

# **I Am An Echo Devotion**

LCMS Servant Events

# Jonah: The Unwilling Echo

## Opening

*Each day will have two possible openings. Choose whichever one fits your participants and space best. Be sure to ask the transition questions at the end to help lead into the preparation for the Bible Study.*

### Two Truths and a Lie

*Supplies and Prep: None*

Each participant should find a partner. Partners should stand face to face and take turns telling two truths and a lie. When they are done, their partner will choose which thing they think is a lie. If they are right, their partner sits down. If they are wrong, the partner continues on.

At the end of each round, everyone finds a new partner and tells two truths and a lie again. They can choose new truths and lies or use the ones from the previous round. This continues on until you have one winner.

Remind participants who are out to avoid giving hints as to which item is a lie, especially if they know the participants well.

### Transition Questions

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- How hard was it to figure out if your partner was lying? What made it hard or easy?
  
- Was it hard to think of a lie? Was it hard to tell a lie without giving it away?
  
- Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted to lie or run away, rather than telling the truth? What did you do? How did it play out?

- OR -

### Bible Verse Freeze Tag

*Supplies and Prep: Bibles*

This game is played just like regular freeze tag. One person is "It" and when people are tagged, they freeze. They become unfrozen by shouting a Bible verse. The leader can decide how close they expect the Bible verse to be to the actual text. Each Bible verse can only be used once in the game.

If a participant does not know a Bible verse, someone else can bring them a Bible from the sidelines. Once they pick and shout a verse, they must run the Bible back to the sidelines or to another player.

You can play several rounds of this with several different people being "It".

## Transition Questions

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- Of the verses you shouted, do you remember where you learned them?
  
- Has a Bible verse or hymn or piece of liturgy ever jumped into your mind at a time when you needed it? If it did, how did that make you feel?
  
- Have you ever felt nervous or scared to share a Bible verse with someone, maybe even someone you know is a Christian?

## Preparing for the Story

*This section helps transition the group from the opening to the Bible story. It provides context for the story and helps youth to see the bigger story of God's Word. If your youth have Lutheran Study Bibles, encourage them to use the resources there to find out more about the characters in the story.*

Jonah was a prophet, a person sent to speak God's Word to the people. He served God at the same time as the prophets Hosea, Amos, and Joel. These prophets obediently followed God's commands helping Israel to win back land and follow God. So when God sends Jonah to Nineveh, Jonah is shaken and shocked. He was willing to share God's Word with God's chosen people, the Israelites. But in Jonah's mind, if anyone deserved God's destruction, it was the Ninevites.

Assyria was Israel's enemy, a powerful and ruthless nation that posed a threat to the entire region. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and God describes Nineveh as a city both great and full of evil (Jonah 1:2). This might explain why Jonah went the opposite direction. But God knew this great and terrible city was filled with people who did not know the one true God. Today we are going to talk about how God used the unwilling echo of Jonah to save many.

*Explain to participants that we are going to read a large section of Scripture. Let them know that the rest of the Bible study will discuss what they hear, so we want to set up ways for them to listen intently and interact with the story. Some of those ways include...*

- *Make sure everyone has a Bible to follow along.*
- *In the Bible study booklet, there is a blank page for participants to write words, questions, or pictures as they listen.*
- *Encourage them to read along, write, and highlight as the story is read.*
- *Encourage participants to find any comfortable spot where they can listen attentively. This may even mean moving around.*
- *Provide things like play dough that participants can shape or form into things they hear from the story.*

*You can have multiple people read or just one. You can have participants act out the story as it is told. Feel free to get creative, but don't cut additional parts of the story out.*

## Imagine the Story

Read Jonah chapters 1, 3 and 4 in their entirety. Please give readers a chance to look over the readings in advance. This helps them read with confidence and inflection. When you are done, have participants in small groups answer the following questions.

- What did God ask Jonah to do? What was Jonah's response?
  
- What happens when Jonah finally goes to Nineveh?
  
- What is Jonah's response to the Ninevites' repentance?
  
- What do we learn about the character of Jonah, God's chosen prophet?
  
- What do we learn about the character of God?
  
- What images, words, or phrases stood out to you in the story?
  
- What does this story make you wonder about?

## Connect to the Story

Jonah's prophet status meant that God had placed him in a position to be an echo of God's Word. As a prophet, being God's echo was literally his job. But when God sent Jonah to echo God's Word in Nineveh, Jonah ran the other way. Jonah was headed in the opposite direction as fast as he could. He was unwilling to echo God's threat of destruction and promise of new life to his enemies.

