

*Semicontinuous*  
**Exod. 17:1–7**  
**Ps. 78:1–4, 12–16**  
*Complementary*  
**Ezek. 18:1–4,**  
**25–32**  
**Ps. 25:1–9**  
**Phil. 2:1–13**  
**Matt. 21:23–32**

# Saying and Doing

## Goal for the Session

*Tweens will be encouraged to pay more than “lip service” to Jesus as they hear his parable of the two sons.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Matthew 21:23–32

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Lewis R. Donelson

This passage is part of the intense, growing, and violent controversy between Jesus and the temple leadership. The day before, Jesus entered the city, accompanied by shouts of “Son of David” (Matthew 21:9). He then drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, knocked over the tables of the money changers, and called the temple itself a “den of robbers” (v. 13). The next morning he is confronted by the chief priests and elders: “By what authority are you doing these things?” It is a fair question. Jesus’ response comes in two parts. First, he connects himself and his authority to John the Baptist. Second, he tells a parable to censure the temple leadership.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Kathryn D. Blanchard

Jesus states it plainly. The tax collectors and prostitutes are the ones “going into the kingdom of God ahead of you,” because of their response—repentance—to John the Baptist and later to himself. John preached the way of righteousness and the sinners believed him, while the religious authorities did not. In spite of their professed allegiance to God, they have shown no actual allegiance in terms of *doing* God’s will. The authority of Jesus has been ratified by the people, who are making the kingdom of God a reality through their good works; meanwhile, these same people have undermined the authority of those leaders who have ceased to lead them in the paths of righteousness.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Charlotte Dudley Cleghorn

The question of Jesus’ authority is important. If his authority is from humans, then the church is just another human institution among other human institutions. What Jesus is saying, both in his question to the religious leaders about John’s baptism and in his question about which of the two sons did the will of the father, is that the God of Israel who gives him his authority is the same God of Israel who welcomes sinners and prostitutes.

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

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Charles L. Campbell

As the chief priests and elders discover, conversations with Jesus are dangerous. The world rarely remains the same at the end of the conversation. Jesus always confronts us with the issue of his identity and the call to faith in him. Through his question about John, Jesus actually asks the central question of the Gospels: “Who do *you* say that I am?” He does not allow for beating around the bush. He wants our lives, and he will do whatever it takes to unmask our deadly priorities and call us to faith in him. We begin by believing in him and following him.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Matthew 21:23–32**

## Focus on Your Teaching

Learning when and how to challenge authority are important developmental tasks tweens must tackle. They know that, unfortunately, not every authority figure deserves respect or trust. Tweens tend to recognize hypocrites quickly, and often call them out! For these reasons, your learners may enjoy hearing about how some temple leaders, feeling threatened by Jesus' proclamation of God's reign, tried to put him in check—only to be checkmated by him. Your goal is to help tweens understand that, through his Spirit, Jesus is also challenging them to a high standard of personal integrity.

*Jesus, may I teach my students with more than my words. Help me to model how to live as your faithful follower. Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ battery-powered candle
- ☐ Color Pack 3, 5, 27, 28
- ☐ prepared puzzle pieces (see Resource Sheet 1, September 10)
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- ☐ pencils or pens
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

**For Responding**

- ☐ option 1: blank paper, pens, markers and/or crayons
- ☐ option 2: copies of your congregation's baptismal liturgy or service
- ☐ option 3: supplies for service project selected

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

Welcome each learner by name. Gather the group by playing “Amazing Grace” (Color Pack 27; track 1 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Invite tweens to sing along as they arrange the green cloth in your learning space and place the candle and Color Pack 3 on it. Light the candle as a reminder of Jesus' presence.

Prepare and lead the activity and ritual on Resource Sheet 1 from September 10 (In Christ, We All Fit Together).

✠ This week's question for discussion: “What's the best promise someone has ever made to you, and then kept?”

### EXPLORING

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources). Challenge tweens, working individually or in pairs, to solve the puzzles in “Tricky Questions.” Allow three minutes, then compare answers as a group. (Answers: 1. 8—the first page is on the right side of volume 1's spine and the last page is on the left of volume 10's, so the worm eats completely through only volumes 2–9. 2. None—in Genesis, Cain killed Abel. 3. “Which way would your twin tell me to go?” 4. They all do.)

