



# A Child Shall Lead Them

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A Ten-Day Devotional  
on Hope and Justice  
for all God's children

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Hope and Justice for  
all God's children**

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## INTRODUCTION:

# 'A Child Shall Lead Them'



**'He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.'—Mark 9:36-37**

Power and status have long been the centre of human conflict. In Mark 9:33-37, Jesus' disciples have been arguing about who among them is greater. Of course, all of scripture is full of stories like this tussle for greatness.

But Jesus surprises his disciples and compels them—and us—to look to children as our example. Taking a child into his arms, he tells us that welcoming and esteeming children is welcoming him. The tussle for greatness is moot. **Because the last shall be first and the kingdom of God belongs to children (Matthew 19:14, Luke 18:16) – and those like them.**

So, we should not be surprised when God works through willing children and young people.

This devotional series, *A Child Shall Lead Them*, explores God's heart for all his children and his desire for us to come to him as children. Together, we will look at children and young people in the Bible **whom God uses for his kingdom purposes.** They bring change to their communities, just as the children in Baptist World Aid Australia's Child and Youth Clubs do around the world.

We'll explore both the challenges and revelations these children of the biblical narrative experienced and consider what their stories teach us about God's character, and ultimately about his Son.

You see, God is not surprised when children demonstrate remarkable courage. The Bible tells stories of young people who are faithful to

God regardless of their age or status. Despite their lack of cultural power, they trust that God will provide what they need to follow him.

And God does provide, again and again.

The children and youth who Baptist World Aid partner with today also do not surprise God when they use their voices to advocate for others, when they help their communities address issues that keep them in poverty, when they speak to leaders much older than themselves drawing attention to injustice and marginalisation. Such courage delights God.

Likewise, children here in Australia who address injustice do not surprise God, and in fact, delight him. When they use their privilege to speak up for people who are being silenced or use what they've been given to be generous, they are following in the footsteps of the children highlighted in this devotional. And they model for us attributes that God, our Heavenly Father, desires for all of us as his children!

We are grateful for these stories God has given us in the Bible and grateful that you have joined us in this journey of exploring how indeed, *A Child Shall Lead Them*.

**'SEE WHAT GREAT  
LOVE THE FATHER  
HAS LAVISHED ON  
US, THAT WE SHOULD  
BE CALLED CHILDREN  
OF GOD! AND THAT IS  
WHAT WE ARE!'**

**-1 JOHN 3:1**

DAY ONE:

# A Little Child Will Lead Them



**'The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.'**  
—Isaiah 11:6

This poem in Isaiah sees the violent reconciled with the vulnerable. It is the image of renewed creation, the Garden of Eden as it was intended to be *in the beginning*. In the new creation, peace reigns. And the Prince of Peace, who arrived as a vulnerable baby, initiated this peace during a time of earthy violence.

Jesus is Immanuel, God with Us, the child who will lead us into a kingdom of *justice*. This is our promised hope: **the Living Hope who will restore creation and bring about peace.**

The book of Isaiah points to Israel's covenant with God. It exposes humanity as unable to be faithful despite God's enduring faithfulness. It is a book of judgment; the

prophet's role, after all, was to call people to repentance and change.

But it is also full of hope. Isaiah uses human history and earthy imagery to warn of God's judgment while pointing to the *long expected, always hoped-for* Messianic King from David's family. He will reconcile all creation, even lions and lambs. And it rests entirely on God's faithfulness.

What an amazing gift it is, then, that we would be invited to be part of this kingdom of justice and generosity now! The Holy Seed, a small shoot, a little child Jesus, leads us. **And his kingdom transforms all creation, bringing peace – that is, fairness and justice for all.**

## Pointing To The Promise:

Pull any narrative thread in the Bible and you will arrive at Jesus. So, in each of the following devotionals, we'll explore how that story points us to the promised hope of Jesus and his coming kingdom. The birth of a little child initiated this kingdom of peace and justice for all of us, starting today!

## Dig Deeper:

**1** What children in your life help you remember Christ's call to become like a child?

**2** What do you think it means to be a part of God's kingdom of justice and fairness? What might that look like for you?

**3** Why do you think God sent his Son Jesus to earth in the form of a vulnerable baby?



## Prayer:

Lord God, please lead us into a deeper understanding of the truths held in your word. You are a good God and you have experienced the vulnerabilities that come with being a child. Help us come to you like children – open hearted, trusting, and confident that you are who you say you are. Amen

DAY TWO:

# Hagar's Son And The God Who Sees



“What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation! Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.—Genesis 21:17-19

## Read Genesis 21:14-19

This can be a difficult part of Abraham's story to understand. Abraham, a father of the Judeo-Christian faith, is sending his son and the child's mother out into the desert. It looks as if he's discarding them, as if Hagar and her son represent Abraham's plan B. He's exploited his slave girl, got her pregnant and then abandoned her and their child.

