

2

Center the Ones Left Out

MATTHEW 15:21-28



GOAL

Children learn to grow away from centering self toward taking action to center the voices of those silenced at the margins.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- C Conversation
- D Drama
- F Food
- G Game
- M Music
- NS Nature/Science
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

God of every concentric circle, come be our center. Level our hierarchies and move the mountains of injustice that keep people marginalized. May this generation growing up in you now be the last to know inequity among people. Amen.

THIS SESSION

To center someone’s voice is to listen to them deeply, creating space for them to share from their lived experience, and then respond with action to build a new center that leaves less on the outside. God’s work of grace is designed to decentralize. God willingly and graciously steps aside for all of us, especially the ones who have been left out.

THE BIBLE STORY

Jesus, usually a steady character in Scripture, is presented in Matthew 15:21–28 as the one needing to learn and grow. This text is an example of centering a marginalized voice by focusing on the Canaanite woman as the moral center of this story. We are still being asked to do what Jesus does here and learn how to be wrong, relinquish the center, and grow from a mistake.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children understand centering from how they are learning to form friendships. To have a best friend is to center that friend. Conversely, the sting of finding out that you are not someone’s best friend can be a starting point for children understanding what it looks like for society to push people out of the center and into the margins.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Where Is the Center?” (p. 20): Use painter’s tape to make five large concentric circles on the floor. You will use these circles throughout the session. Cut out the figures from Resource Pages 2 and 3 and glue them to cardboard. Make a small cut where indicated on the bottom of the figures and cut a piece of cardboard to slide into the notch and make a stand.
- Depending on the options you choose:
- “Native American Stories” (p. 22): Find out what indigenous land(s) you live on. Familiarize yourself with the interactive native lands map at www.native-land.ca. Preview and choose one or more of the listed videos to show the children about Native American history or stories.
- “Appreciating Others” (p. 22): Obtain *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña (G. P. Putnam’s Sons Books for Young Readers, 2015) or use the YouTube video “Last Stop on Market Street” (bit.ly/FMMarketStreet, 7:05).
- “Paying Attention to the Center” (p. 23): Cut the strips apart from Resource Page 5 and place them into two paper lunchbags, the strips with the circles in one bag marked with a circle and the strips with the squares in the other bag marked with a square.



GETTING STARTED

- Copies of Resource Page 1
- One big box of crayons

SHARING ALL THE COLORS

A C

Place copies of Resource Page 1, but no crayons, on a table for children to color as they arrive. Give the first child to arrive all of the crayons, and tell them that the crayons are for them to color. For the children that arrive after the first, do not give them any crayons but tell them to find a spot at the table and work on the coloring page. Do not give the children any instructions about sharing the crayons or help them figure out how to distribute them. Let them figure it out for themselves and pay attention to what happens. Notice who gets crayons and how they go about it. Notice if any of the children help the other children get crayons. Once all have arrived and have had a chance to color, or not, reflect on the coloring experience using the following questions:

- ✦ How did it feel for one to have all the crayons and others to have none?
- ✦ How did it feel to show up and not have anything to color with, especially when the directions were to color the picture?
- ✦ What did you notice about the picture you were coloring?
- ✦ Why did or didn't you decide to share crayons?

CELEBRATING GOD'S DIVERSITY

C

Invite the children to respond with suggestions as prompted, highlighting God's diversity in creation and in us. Let the group know when they will respond individually and as a group. Use the following pattern:

God made (*name an item of creation, such as the moon or mountains, or a particular body of water or land form, or a particular plant or animal*).

Let's describe (*repeat the item of creation named above*).

(*Invite people to take turns describing the item of creation named above.*)

Thank you, God, for (*repeat the item of creation named above*).

(*One person at a time, lead this part of the litany.*)

(*Name*), you are made in God's image.

(*Invite the named person to say a sentence that describes something about themselves, such as "I am tall," or "I have green eyes," or "I like to draw."*)

Thank you, God, for (*name of person named above*).



Example:
God made trees.

Let's describe trees.

Some trees are green. Some have flowers. Some have fruit.

Thank you, God, for trees.

Bennett, you are made in God's image.

I like to sing.

