for them throughout the coming week. Save the children's footprints to use in future sessions.

June 6, 2021
All Are Welcome

Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 1

A Crowded House based on Mark 3:20-35

Large crowds followed Jesus as he walked through the countryside. They heard that he was healing those who were sick and telling amazing stories about God's love. People came from far and wide just to catch a glimpse of him.

One day Jesus went into a house. As usual, people gathered. Even Jewish leaders from Jerusalem, experts in the Law, who weren't sure they liked what Jesus was teaching, came. Everyone wanted to be inside where Jesus was. They squeezed and pushed until there was not an inch of space left.

Jesus began to teach about the Holy Spirit and God's forgiveness. He talked about good and evil. He told stories to help people understand who he was.

While Jesus was teaching, his family arrived. They wanted to see Jesus, but they couldn't get inside the house. They called, "Jesus! Where are you? Come out and talk to us."

It was no use. There were too many people and Jesus couldn't hear them. They sent a messenger inside to tell Jesus that his family was outside. The messenger pushed through the crowd until he stood before Jesus.

"Jesus," he gasped. "Your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside. They want to speak with you."

Jesus looked at the people crowded into the room and those who were looking in the windows. Many of them wanted to hear and see him and know that he welcomed them.

"Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Jesus asked. He pointed to the people squished around him and said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers and my sisters. Whoever follows in God's loving ways is my brother, sister, and mother."

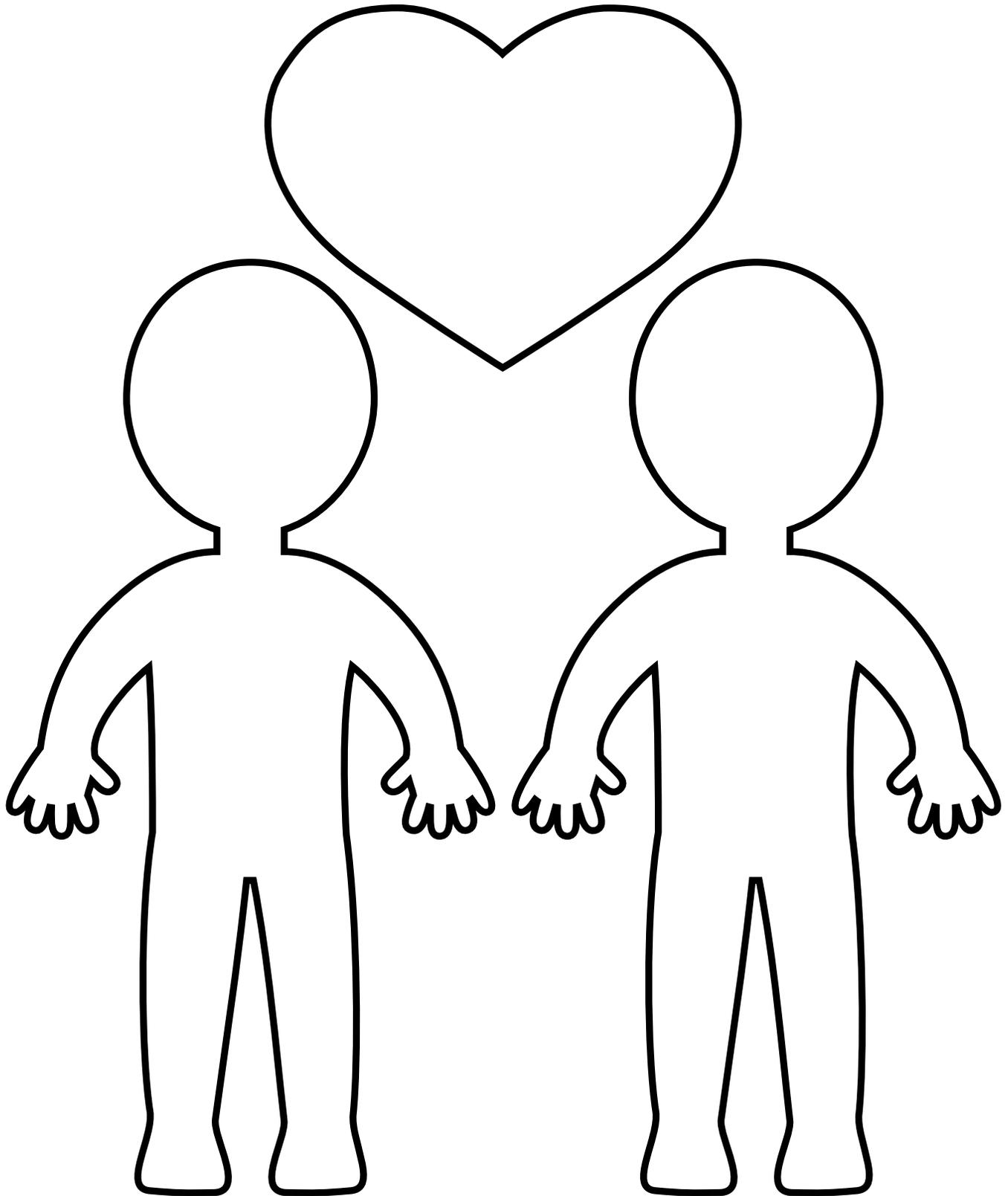
This story is found in the third chapter of the Gospel of Mark, early in the story of Jesus. Right from the start, Jesus wanted people to know something important: Everyone was welcome. Everyone belonged. They were all part of his family. They were all God's children.