Is this Abraham's attempt to take the reins of God's plan and create the descendants he'd been promised but was tired of waiting for?

But Hagar's son, Ishmael, was never God's plan B. God always saw him, just as he has always seen us. In

an earlier part of Hagar's story, she names God, 'the God who sees me' (Gen 16:13). She's already been given a revelation of God's character and in this story, God doubles down. He not only sees Hagar, he sees her young son *because he sees all*.

This story delivers a powerful truth for rejected, oppressed women and their 'unwanted' children. It delivers a powerful truth to anyone whose story took a sharp turn they could not have predicted, to anyone who has felt abandoned and alone. If you have ever doubted God sees you, this story is for you. **You were never God's plan B.**

Like Hagar, our distress can overwhelm us. We can feel powerless



whenever we see children in pain. But God speaks to us, as to Hagar, and reminds us he is in charge. He says – *I have a plan for these children, get up, give them a drink* – and then he provides the water.

This story **declares that no child is ever God's plan B!** No life is outside the range of his attention. This is a profound hope for families suffering injustice and poverty around our world. And this hope keeps us engaged with children on the margins. Because no matter how broken our world appears, God has a plan, and he is at work.

## Pointing To The Promise:

The story of provision in Hagar and Ishmael's moment of distress draws our attention to the promised hope of Jesus. God's heavenly kingdom is one where every child has what they need to not only survive but to thrive. Where thirst is quenched by living water. With the birth of Jesus came a Living Hope that does not only meet an immediate need but meets all our needs. (See Revelation 7:16-17 for more.)

## Dig Deeper:

**1** Why do you think Hagar calls God, 'the one who sees me'?

**2** Can you think of a time when you or someone you know felt invisible or overlooked until God provided something (or someone) to change the circumstance?

**3** How might God be calling you to come along side children who might be in need of care, support, prayer and water?



## Prayer:

Father God, who sees us, thank you for your all-knowing nature. We pray for children around our world in situations as precarious as Ishmael's. And we trust you to provide for them through us, that they would not merely survive but thrive. Amen

## DAY THREE:

# Joseph And An Uncertain Future



**“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. ‘Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”**

**—Genesis 37:19-20**

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### Read Genesis 37:12-35

Joseph was the youngest of Jacob’s sons and his favourite. He doesn’t hide it and gifts him with an extraordinary, multi-coloured coat. Joseph’s brothers don’t hide their jealousy and disdain either. Families are complicated.

At 17, Joseph had a strong prophetic gift, an insight his brothers lacked. Though he may have wielded it with a degree of immaturity, his ‘predictions’ all proved true in the end.

In Matthew 5, Jesus describes anger as the equivalent of murder, so as it happens Joseph was dead to his brothers from the moment his father gave him the robe. His brothers hated him even before he had wild

dreams about them, and they hated him more when he shared those! Clearly, he didn’t have a lot of respect for them either as we see when he told their dad about their behaviour. Families can be difficult.

Joseph’s brothers set out to remove him, and his dreaming, from their lives. And they took a cruel step when they resolved to sell their brother into slavery.

Discarded and despised, Joseph experienced a sharp turn. But if we read on, we see that God does not abandon Joseph. He was young, yet God had a plan for his long life. Injustice and exploitation stood in the way momentarily – **but God was always, and is always, at work.**

Either from the bottom of a cistern, or tied to the Midianite caravan, Joseph could not have seen the future God had in store for him. He'd known betrayal and hopelessness—and a father's love—yet God used him at just the right time to save his people from famine.

When we look out at our world, young people are at risk and injustice seems to target children. But we call to mind the closing statements of the book of Genesis (50: 20) 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.' We look to our good God whose eye is always on children, and on their future. *His plan is always for good*, reaching to the generations to come.

## Pointing To The Promise:

Joseph's story reads like a pre-echo of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. The brothers in both stories – forgetting they were already home – allowed jealousy to cloud their perspectives. Sometimes we lose connection with family or community because we leave voluntarily, sometimes we feel others forced us out. Both stories remind us that what is intended to harm us, is always turned into good because of Jesus. His death and resurrection always make a way for forgiveness and reconciliation.

## Dig Deeper:

**1** How did God use the harm Joseph's brothers brought on him for good?

**2** Families are complicated. How is God working in yours? Or how do you hope he will?

**3** How can you help the children in your community work for the good of others?



## Prayer:

God of restoration, there is no brokenness so big you cannot heal. There is no harm you cannot turn into good. We look to you, believing that your plans for our broken world are always good. Amen

## DAY FOUR:

# Miriam, A Calm In A Crisis



**'When she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.'—Exodus 2:3-4**

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### Read Exodus 2:1-10

When my first daughter was born, this story came to mind. In the middle of a genocide, a mother hid her newborn baby for three months. I cannot fathom how. When she could no longer hide him, was it because he grew too loud, too restless?