- If you had been Jonah, how would you have felt?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Have you ever chosen to walk (or run) away from a chance to echo God's Word? Why?  
*(If you want, you can have participants run around the perimeter of the room after they answer!)*

In running away, Jonah nearly dies. Yet in His mercy, God saved Jonah from a watery death with a large fish. Three days later, the fish spits him out onto dry land safe, smelly and sound. Jonah changes his direction and heads to Nineveh. He may have changed his travel plans, but his attitude changes very little.

Jonah's makes it to Nineveh and begins to share God's messages in a half-hearted way. He might have followed God's instructions, but it was clear he retained his unwilling attitude. Perhaps Jonah hoped the Ninevites wouldn't repent so God would wipe them from the earth. Jonah knew that if they repented, God would be merciful and Jonah would look silly as someone who claimed disaster was coming only to have nothing happen.

- Re-read Jonah 3:3-4. Read out what Jonah said in the tone you think he might have taken. The louder, the better.
- Have you ever echoed God in a less than enthusiastic way?

Here's the best part. Even though Jonah ran the other way and then preached one of the world's most awful sermons, God still did His saving, redemptive work. Jonah's attitude couldn't take away the power of God's Word. God's Word accomplishes its work and doesn't rely on our speech or attitude. God used Jonah's unwilling echo to change the hearts and minds of a huge city and turn them to the one true God. Jonah never really got it. He sulked and threw a fit when God showed mercy. But we can see how God used Jonah, even in his unwillingness, to save and redeem lost people.

You and I can be like Jonah. I don't always feel like loving my neighbor. It's uncomfortable to humble ourselves. Maybe we are worried about how we will look if we talk about our Christian faith so we hide it or only express it halfheartedly. Our echo of Jesus is imperfect and incomplete. But thank God it is not up to you and me. Jesus died for sins, including when we are unwilling to echo Him. Because of our Baptism, God's Spirit is at work in us and in the world. God does His saving work with or without us. Our attitude, our service and our speech cannot diminish the power of God's Word.

- Where do you relate most to Jonah's story?

- How does this story challenge or encourage you?

## **Song and Prayer**

Close in prayer in whatever way works best for your group. You can consider having participants share prayer concerns with a partner and then having them pray for one another.

# Gideon: The Unsure Echo

## Opening

*Each day will have two possible openings. Choose whichever one fits your participants and space best. Be sure to ask the debriefing questions at the end to help lead into the preparation for the story.*

### Egg Roulette

#### *Supplies and Prep:*

*You will need several eggs based on the number of participants and rounds you want to do. You should hard boil most of the eggs leaving 2-4 of each dozen raw. The number of raw to hard boiled can be up to you depending on how fast and messy you want the game to be. (You would need about 30 eggs for 12 participants.) When you are done, put all the eggs back in the carton so that participants cannot tell the difference. Cover the area with tarps or play in an area that is easily cleaned.*

Each participant receives an egg. They cannot exchange an egg once they have picked it out. One at a time, a participant will smash the egg on their heads. If it is hard boiled, they stay in the game. If it is raw, they are out. Go several rounds until you have a winner/winners who are un-egged.

#### **Transition Questions**

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- How nervous were you when you got ready to smash your eggs?
  
- Was there a moment where you knew if you had a raw or hardboiled egg? What did knowing the outcome do to help or hinder you?
  
- We usually need a good reason to do something that scares us. Can you share a time when you did something brave even though you weren't sure how it would turn out?

- OR -

### Grog

#### *Supplies and Prep:*

*This game can only be played in a space that can be significantly darkened. The leader should take one flashlight apart into as many pieces as they can. Usually this leaves the barrel, the batteries and the lens. The leader should hide each piece in a different part of the darkened space.*

The leader selects the GROG. The GROG is a "creature of the dark", and goes into the dark or dim play area to hide. The GROG's goal is to tag the other players, like freeze tag, and render them inactive. A participant can be unfrozen by the tag of an active player. The GROG wins by freezing all the players in place.

The participant's objective is to find the flashlight and assemble it as a team. If the participants find the pieces of the flashlight and shine the light on the GROG before all the players are frozen the participants win the game.

## Transition Questions

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- What was the hardest part of trying to win this game?
  
- Have you ever been afraid of the dark or of the unknown?
  