Thank you, God, for Bennett.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Prepared five large concentric circles on the floor made with painter's tape
- Prepared figures from Resource Pages 2 and 3

WHERE IS THE CENTER?


G C X

To help children understand the concepts of people in the *center* and the *margins* or *marginalized* people, explore the relationships of the characters from a kingdom. Invite the children to sit in a circle on the floor around where you have made the concentric circles. Tell the children that the circles represent a kingdom. Put the figure of the king in the center circle.

Explain that the center of the kingdom, where the king rules the whole kingdom, has all the power and gets whatever he wants. Hand out the rest of the figures from the kingdom and have the children place them where they think they belong in relation to the king in this kingdom of circles. As each child places their character, ask them why they put their character where they did. Wonder what patterns they are noticing. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- Who has the most power and the least, those at the center or the edges of the kingdom?
- Who is most likely to get the king to do what they want?
- Who is the most likely to have enough to eat?
- How would it feel to live your entire life out on the edge of the circle?
- What would happen if the king made the center circle bigger and invited those from the edges in to help him make decisions?
- What might happen if someone else became the one at the center of the circle? The queen? The blacksmith? The shepherd?

Talk with the children about how there are invisible circles kind of like these all around us in the world, where some people are in the center and have power and make the decisions for others, some people are in the middle sections, and some people are way out on the edges, or margins, of society with little or no voice in what affects their lives.

 The children may get silly with the placement of characters, wanting to put the jester in the king's place or the knight out fighting battles. Allow them some space for play, as long as it's clear that they understand that the center is where the power resides.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

FREEZE UP




Tell the children that today's Bible story is best told by acting it out. Invite volunteers to play these roles: Jesus, the Canaanite woman, the daughter, and two or three disciples. Explain that you will be the director and any additional children are consultants, advising you when called upon for opinions. Explain to the actors that you will be reading from the script and telling them to say lines or to act or move in some fashion. Pause for the actors to say their lines, act, or move. Use biblical costumes if desired.

Read the script of the adapted Bible story from Matthew 15:21–28 on Resource Page 4 as if you are a harried movie director. Follow the stage directions written in the text. The actors will end up being moved around on the concentric circles based on who the story is centering.

After the drama, have everyone applaud the actors and then have everyone applaud the consultants. Ask the children when they might have had an experience where they learned and grew from a time they were wrong. Share an experience of your own as well.

- Concentric tape circles on the floor
- Resource Page 4 (2 pages)
- Biblical costumes (optional)

 If you have a small group and everyone is playing a part, invite them to be consultants as well when advice is needed.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

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- Concentric tape circles on the floor
 - Internet-connected device

NATIVE AMERICAN STORIES



Invite the children to sit all over the concentric circles taped to the floor. Suggest that the circles now represent the United States, and that they are the *native*, or *indigenous*, peoples (now called Native Americans) who lived all over this land. Explain that they lived on the land before people from European countries took possession of their lands. All the various tribes of native peoples found across North America had cultures, languages, and a way of living that were moved from the center to the margins, or marginalized.

Ask the children if they know whose native lands they live on. Show the children the native lands interactive map at www.native-land.ca. Note the layers and wonder why some areas have several layers representing different native peoples. Enter your ZIP code in the search bar. Click on the links provided to see the territories of specific tribes.

Tell the children that learning about the stories of people who have been marginalized honors their stories and cultures. Depending on the age, background knowledge, and interest of your group, choose one or more of the YouTube videos listed below to show the children.

- “BrainPop: American Indians” (bit.ly/FMAmericanIndians, 4:08)
- “Native American for Kids—An Insightful Look into the History of the Native Americans” (bit.ly/FMNativeAmericans, 6:48)
- “Giving Thanks Read Aloud by Chief Jake Swamp” (bit.ly/FMGivingThanks, 3:50)
- “We Know Where We Come From: Creation Story” (bit.ly/FMWeKnow, 5:36).

Wonder together how hearing these stories can help honor God’s diversity and center the stories of people who were pushed to the margins. Suggest that, when we take the time to hear and honor the stories of people who have been marginalized, as in these examples of the Native Americans, the center may grow so that fewer people are left out.

