

Serve a Stranger

2

1 KINGS 17:8-16



GOAL

Youth explore ways to show love to those they do not know.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Holy God, give me wisdom as I prepare to serve your children, helping them to serve others. Amen.

THIS SESSION

The command to love in active, extravagant ways, and to treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves, means we give ourselves away in service to everyone, including those whom we might consider strangers. Yet we live in a society where young people are taught to be wary of strangers and trust only those whom their elders tell them they can trust. As a result, youth may unconsciously learn to distrust strangers throughout life, despite Bible stories they hear, or hymns they sing that teach otherwise. The desire to protect ourselves and our children can cause us and them to develop apathy toward the struggles of others. We may neglect showing care and compassion to those in need. It takes an intentional act of love to reach across stubborn cultural, racial, class, geopolitical, and religious boundaries to connect with those whom we don't know.

THE BIBLE STORY

First Kings 17:8-16 tells the story of Elijah's encounter with a widow and her son. God told Elijah, who had been traveling for some time, to go to a specific town where he would find a widow who would take care of him. When Elijah finds the woman, he asks her for water and something to eat. The two are strangers to one another. The widow explains that she barely has enough food for herself and her son to survive. Elijah insists that she make him something to eat before preparing food for herself and her son. While on the surface this request may seem selfish, it is a demonstration of Elijah's faith and a test of the woman's obedience. God rewarded the woman's faithfulness by ensuring that she and her son never went hungry again.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

At this stage in their lives, youth are learning that much of what they were taught as hard-and-fast rules (e.g., "don't talk to strangers") is not always so black and white. They are learning to discern and determine appropriate responses for specific situations that may include gray areas. This session offers youth an opportunity to reflect on appropriate ways of showing love to strangers.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Meeting a Stranger" (p. 14): Write questions on newsprint and display it.
- Depending on the options you choose:
- "Getting Home" (p. 16): Gather blindfolds for each youth. Clear an open space or move to an open space.

GETTING STARTED

□ Newsprint and marker

MEETING A STRANGER

C

Write these statements on newsprint and display it.

- ➔ What were you taught as a child about interacting with strangers?
- ➔ When you encounter strangers now, what is your reaction?
- ➔ What lingering suspicions toward strangers do you think are helpful or unhelpful?
- ➔ When have you helped a stranger or has a stranger helped you?

As young people arrive, invite them to pair up with someone whom they do not know very well. Use the posted questions for discussion within the pairs. When all youth have arrived, gather the group and invite volunteers to tell something they learned about their partner.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

OPENING LITANY

QC

Welcome the youth with your usual opening activities. Explain that the theme of this session is “Serve a Stranger.” After you read a line of the litany, have youth repeat in unison “when we serve a stranger.” Their final line is “may we serve a stranger.”

We love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind

when we serve a stranger.

We love our neighbor as ourself,

when we serve a stranger.

We love our enemies

when we serve a stranger.

Lord, in your mercy,

may we serve a stranger.

□ Internet-connected device

UBUNTU

C T

Ask if anyone has heard the word *ubuntu*. What do they know about the term? Show the YouTube video “Ubuntu: The Essence of Being Human” (bit.ly/FMUbuntu, 2:48). Use these questions for discussion:

- ➔ What messages stand out for you from the video?
- ➔ How does the *ubuntu* principle inform ways you love yourself, strangers, and enemies?
- ➔ When have you seen *ubuntu* in practice?
- ➔ How might the world be different if this principle were widely practiced?

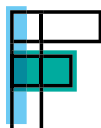
UNDERCOVER BOSS

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Explain the premise of the television program *Undercover Boss*: a corporate boss goes undercover in a restaurant or business to observe employees and their work. The employees do not know they are being watched. Hidden cameras capture employees’ behavior when they do not think the boss is looking. By the end of the show, the boss reveals himself and changes are made to improve the business.

Invite comments to these statements:

- ➔ When have you done something and were glad your teacher or boss was not looking?
- ➔ What might have happened if your teacher or boss was undercover and observed the incident?
- ➔ Imagine that a stranger—someone you do not know—observed the incident. What might their reaction be?
- ➔ Why might we act differently around strangers than we do around a teacher or boss or friend?