- Who has it easier in the game: the person who is playing alone or the person who is playing with a team? Why?

## Preparing for the Story

*This section helps transition the group from the opening to the Bible story. It provides context for the story and helps youth to see the bigger story of God's Word. If your youth have Lutheran Study Bibles, encourage them to use the resources there to find out more about the characters in the story.*

It's a story we hear many times throughout Scripture. The Israelites had sinned again and fallen away from God again. As a result, God allowed the people of Midian to conquer them. God's people were driven into mountains and caves. Anytime they had crops or animals, the Midianites would swarm in with their allies, the Amalekites, and steal everything. For years they were an Old Testament version of a pack of bullies stealing the Israelite's lunch and homework every day.

The Israelites cried out to God for deliverance. God was faithful to His people then just like He is now. Even though the Israelites weren't always faithful, God loved them, forgave them, and promised to save them, just like He does for us today. But who would lead the charge to free Israel from Midian? The most unlikely, unsure character: Gideon.

*Explain to participants that we are going to read a large section of Scripture. Let them know that the rest of the Bible study will discuss what they hear, so we want to set up ways for them to listen intently and interact with the story. Some of those ways include...*

- *Make sure everyone has a Bible to follow along.*
- *In the Bible study booklet, there is a blank page for participants to write words, questions, or pictures as they listen.*
- *Encourage them to read along, write, and highlight as the story is read.*
- *Encourage participants to find any comfortable spot where they can listen attentively. This may even mean moving around.*
- *Provide things like play dough that participants can shape or form into things they hear from the story.*

*You can have multiple people read or just one. You can have participants act out the story as it is told. Feel free to get creative, but don't cut additional parts of the story out.*

## Imagine the Story

Read Judges 6:11-15, 36-40, 7:19-23 in the entirety. Please give readers a chance to look over the readings in advance. This helps them read with confidence and inflection. When you are done, have participants in small groups answer the following questions.

- What did God ask Gideon to do? What was Gideon's response?
  
- How does God press Gideon's trust in Him?
  
- What do we learn about Gideon?
  
- What do we learn about the character of God?
  
- What images, words, or phrases stood out to you in the story?
  
- Is there anything you would like to know more about this story?

## Connect to the Story

When our story opens, Gideon is beating wheat in a winepress. If you were reading this verse long ago, you might immediately know what it says about Gideon. But perhaps the meaning is lost now, so let's describe what that looked like.

When farmers harvest grain they have to get the grain (the delicious food part) away from the chaff (the not tasty plant part). Before fancy equipment, they did that by waiting for a windy day and then throwing it all into the air. The chaff is light and would fly away. The grain is heavy and would fall to the ground for them to collect and use. A winepress is set of deep holes built into the ground that allowed a farmer to press the juice from grapes.

So, picture Gideon standing in a pit higher than his head throwing up tiny handfuls of grain and praying every time a chaff flew away that no one would see it. Rather than boldly throwing up the grain in the open where separation would be easy but been seen by hungry neighbors or enemies, he desperately tries to do the work while hiding where no one will spot him.

- What does this action tell us about the character of Gideon?
  
- Has there ever been a time when you wanted to hide and keep attention away from you?



Gideon was terrified and demoralized. It's hard to be an echo when you are hiding in a pit to avoid being seen! Yet, the angel calls Gideon a "mighty man of valor". In context, that might sound ironic or sarcastic, but it's not. God is calling Gideon to something bigger and braver. Gideon tells the angel his clan is the weakest and that he is the very least in his family. God has got the wrong guy. He is not the sure, strong, brave leader of an army. But God is sure of Gideon. He sends Gideon to be an echo and save Israel from the hands of its enemies.

→ If you were Gideon, how would you feel in that moment?

→ Why do you think God choose Gideon to lead the Israelites?

→ Was God's ability to save hindered by Gideon's fear and low stature?

Even with God's confidence, Gideon did not immediately warm up to the idea of leading God's charge against the Midianites. He decides to make absolutely sure that God is really going to go with him. So, Gideon devises a test. He will put out some fleece on the ground overnight. If it is wet and the ground is dry, God is with him. God responds by doing exactly what Gideon asks.

But that's not enough. Gideon decides that maybe since fleece naturally attracts moisture it might have been a fluke. He asks God to do the reverse the next night, leaving the fleece dry and the ground wet. God does this as well.