In her last effort to protect the baby Moses, she set him afloat in the Nile. The terror, grief, and uncertainty would have been overwhelming – too overwhelming to stay and watch. But Miriam, the baby's sister, stood nearby. How fast was her young heart beating as her abandoned brother lay crying in his tiny boat? How long was Miriam standing guard before Pharaoh's daughter discovered the Hebrew baby?

When my youngest child was born, my eldest was seven, the same age as Miriam in this story. I imagined her standing in the reeds watching a strange, regal woman pull her baby sibling from the river. I imagined her being as brave and quick witted as Miriam to speak up and suggest a Hebrew nurse for the baby.

**Miriam represents a courage that resides innately in children to speak out for the sake of others. They are after all made in God's image, and we know he speaks out for the vulnerable.** In this case, Miriam's bold suggestion, led to Moses escaping the massacre and spending his first year (or possibly two to three years) back in the arms of his mother. I imagine the deep exhalation of breath from Moses'

mother, when her extraordinary daughter came home to fetch her to nurse the baby. Her baby.

When we listen to children, solutions to complex problems can become clear, even problems that are literally life and death.

This moment, as a girl watching from the reeds, formed Miriam. She stepped out in courage and hope and saw God deliver her baby brother to safety. Eventually, she saw Moses become a great leader who led her people out of slavery.

## Pointing To The Promise:

Jesus, in his death and resurrection, saved us from the fear of death and placed us in a family, in safety. The exodus of God's people from Egypt was a *foreshadowing of God's ultimate redemption for humanity in Jesus*. Imperfect Moses points to our perfect Saviour. And Miriam reminds us that God always makes a way, from the water, through the water, to life everlasting.

## Dig Deeper:

**1** Why was Moses' mother forced to abandon her newborn son?

**2** What do you think gave Miriam the courage to step forward when the Pharaoh's daughter found Moses in the river?

**3** When was the last time you heard children offer a great idea? What happened?



## Prayer:

God of hope, open our eyes to see you at work in our world. To see the signs that point to the living hope that is in Jesus. Help us to listen to children, and learn from their courageous, hopeful faith. Amen

## DAY FIVE:

# David, Faithful And Tenacious



**'And Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.' David said, 'The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, he will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.'—1 Samuel 17:33, 37**

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### Read 1 Samuel 17

At this point in his life – aged 15 years – David's role was shepherd to his father's sheep. Despite Samuel, the priest and prophet, anointing him in front of his brothers (1 Samuel 16:13), they still saw him as young and insignificant. Even when he played music for Saul that soothed his encounters with a troubling spirit (16:23), David had not yet gained the full attention of the king.

While his brothers went off to war, David stayed caring for sheep. Then one day, his father sent him on the errand assigned to younger siblings, *go run some food to your brothers.*

At the sight and sound of a nine-foot-tall man taunting the armies of Israel, David asked, 'who is this

uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?' He's outraged and he's activated even before knowing that there is a reward available to the potential giant-slayer. A wife, wealth and tax exemption are on offer if you defeat Goliath.

His brother Eliab's reproach of David is essentially, *this is no place for a kid. Get back to the paddocks where you belong.* The brothers see David as having no experience because it's easy to discount the experience of children. But David's experience was that God had always delivered him from danger. And faith trumps experience.

**When we look beyond the appearance of children, trust their experience, listen to their ideas**

**- great things can happen. The course of a nation can be changed.**

As it turns out, David's was the only experience that mattered. He defeated Goliath with a pebble and a slingshot – the arsenal of a 15-year-old. He faced a giant, standing in God's strength, knowing it is the LORD who saves.

This is a tenacious faith built on an experience of God's faithfulness. Child-like faith says, *God helped me then, he will help me now.* It's a simple trust we can all aspire to.

## **Pointing To The Promise:**

A glowing youth, David was the least likely candidate to slay a giant, lead a kingdom, and foreshadow the coming Messianic King. Jesus didn't live up to the expectations of many in Israel waiting for their deliverer either. His appearance was ordinary, and he didn't come wielding a sword (or heavy armour). But like David, he proved the irrelevance of appearances gaining victory over death and liberating all who believe he is who he says he is.