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- Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña (G. P. Putnam’s Sons Books for Young Readers, 2015) or internet-connected device

APPRECIATING OTHERS



Remind the children that, at first, Jesus did not want to pay attention to the Canaanite woman because, in his world at the time, she was an outsider, someone who was unimportant to him. Wonder together what or who we pay attention to and, particularly, who we do not. Comment that we are often so caught up in our own interests that we neglect to see or hear what is around us. Invite the children to hear a story about a boy who learns to appreciate what he has not paid attention to.

Read aloud *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña or show the YouTube video “Last Stop on Market Street” (bit.ly/FMMarketStreet, 7:05). After the story, engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ✦ What things or people was CJ not paying attention to?
- ✦ What things or people did Nana open CJ’s eyes and ears to?
- ✦ Who or what might you be missing and what might you do to pay attention?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

PAYING ATTENTION TO THE CENTER

G AM C

Invite the children to sit around the concentric tape circles on the floor to play a game like Charades, but with a twist. Show the children the two bags and explain that each strip in the bag with a circle has a secret rule that must be obeyed during a person's turn. Tell them that the rule will be something they can or cannot do while trying to get the rest of the group to guess what is on a strip of paper from the bag with a square, but without using any of the words written on the paper.

Invite a volunteer to step into the center of the circle, draw one strip of paper from each bag, and get the group to guess their strip while following the rule. Once the group has guessed, the child can reveal the rule they had to follow. Continue playing until everyone has had a turn who would like one. Reflect on the game using the following questions:

- What did it feel like to be in the center and not be able to fully express yourself?
- What did it feel like to be paying attention to the person in the center but have a hard time understanding?
- Where can you imagine something like this happening, where you don't know the background story of where someone else is coming from?
- What might you do to better understand another person's point of view?

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- Concentric tape circles on the floor
 - Prepared paper lunchbags with strips cut from Resource Page 5

A WORLD WITHOUT LEFT-OUTS

A C

Invite the children to play a game of musical chairs. Have the children set the chairs up in a circle, with the chairs facing outward, with one less chair than children. Explain that, while you play music, the children should walk around the outside of the chairs. When the music stops, each person needs to sit down in a chair. One child will not have a chair and be eliminated. Play several rounds, and then suggest you try a new game.

Have the children remove the chairs and use the concentric tape circles on the floor. Tell the children that, as the music plays, they can move all over the circles. When it stops, they stop in place. The first time the music is stopped, remove the center circle so that the new central circle has been enlarged. Continue playing, removing the new center circle each round until only the largest circle is left and everyone is included in it. Reflect on the game using the following questions:

- What did it mean to be eliminated from the game, in regard to playing the game?
- How did it feel to be *winning*, and how did it feel to be *eliminated*?
- How is the first game of musical chairs like life for some people?
- How did it feel to include more and more people in the game?
- One of the games was competitive and one was not. Which did you like better and why? Do you think it made a difference if you were *winning* at the first game or not? Why or why not?
- How do you think people feel who are *eliminated* or pushed to the margins of society?
- How might we make life more like the second game?

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- Chairs, one for each person
 - Music player
 - Concentric tape circles on the floor



FOLLOWING JESUS

- Concentric tape circles on the floor, or the largest circle remaining on the floor from “A World without Left-Outs” (p. 23)
- Internet-connected device



The song “Draw the Circle Wide” with a different video, will be used in each session so the children will have the chance to learn the verses.