At best, Gideon's challenge is based in his scared and nervous nature. At worst, Gideon simply doesn't believe God will do what He says. Yet, God is patient and loving even in Gideon's uncertainty. Gideon may be an unsure echo but God gives Gideon the Holy Spirit, the promise of His presence, and evidence as many times as he needs.

→ Have you ever wanted to test God?

→ What evidence does God give us of His presence today?

→ How are we assured that God will do what He promised?

Gideon may have been unsure about God's call to be His echo, but he does what God asks. Using just an army of 300 (If you have time, check out earlier in chapter 7 about how those 300 were chosen!), Gideon leads to people to surround the Midianites in the middle of the night. All at once they break jars covering their torches, shouted, and blew trumpets. To a sleepy Midian army, it looked like they were overrun. The Midianites were so confused they cried out and fled giving Gideon the victory. God did exactly what He promised, using an unsure Gideon to save His people.

Being an echo of Jesus in a scary world isn't always easy, but that isn't anything new. Gideon experienced some of the same fear that we do today. If we echo too loudly or draw too much attention to our faith, we might be bullied, abused,

or left out. You might feel like fewer and fewer people are hearing or joining your echo. But Gideon defeated an army with just 300 men.

→ Where have you experienced uncertainty when sharing your echo of Jesus?

But God calls us His own men and women of valor. When we were scared, beaten down, and calling out, God sent His Son to die on our behalf. God promises to be with us till the end. God gives us His Word and Sacraments as evidence of His presence. Our God is a God of peace. He gave His peace to Gideon and to us today.

→ Who do you know that needs to be encouraged as a man or woman of valor this week?

### **Song and Prayer**

Close in prayer in whatever way works best for your group. You can begin the prayer and then open it up for everyone to share prayer requests. When it has been quiet for a short time, you can close the prayer.

# Samaritan Woman: The Unwelcome Echo

## Opening

*Each day will have two possible openings. Choose whichever one fits your participants and your space best. Be sure to ask the debriefing questions at the end to help lead into the preparation for the story.*

## Sponge Relay

*Supplies and Prep: Leaders will need a large bucket, bowl, and sponge for every team*

Separate the group into at least three teams. Each team sits single file front to back on the floor. At the front of each team place a large bucket of water with a sponge. Behind the last member place a bowl.

Each team must fill the sponge with water and pass it to the back over their head. They cannot pass the sponge to the right or the left. When it gets to the back, the last person wrings it out into the bowl. Then the sponge is passed back to the front. The first team to fill their bowl wins.

### Transition Questions

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- How often do you use water in your everyday life?
  
- Have you ever been in a situation where water was hard to use or find? How did that impact life?
  
- Jesus starts the conversation with the woman at the well over water. How does water connect us all?

- OR -

## Who's the Leader?

*Supplies and Prep: None*

One participant steps out of the room. The rest sit or stand in a circle. The group picks one individual as the "leader". The leader's job is make creative motions and have the other players follow along as quickly as possible. Some motions include snapping fingers, slapping their hands on their knees, clapping hands. The leader starts the motion while all the players are following the leader switches to another motion. The other players must quickly catch on and follow the leader.

While the leader is doing the motions have the player that is outside come back into the room. They must observe the circle and figure out who the leader is. Give them around two minutes to figure it out. If they guess correctly, the leader is now "It" and has to leave the room. If they guess wrong, the person in the middle remains "it" and has to leave the room again.

## Transition Questions

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- Was it hard to figure out who was the leader? Why or why not?
  
- Was it hard to follow the leader without being obvious?
  
- Echoing Christ means following His lead. How do we know how to follow Jesus' lead?

## Preparing for the Story

*This section helps transition the group from the opening to the Bible story. It provides context for the story and helps youth to see the bigger story of God's Word. If your youth have Lutheran Study Bibles, encourage them to use the resources there to find out more about the characters in the story.*

As Jesus traveled teaching and healing, he went from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south. Between these two places was Samaria, a land and a people that Jews tried to avoid at all costs.

Several times in the gospels we hear how Jesus traveled through Samaria. Samaritans were Jewish by heritage, but had intermarried with foreigners. They worshiped God but not in Jerusalem like other Jews. Even though both Jews and Samaritans saw the Books of Moses (the first five books of the Bible) as God's Word, there was hostility between the two groups because of their cultural differences. There was so much hostility that Jews would travel the long way around Samaria rather than going through it. But not Jesus.