## **Dig Deeper:**

**1** What would have given the teenager David such confidence to step forward to fight Goliath?

**2** How did he defy the expectations of his family and the culture?

**3** What about child-like faith inspires you?



## **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, you are the God who saves. You have shown yourself to be faithful time and again. We thank you for the children in our world who show us tenacious faith like David. Help us follow their example. Amen

## DAY SIX:

# Jeremiah, When God Knows Us



**'The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations . . . Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the Lord!—Jeremiah 1:4, 7**

### Read Jeremiah 1:1-12

Jeremiah's story reflects a vivid intimacy in God's relationship with people. Before we were even conceived, in human terms, God knew us. The Message translates Psalm 22:9 as ' . . . you were midwife at my birth, setting me at my mother's breasts! When I left the womb, you cradled me; since the moment of birth, you've been my God.'

God knew us before the thought of us crossed the minds of our parents. He knew us as we were growing in utero, and he was there, present in the very room when we were born.

Considering this knowledge, Jeremiah's objection 'I am too young'

does sound a little silly. God had known this young boy for millennia. God has planned, before he was born, for him to speak to the nations.

**These verses are a manifesto for children through the ages, and all around the world.** God has commissioned them to speak because, before they were formed, he'd planned to help them lead others to himself. When Jeremiah was fearful of the consequences of speaking out, God assures him of his abiding presence, his empowering spirit and then simply asks him to say what he sees.

When God calls children into their purposes, his timing is his business. When young people step out in faith



and say what they see, it can change the course of history. We would be wise to listen, and not say to them, 'alas, you are too young'.

## Pointing To The Promise:

When Jesus says in Matthew 19, that his kingdom belongs to children, he had knowledge of this encounter with Jeremiah in his heart. Jesus knew Jeremiah before he was formed and saw him grow to become a prophet who would tell of his coming kingdom. God has plans for every child from the moment they are conceived. He has great plans for the part they will play in bringing justice and hope.

## Dig Deeper:

**1** Jeremiah at first didn't accept God's call. Why? What changed for him?

**2** What happened when he was afraid to speak out God's words?

**3** In what ways can you encourage young people to speak out for justice and for what's right?



## Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you know us so well. You know every fear, every hesitation. Lead us to trust in your empowering presence. Help us make a way for the voices of children so we do not miss what you can teach us through them. Amen

## DAY SEVEN:

# Daniel And Godly Recklessness



**‘To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.’—Daniel 1:17, 20**

### Read Daniel 1:1-21

Throughout history, children and young people have been instrumental in launching social movements against injustice. Young people were pivotal in the Civil Rights movement in the U.S., the end of apartheid in South Africa, the student protests in Tiananmen Square and the Freedom Rides here in Australia. Young people across the world have spoken up for centuries when they see that something is not right. **With youth, comes a clarity about right and wrong that can become muddled as we age.**

Daniel, growing up under a foreign and oppressive regime but having found favour with those in power,

had every opportunity to choose a ‘safe’ path for his own life. He could have ‘towed the party line’, kept a low profile and lived his life in comfort. But even as a young man, in his late teens/early twenties, Daniel chose faithfulness to God’s commands.

The king was looking for recruits from the Israelites to become disciples of Babylon. They’d be trained in Babylonian language and literature, ready to serve the king however he required. Daniel could have sidled up to power and gained personal wealth and fame. But he chose the God of Israel. And God was faithful. To him and his friends God gave supernatural wisdom and knowledge so that they stood out to the king above their peers.

We know, if we read on in Daniel's story, that this is not the last time he required courage to stand up for what he believed. And it's not the last time God showed himself faithful. Daniel aligned himself with God's kingdom even when it stood in opposition to the kingdom of this world.

Daniel's story assures all of us that when we speak out on behalf of the oppressed and marginalised, we are aligning ourselves with God's values of peace, and justice for all.

### Pointing To The Promise:

Daniel's commitment to God's decrees and the favour that came from his faithfulness and integrity demonstrate that, even in exile, God was faithful to Israel. Daniel maintained hope and knew that one day, God's promised kingdom would come, and his people would be redeemed. His story reminds us that no matter how the rulers of the time behave, our hope is in Jesus and in his kingdom that endures through persecution and injustice.

## Dig Deeper:

**1** Why were Daniel and his friends taken into the king's palace?

**2** How did Daniel stay faithful to God's commands, and not yield to the unjust laws of the lands?

**3** How do today's young people challenge you to face injustice?



## Prayer:

God of history, we look to you in the face of global injustice and oppression. We thank you for courageous young people who choose to stay faithful to your kingdom values. Help us stand alongside them and pursue your justice for all. Amen

## DAY EIGHT:

# Mary's YES



**"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled! Then the angel left her. . . Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!'"—Luke 1:38, 45)**

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### Read Luke 1: 26-45

Mary's encounter with the angel heralds the upcoming arrival of the king that all of humanity was longing for. The excitement in this encounter is palpable and when I read it, I hear, *get ready humanity! Disregard everything you thought you knew about power and status. The Messianic King you've been longing for, **the hope for humanity promised to Abraham, David and through the prophets, is about to bind himself to humanity in the womb of an unwed teenage girl of little significance!***

The arrival of Jesus as a baby is the fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel and his redemptive plan for humanity. And the story begins with a teenager. Though fearful at first,

Mary is quick to surrender to the plan of her God.

