

Junior Soldiers

Unit 7 : Lesson 8



The Bible: a letter from God

PURPOSE : For the children to understand that reading, exploring and engaging with God's Word is an important part of being a follower of Jesus.

'Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path. I've promised it once, and I'll promise it again, I will obey your righteous regulations.'

Psalm 119:105-106 (NLT)

Consider & Prepare

Read:

Psalm 119: 105-106

Psalm 119:15-16

Proverbs 4:12-14

Psalm 33: 4

This lesson focuses on opening our Bibles and reading them carefully. It can be used as a standalone lesson but has been designed to go along with the previous lesson that focused on the importance of prayer. Engaging with God's Word and talking to Him are vital for anyone wanting to be in an authentic and meaningful relationship with God, which is why they are included as key sections in each of the Junior Soldiers passports. It would be ideal to use some time in each of these lessons to intentionally support and encourage your Junior Soldiers to continue working through their passports.

It would also be good to look again at Lesson 5 and 6 from Unit 2 that explore the first doctrine, about the importance of reading and trusting what the Bible says.

Considering the purpose of this lesson, it is important to give opportunity to the children to gain some understanding about how they can engage with the scripture they read, and also have practical opportunities to experience this during the lesson so that they feel confident with similar activities at home.

The Bible is the foundational and central text of the Christian faith. It is a source of great teaching and theology and more books have been written about the Bible than about any other topic in the world. You can start studying the Bible when you're eight and still be studying it when you're 80!

This doesn't mean it's too hard to understand the Bible and you shouldn't bother starting—it means you need to start familiarising yourself with the Bible as soon as you can! The earlier in life we can help children both appreciate the Bible and form a habit of reading it, the better.

God's Word is full of amazing insights into the human condition (life-skills and relationships); it offers information on the background to and then the formation of the Christian Church (history); it teaches

us about the nature of God (theology); it stresses the need to care for others (altruism and social responsibility); it includes information on coming days (prophecy and revelation); it offers advice and wise counsel (ethics and wisdom); and, most importantly, it informs us of the life, teaching, mission and purpose of Jesus Christ (salvation).

You can't claim to be a Christian if you don't read the Bible.

What you will need:

For 'Connecting in'

- Print off the two 'instruction' cards attached at the end of this lesson
- Prizes or lucky dip box for the whole group

For 'The Main Thing'

- 2-4 tables
- An unopened letter from a friend
- Listed scripture printed or written on paper for the children to brainstorm around
- Bibles
- Dictionaries (optional)
- Pens, textas and/or highlighters
- SOAP pages

For 'Home & Beyond'

- SOAP pages
- Junior Soldiers Passports
- Paper
- Pens, textas and/or highlighters



Connecting In

Following Instructions...

For this activity you will need to print the 'instruction' cards attached at the end of this lesson, an envelope to put each card in and some small prizes. This is a great game that teaches the importance of reading the Bible carefully and following its instructions instead of just trying to 'wing it' spiritually by only looking at little bits of what the Bible has to offer us.

Ask for two volunteers that are outgoing and willing to look a little silly for a prize. But mention that they must be good at reading and following directions. *(You will need to pick replacement volunteers as the game continues, as it is quite likely that a majority of the children who attempt this activity will be unsuccessful at following the instructions correctly. You might like to divide the children into a team of boys and a team of girls or just split your group down the middle so you can easily pick one from each side, as you pick replacements.)*

When they come up, give each volunteer an envelope with the instructions inside. Explain that they are exactly the same instructions, only in a different order. They can't just follow what the other person, they need to read their card. It will be difficult to tell who is winning until the end of the game so don't try judging how you are going by looking at the other person playing. Below are the instructions included on the cards that you will find at the end of the lesson:

Instruction Card 1

Read these instructions all the way through and then do what they say.