In the passage we read today, Jesus chooses to speak to a woman who was an outcast in her village. When we meet the woman, she is drawing water during the very hottest part of the day. Usually the women of the village would go to the well together in the cool, early morning, but this unwelcome woman is drawing in the middle of the day. It was unheard of for a Jewish Rabbi like Jesus to be having a conversation with an outsider Samaritan woman, but Jesus didn't see those distinctions. Because He didn't, their interaction had a lasting impact, as you will see.

*Explain to participants that we are going to read a large section of Scripture. Let them know that the rest of the Bible study will discuss what they hear, so we want to set up ways for them to listen intently and interact with the story. Some of those ways include...*

- *Make sure everyone has a Bible to follow along.*
- *In the Bible study booklet, there is a blank page for participants to write words, questions, or pictures as they listen.*
- *Encourage them to read along, write, and highlight as the story is read.*
- *Encourage participants to find any comfortable spot where they can listen attentively. This may even mean moving around.*
- *Provide things like play dough that participants can shape or form into things they hear from the story.*

*You can have multiple people read or just one. You can have participants act out the story as it is told. Feel free to get creative, but don't cut additional parts of the story out.*

## Imagine the Story

*Read John 4:5-30, 39-42 in the entirety. Please read them over in advance so that you can read them with confidence and inflection. When you are done, have participants in small groups answer the following questions.*

- What do you learn about the woman through her conversation with Jesus?
  
- What do you learn about Jesus?
  
- What do you think the disciples were thinking when they came back to find Jesus talking to the Samaritan Woman?
  
- What is the woman's response to meeting Jesus? What impact does it have on others?
  
- What images, words, or phrases stood out to you in the story?
  
- How does this story challenge you?

## Connect to the Story

When Jesus walked up to the well in Samaria, the woman who was there fetching water probably felt confident that Jesus would leave her alone. He had every reason to ignore her. Jews and Samaritans hated each other. Men in that time would not speak to a strange woman while she was alone. She was obviously gathering water at a time which kept her away from the other women. The last thing this woman expected was for Jesus to ask her for a drink. But He does.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus treats those on the fringes of society with compassion, dignity and love. Jesus takes the most unwelcome people and gives them a chance to be an echo of Him. Jesus engages this woman not in casual conversation, but in meaningful discussion about faith and salvation.

→ Who might be on the fringes of your community? Who might feel unwelcome at school or church?

→ How do we treat people who are seen as unwelcome? How does Jesus treat them?

Jesus isn't just talking to this woman because He is thirsty. Jesus talks to her because He loves her and wants to share the Gospel with her. In their conversation, He doesn't talk down to her. Instead, Jesus listens and answers her questions. He doesn't walk away when she doesn't immediately understand. He spends time with her and exercises His

power by telling this woman about her past. Jesus speaks the truth of her sins to her, and in doing so reminds her of her need for a Savior.

When we are an echo of Jesus, we should do the same. Talking to people who do not yet know Jesus as the Savior, we can be frustrated when the conversation doesn't go smoothly. We can be tempted to be dismissive and walk away when someone is entrenched in sin. Yet when we echo Christ, we engage and answer questions. We continue the conversation for the Holy Spirit to use our echo.

- Have you ever been frustrated when trying to be an echo of Jesus to others? What made it difficult?
  
- Why can it be hard to keep faith conversations going?
  
- What is challenging about talking with others about sin and a need for a savior?

Jesus is clear about who He is. Jesus starts by calling Himself living water, a well that springs up forever. Jesus is the water of life that washes away every brokenness and brings us to everlasting life. But the woman doesn't understand what He is trying to say, so Jesus makes it clearer. She says the Messiah who comes will explain all things. Jesus tells her He is that Messiah, the one who is to save the people from their sins.

- People say Jesus is a lot of different things. Who do people inside and outside of the church say Jesus is?
  
- Who does Jesus say He is?

This one experience with Jesus sent the woman out echoing as loud as she could. She told everyone to come and see this man who could be the Messiah. I'm sure some people in town were skeptical. Why would this woman be the one to echo such important news? God used an unwelcome person on the fringe to bring people to Jesus. Echoes can come from anywhere God wants. In fact, the people were so impressed by the woman they listened to Jesus and believed for themselves. Through the Holy Spirit's work, these people came to know Jesus is the Savior of the world.

- To whom is God asking you echo His Word?
  
- How can we be more like this woman in sharing our faith with others?