Mary's song in the following verses reveals that she knew well the promises God made to the people of Israel. She knew of the promise of a Messianic King who would bring down earthly kings and elevate the humble, a king defined by mercy coming to defend the oppressed and hungry.

I like to imagine Mary sitting in the dark, talking to the unborn Jesus, filled with peace even with the knowledge that her baby son would turn the current world order upside down.

The extraordinary faith of ordinary people is a radiant guide in dark times. A young woman said 'yes' to

God's plan. In doing so, Mary got to participate in the fulfillment of the rescue mission Israel had been waiting centuries for, one the world had been crying out for since Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden.

We can look to Mary's faith and follow her humble example. With this child-like trust, we can say 'yes' to God. And we can participate in the ongoing rollout of God's kingdom Jesus established here on earth, knowing it has nothing to do with who we are and everything to do with who God is in us!

## Pointing To The Promise:

Mary's story brings us a step closer to the earthly arrival of the promised Messiah. In her conception of this baby as a virgin, she embodies the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's hope: 'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel,' (Isaiah 7:14).

## Dig Deeper:

**1** Mary would have known about the promise of a Messiah. Nonetheless, how did she respond to the angelic news that she would be a part of his plan?

**2** Given how bleak the circumstances might have looked for her, what does Mary's trust teach you?

**3** In what ways have you seen Immanuel, God with us, in your community?



## Prayer:

Jesus, our redeemer, we say YES to you. We trust that you will not abandon us when we step out in faith with you. Help us to find ourselves in your story and to play our part faithfully. Amen

## DAY NINE:

# Joseph, Son Of David



**'When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus! —Matthew 1:24-25)**

### Read Matthew 1:16-25

As a young man, Joseph, when finding out that his fiancé was pregnant, could've chosen a path of life-long disgrace for Mary. But Joseph chose grace, even before God told him what was going on.

As a descendent of David, Joseph knew that the promised Messiah was meant to emerge from his family. Living under yet another foreign empire that cared little for the life of the Jewish people, governed by corrupt puppet officials like Herod who cosied up to imperial power for their own selfish gain, these were dark and difficult times for the people of Israel.

In this context, we see Joseph, like his young bride-to-be, saying 'yes' to God's plan. Joseph follows the instructions of the angel, helping to fulfil the longing ache of the family of David to see a heavenly king come and establish God's kingdom on earth, one which would usurp earthly empires and bring justice and hope to all humanity.

**Each element of the story of Jesus' birth - the how, where, when were all important in terms of knitting his arrival into the biblical story, and God's promises to Israel and the world.**

I wonder about the delight and fear that would have risen in Joseph's heart at the words, 'they will call him

God with us'. What an extraordinary moment in this young man's life. After Jesus' birth, Joseph moves to the periphery of the story but the part he plays is critical.

As a young man, Joseph presents a beautiful example of manhood to young men. Both in his surrender to God and in his care for Mary. He places his own needs second to hers and to God's plan. And as a result, this 'son of David' gets to play a beautiful role in God's redemptive plan for all humanity.

We all have a part to play in God's plan. At every age and stage of our lives, God calls us to participate like Joseph and allow God to work in our lives for the sake of others.

## Pointing To The Promise:

Joseph's story is the longing fulfilled for the house of David. The Messiah will come from the line of David as promised long ago. In Joseph we see the faithful narrative thread of the Bible weaving its way to Jesus. In Mary and Joseph's 'yes' we arrive at the cusp of the greatest story of all. The story of Immanuel, God with us, a story told across the pages of scripture and spilling onto ours!

## Dig Deeper:

- 1** How did Joseph respond to the news Mary gave him?
- 2** What helped him care for her needs?
- 3** What is God asking you to say 'yes' to?



## Prayer:

Jesus, our Immanuel. We thank you for coming and dwelling among us. For taking on human flesh and frailty, revealing God to us and saving us through your sacrifice. Help us surrender with joy knowing you are our good king. Amen

## DAY TEN:

# Jesus, A Boy After His Father's Heart



'When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.'

'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?'"—Luke 2:48-49

### Read Luke 2:41-52

The prophet Isaiah said of the Messiah, 'He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right' (Isaiah 7:4a). As a small child, Jesus was destined to be full of wisdom from God – because he was God. It's extraordinary to think that the boy Joseph and Mary took with them to Jerusalem was vulnerable, as any child, but was also fully God.