1. Jump up and down ten times.
2. Run and touch the back wall, come back and yell 'I'm back!'
3. Say the alphabet backwards.
4. Pat your leader on the head.
5. Go and knock on the door.
6. Sing 'Row, Row, Row your Boat' all the way through fast.
7. Turn around three times.
8. Sit on the ground and yell, 'I'm so silly!'
9. Say 'Supercalifragelisticexpealidosious' loudly three times.
10. Only do number 4 and yell 'I'm all done!'



Instruction Card 2

Read these instructions all the way through and then do what they say.

1. Turn around three times.
2. Sing 'Row, Row, Row your Boat' all the way through fast.
3. Jump up and down ten times.
4. Run and touch the back wall, come back and yell 'I'm back!'
5. Sit on the ground and yell, 'I'm so silly!'
6. Pat your leader on the head.
7. Say the alphabet backwards.
8. Say 'Supercalifragelisticexpealidosious' loudly three times.
9. Go and knock on the door.
10. Only do number 6 and yell 'I'm all done!'

It is important to note here that the first line in small print is the key instruction!

Most kids will start by doing each instruction as they read it, failing to notice the first line that says, 'Read these instructions **all the way through** and then do what they say.'

- Let the children go for awhile (they may even finish) and then announce that nobody won, because they did not follow the instructions properly.
- Choose another child to have a go. After awhile you can start interrupting the volunteers attempts sooner announcing they were unsuccessful.
- Eventually someone will read it all through first and then only do number ten. Declare them the winner and discuss why.

Link: Today we have played a fun game that has reminded us how important it is to read things carefully before we start responding. Many of you missed the first line, or you read it but didn't follow it carefully.

- I wonder if anyone might like to share a time where they have not read something carefully or failed to follow instructions properly. (*You might like to start by giving an example of your own. For example, missing an ingredient in a recipe, reading a text message incorrectly or misreading the due date of a bill or form to be submitted.*)
- I wonder what you think might happen if a builder didn't read all the instructions carefully before setting off to build a house. (*He might do things in the wrong order, he could miss important instructions and make the house unsafe, it might take him a long time to finish the house because he has to go back and fix parts that he didn't read about properly.*)

The builder might finish the house quicker if he does things his way rather than reading all the instructions and he might even save money, but when the house is finished it probably won't match the designer's plans. This is sometimes what happens when God's children don't read His special book—the Bible—carefully or at all and follow His instructions properly. Today we are going to talk about why it is important to read the Bible carefully and how we can follow what God says to help us live the life He designed for us.

The Main Thing

A Letter from God...

For this activity you will need a sealed envelope addressed to you from a good friend who lives far away (*make sure the stamp has been 'processed' to make your illustration more authentic*).

Show the envelope to the children and explain that you have just received this exciting letter in the mail. (*You could tee up another leader or volunteer to 'deliver it' to you right there in front of the kids or you might even know a postman or courier who could deliver it to you.*)

- I have just received this letter. I am so excited! It is from a really good friend of mine who I really like. I haven't seen this person for a long time. We haven't spoken to each other for ages either. I wonder how they have been going and what they have been doing. Oh, we are such great friends. (*You could add in some extra details here, maybe tell a funny story from the past.*)
- I am just so excited that they have sent me this letter! I wonder what it says. I wonder how they are going. (*With a really excited facial expression and a deep breath...*) maybe they got married....maybe they even have kids now! WOW! I would love to know more about what life is like for them right now! They are really such a good friend and I miss having contact with them. (*By now the children are most probably telling you that you should open it. If not... say, 'I wonder how I could find out what they are up to or how they are doing?' It is important to be committed to the drama that you are trying to create with this letter using body language, facial expressions and large movements.*)
- (*Hopefully the children will suggest opening the letter and reading it and you can respond by saying...*) Oh, no! I would never open this letter. I like it just the way it is. It is really important to me, very special. I don't want to open it. I like the stamp, and the handwriting is so nice. I don't want to rip it. Receiving this letter made me feel so special and cared about. Why would I open it? I just want to carry it around.