June 6, 2021
All Are Welcome

Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 2

Family Tree



Semicontinuous
1 Sam. 8:4–11,
16–20
Ps. 138

Complementary
Gen. 3:8–15
Ps. 130
2 Cor. 4:13–5:1
Mark 3:20–35

The Cost of Discipleship

Goal for the Session Youth will examine the tensions faith can sometimes bring to families and explore ways to respond in such situations.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

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FOCUS SCRIPTURE
Mark 3:20–35

Focus on Your Teaching

“My parents just don’t understand” is a common refrain among young people. As they assert their independence teenagers may feel constrained by family expectations. Even the Scriptures suggest that Jesus’ relationship with his mother and family was strained at times. In this week’s reading, Jesus redefines the criteria for those who constitute his “true family,” one not defined by blood relations, but by doing the will of God. Teens are still exploring what it means to do the will of God and they are learning that sometimes making choices in the life of discipleship can create tension within families.

Reconciling Spirit, may my words reflect your love and create a supportive environment for the young people in my care. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- scissors
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- bag or basket
- bowl
- stones
- permanent marker or paint pen

For Responding

- option 1: question squares from Resource Sheet 2, one die
- option 2: half-sized sheets of poster board, used magazines, scissors, glue sticks
- option 3: invited guest; option: copies of Resource Sheet 1

For Film Connection

- trailer for *The Way* (2011), Internet access

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, gather stones and print “courage” on them. Place the stones in a bowl. Cut apart the scenarios on Resource Sheet 2 (Family Matters) and place in a bag or basket. If you choose option 3 in Responding, invite a member of the congregation who has experienced tension within his or her family because of a faith commitment to speak with the group.

Welcome group members and invite them to form two teams of equal size. Explain that one team will be the “teens,” asking for their curfews to be extended. The other team will be the “parents,” explaining why the curfew time cannot change. Allow a few minutes for each team to think of persuasive arguments for its case, and then present a role play, with one or more people from each team participating. When the role play has ended, ask:

✠ What does it feel like when there is tension between parents and teens?

Invite group members to name other things that can cause tension or disagreement between family members. Explain that in this week’s Bible reading tension develops between Jesus and his family. Pray:

O God, be with us as we consider your word for us today. Amen.

EXPLORING

Distribute Bibles and help youth find Mark 3:20–35. Explain that just before this section, Jesus had left the crowds behind to go up into the mountains with his followers. There he chose twelve to be his apostles to travel with him, giving them the authority to preach and to cast out evil spirits. Ask a volunteer to read Mark 3:20. The last half of verse 19 states that “[Jesus] went home,” probably meaning that he went to the house of friends or relatives.

Ask:

✠ What happens when Jesus returns home?

✠ Why do you think the crowd interrupted Jesus’ evening meal? What did they want?

The scribes were secular officials who functioned like lawyers and were the ones who made copies of the Torah. Later they came to have religious standing and were associated with the Pharisees.

Ask another volunteer to read Mark 3:21. In *The Message*, a paraphrase of the Bible, the last part of this verse reads: “They suspected he was getting carried away with himself.” Ask:

✧ What clues did the family have that would lead them to think that Jesus had gone “out of his mind” or was “getting carried away with himself”?

After his family commented on his behavior, another group came to tackle Jesus and his teachings. Review the information about scribes in the sidebar. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Satan Fighting Satan?) and invite volunteers to read aloud the paraphrase of Mark 3:22–30. Ask:

✧ How did the religious leaders react to Jesus’ popularity?