This was not the first time Jesus had been in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. But this time, slipping out of the entourage of friends and relatives, twelve-year-old Jesus finds his place in the Temple among teachers who'd been studying the

Hebrew scriptures all their lives. I love that he was asking *and* answering questions. And in both, he was astounding people—as he still does!

Jesus' response to his parents' worry implies they should have known where to find him, but the anxiety Joseph and Mary felt was real. Anyone who has 'misplaced' a child in a supermarket knows it only takes a couple of minutes for your entire body to be flooded with terror. In this case, not only had they lost their son, but they'd misplaced the Son of God!

But twelve years old was not too young for Jesus to begin going about Father's business. **And there is a place for us in God's house at any**



**age. There is always a place for the questions of young people, for the unique perspectives they bring, the unguarded curiosity that should define us all as children of God.**

Though Jesus here is fully God, he is also fully man – or in this case fully boy. And in this way, this story is a gift to children. It’s an invitation to join the boy Jesus in the temple – to ask questions, and to pursue understanding. And for adults not to worry when they do, knowing their journeys will lead others to the integrity of truth.

## **Pointing To The Promise:**

This final story in our devotional is the preface to the big reveal. Jesus is not out healing the sick at twelve years old, but he is fulfilling the work of his Father in Heaven. He is getting on with the business of establishing God’s kingdom – sowing seeds of faith, of curiosity, modelling to us how to live. And he is preparing hearts – in the Temple and in his family – for what is to come. Like his mother Mary, we can treasure these things in our hearts as we carry the fullness of his goodness with us daily, so that we, too, may reflect our heavenly Father’s heart to others.

## **Dig Deeper:**

- 1** Why did Jesus stay back when his family went home?
- 2** What does his response in the Temple and to his parents reflect about God’s character?
- 3** How can you reflect Christ’s heart for children around the world? How can you support children to lead their communities?



## **Prayer:**

Lord God, give us childlike faith that is curious and seeks understanding as a gift from you. Lead us deeper into freedom as your followers – knowing that we are never too young, or too old, to be part of your plan for all people. Help us to serve and support generously the children who will lead us. Amen

# **A Child Shall Lead Them**

**Leader's Guide**

# Dear Leader

Whether you work with children, youth or adults in your church or community, we've created this guide to support you as you dive into these remarkable stories.

For each reflection, we've provided a short summary, some suggested activities, key takeaway ideas, and a question or two to consider. We've also drawn out nine leadership traits on display in these stories and created a leadership puzzle to assemble along the way.

For younger children, there are simple activities to help make sense of the ideas in these stories. You may find working through the devotional as it stands is more compelling and relevant for older children, teenagers or adults. Ultimately, we hope the people in your life see themselves in these stories and hear God's encouragement to each of them as beloved children of God, regardless of age.

## CHAPTER ONE—INTRODUCTION

# What Makes A Leader?

Mark 9:36-37 and Isaiah 11:6

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The verses in Matthew and Isaiah both say something amazing about God's heart for children. In Matthew, Jesus rebukes those who would devalue young people when he says to welcome him, you must welcome and include children. Isaiah says that in the heavenly Kingdom to come, a child will be the leader. Isaiah talks about an amazing peace between creatures: a lion lies down with a calf and a wolf with a lamb. Predator and prey just chilling out together.

### Questions

1. What do you think this says about how God feels about children? About you?
2. Do you know of children in your community who are leaders? Or can you think of any young leaders on the world stage right now? What makes a good leader?

### Activity

Check out some images and stories of Baptist World Aid's Child Partners who are leaders in their communities [baptistworldaid.org.au/resources/a-child-shall-lead-them-leaders-guide/#row3](http://baptistworldaid.org.au/resources/a-child-shall-lead-them-leaders-guide/#row3)

Discuss what their stories say about children leading.

### Takeaway

*A leader brings peace.* Like Jesus, the Prince of Peace, the best leaders work for peace for all. What could you do this week to lead and bring peace?

## CHAPTER TWO—HAGAR

# A Leader Makes People Feel Seen

Genesis 21:14-19

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This story of Hagar and her son reveals that God sees all. When you are young, it can feel like people often overlook you. Families get busy, schools can feel crowded, it can be hard to feel seen sometimes. But God always sees you, and all your needs matter to him.

### Questions

1. Have you ever felt unseen?
2. What do you notice about who God is in this story?

### Activity

PLAY a game where group members try to be invisible. Take your time. Eventually everyone is 'seen' because being invisible is not possible. You're always visible to God!