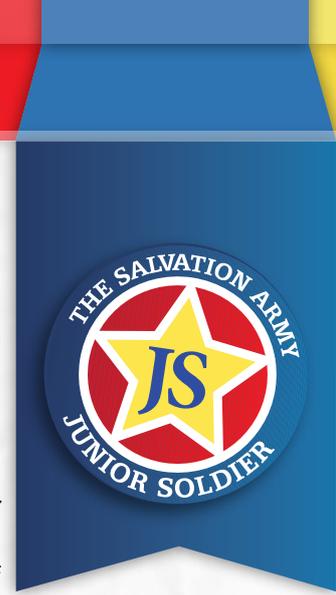
Ideally, drag it out a bit and over dramatise it, the kids will be strongly encouraging you to open it and read it! This can then lead into a discussion about how effective and sensible your way of thinking is. You might ask...

- Does it make sense to say that I love this person and want to know them better but then not open the letter they wrote to me? What do you think? Why?
- What do you think is more important: protecting the letter and keeping it 'nice' and showing it to everyone or opening it, reading it and then writing back?
- How do you think my friend who wrote the letter might feel if they found out I haven't opened it?

Sometimes people talk about how much they love God and they get really excited about being a follower of Jesus. They might even say things like, 'I want to know God better' or 'I want to be more like Jesus'. This is a little like me not opening my friend's letter: I wanted to know more about what they were up to but I didn't take the time to read the letter. It doesn't make sense not to open the letter and read the information and find out more about what is happening for them. Just like it doesn't make sense to not read the message God has sent to us... the Bible! Some people carry a Bible around in their bag and others have it on their phones these days but they don't OPEN it and READ it! The Bible is not going to help us get to know God better or give us instructions to live a life following Jesus if we don't take the time to sit down, open it, and read it.

Many people who follow Jesus have a Bible and read it. However, often people only read certain parts of the Bible or they read it really quickly because they want to go and watch TV instead or they might read it carefully but choose not to follow what it says, only pick out the bits that they want to listen to and put into practice. When we read the Bible like this we can sometimes miss out on God's important instructions for us. We can also miss out on the special blessings that He has for us. Reading the Bible carefully and with the right attitude and focus helps us to find out more about our God, the one who created us and gives us important information and instructions about the best way for us to live.

So if reading the Bible is so important to those that are followers of God... we'd better do some reading and exploring of the Bible.



Exploring Scripture with SOAP...

For this activity you will need 2–4 tables, the listed scripture written or printed out (it is best to use the CEV version of the Bible for the best language to connect with the children) on paper for the children to brainstorm about, Bibles, dictionaries (optional), pens or textas and the 'SOAP' page (attached) printed out for each child. The number of children you have in your group will dictate how many tables you set up—ideally you will have one set up for each of the passages below and one set up with the SOAP pages (instructions below). It is important to have a leader at each table to help facilitate the discussion and questioning as the children explore what they see, think and feel about the passages displayed.

Matthew 25:14–30 (The parable of the talents)

Mark 4:35–41 (Jesus calms the storm)

Luke 8:16–18 (A lamp on a stand)

John 10:1–5 (The good shepherd)



Have the children highlight what stands out to them, what parts they like, parts that concern them. They can write down any questions or they can note words they might not understand in the passage. You might like to encourage them to look up dictionaries to help them discover the meaning to unfamiliar words. Maybe get them to have a go at rewriting a verse in a way that would help them to remember something they would like to take away from the passage and apply to their daily life.



Explain each section of the SOAP model:

- **S** is for Scripture... look up the Bible passage for today and record the main part of it.
- **O** is for Observation... read the passage and jot down anything that stands out for you.
- **A** is for Apply... write about what God might be saying to you through this passage.
- **P** is for Prayer... write a prayer about what you have discovered today.

Have the children choose a passage of scripture to read and follow the SOAP guide to help them explore what they have read.