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW

T AT

☐ Internet-connected device

Show the YouTube video “Elijah and the Widow” (bit.ly/FMElijahWidow, 3:28). Select from these questions to help young people consider the Bible story.

- ➔ What part of this story do you like the best?
- ➔ What part of this story is most important?
- ➔ How might the widow have felt when Elijah first asked her to give him bread?
- ➔ Why do you think she trusted what Elijah said about God?
- ➔ What might the son have thought when the grain and oil did not run out?
- ➔ When have you ever felt like one of the people in this story? Which person?
- ➔ What does this story tell you about serving a stranger?

ENTERTAINING A STRANGER

D CT

☐ Copies of Resource Page 1

Invite five volunteers to read aloud the Bible story in reader’s theater style, taking the roles of Narrator, God, Elijah, Widow, and King Ahab (non-speaking). Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and have volunteers present the story adapted from 1 Kings 16:29–17:16. Engage youth in a brief discussion about the Bible story.

- ➔ Why did Elijah continue to move from place to place?
- ➔ Why did Elijah ask the woman, a stranger, to make him a meal knowing that she had very little ingredients? How would you have responded to such a request?
- ➔ What is the result of the woman’s generosity toward a stranger?

BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY

CT

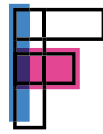
☐ Bibles
☐ Copies of Resource Page 2
☐ Pens

Explain that the Bible is full of examples of hospitality. Have youth use a fill-in-the-blank activity to review a variety of stories referencing biblical hospitality. Distribute Bibles, pens, and copies of Resource Page 2. Read aloud the introductory statements and instructions. Have young people work together to fill in the blanks. They may use Bibles if necessary.



Answers:

1. Abram; 2. Sodom;
3. Good Samaritan; 4. Jesus; 5. Levi;
6. Neighbor; 7. Paul; 8. Rahab; 9. Sarah;
10. Gomorrah; 11. Stranger; 12. Zacchaeus



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

☐ Internet-connected device

HELPING A NEIGHBOR

T C

Remind the youth that in February 2022, war erupted in Ukraine when Russia invaded the country. Within weeks, over ten million Ukrainians lost or were forced to leave their homes. Many fled to neighboring countries such as Poland. Show the YouTube video “Polish Church Helping Refugees” (bit.ly/FMUkrRefugees, 4:24). Use these questions for discussion:

- ➔ How did you feel while watching the video? What do your feelings make you want to do?
- ➔ How did the church in Poland show hospitality to Ukrainian refugees?
- ➔ How does love for God, self, neighbor, and enemy encourage this church to serve the stranger?

If you did the “Ubuntu” activity on page 14, recall with the youth the meaning behind the principle: “I am because you are.” Archbishop Tutu suggests that, while it is good to offer help to strangers out of pure good will, we often help ourselves in the process. Invite youth to identify how church people in Poland live out the principle of *ubuntu* by serving the stranger.

☐ Internet-connected device

RED BROCADE

CT AT C

Display the poem “Red Brocade” (bit.ly/FMRedBrocade) by Arab-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye. Read the poem aloud as young people listen or read along. If you have access to the internet, play the recording of Shihab Nye reading her poem aloud (bit.ly/FMRedBrocade, 1:11) (optional).

Invite the youth to identify phrases or images from the poem that stand out. Discuss advice the poet offers for serving a stranger. Continue discussion using these questions:

- ➔ Have you ever been a stranger welcomed by someone unexpectedly? What details of welcome and service do you recall?
- ➔ Consider how you serve a friend who comes into your home. What comforts and care do you offer? Why do you offer these?
- ➔ How can you translate these same offerings into service for a stranger? What would such service look like in your home? In your school? In your church?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

☐ Blindfolds

GETTING HOME

AM X C

Use an open space in the room. Designate a centrally located home base, such as a safety cone or chair. Provide each person with a blindfold. Explain that they are to make their way *home*. Everyone must arrive home together as a single group. When they are blindfolded, they may not talk to one another, but they may make noises such as clapping or stomping.