GOD’S CIRCLE

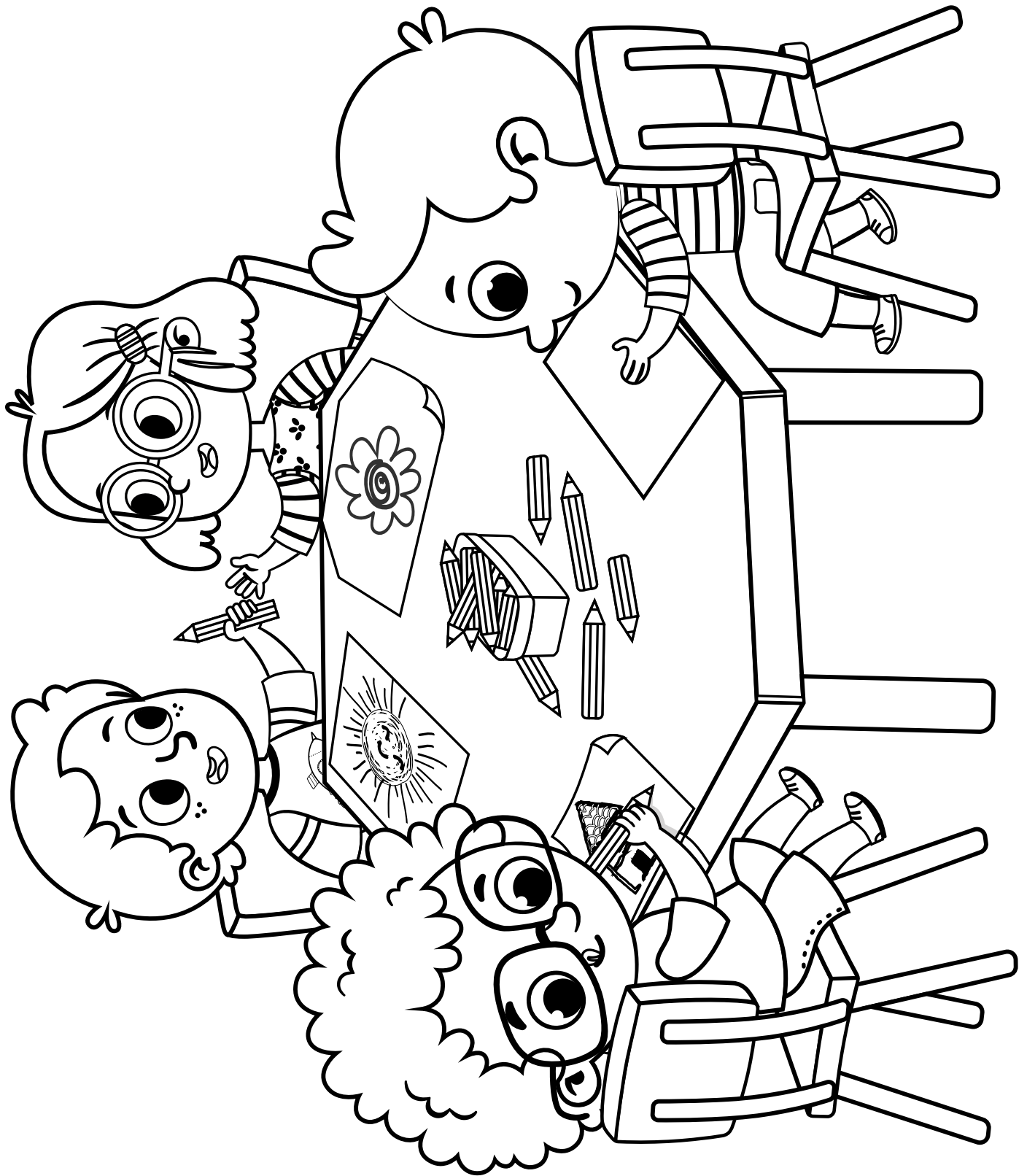


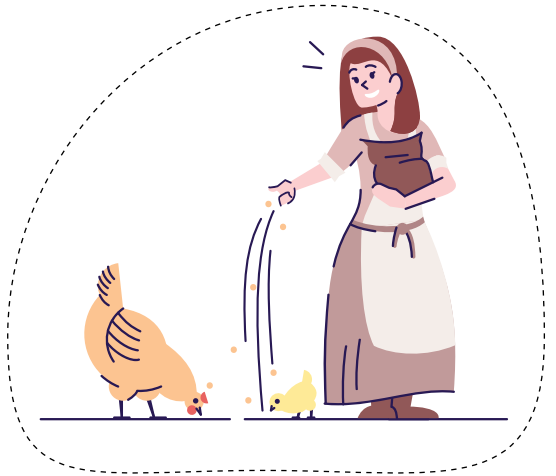
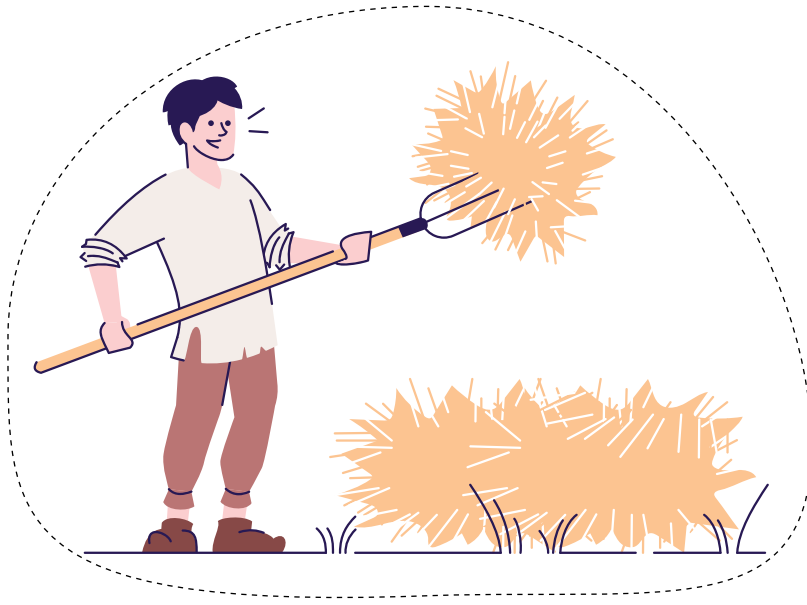
Invite the children to sit around the largest tape circle. Ask the children what Jesus said to the Canaanite woman at the end of the Bible story. (“*Woman! Great is your faith! Let your daughter be well!*”) Tell the children that, after Jesus died, rose, and met with his disciples, he gave them final instructions. Read Matthew 28:19 aloud, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Comment that Jesus’ ministry wasn’t to just his own people but included everybody. Jesus drew the circle wide!

