Choose Life

Goal for the Session

Tweens will hear Moses preach about choices and consequences and begin to discern how these words may shape their lives.

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Deuteronomy 30:15–20

WHAT is important to know? —From “Exegetical Perspective” by W. Sibley Towner

Then comes the great challenge: “Choose life!” The sense if not the form of the Hebrew verb for “choose” (ubaharta) is imperative. It points to an as yet unresolved decision. What do they do? At the end of the book of Joshua, in the context of a covenant ratification ceremony, the people publically commit themselves to rejecting idolatry. They say, “We also will serve the Lord, for he is our God” (Josh. 24:18). They seal the covenant with their choice and consequently are liable for their subsequent apostasies.

WHERE is God in these words? —From “Theological Perspective” by Carol J. Dempsey

The people are called to live Torah as a way of life. Their reward for their fidelity and integrity will be divine blessing. To be blessed by God is to be guaranteed safety, well-being, strength, prosperity, and progeny. Furthermore, the people themselves will become “a blessing” (cf. Gen. 12:2–3). God’s commandments and ways are meant not as restriction but rather as prescriptions that lead to the fullness of life for all; in that sense, their end is not meant to constrict but to set free. Obedience is not merely doing as one is told. Obedience means “to listen,” which involves more than just hearing and following. Obedience is a discernment process that involves not only the mind and will but also, and most especially, the heart.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives? —From “Pastoral Perspective” by Andrew Foster Connors

The flip side of these ominous warnings is that God desires for the community to be blessed. God desires life, not death. God hopes that Israel will make the right choice, for faithfulness. The right choice means blessings for the entire community, not just for some. The right choice means a home not just for God’s people but for resident aliens as well. The right choice means economic policies that leave enough for everyone. The right choice means an equitable distribution of resources. The right choice means life—this is what God desires for us.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do? —From “Homiletical Perspective” by Brett Younger

Worship with all your heart. Pray genuinely. Love your church. Believe that God loves you. Remember the stories of Jesus. See Christ in the people around you. Share God’s love with someone who has forgotten it. Delight in God’s good gifts. See that all of life is holy. Open your heart to the Spirit. Search for something deeper and better than your own comfort. Live in the joy beneath it all. Let God make your life wonderful. Moses preached that we choose life in an amazing variety of ways. This text provides a wonderful chance for us to hear: “Today I set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life.”
Focus on Your Teaching

Tweens are beginning to face choices that can have long-term consequences. Learning to listen and to discern the implications of various options are important skills to develop to make healthy choices. Developmentally, however, tweens are not capable of fully assessing consequences before making a choice. Research has shown that the cognitive ability to thoroughly evaluate consequences is not fully developed until the late teen years or early twenties. Being able to practice discernment skills is valuable for tweens. So is hearing Jesus’ message of forgiveness and promise of second chances.

Gracious God, lead me in the choices I make each day. As I teach, help me convey the good news of your generous mercy and unconditional love. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, spread a green cloth in the center of your learning space and place the candle and Color Pack 13 on it.

Greet tweens as they arrive. Ask for three volunteers to present the drama on Resource Sheet 1 (Dramatic Reading) and give them copies so they can review their lines.

Remind tweens that the church is in the season of Ordinary Time (or Season after the Epiphany), a time when Christians focus on growing in understanding who Jesus is. Light the candle. Form two groups and pray the litany on Color Pack 13. Extinguish the candle.

Invite tweens to think of choices they have made recently. Ask for volunteers to tell about times when the choices they made led to things going well for them. Offer a story from your experience. Discuss:

* When you have to make a tough choice, what helps you decide what to do?

**YOU WILL NEED**

- green cloth
- white candle, matches or battery-powered candle
- index card with “Gathering Prayer”
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheets 1 and 2
- pens
- Color Pack 13, 21, 22, 23, 32
- fine-tipped marker
- sticky notes
- *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: poster board, old magazines, scissors, glue sticks, markers
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pencils, construction paper, scissors, markers
EXPLORING

Display Color Pack 21. Explain that the Israelites had been in the desert wilderness for forty years after Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt. Option: Invite learners to look in the backs of their Bibles for a map of the Exodus journey and compare it to Color Pack 21. Emphasize that any routes marked on such maps are the mapmaker's idea of the route the Israelites likely took, because no one knows for sure.

Point to Mt. Nebo on the map. Set the scene for the Bible reading by saying that the Israelites are gathered near the Jordan River and ready to cross into the land of Canaan, the land God promised them. Display Color Pack 22, which is a contemporary photo of that area. Ask: After forty years in the desert wilderness, why might the Israelites be looking forward to living in this area?

Explain that Moses is wondering if the Israelites are ready to live in Canaan. The people who were living in Canaan worshiped other gods. It would be a challenge for the Israelites to remain faithful to the one true God. So Moses gathers the people and speaks to them. He reminds them of the covenant God made with them—the promise to be their God and to bless them to be a blessing to other people.