Explain that there were probably a number of reasons why the scribes didn’t like what Jesus was doing. They wanted to label him and discredit what he did so that people wouldn’t take him seriously. Ask:

✧ How do you think Jesus’ response to the scribes confirms or disproves their suspicions?

One of the features of Mark’s Gospel is the use of the *inclusio*, a literary device that uses a “sandwich” technique, framing one story within another, using the same or similar words, phrases, or themes at the beginning and the end. This technique intends that each of the two stories enrich the understanding of the other.

Point out the two scenes described in the reading: it begins with an encounter between Jesus and his family (20–21), moves into a story about Jesus and the religious scholars (22–30), and then returns to finish the story of Jesus’ encounter with his family. Read Mark 3:31–35. Explain that respect for family in these times was essential and it was important that Jesus’ behavior didn’t bring dishonor to the family name. Jesus’ response to his family’s request would have seemed shocking. Ask:

✧ How does Jesus redefine the term *family*?

✧ Why do you think he said that the people listening to him were his family?

✧ What does it mean to do “the will of God”?

Distribute the scenario strips from Resource Sheet 2 (Family Matters). Take turns reading the scenarios aloud and discussing the tensions between teens’ desires and the parents’ concerns.

Explain that, just as Jesus found, there may be times when youth might feel a commitment to follow God in a way that their parents and friends won’t understand. Ask:

✧ Where could you find support during these times?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

- 1. Question Path** Youth will explore some of the tensions of living faithfully as followers of Jesus Christ by reflecting on questions together. Place the question squares from Resource Sheet 2 (Family Matters) in different places around the meeting space. Invite youth to walk around, look at the questions in silence, and reflect on how they might answer each one. Then take turns rolling a die; when a 1, 2, 3, or 4 is rolled, invite the group to offer a response to that numbered question. Continue until the questions have each been discussed one or more times.

EASY
PREP

- 2. Family Collages** Youth will examine some tensions their faith might cause in their families and explore ways the church family can offer support. Provide sheets of poster board and used magazines. Have youth divide their papers in half diagonally and tear out magazine pictures representing their families (parents, siblings, other relatives) to collage on one half and words or phrases representing tensions that might be caused by their choices to live in God's way. On the other half, have them collage images to represent their church family and words or phrases representing ways the church can offer support during times of tension. Compare collages and talk about the ways in which the youth group could provide a safe family of support.
- 3. Guest Interview** Youth will hear a story of a time when faith caused tension within a family. Introduce your guest and invite him or her to talk about a time when faith caused tensions within the family and how she or he responded. Encourage youth to ask questions to clarify or learn more about what happened.

Youth can formulate their own questions or use the ones offered on the bottom of Resource Sheet 1 (Satan Fighting Satan?).

CLOSING

Gather in a circle around the bowl of "courage stones." Invite them to each take a stone and sit quietly holding their stones and reflecting on these words: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister. This group is my family. Thank you, God."

Then lead the group in the following blessing, inviting them to repeat each line after you:

*May the hope of God surround us,
the love of God hold us close,
the power of God protect us,
the presence of God watch over us,
and the Spirit of God live in us. Amen.*

■ ENHANCEMENT

FILM CONNECTION

In the movie *The Way*, a father goes to Spain, where his estranged son had died on the first day of a pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago. While Tom had not understood his son Daniel's commitment to this faith pilgrimage, he decides to complete the walk in memory of his son. Along the way, he meets three fellow pilgrims, each carrying their own burdens, and they become a community of support for one another. Search YouTube for "The Way - Movie Trailer (2011) HD" to watch the trailer for the movie and discuss these questions together:

- ✠ How does Daniel try to explain his reason for doing the pilgrimage?
- ✠ What tensions does this seem to cause between Daniel and his father?
- ✠ Why do you think Tom decided to take the pilgrimage himself?

Satan Fighting Satan?

Mark 3:22-30, *The Message*

The religion scholars from Jerusalem came down spreading rumors that Jesus was working black magic, using devil tricks to impress them with spiritual power. Jesus confronted their slander with a story: “Does it make sense to send a devil to catch a devil, to use Satan to get rid of Satan? A constantly squabbling family disintegrates. If Satan were fighting Satan, there soon wouldn’t be any Satan left. Do you think it’s possible in broad daylight to enter the house of an awake, able-bodied man, and walk off with his possessions unless you tie him up first? Tie him up, though, and you can clean him out.