To begin, have young people scatter around the room, then put on their blindfolds. They are to work together to get everyone safely home.

Invite the youth to discuss their thoughts and feelings as they tried to get home. How did they communicate? How did they help one another? What were the advantages and challenges of working together?

Explain that, even though they may not have known who they were helping or who was helping them, everyone needed everyone else in order to get home. How is working together a practice of *ubuntu*, “I am because you are”?

AT YOUR SERVICE



☐ Newsprint and markers

If you chose “Helping a Neighbor” activity on page 16, have youth think about the church in Poland offering aid to Ukrainian refugees. Discuss ways strangers and people in need are welcomed into your group and your church. On newsprint, list ways that your group and your church serve strangers and people in need. As a group, plan to join in one of the listed activities or plan an activity that engages and serves strangers.

QUIET REFLECTION



☐ Paper and pens

Distribute paper and pens. Give the youth these prompts for personal reflection.

Invite youth to think about when a stranger helped them.

- ➔ What did this person do?
- ➔ How did it feel to be helped by someone you did not know?
- ➔ How did you respond to them?

Invite them to think about when they helped a stranger.

- ➔ What did you do?
- ➔ Why did you do it?
- ➔ How did it feel to help someone?
- ➔ What was the stranger’s response to your act of kindness?

Say a prayer for the stranger who helped you and for the stranger you helped.



FOLLOWING JESUS

CLOSING CHARGE



Gather in a circle. Explain that the heart of serving the stranger is *empathy*. When we are aware of our own feelings and sensitive to the feelings of others, we can love more extravagantly, even those we do not know.

With the group, read Romans 15:7 line by line, with the group echoing each line:

Welcome one another, therefore, /
just as Christ has welcomed you, /
for the glory of God. /

Entertaining a Stranger

Adapted from 1 Kings 16:29–17:16

Cast: Narrator, God, Elijah, Widow, King Ahab (non-speaking)

Narrator: Elijah was God’s prophet, a messenger for God. Unfortunately, prophets often told people bad news. Elijah had to tell King Ahab that, because he worshiped other gods and led his people to worship idols, a drought would come to the land.

Elijah (*speaking to Ahab*): I only serve the God of Israel. By God’s power, I promise there will be neither dew nor rain these years unless I say so. (*Ahab walks off in a huff.*)

Narrator: After Elijah delivered this news to King Ahab, God told Elijah to find safety in the wilderness.

God: Elijah, leave this place and go hide in the wilderness. Go to the east of the Jordan River. You can drink water from the stream, and I will have ravens bring you food.

Narrator: Elijah did as God told him. Eventually, because of the drought, the stream dried up. So God gave Elijah new directions.

God: Elijah, now go to Zarephath. There you will meet a widow who will take care of you.