### **Amazing Grace**

Amazing grace, how sweet  
the sound,  
That saved someone like me.  
I once was lost but now am  
found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

Through many dangers,  
toils, and snares  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace that brought me  
safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me home.

When we've been here ten  
thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing  
God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.

The temple merchants provided important services. Visitors from far away needed to be able to buy ritually acceptable animals for sacrifices. They also needed to exchange money because they couldn't use Roman coins for the temple offering—these coins carried the image of the emperor, who demanded he be worshiped as a god.

Tell learners that in today's Bible story, Jesus is asked a tricky question, and he answers with a tricky question of his own.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Phoning It In). Recruit volunteers to act out the various parts. After the skit, invite conversation about the final caller's question.

Ask tweens to find Matthew 21:28–31 in their Bibles; assist as needed. Invite them to follow along as you read aloud verses 28–31, ending with “. . . the first.” Ask:

✎ Why might Jesus have told this story to the temple leaders?

Affirm all thoughtful responses, remembering learners have not yet read Jesus' parable in context, and may not know that context.

To study the context for Jesus' parable, form three teams: A, B, and C. Each team will research and report on another text from Matthew's Gospel to help the group better understand Jesus' parable. Teams should consult “Behind the Parable” on Resource Sheet 1 for their assignments. Allow four or five minutes for teams to work, then ask each to tell the answers to their questions to the whole group.

Ask three volunteers to read aloud today's entire focus passage, as follows: vv. 23–27; 28–30; 31–32. Discuss:

✎ How does Jesus' question about John the Baptist trip up the temple authorities?

✎ How do the other texts in Matthew help you better understand Jesus' words in this passage?

Remind learners that Jesus and the temple leaders were all Jews. Jesus' story is a contrast between those who *say* they'll serve God and those who *do*, not between Jew and Gentile.

✎ What do you learn from these verses about the value God gives to saying and doing?

Invite a moment of personal reflection, not asking tweens to tell their responses:

✎ When, in your life as a Christian, have you been more like the first son? When have you been more like the second son?

EASY  
PREP

## RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Author, Author** To help tweens appreciate how Jesus created stories to teach God's will, challenge them to write and illustrate a modern version of Jesus' story of the two sons for the younger children of the congregation. Stories can be realistic or imaginative, serious or funny, but should help younger children understand the difference between saying we follow Jesus and actually following him.
- 2. Remember Your Baptism** To explore the relationship between baptism and obedience to God, give learners copies of the baptismal liturgy or service used in your congregation. Read the service together, looking for how it describes a baptized Christian's responsibilities. Ask for specific examples of how your congregation is fulfilling its responsibilities. In what ways are baptized individuals and their families in your church fulfilling their promises? Be prepared to talk with young people who are not baptized, and wish to be, about the next steps they can take. Option: Contact families before the session and ask them to bring photographs or other mementos they may have of the learners' baptisms.
- 3. Time to Serve** To emphasize the importance of doing God's will, spend time in some form of service. For example: Sort and shelf canned goods for a food pantry; clean up litter in the neighborhood; write notes to your congregation's sick and homebound members; assist teachers of younger children; or assemble small kits of medical or school supplies for people in your community or abroad (check with your denominational agencies or programs such as Church World Service: [www.cwskits.org](http://www.cwskits.org) for guidelines). Remind tweens that even seemingly small forms of service are great in God's sight.

### I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

I'm gonna live so God can  
use me  
anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna live so God can  
use me  
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

I'm gonna work . . .

I'm gonna share . . .

I'm gonna care . . .

For the next session, you will need one plastic bottle for each participant. Ask for help collecting bottles, and/or contact learners before the session and ask them to bring bottles.

## CLOSING

Show Color Pack 5. Ask learners to suggest captions that say what this person is thinking. After several captions are given, read aloud James 1:22–24 from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*:

Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. *Act* on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.

Sing "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" (Color Pack 28; track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Lead the closing charge:

**Leader:** We are ready to live so God can use us.

**All: Go with God! Amen!**

Extinguish the candle. Tell tweens you will pray for them this week, and ask them to pray for you.

## Session Resources



### Tricky Questions



1. A ten-volume encyclopedia set is on a shelf. Each volume has 100 pages. The volumes are shelved volume 1 to 10, left to right, with no other books or spaces between. If a bookworm starts on the first volume's first page and nibbles a direct path to the last volume's last page, how many books will it have eaten through?