“Listen to this carefully. I’m warning you. There’s nothing done or said that can’t be forgiven. But if you persist in your slanders against God’s Holy Spirit, you are repudiating the very One who forgives, sawing off the branch on which you’re sitting, severing by your own perversity all connection with the One who forgives.” He gave this warning because they were accusing him of being in league with Evil.

Scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.



Interview questions:

- How did you feel about this situation at the time?
- How do you feel about it now as you look back on that time?
- Why do you think it is important to be faithful, even when it creates problems within families?
- What advice do you have for us?

Family Matters

You want to go on a mission trip with your church youth group; your parents want you to go to an important sports camp instead.

You want to attend a different church with a friend; your parents refuse because they are fearful that you'll like the other church better than theirs.

You want to take a year off between high school and college to serve on a mission team; your parents want you to start college right away.

You want to visit a very ill friend in the hospital; your parents are afraid it will be too dangerous for you.

1

What is one question you would like to ask Jesus about family relationships?

2

Why do you think doing something good can sometimes cause tension between you and your parents?

3

“Being a brother or sister (a follower) of Jesus Christ is hard work.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?

4

“There’s nothing done or said that can’t be forgiven.” (Mark 3:28, *The Message*) Do you agree or disagree? Why?

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1 Sam. 8:4–11,
16–20
Ps. 138

Complementary
Gen. 3:8–15
Ps. 130
2 Cor. 4:13–5:1
Mark 3:20–35

Dividing the House

Goal for the Session *Through Jesus’ challenging words to religious leaders and his family, adults will identify and address contemporary allegiances that restrain discipleship.*

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WHERE is God in these words?

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If we transpose this theological vision into our own time, instead of lepers and demoniacs crowding around Jesus, we might see the strange bodies of the disabled. The only ones not in the picture, the ones not pressing in at the doors and windows, desperate and aching to be near Jesus, are the ones who think they know what religion and family life is supposed to look like. Jesus, infinitely patient with the crowd, blasts away at these people. Everyone will be forgiven, except people who blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The inability to tell the difference between the power of the Holy Spirit and the demonic is an *unforgivable sin*.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

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FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 3:20–35

Focus on Your Teaching

All adults face multiple allegiances tugging for priority in their lives: faith, family, work, political, self-care. Such allegiances often grow out of relationships with those experienced as authorities in their lives. But what happens when those authorities summon adults to act in ways seen as conflicting with allegiances felt as more pressing? Today's text explores two related encounters in which Jesus speaks hard words to religious authorities and his own family. Older adults may find this narrative more disturbing than young adults, who may themselves be in the midst of challenging allegiances and authorities from their past.

Guiding Spirit, fill me in this session's preparation and leadership with your wisdom. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for June 13, 2021

For Responding

- option 2: paper, pens
- option 3: Resource Sheet 1

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, print out the two questions for small groups to discuss in Exploring to distribute at the appropriate time.

Welcome participants as they arrive. Introduce any guests or newcomers.

Have adults choose partners. Direct each participant to tell his or her partner one thing he or she hopes to accomplish this summer, and at the same time relate any priorities or commitments that might stand in the way of carrying through with that hope. After a few minutes, ask the pairs to discuss briefly in general terms how they resolve conflicting priorities and allegiances in their lives and families.

Gather the whole group. Invite each pair to relate one insight about dealing with conflicting priorities and commitments.

Explain that today's focus text presents a set of encounters in which Jesus addresses conflicting priorities and commitments that pose potential hindrances to ministry with those closest to him.

Say this prayer or one of your choosing:

Gracious God, we gather as your people. As such, may we be gracious in our speaking and in our listening, and in our openness to having our lives shaped and reshaped by you. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

EXPLORING

Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (Hallmarks of Mark). Explain that Mark's Gospel will provide the focus text for this and the next four sessions. Direct participants to silently read the

In Mark, the conspiracy to destroy Jesus does not wait until Passion Week when Jesus cleanses the temple (Luke 19:47). Mark sets the conspiracy's initiation at the outset of Jesus' ministry after a confrontation with religious leaders (Mark 3:6).

material. Have adults identify insights that strike them as important. Encourage adults to keep this background material in mind as they proceed through this session and the following four.