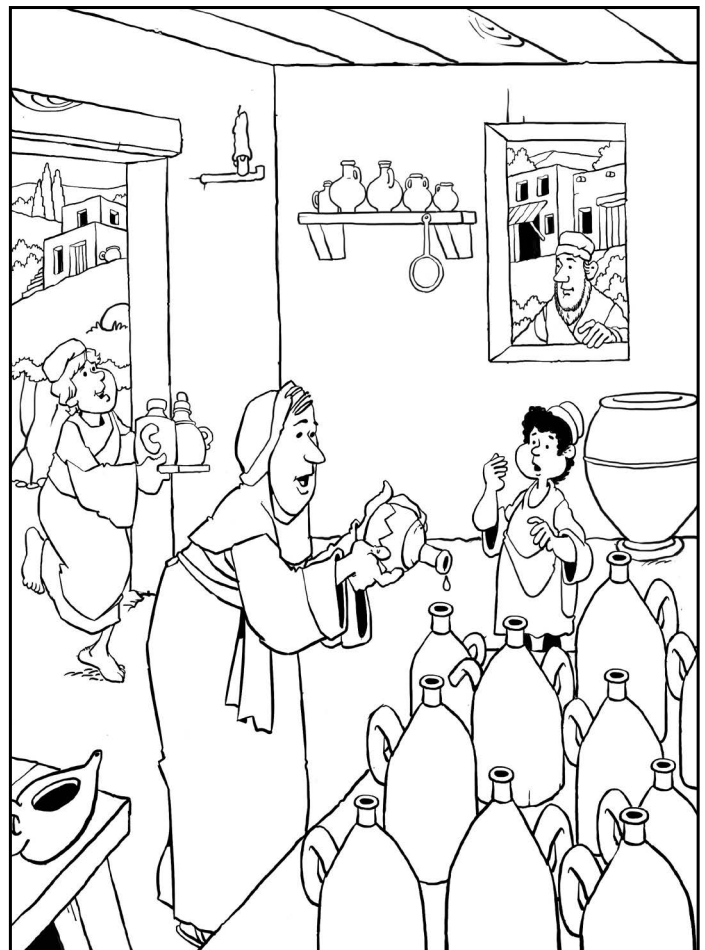
Narrator: Again, Elijah did as God told him. When he reached the town’s gate, he met a widow who was gathering wood to make a fire.

Elijah: Would you bring me a small cup of water to drink? Oh, and a piece of bread too.

Widow: I promise you, before the Lord your God, that I have no food. I have only a handful of flour in a jar and a little bit of oil in a jug. I came here to gather a few sticks of wood for a fire to make some food for my son and me. We will eat it and then die from hunger.

Elijah: Do not be afraid. Make the meal for you and your son. But first, bring me a piece of bread. My God says your jar of flour will never be empty and your jug will always have oil until Lord sends rain to the land.

Narrator: The woman did as Elijah told her. Sure enough, the jar of flour did not run out; nor did the jug of oil ever empty. The woman, Elijah, and the woman’s family had food for many days, just as Elijah had said.



Biblical Hospitality

Practicing hospitality and welcoming the stranger are important biblical teachings. Because of the harsh living conditions of the desert region, welcoming the stranger was an important practice for people's mutual survival. One welcomed a stranger and offered hospitality, for if one ever found oneself in need, they would be dependent on another person to show them hospitality.

Hospitality is one of God's primary mandates. While God generally rewarded people for showing love and kindness to others, God also punished the children of Israel for not extending hospitality to strangers.

Instructions: Below are several biblical examples of people obeying or disobeying God's commandment to show kindness to strangers. Match a person from the list with the biblical example. Use the Scripture references if necessary.

Rahab
Abram
Stranger
Good Samaritan

Sodom
Sarah
Jesus
Zacchaeus

Gomorrah
Paul
Levi
Neighbor

1. After welcoming strangers to his home, _____ received a name change and left a long legacy. (Genesis 17:1–8; 18:1–16)
2. A city destroyed because the people were inhospitable to angels in disguise. _____ (Genesis 19:1–24)
3. A common nickname for one who cared for an injured person on the side of the road, even though the injured person was from a rival ethnic group. _____ (Luke 10:30–35)
4. He commanded his followers to love God, their neighbors, and their enemies. _____ (Matthew 5:43–48; 22:36–40)
5. A disciple who hosted a banquet for Jesus that included sinners and tax collectors. _____ (Luke 5:27–32)
6. The second greatest commandment is “Love your _____ as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39)
7. An apostle and New Testament author who instructed Christians to show hospitality to strangers. _____ (Romans 15:7)
8. She hid Hebrew spies in her home and ended up saving her entire household. _____ (Joshua 2; 6:17–25)
9. _____ laughed when the strangers she welcomed to her home promised that she would become a very important woman. (Genesis 18:11–13)
10. The other city destroyed because the people were inhospitable to angels in disguise. _____ (Genesis 19:24)
11. In Matthew 25:35, Jesus says, “I was a _____ and you welcomed me.”
12. _____ climbed a tree to see Jesus and later received a special house guest. (Luke 19:1–10)



For Conversation:

What do you discover about serving the stranger from these stories of biblical hospitality?