## Song and Prayer

Close in prayer in whatever way works best for your group. You can pray by using the Lord's Prayer or Luther's Morning or Evening Prayer together.

# Pentecost: The Improbable Echo

## Opening

*Each day will have two possible openings. Choose whichever one fits your participants and space best. Be sure to ask the debriefing questions at the end to help lead into the preparation for the story.*

### Wind Motion Relay

*Supplies and Prep: Every team needs a ping pong ball.*

Split the group into 3 or 4 teams. Have each team line up behind a starting line with a ping pong ball. One at a time, each person will move the ping pong ball only by blowing on it to a designated line (about 15 feet away) and back. They are not allowed to touch it in any way. Once they have crossed back over the starting line, the next person moves it. The first person to have everyone get the ball down and back wins. For extra fun, you can do it on a table and have participants start over again if they blow the ball off the table.

#### Transition Questions

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- Was it easy or hard to control the ping pong ball with your breath?
  
- How difficult is it to harness the wind?
  
- Where do we hear about the action of wind in Scripture?

- OR -

### Pudding Pictionary

*Supplies and Prep: a cookie sheet covered in pudding for each team.*

This is essentially Pictionary, only the medium for drawing is pudding. Split the group into either 2 or 4 teams depending on your numbers. In each round, a person from each team will receive a word. They will be asked to draw something in their pudding that will get their team to say that word. If you have four teams, have two teams go head to head with the same word at the same time. If two, have the teams go back and forth.

#### Transition Questions

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- What was difficult about communicating through pudding?
  
- Which words were the hardest to convey in picture?
  
- Can you think of a time when you tried to communicate something important and failed?

## Preparing for the Story

*This section helps transition the group from the opening to the Bible story. It provides context for the story and helps students to see the bigger story of God's Word. If your students have Lutheran Study Bibles, encourage them to use the resources there to find out more about the characters in the story.*

Pentecost was a Jewish celebration that took place 50 days after the Passover Sabbath. Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem to celebrate the giving of the Law on Sinai. Jesus' disciples were gathered together, not celebrating but waiting. Jesus had died and risen again. He had ascended into heaven and instructed them to wait in Jerusalem. In just a short time, the Holy Spirit was coming to them.

We aren't sure what the disciples were expecting the Holy Spirit's arrival to be like. What they experienced that day was improbable and defied description. The Holy Spirit's arrival took forms they had never before seen and empowered them to be amazing echoes of Jesus. God uses their improbable echo to make believers out of many that day.

*Explain to participants that we are going to read a large section of Scripture. Let them know that the rest of the Bible study will discuss what they hear, so we want to set up ways for them to listen intently and interact with the story. Some of those ways include...*

- *Make sure everyone has a Bible to follow along.*
- *In the Bible study booklet, there is a blank page for students to write words, questions, or pictures as they listen.*
- *Encourage them to read along, write, and highlight as the story is read.*
- *Encourage students to find any comfortable spot where they can listen attentively. This may even mean moving around.*
- *Provide things like play dough that students can shape or form into things they hear from the story.*

*You can have multiple people read or just one. You can have students mime out the story as it is told. Feel free to get creative, but don't cut additional parts of the story out.*

## Imagine the Story

*Read Act 2:1-15, 32-47 in the entirety. Please read them over in advance so that you can read them with confidence and inflection. When you are done, have students in small groups answer the following questions.*

- What happened to the disciples when the Holy Spirit arrived?
  
- What were they able to do and say?
  
- How would you have felt as a disciple that day? How would you have felt as someone hearing them?
  
- How is the picture of the early church the same or different from our church today?
  
- What images, words, or phrases stood out to you in the story?



## Connect to the Story

Jesus' disciples were all gathered, praying, listening to teachings, and waiting. Suddenly, the entire house is filled with sound and each believer is filled with the Holy Spirit. What Luke describes is truly improbable and indescribable. He uses the best descriptions he can: a sound like a mighty rushing wind and tongues as of fire on their heads. We don't know exactly what this sounded or looked like, but we can be sure it was a sign from God. It is something that we don't hear or see today, but that doesn't mean God isn't acting in our lives.

→ You had your own Holy Spirit moment in your baptism. What do you know about your baptism or a baptism that you have seen?

→ What things do you hear, see, feel in the story of Pentecost? What things do you hear, see, and feel at baptism?