Form three groups and assign each group one of the following identities: Jesus' family, the scribes from Jerusalem, and the crowd. Distribute the questions below, prepared before the session, to each group. Ask each group to read Mark 3:20–35 to themselves. Then have each group explore how their characters might have experienced this encounter. In particular, focus the conversation on these questions:

- ✧ What prior allegiances color your experience of this encounter?
- ✧ What does this encounter reveal to you about Jesus and your relationship/allegiance to him?

Gather the groups together. Invite the groups to report on their characters' view of this encounter, highlighting their thoughts on the two questions regarding prior allegiances and what has been revealed here of Jesus. Discuss the similarities and differences between the perceptions of these characters, and how allegiances play into those perceptions.

Explore more deeply how Jesus' family and the scribes respond to Jesus. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Mark 3:20–35) and have people read the "What?" excerpt. Consider especially the interpretation of the RSV of the charge that Jesus is "beside himself." Ask:

- ✧ Do you hear that as the family seeking to protect Jesus or as trying to get him under control? Why?

Read the sidebar on the timing in Mark of the conspiracy to destroy Jesus. Ask:

- ✧ How might this help us understand the scribes' attempt to demonize Jesus?

Discuss the consequences on the family's and scribes' responses to Jesus on his authority as well as the allegiance any may consider placing in him as a disciple.

Ask the adults to listen to the text now, not as one of the characters within it—but as who they are as participants in a faith community and as members of a family, and all the loyalties and allegiances that come with both. Invite adults to close their eyes, then read the text aloud. If you feel comfortable doing so, read the dialogue portions with dramatic affect in your voice. Invite participants to open their eyes. Have them call out words or phrases that stood out—or feelings evoked—as they listened. As participants listen to the text from their own perspective, invite them to reflect silently on the following:

- ✧ What does this passage reveal about conflicting allegiances that might become stumbling blocks for discipleship?

Single out verse 35. Ask adults to consider how Jesus' words here might shape their understanding and practice of discipleship, particularly when the allegiance that discipleship claims comes into conflict with other allegiances they hold (or that hold them) in life.

**EASY
PREP**

Be sensitive to how some adults may respond when “family” is included in the conversation regarding allegiances that may restrain discipleship. “Family values” can be a line in the sand, even when it comes to priorities of faith.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session.

- 1. Good Versus Higher Good** Even allegiances we value highly may stand in the way of faithful discipleship. Form small groups. Have each group create a role play in which allegiance to one’s family or religious tradition comes into conflict with discipleship. For example, perhaps an urgent service need conflicts with a regular family outing. Do the role plays, then discuss what they revealed about how things we rightly value as good can hinder our following of Jesus. Challenge adults to bring this awareness into their choices in the coming week that may involve prioritizing one good over another.
- 2. Taking It Personally** Amending allegiances that might inhibit discipleship begins by identifying them and what authority they carry in our lives. Distribute paper and pens. Have adults list the most important allegiances in their lives. Alongside each, describe what makes that allegiance important—and how it might, intentionally or unintentionally, restrain some aspect of their discipleship. Have them consider how these allegiances are playing out in general—and how they might need to be changed or amended for the sake of following Jesus with greater faithfulness. Invite them to write one or two changes they wish to make. Encourage participants to revisit this list each day this week.
- 3. With Whom Do We Stand?** Addressing and amending our allegiances for the sake of discipleship may involve us in deeper relationships with some we have not stood with before. Read the “So What” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Identify those we naturally tend to “stand with” in terms of missional and service engagements—and those with whom we find it difficult to do so. Discuss how the excerpt’s emphasis on a “new solidarity” challenges us as individuals and communities of faith to take on new partners. Encourage each adult in the coming week to consider one new person with whom they will stand as an expression of discipleship.

CLOSING

Gather adults in a circle. Invite them to recall first their initial conversations with partners regarding a hope for this summer, and competing priorities that might stand in its way, and then bring to mind the conversations regarding allegiances in Exploring and Responding. Have participants identify one insight or question regarding discipleship and our varied allegiances that has come to them during the course of this session. If they feel comfortable doing so, have them further indicate how that insight or question will be brought to bear on their practice of discipleship in the coming week. If you used option 2 in Responding, encourage participants to use the list created in it as a daily spiritual discipline for examining allegiances that may need amending to further our discipleship.

Close the session by praying the Lord’s Prayer.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for June 13, 2021, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on Mark 3:20–35

WHAT is important to know?