2. In what biblical book is the story of Abel killing Cain?



3. An astronaut is traveling to a human colony on a planet populated by flesh-eating aliens. She finds the path that leads to the colony. At a fork in the road stand alien twins who know which way she should go to reach safety. One alien always lies; the other always tells the truth. The astronaut has only one chance. What question should she ask?



4. Some months have 31 days. How many have 28?



### Behind the Parable

#### Team A: Matthew 3:1–10

Who was John? What did he tell people to do?

How did John respond to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Jewish leaders) who came to hear him?

#### Team B: Matthew 7:21–27

According to Jesus, who will enter the kingdom of heaven?

What is “wisdom” and “foolishness,” according to Jesus?

#### Team C: Matthew 21:12–16

Why do Jesus’ actions upset the temple authorities?

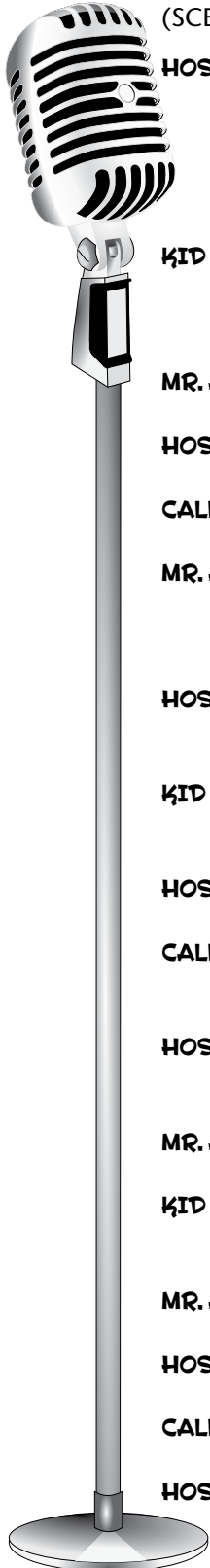
What can we learn about these leaders, based on their reaction to Jesus?

October 1, 2023  
Saying and Doing

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary  
**FEASTING on the WORD**  
CURRICULUM

Tweens  
Resource Sheet 2

## Phoning It In



(SCENE: A radio studio. The HOST sits across a desk from MR. ABLE and his two KIDS.)

**HOST:** . . . and welcome back to “Phoning It In”! Our topic: getting kids to listen. With me in the studio today are Mr. Able and his two kids. Mr. Able—can I call you Par? (*Not waiting for the reply*) Par, you’re a major player in this country’s food business. Nearly all of us buy your food and eat in your restaurants. We respect you, so why don’t your own kids respect you?

**KID 2:** Dad, I told you: I did what I did because I respect you! If everybody hears me ask, “How high?” when you say “Jump,” what does it matter if I jump or not? You still get to look like Mr. Big Shot!

**MR. ABLE:** It wasn’t about looking good; it was about getting the work done.

**HOST:** Hello, caller: You’re Phoning It In!

**CALLER 1:** Mr. Able, if this work was so important, why didn’t you do it yourself?

**MR. ABLE:** You have no idea what I do behind the scenes—I can’t do it all! I know what’s best for my business. I need my kids to share in the work. Considering all I’ve given them in the past, that’s the least they can do.

**HOST (to KID 1):** What did you say when Dad asked you to roll up your sleeves, burn some of that ol’ kneecap oil?

**KID 1:** I had pretty much the same reaction as my brother. I had my own stuff I wanted to do.

**HOST:** Hello, caller: You’re Phoning It In!

**CALLER 2:** So this other kid just told his dad “No” to his face? What’s the matter with these kids today!

**HOST:** Yeah, kid, what’s the matter with you today? (*KID 1 remains silent.*) Llama got your larynx?

**MR. ABLE:** Actually, this kid eventually changed his mind and did show up to do the work.

**KID 2:** OK, technically . . . but don’t forget who didn’t make his old man a public laughingstock by saying no to his face!

**MR. ABLE:** Don’t you forget who didn’t do any work that day.

**HOST:** Hello, caller: You’re Phoning It In!

**CALLER 3:** So which of these kids did the right thing?

**HOST:** Good question, but we’re gonna have to leave it there. Thanks for “Phoning It In”!