Have the three volunteers present the dramatic reading on Resource Sheet 1 (Dramatic Reading). Afterward, distribute copies of the resource sheet and encourage learners to refer to it as you discuss:

- What three things did Israelites need to do to live? (v. 16)
- If the Israelites did these things, what would happen?
- What three things would cause the Israelites to perish? (v. 17)
- What would be the consequences of doing these things? (v. 18)
- What does it mean to “choose life”? (v. 19)
- How does this passage describe the results of choosing life with God? (v. 20) Do you think this is the same as being blessed by God? Why or why not?

Show Color Pack 23, noting this is a cartoon of Moses preaching to the Israelites. As a group, compose a very short summary of Moses’ teaching in Deuteronomy 30:15–20. Ask a volunteer to use a fine-tipped marker to write this in one of the speech bubbles on the Color Pack page. (The other speech bubble will be used next session.) Discuss:

- What is one way Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 30:15–20 make you think about the choices you make?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Choose Life Poster** Tweens can encourage others to choose life with God by making posters. As a group, discuss what it means to be blessed by God and to be a blessing to others. Form pairs or groups of three and give each group a half sheet of poster board.
Set out magazines to cut apart, scissors, glue sticks, and markers. Instruct each group to design and create a poster on the theme of “Choose Life.” Have each small group show its poster to the entire class and then find a place in the church to display them.

2. **Group Sculpture** This activity invites tweens to explore how Moses’ instructions might be expressed in practices for daily life today. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (A Blessed Life). Form groups of three or four and divide the statements in “Living a Blessed Life” among the groups. Ask small groups to think of two or three consequences of choosing to do the actions named and then create a sculpture to express the practice, using their bodies. Each person in the group must be included in the sculpture. After all have finished, have groups enact their sculptures for the rest of the class. Encourage tweens to choose one of the practices and make it their own for the next month.

3. **Cinquain Poems** Encourage tweens to find their own words to express the meaning of Moses’ command to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (A Blessed Life) and refer to the “Choose Life Cinquain.” If necessary, explain that a cinquain (pronounced sin-cane) is a form of poetry. Review the instructions and the example. Invite learners to work individually or in pairs to compose a cinquain. Demonstrate how to fold a sheet of construction paper in fourths and make a single diagonal cut along the open edges to form a diamond shape. Have learners use markers to print their poem on a paper diamond. Create a display of poems in your meeting space.

**CLOSING**
Gather around the candle and light it, if necessary. Place Color Pack 22, sticky notes, pens, and a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (A Blessed Life) near the candle. Invite tweens to tell what they discovered in the session today about God’s desires for them. Ask each one to choose one of the practices on the resource sheet to do in the week ahead. Have learners write their choices on sticky notes and place them around the edges of Color Pack 22.

Show Color Pack 32 and comment that the Israelites sang hymns of praise to God. Invite learners to sing along as you play “Hallelujah” (track 9 on *Singing the Feast, 2016–2017*). Pray aloud:

> Gracious and loving God, help us to be the people you created us to be. Guide us to choose life with you. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Invite tweens to stand in a circle with you. Link arms with the person on your right as you say, “You and I are God’s people.” Have this action move around the circle, learner by learner, until the circle is complete. Lead the group in exclaiming, “Praise God!”

Tell learners you will pray for them this week and invite them to pray for you.
Dramatic Reading
—Deuteronomy 30:15–20, CEB

The three readers stand in front of the group in their respective locations.

Middle: \(^{15}\)Look here! Today I’ve set before you

Right: life and what’s good,

Left: versus death and what’s wrong.

Middle: \(^{16}\)If you obey the LORD your God’s commandments that I’m commanding you right now by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments, his regulations, and his case laws,

Right: then you will live and thrive, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

Middle: \(^{17}\)But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and so are misled, worshipping other gods and serving them, \(^{18}\)I’m telling you right now that you will definitely die. You will not prolong your life on the fertile land that you are crossing the Jordan River to enter and possess.

Left: that you will definitely die. You will not prolong your life on the fertile land that you are crossing the Jordan River to enter and possess.

Middle: \(^{19}\)I call heaven and earth as my witnesses against you right now: I have set

Right: life,

Left: and death,

Right: blessing

Left: and curse before you.

Middle: Now choose life—so that you and your descendants will live—\(^{20}\)by loving the LORD your God, by obeying his voice, and by clinging to him.

All: That’s how you will survive and live long on the fertile land the LORD swore to give to your ancestors: to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
Living a Blessed Life
Worship with all your heart.
Pray genuinely.
Love your church.
Believe that God loves you.
Remember the stories of Jesus.
See Christ in people around you.
Share God’s love with someone who has forgotten it.
Delight in God’s good gifts.
Strive to see life as holy.
Open your heart to the Spirit.
Search for something deeper and better than your own comfort.
Live in the joy of God’s love.

Choose Life Cinquain
Line 1: Title (Choose Life)
Line 2: Describe the title
Line 3: Action words or phrase about the title
Line 4: Describe a feeling about the title
Line 5: Refer to the title

Example:
Choose Life
Live Faithfully
Love Others More
Grateful for God’s Love
Blessed