— From “*Exegetical Perspective*,” Judith Hoch Wray

Jesus’ family serves as a literary tool to introduce several key themes. The antecedent of the pronoun translated as “people” (v. 21) in the NRSV is unclear, and probably indicates Jesus’ family as the ones who were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” “Out of his mind” is literally, “he has stood outside.” (Compare today’s idiom, “he is really out of it,” or the RSV “beside himself.”) The question of who is *outside* arises again and again. In verse 31 the family is standing outside, in contrast to their saying in verse 21 that he “has gone outside,” that is, out of his mind.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “*Theological Perspective*,” Wendy Farley

If we transpose this theological vision into our own time, instead of lepers and demoniacs crowding around Jesus, we might see the strange bodies of the disabled. The only ones not in the picture, the ones not pressing in at the doors and windows, desperate and aching to be near Jesus, are the ones who think they know what religion and family life is supposed to look like. Jesus, infinitely patient with the crowd, blasts away at these people. Everyone will be forgiven, except people who blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The inability to tell the difference between the power of the Holy Spirit and the demonic is an *unforgivable sin*.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “*Pastoral Perspective*,” Don E. Saliers

For us, however, the issue is how we now understand the relationship between discipleship and Christology. More than simply “understand” intellectually, it seems crucial for the churches today to seek to live out that understanding. Living out the form of discipleship Christ bids us follow means a new solidarity with all of humanity. It requires that we learn with him to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. It asks us to live into the densities of human joy and suffering. It calls us to find ourselves precisely in our willingness to give up our self-absorption. This is a demanding task, requiring a willingness to follow him into a new solidarity with God’s whole family.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “*Homiletical Perspective*,”

Nibs Stroupe

We should look for the reality signified by the name “Satan.” Satan does not necessarily mean a personality with horns and a red tail, but it does name a demonic power that is actively engaged against the compassionate and reconciling love of God. This is the reality that Jesus names here, and whether we believe in a person named “Satan” is not as important as hearing about our captivity to the powers of evil signified by “Satan,” powers that continue to seek our allegiance.

Hallmarks of Mark

The Gospel of Mark

A Gospel of Action

The Gospel of Mark is distinguished, particularly in its first half, by an almost continuous series of actions by Jesus that demonstrate Mark's theme announced in the Gospel's first verse: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ." There are no extended theological discourses as in John's Gospel. While there are parables in Mark, they do not compare in number to those found in Matthew or Luke.

A Gospel of Power and Authority

Mark explores what power and authority make Jesus' actions possible. Jesus' teaching is viewed as uniquely authoritative (1:22). His power over demonic forces, who themselves confess him to be the Holy One of God, stirs recognition of Jesus' power among the crowds (1:27). The narrative of Jesus' stilling the storm (4:35–41) witnesses to the power of God at work through Jesus. Such power as Jesus exercises, however, is not coercively forced on others. Unbelief creates a hurdle for what even the power and authority of Jesus can do (6:1–6).

A Gospel of Controversy

Mark's "beginning of the good news" is constantly beset with controversy and conflict with would-be recipients. Barely midway through the second chapter, Jesus offends religious authorities by consorting with those dismissed as sinners (2:16). Far from attempting to smooth over ruffled feathers, Jesus exacerbates the situation by a retort to their rebuke of him (2:17). Confrontations over Sabbath keeping quickly result in a conspiracy of some religious leaders to destroy Jesus (3:6).

A Gospel of Urgency

In Mark's Gospel, things often happen "immediately." Literally. The Spirit *immediately* drives Jesus into the wilderness following baptism (1:12). When Jesus calls Simon and Andrew, they *immediately* leave their nets and follow (1:17–18). When Jesus touches and speaks to a leper, the disease leaves the victim *immediately* (1:42). "Immediately" conveys a sense of urgency to this Gospel, and the response evoked by the "beginning of the gospel" that is Mark's theme.

A Gospel Open-Ended

Mark leaves much untold. There are no birth narratives. There are no sermons on mounts or plains. But most significantly, according to the oldest manuscripts, the Easter narrative in Mark ends abruptly—"and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8). These accounts leave it to the reader and hearer to decide how Easter ends—that is, how the opening verse's "beginning of the good news" finds its way out into the world, if at all.

Take this last theme as the starting point for your entry into Mark. In the passages you will encounter this session, what ending is yet to be written—not by disciples of long ago, but by you, and the people in your group? How will you engage in the actions, and face the controversies, and rely on the power, and respond to the urgency, of the "beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ?"