OR lead children in a DIY invisible ink activity:  
([sciencekids.co.nz/experiments/invisibleink.html](http://sciencekids.co.nz/experiments/invisibleink.html))

Write something about yourself on a piece of paper in invisible ink. Others may not always see these things, but God sees all.

### Takeaway

*A leader is someone who makes people feel seen.* Jesus always made people on the outside feel seen and included. This week, is there someone you know who you think might sometimes feel unseen? A younger sibling, another child or youth in your class, a relative who lives alone? What could you do to make them feel seen?

## CHAPTER TREE—JOSEPH

# A Leader Perseveres

Genesis 37:12-35

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This story describes the beginning of Joseph's troubles. The situation is bleak. He's bullied and his brothers abandon him. Things then go from bad to worse for Joseph. Life isn't smooth sailing – even for the favorite son! But in Joseph's story, we see that even when terrible things happen to us, and around us, things can turn around. God is always working – no matter the circumstances.

### Questions

1. Can you think of a time the decisions of other people made life tricky for you?
2. Can you think of something that was once hard for you but isn't hard for you now?
3. Have you ever seen a sad situation turn into something good?

### Activity

Create a task that is difficult for one person to do alone but with help can be done. Eg. navigating an obstacle course with a blindfold on is impossible alone but with a kind guide, you get through. The course is difficult initially and gets easier as you keep going together.

### Takeaway

*A leader perseveres.* Even if you feel alone, like Joseph would have felt in the bottom of the cistern, God does not abandon us. Or alone like Jesus felt in the Garden of Gethsemane – he persevered, for our sakes, and God was always with him. Remember you're never alone.

## CHAPTER FOUR—MIRIAM

# A Leader Is Quick-Thinking & Creative

### Exodus 2:1-10

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Moses' story is a well-known one. But his story begins with the courage and quick-thinking of his older sister in this story. In the middle of a crisis, Miriam's baby brother was in great danger, and she came forward quickly and boldly with a plan.

### Questions

1. How would you describe Miriam's character to someone who hadn't read this story?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where some people (the adults) are stressed but you can see a solution?

### Activity

Act out the story of Miriam. You could leave it to the children (or group members) to decide how they'd like to portray this story (get them-thinking quickly!). Moses' mother could be standing in the corner of the room. How do we get the baby back to his mother?

Suggestions could be to have someone play the cruel leader who wants to kill all the Hebrew babies; some children play the part of the river; some the bushes, and there is a baby on the river, and Miriam hiding in the bushes watching.

### Takeaway

*A leader is quick-thinking and courageous.* Fear defined Pharaoh's leadership, but Miriam showed great courage. Without Miriam's courage, Moses may have been lost. Without the courage of Jesus to go to the cross for our sake, we are lost.

## CHAPTER FIVE—DAVID

# A Leader Relies On God

## 1 Samuel 17

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In this story, there is a whole army unable to defeat Goliath, when in walks David. He's young, small and inexperienced in battle. But it is David who God chooses to defeat the giant. God is not concerned about the outside – about our shape, our size, our age – but who we are on the inside. God also uses what you're already good at and creates a miracle from it. He used what David already had in his hand – a slingshot. And there is a parallel story in the Gospel of John about a boy with a few loaves of bread and couple of fish. Jesus took what was in the boy's hands and created a miracle then too (John 6:9).

### Questions

1. Why do you think God chose to use a child, not an army, to defeat Goliath? Or a young boy to provide lunch for thousands of people?
2. What do you have in your hand – what are you good at already – that God could use for his purposes?

### Activity

David and Goliath is a great story to act out. The youngest child in the group defeats a big scary adult!

Take a look at some 'small' things that grow into something big – seeds to trees. Talk about these as you're observing them. Remember, it's the heart that matters.

### Takeaway

*A leader has tenacious faith and relies on God!* David relied on God, and he defeated a giant. Jesus relied on his heavenly Father, and he defeated death! Death looked like an undefeatable giant, but trusting his father, Jesus went to the cross and defeated death!



## CHAPTER SIX—JEREMIAH

# A Leader Listens & Is Obedient To God

## Jeremiah 1:1-12

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Jeremiah's feelings of 'not being good enough' in this story are normal. When faced with a task many of us often think, 'I cannot do this.' Despite feeling like this, Jeremiah listened to God and in obedience followed God's direction. His confidence came from God, knowing that he wouldn't let him down.

### Questions

1. How long do you think God has known you?
2. Have you ever felt too young to do something? How did you solve this?

### Activity

For older children, trust falls (one person falls backwards into the arms of another, trusting their partner will catch them) that involves listening to instructions would be a good way to tie trust and listening together. For younger ones, set up a treasure hunt where they have to listen to incremental instructions on how to find the treasure.