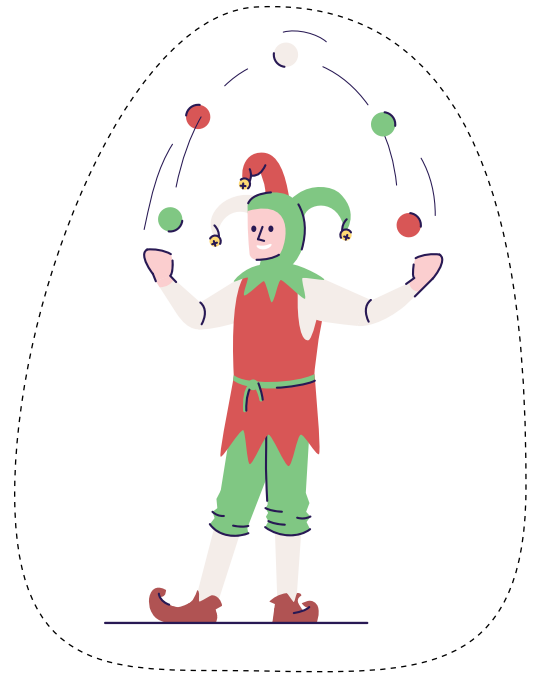
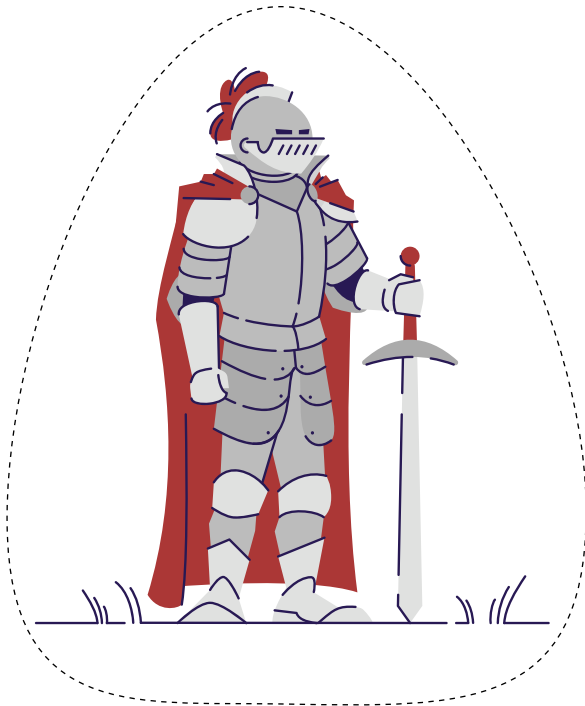
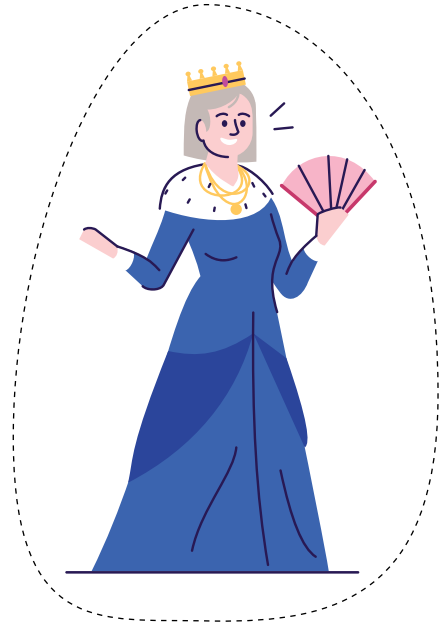
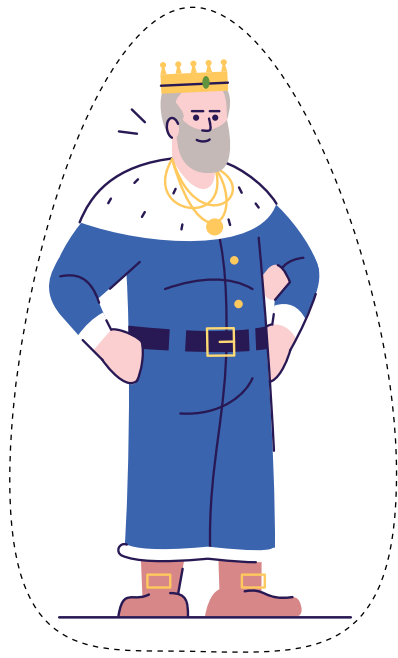
Show the YouTube video “Draw the Circle Wide” (bit.ly/FMDrawTheCircle, 3:04) and invite the children to sing along, especially with the chorus as it becomes familiar.

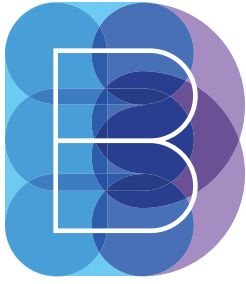
Pray the following prayer, or one of your own choosing:

Thank you, God, for the faithfulness of the Canaanite woman. And thank you, Jesus, for centering the voice of someone left out on the margins and learning from her so that we might learn from others like her too. Amen.









BIBLE STORY

BASED ON MATTHEW 15:21–28

OK, everyone. Quiet on the set! Let's get rolling! Where is my Jesus? There you are, looking good. Stand right here in the center of the set. [*place Jesus in the center circle*] Perfect.

Now, where is my Canaanite woman? Wait! Everybody stop. She doesn't have a name in this story? How disrespectful! Consultants! Give me a beautiful and powerful name for the Canaanite woman. [*insert name here*] I love it. Great. Now, you stand way out here on the edge. [*place her in the outer circle*]

Where is the daughter? I need the daughter. Wait! You don't have a name either . . . never mind. There's no time! [*place the daughter next to her mother, but even a bit further or over the outside of the circle*]

Disciples! Where are my disciples? Scatter yourselves casually around Jesus. That's too close. Back up a bit. OK. More casual. No, that's too casual. Come on, we're losing the light. This will have to do.

OK. Everyone just do what I say. Let's see if we can get this on the first take!
Lights! Camera! Action!

[*use a more serious "movie voiceover" voice*] We open on the district Tyre and Sidon: an idyllic coastal town. Jesus and his disciples are tired from their journey there.