God had given each of the disciples exactly what they needed to be an echo of Jesus to the people visiting Jerusalem for Pentecost. For the Jews, Pentecost (or the Feast of Harvest) brought believers from as far as Asia, Africa, and all over Europe. Jesus' disciples spoke perfectly in a language they had never spoken before. They were able to echo the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection for their sins with every Jew gathered from around the world. But those who heard them could not believe what was happening. They were amazed and perplexed. They even tried to make fun of what they were hearing by saying the disciples were drunk.

God has given each of us gifts in our baptism. He gave us the Holy Spirit and forgiveness of sins. He gave each of us gifts and talents to use as we echo Jesus. We might not suddenly be able to speak another language, but God has given us what we need to speak the Gospel to the people around us. It isn't an accident or mistake that you are who you are where you are. God has put you where you are so you can be an echo of Jesus in that place.

→ Show off a skill or ability you have that no one else in the room might. How can our gifts, skills, and ability help share the Gospel?

→ Have you ever had someone make fun of your faith, like the disciples experienced? How did it feel? How did you react?

The people may have mocked the disciples, but the disciples stayed bold in their echo. Peter preaches a sermon that was translated right then and there by all the disciples. He showed how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus. He shared how Jesus' life, death and resurrection fulfilled all those Old Testament promises and more. He reminded them that they were responsible for Jesus' death on the cross, but that He had risen again to glory with God. The Holy Spirit used Peter's words to move the crowd in an improbable way. Thousands repented, turned away from their sin and were baptized.

→ Who do you know who doesn't yet believe in Jesus? How can you share your faith and trust in the Holy Spirit to work?

→ Where is God calling you to be a bold echo in an improbably place?

This wasn't just a flash in the pan for those who heard the Gospel that day. Those who were baptized on Pentecost devoted themselves to walking in faith together. They made their lives an echo of Jesus in service and compassion for one another. They worshipped together and they shared the good news that Jesus had died for our sins. Their glad and generous echo brought not only favor with people, but more and more to faith. Our faith sometimes has mountaintop experiences, but we are called to be faithful echoes day to day as well. Faith is not just for special occasions but it is a constant, daily part of our lives.

→ How does this story challenge or encourage you?

→ What might being a faithful echo in your day-to-day life mean for you?

### **Song and Prayer**

Close in prayer in whatever way works best for your group. One way you could pray is to pull out a map and have students pray for people in different parts of the world. If you have students who are fluent in other languages, encourage them to pray in those languages tonight.

# Timothy: The Inexperienced Echo

## Opening

*Each day will have two possible openings. Choose whichever one fits your participants and your space best. Be sure to ask the debriefing questions at the end to help lead into the preparation for the story.*

### Silent Birthday Line Up

*Supplies and Prep: None*

Participants are instructed not to talk, make any noise, or write at all through the duration of the activity. Ask participants to line up in a single file line from youngest to oldest down to the day. Participants should be allowed to use whatever other means they have to them to ensure that everyone is lined up.

Once the group indicates they are done, have them list off their birthdays. See if they can do it with no mistakes.

You can also have them try to line up by birthday over the course of a calendar year or by height.

#### **Transition Questions**

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- How hard was it to get the task done without talking?
  
- Was it easy or hard to guess age based on appearances?
  
- Do you think people ever make judgments about you based on your age?

- OR -

### Baby Food Taste Test

*Supplies and Prep:*

*Leader should purchase 5-10 different kinds of baby food. Each container should have its label taken off, a number on the front, and the flavor listed on the bottom. Each participant will need a blank piece of paper, pens, and one toothpick for every jar.*

Participants will line up and put a clean end of the toothpick in each container to taste test the food. After they do, have each participant write down what flavor they think it was. When everyone has had a chance to taste each container, see who got the most answers right.

#### **Transition Questions**

*After the game has ended, debrief the experience by asking the following questions. If you have a big group, you might ask them to answer these questions with a partner.*

- How easy or hard was it to guess the flavors?
  
- Did the appearances of the food help you guess the flavor or not?
  
- Do you think people ever make judgements about you based on your appearance or age?

## Preparing for the Story

*This section helps transition the group from the opening to the Bible story. It provides context for the story and helps youth to see the bigger story of God's Word. If your youth have Lutheran Study Bibles, encourage them to use the resources there to find out more about the characters in the story.*

Timothy grew up with a non-Jewish father and a Christian mother in what is modern day Turkey. His reputation in the church where he grew up caught Paul's attention. Paul asked Timothy to accompany him on some of his missionary journeys. After those journeys, Timothy ended up as a young pastor in Ephesus.