### Takeaway

*A leader listens and obeys God.* Even from a very young age, you can listen, and you can follow where God leads. You can trust God that his instructions will not be too hard for you to follow because he loves you. Jesus also listened to God and followed where he led him: all the way to the cross.

## CHAPTER SEVEN—DANIEL

# A Leader Pursues Justice

### Daniel 1:1-21

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Daniel's is another story of courage and willingness to stand up for what is right at a young age. Even when the opportunity was there for him to take power and wealth for himself, Daniel chose God's way. This story provides a good platform for a history lesson for older children and teenagers. Just about every social justice movement in recent history has been led by young people – high school students and university students. Look into stories about the Freedom Rides here in Australia, the students standing up to oppression in Tiananmen's Square, the ending of Apartheid in South Africa, the Velvet Revolution in what's now the Czech Republic or the young people involved in the Civil Rights movement in the U.S.

## Questions

1. What could Daniel have done differently in this story, if he hadn't been so committed to God?
2. Have you ever had to speak up when you felt something wasn't right?

## Activity

For younger children, explore ideas around 'right and wrong' by presenting some scenarios where the children can discuss right or wrong choices. A lost wallet, an opportunity to cheat on a test or to stand up for another child (person) who was not being treated right.

## Takeaway

*A leader is someone who pursues justice.* Jesus stood up for victims of injustice because God is the God of justice. Take home a story of a Child Partner who has led in their community. Stories found here [baptistworldaid.org.au/resources/a-child-shall-lead-them-leaders-guide/#row3](http://baptistworldaid.org.au/resources/a-child-shall-lead-them-leaders-guide/#row3)

## CHAPTER EIGHT—MARY

# A Leader Is Ready, Prepared To Play Their Part

Luke 1:26-45

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This story is a story about a good Jewish girl who knows the promised Messiah is coming. And in this moment, she says 'yes' to being part of story. It is utterly impossible, but she says yes to this history-making task of being the mother of Jesus – God's son. Her story is one of courage and humility.

### Question

1. For older children and teenagers, invite them to put themselves in this story. What would you do if you were Mary at that moment? (She was a teenager!)

### Activity

While listening to the story, younger children could draw or mold clay and create something reflecting the story. Encourage them to use their imaginations and step into the wonder of this amazing moment.

### Takeaway

*A leader is ready to play their part.* Mary said 'yes' to the angel's news and did not worrying about her reputation. Jesus was also ready to go with God's plan despite what others may think or say. Jesus said yes and gave up his reputation (not considering equality with God something to be clung to).

## CHAPTER NINE—JOSEPH

# Leaders Are Respectful & Humble

Matthew 1:16-25

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Remember David – he was Joseph’s great, great, great (plus) grandfather. Joseph could have said ‘no’ to God’s invitation into his plan. He could have abandoned Mary to shame and disgrace. But, like Mary, he knew the promises about God’s Messiah coming from the house of David – his own family. He stepped up and in humility played his part.

### Questions

1. How much do you know about the people in your family? Who are some of your ‘great’ people? What are their stories?
2. Why do you think Joseph said ‘yes’ to God? Why was he willing to marry Mary?

### Activity

Create or fill in a family tree. Think about the people who have gone before you in life. All families look different, but God has a plan for them all. Have children (group members) share some stories of their ancestors, if they know them? If they don’t know much, send them away with an assignment to find out some info on their family history, interviewing their grandparents or relatives.

### Takeaway

*A leader is humble and respectful.* Read Phil 2:1-7. Jesus is the ultimate example of humility in a leader. He is God but did not use this to disadvantage others. Joseph humbly followed God’s lead and in doing so got to take part in God’s rescue mission for humanity.

## CHAPTER TEN—MIRIAM

# A Leader Is Focused

Luke 2:41-52

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This is the story of Jesus as a young boy. He was fully God but also a child, still in need of his family's protection and care. He was full of wisdom and eager to be in his father's house (the Temple) in Jerusalem. Even though he was young, he was focused, and he astounded everyone around him with his curiosity and insight.

### Questions

1. Have you ever wandered off from your parents (or had your children wander off)? Even by accident? How did they respond?
2. Do you ever struggle to stay focused? What are some things that help you get back on track?

### Activity

Act out this story having some play the role of stuffy, know-it-all teachers and then have one of the youngest children play the role of Jesus astounding them with the things they understand. Others can play Jesus' distressed parents. They can adlib what they think people would do or say, especially when the parents on the road first discovered Jesus was not with them.

### Takeaway

*A leader is focused.* Throughout his life, Jesus remained focused on the most important thing in that moment. Whether that was a need or question someone had, or whether it was time to take time out and pray, he kept his eyes on his Father and the work God had given him to do. Life is full of competing priorities, and we need to listen to God to help us stay focused. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus!



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