NOTE: It is important when children are exploring scripture that it is just that, 'exploring'—this is not a time to read through the scripture for the sake of a school reading comprehension exercise. We need to be creating a space and environment for the children to sit with and explore what God has to tell 'them' through His word—this also means we don't have to always have the answers. You will be aware that God talks to us all a little differently through the very same scripture; what you see is not always what God is wanting to show others. However, we do need to be mindful that we are guiding the children in healthy ways of engaging with scripture and God.

Tying In

In the promise that Junior Soldiers sign, it says 'I promise to read my Bible'.

→ I wonder why you think it is important for this to be included in the Junior Soldiers' promise.

Reading your Bible is an important part of being a follower of Jesus. God doesn't want us to just get excited about owning or carrying His special book around. He wants us to read the Bible so that we can find out more about who He is and who He created us to be.

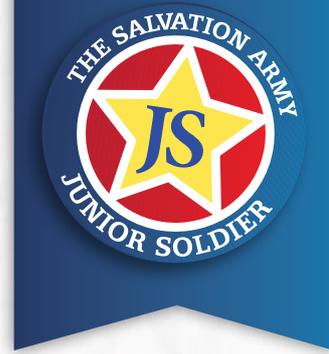
Imagine carrying around your favourite chocolate bar and telling others how good it is and showing them, but not opening it and enjoying eating it.

God wants us to read His Word carefully to ensure we receive important information and instructions about the best way for us to live so that we can get the goodness out of what is written in this special book.

- What do you think are some things that might distract you or stop you from reading the Bible?
- What are some ways you might remind yourself to read the Bible regularly? (*Make a list together.*)
- I wonder if there is anything you could do if you are finding it difficult to understand stuff in the Bible.

You might like to choose a scripture activity from the following suggestions or think of your own. You might even like to have a range of activities listed for the children to choose from.

- Group the children according to their current Passport type (i.e. Bronze, Silver, Gold, Crest) and have them choose a 'Memorisation' or 'Bible' activity to complete individually or together.
- Encourage the children to use this time to complete a 'SOAP' page with a partner or on their own.
- Have children choose their favourite Bible story or passage and repeat the 'Bible Brainstorm' activity from above, individually or with a partner.
- Have children draw up a 'Bible Reading Plan' for the week ahead by writing down each day of the week with a Bible reference next to it. For example, they might decide to read a chapter from a gospel and split it up into seven sections, one for each day of the week, or they might read the first seven Psalms, one each day of the week. Encourage them to be easy on themselves to begin with and make their plan realistic. You might also provide them with some of the 'SOAP' pages to help them engage with their chosen scripture each day.



Home & Beyond

Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.

'Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path. I've promised it once, and I'll promise it again: I will obey your righteous regulations.'

Psalm 119:105–106

- This week, show God how much you love Him, by taking his 'letter' and spending some time reading about Him. Your friendship with God will grow even closer!
- Your 'Home & Beyond' card has been left blank for you to choose how you might like to read your Bible this week.
- You might like to use the SOAP page to help you each day or check out the 'Bible' section in your Junior Soldier Passport.
- You might like to ask someone special to you to read with you each day and discuss what you read with them.
- You might like to place this card somewhere that will help to remind you how you are going to read the Bible this week.
- You might like to share the ways you have been reading God's Word next time we meet.

Home & Beyond

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Psalm 119:105-106

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Home & Beyond

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Instruction Card #1

Read these instructions all the way through and then do what they say.

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Instruction Card #2

Read these instructions all the way through and then do what they say.

1. Turn around three times.
2. Sing 'Row, Row, Row your Boat' all the way through fast.
3. Jump up and down ten times.
4. Run and touch the back wall, come back and yell 'I'm back!'
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Date:

Reading the Bible with...

SOAP!



Write or draw your response to the following...

S is for scripture: what did you read today?

O is for observe: what stands out for you?

A is for apply: what is God saying to you?

P is for prayer: what do you want to say to God?

Scripture

Observe

Apply

Prayer