Paul's letters to Timothy is one of direction and encouragement. Think of it as a father to son or a mentor to mentee relationship. Paul wants Timothy not only to be successful as a young pastor, but to be effective in sharing the Gospel. Paul's letters to Timothy are helpful for the whole church, but they can be particularly inspiring for all young leaders in the church.

*Explain to participants that we are going to read a large section of Scripture. Let them know that the rest of the Bible study will discuss what they hear, so we want to set up ways for them to listen intently and interact with the story. Some of those ways include...*

- *Make sure everyone has a Bible to follow along.*
- *In the Bible study booklet, there is a blank page for participants to write words, questions, or pictures as they listen.*
- *Encourage them to read along, write, and highlights as the story is read.*
- *Encourage participants to find any comfortable spot where they can listen attentively. This may even mean moving around.*
- *Provide things like play dough that participants can shape or form into things they hear from the story.*

*You can have multiple people read or just one. You can have participants act out the story as it is told. Feel free to get creative, but don't cut additional parts of the story out.*

## Imagine the Story

*Read 1 Timothy 4:6-16 in its entirety. Please read them over in advance so that you can read them with confidence and inflection. When you are done, have participants in small groups answer the following questions.*

- What is Paul encouraging Timothy to do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Why is Paul encouraging Timothy to act in these ways?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What distractions to ministry does Paul point out?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How would you feel if you were Timothy reading this letter for the first time?

- What do you think was different about the church in Paul and Timothy's time compared to our church? What might still be the same?

## Connect to the Story

Paul is reminding Timothy of the importance of sticking with the words of faith and solid doctrine he learned growing up. Timothy was surrounded by "irreverent, silly myths" that threatened to pulled him and others away from the one true God. Timothy's age and inexperience might have made him more susceptible to believing things that aren't from Scripture.

Not much has changed for us. We get swayed by silly myths, false beliefs, and fictitious stories that end up pulling us away from God. Maybe it's the television show that shows the devil as the buddy cop here on earth solving crime or it's the friend who tries to make the case that all religions are really the same. We can be drawn in to other stories which begin to damage our faith and our echo of Christ. It is critical that we depend entirely on God's perfect words in the Bible and believe, teach, and confess what come from Scripture alone.

- What myths and false beliefs do you see people believing in today?

- When is it difficult to stick to God's Word and not be caught up in false belief?

Paul knew that Timothy was faithful, but inexperienced. Paul wanted to be sure that Timothy's echo stayed strong as he grew. In order to do that Paul encourages Timothy to train himself for godliness. Crunches and planks are good for our bodies now, but worship and prayer are important for eternity. Spiritual training keeps us focused on God's Word and promises. It keeps our eyes on the living God that loves us and sent His Son to die for our sins. Our spiritual lives are not a competition or something we can perfect this side of heaven. Holding onto the one true faith, even in the face of all sorts of false beliefs, gives us hope now and for eternity.

- What kind of training helps us grow in faith?
- For fun, have participants connect spiritual practices to physical ones like Scripture reading squats. Have them design a physical and spiritual workout in one!

- How does spiritual training help us to be better echoes of Christ?

Timothy was young, though we don't know exactly how young. His age may have kept some people from taking his echo seriously. Perhaps you have seen this in your life or church as well. Adults can sometimes undervalue the faith, passion, and gifts of young people. The antidote that Paul gives is for Timothy to be an example in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity. That's a tall order! We aren't expected to be perfect, but our echo will ring out louder the more our life sets an example for others.

- What are some ways God has especially gifted young people in the church?

- Has there been a time you felt unheard or undervalued because of your age?
- What do you think it means to set an example for the believers in your church?
- What are some ways you and your peers could serve in your congregation?

Paul wanted Timothy to keep a close eye on himself and how he shared the Gospel. Our sinful nature has a way of sneaking up on us when we aren't looking. We need to pay attention to our words and actions, and keeping up with our spiritual training. We should encourage friends, parents, and other adults to help keep us accountable and to speak the truth in love to us when our echo falters. If we pay attention and focus on God, the Perfect Source, the Holy Spirit can use our echo to help share faith with others.

- How does this story challenge or encourage you?
- Who around you can help you “keep a close eye” on your faith life?

### **Song and Prayer**

Close in prayer in whatever way works best for your group. You can have everyone pray for the person directly to their right.