

- God's part: put new life in us and seal us forever as His children, 1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 1:11–14.
- First, read James 2:14–23. Then ask:
- What two kinds of faith did James mention?
- **Ask:** What makes the difference between the two kinds of faith? [*God wants faith that results in a changed life and good deeds. Beware of faith that does not start with repentance. James says that the devils also believe, and shudder!*]
- Read the poem, The Devil **Whispers in a New Shepherd's Ears** (If you translate the poem, you will not have to keep the rhyme.)

The Liar aims, the arrow flies! Its venom carries subtle lies!

The message of these fiery darts? "Don't ask if Christ dwells in their hearts!

"Just promise grace, forget God's rules, say anything to fill your pews!

Do not mention that they must repent and know the One that heaven sent.

"Do not offend nor bring on tears, just entertain those itching ears,  
And offer empty, fruitless faith—the kind that even I embrace!"

**Ask** the people to give testimonies about how God has helped them to repent.

Here is an example by a young lady. "For years I followed a guru, chanted in Sanskrit and lived in an ashram. I nearly died trying to create my own reality. One day I learned I was a hopeless sinner unable to save myself, and that Jesus loved me and could save me. I left the powerless gods, asked forgiveness for my sin of unbelief, and gave my life to Jesus."

**Memorize** together Mark 1:5.

## John the Baptist Called People to Repent

Those who teach children should read study #51 for children.

**Prayer.** "Dear Father in heaven, help us to be like John the Baptist, helping sinners to repent and to turn to Christ. Also, help us to restore gently believers who have strayed into sin."

### 1. Prepare Your Heart with God's Word

Find in Matthew 3:1-4 and Luke 3:2-18 how John the Baptist brought many thousands of sinners to repentance.

- When people came to be baptized because they thought they were good, what did John say to them?
- When sinners came confessing their sins, what did John do for them?



**Find** in the parable of the lost sheep, Luke 15:1–10, why the angels rejoice in heaven.

Some shepherds scold and threaten sinners to force them to repent. Jesus explained in this story the better way that He wants us to do it:

- Imagine that you are a 'lamb' that has strayed, but the Good Shepherd has found you.
- He holds you gently in His arms as He carries you back to the fold, to His people.
- You feared that He would scold and punish you, but His face shows only love and rejoicing.



- Sooner or later, all of us go astray, but the straying sheep is of great value to Jesus.
- The Shepherd is willing to leave the rest of the sheep until He finds the erring one and restores it.
- Jesus loves us even when we go astray. He loves us so much that He died for us, Romans 5:8.
- The most important part of calling sinners to repent, and of restoring straying believers, is to love them, not the disciplinary action that we may have to take.
- If you discipline a child angrily, he may respond angrily. If you discipline in love, he will learn.
- When a member of the flock strays away, your purpose in disciplining him is to restore him, not to punish him.
- The apostle Paul told us in Galatians 6:1, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”
- Sometimes we must take severe action to restore someone, but we must always do it with love.

## 2. Plan with co-workers activities to do during the week.

**Visit** friends who need Christ and explain to them that God loves them, will forgive their sins, and wants to bring them new, eternal life of true holiness and joy.

**Visit** any believers who have gone astray. Restore them like Galatians 6:1 says.

- Help them in a loving way to remember their conversion.
- Try to discover if they will let God convict them of their sinfulness.
- Try to discern if they understand God's great love.
- Pray with them to ask God to transform their lives.

## 3. Plan with your co-workers the upcoming worship.

Choose activities that fit current needs and local customs.

**Tell, or act out, the story** of John the Baptist from Luke 3:1–18. Ask questions about what you found in part 1.

**Tell, or act out the parable** of the lost sheep. Explain from part 1 the way that Jesus wants us to call people to repent, and to correct straying lambs.

**Explain** what humans do to bring about our salvation, and what God does:

- One must repent, that is, have a change of heart and trust God (John 3:1–8).
- God forgives us believers and seals us forever as His children; and His Holy Spirit gives to us spiritual rebirth (Ephesians 1:13–14).

To introduce the **Lord's Supper**, read Luke 3:4–7 about the people coming to John the Baptist and confessing their sins.

**Explain** that this was like what we believers do before we take the Lord's Supper; we examine ourselves and confess our sins to God, 1 Corinthians 11:28.

Have the **children** present the drama about Zacheus. They may also have prepared questions to ask the adults after the drama.

**Explain** the humans' part and God's part in our rebirth.

- Our part: repent (trust God to forgive us and change our hearts), Acts 2:37–38; 8:21–23.