[*speak in your regular director voice*] Look more tired! Good. Keep rolling.

[*use the "movie voiceover" voice*] Suddenly the Canaanite Woman . . .

[*speak in director voice*] Sorry, what was that name again?

[*use the "movie voiceover" voice*] (*Name*) stands right in front of Jesus.

[*speak in director voice*] (*Name*), that's your entrance. Yeah, move to Jesus, right there in front of Jesus. Here's your line. You ready? The script says to shout it.

[*turn to the consultants*] What do you think, consultants, should she shout her line? Yes? [*speak to Canaanite woman*] OK. Good. Say, "HAVE MERCY ON ME . . ."

No, louder, from your gut, "HAVE MERCY ON ME . . ."

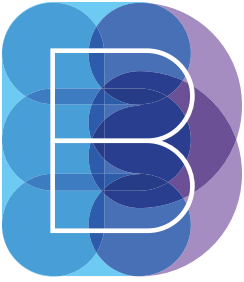
Good. Continue. "LORD, SON OF DAVID . . ."

Yes! Now say, "MY DAUGHTER IS TORMENTED BY A DEMON."

OK, daughter, stay over there on the edge but act like you are tormented by a demon. Action!

[*turn to the consultants*] What do you think, consultants?

[*speak to daughter*] Try being tormented in a different way. Nope. Let's change it up. Lay down. Hold your stomach like you're sick. Now put one hand on your forehead. Flip the hand over! Perfect. Don't move.



BIBLE STORY

OK, back to you, Jesus. She's shouting in your face, but you don't hear her at all. Show me that. Yes! Are we rolling on this? Pure gold!

(*Name*), keep trying to get his attention! Jesus, keep ignoring her. Perfect.

Disciples, here's your big moment. Say, "Send her away!" OK, but I need more. Say it sassier. Now try it grumpier.

[*turn to the consultants*] Consultants, suggestions? Yes!

Disciples, try that. OK, I think we got it.

(*Name*), keep shouting!

Jesus, now it's your line. Calm and cool say, "I was sent only for my people, not yours."

Can you do it with a little rude tone, but not too much?

Perfect.

[*turn to the consultants*] What do we think, consultants? Should we keep Jesus in the center still? So far, I think the story has him centered. OK, what's next?

(*Name*), kneel in front of Jesus. Think of how sick your daughter is. In your most pleading voice say, "Lord, help me." More pitiful. Yes.

Jesus, you say, "It isn't right to take food from my children and throw it to dogs like your children." Can you give me a little arrogance? Maybe a gesture? There. Hold it.

Daughter, Jesus just called you a dog. Act like a dog!

[*turn to the consultants*] Consultants, what do you think? Is she supposed to be a dog, or is Jesus using a metaphor here? That's what I thought. Go back to being sick.











OK, (*Name*), you're still on your knees. Good. Still pleading but now he's insulted you, so you have a little defiance in your voice when you say, "Yes, Lord, but even dogs get scraps from the master's table."

Wait, wait! CUT! We need to reset here.

[*turn to the consultants*] Consultants, I don't think Jesus is the center of the story anymore. What do you think? (*Name*), stand up and switch places with Jesus. The story is centered on you now.

OK. Jesus, we'll start with your line. Say, "Woman! Great is your faith! Let your daughter be well!" OK, daughter, get up and look healthy. Great!

And . . . scene! Great job, everybody. I'm looking ahead here in the script. For your character, Jesus, keep in mind that he is changed by meeting (*Name*) and expands his ministry to not just people like him but to all kinds of different people. Wow! Makes you think. Well, great work, everybody. That's a wrap. Give yourselves a round of applause.

	You cannot make sounds. You can only use actions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dancing a ballet
	You can only whisper.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Riding a rollercoaster
	You can only sing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Riding a bicycle
	You can only say one word every 10 seconds.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Making a hamburger
	You cannot use the word <i>the</i> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	Going to church
	You can only spell words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fighting with a sword
	You cannot open your mouth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Surfing
	You can only stand on one foot.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Washing the dishes
	You cannot stand still. You must be moving constantly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing guitar in a rock band
	You must lie on the floor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Delivering the mail

