

Semicontinuous

Jer. 2:4–13

Ps. 81:1, 10–16

Complementary

Sir. 10:12–18

Ps. 112

Heb. 13:1–8, 15–16

Luke 14:1, 7–14

Welcome!

Goal for the Session

Children will hear and respond to God’s invitation in Hebrews 13 to practice ways of making others feel welcome.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by David R. Adams

Hospitality (v. 2) is one way, obviously enough, in which this love becomes concrete. The author strengthens the injunction that hospitality not be neglected by grounding it in biblical precedent: in providing for strangers “some” have entertained angels (divine emissaries) unknowingly. The allusion is presumably to Abraham and Sarah, who entertained three “men” who turned out to have supernatural qualities (Gen. 18:1–15), though Lot, Gideon, and Manoah may also be in view (Gen. 19:1–14; Judg. 6:11–24 and 13:3–23). How does this precedent function? It seems to promise more encounters of this kind and perhaps to warn that their significance is easily overlooked.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Gray Temple

Suppose your congregation, or any other, were to face into and lay claim to the energies with which we have voiced contentious discontent, asking God’s forgiveness only for its target, not for its voltage and amperage? Suppose we were to direct that same energy into passionately adoring Jesus Christ in church? Suppose we applied the judgment that formerly shaped our gossip into appreciating the excellence of potential friends in the congregation? Suppose those energies made us brave in the face of the world’s many needs? Just imagine it. There would be no institution quite like *that* church anywhere in the world—not even in America.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Lanny Peters

The writer goes on to mention another unlikely place to entertain angels without knowing it (echoing Jesus’ words in Matthew 25), with those in prison. It is a challenging word to remember those in prison, “as though you were in prison with them,” and even more demanding to remember “those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.” If we took this passage seriously, we would all be joining organizations that would help us identify in an empathic way with victims of torture, whether in Guantánamo Bay or Beijing. The pastoral word may have to be a prophetic word today.

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

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Frederick Borsch

Being able to offer hospitality to strangers comes from a new kind of reaching out in love. This is empathetic love that also enables one to put oneself in the shoes of those in prison and to *feel in one’s own body* what it is like for another to be tortured (v. 3). Today, when torture can be rationalized and nearly two million American brothers and sisters are shut away in our grim penal system, one realizes painfully what an adventure of love it is to try to participate fully in the good life—to participate in eternal life and to act as the Good Samaritan and Jesus did.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

*Hebrews 13:1–8,
15–16*

Focus on Your Teaching

Children understand hospitality. They spend most of their time in an adult world where everything is too big or too complicated. Every time they enter a space, they are quickly aware of whether they are welcome there—will they be “hushed” or invited to speak? At the same time, they are still learning to share with others. As they grow, they learn to extend hospitality rather than simply seeking it for themselves. Affirm their unprompted efforts to be welcoming hosts.

Loving God, thank you for the hospitality you have shown me in welcoming me into your family. May I pass that hospitality on to each child through my words and actions. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- small table or large box
- Bible
- cross
- battery-powered candle
- green cloth
- name tags
- markers, pens
- paper
- digital or cell phone camera
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 27
- Singing the Feast*, 2019–2020; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: construction paper, glue sticks, scissors, pencils, markers, poster board
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 1, crayons
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock, scissors

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, make a name tag for each child and yourself. Take photos of places in your church that convey welcome, such as: visitor table, food pantry, directional signs, coffee area. Print them, if desired. Write each of the following words on a separate sheet of paper: care, welcome, remember, share. If you are using option 1 in Responding, make an angel for yourself. If you are using option 3, make a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Living as God’s Family Game) on card stock for each learner; cut out the cards.

Before the children arrive, place a green cloth on a table or large box to create a worship center. Arrange the Bible, cross, and candle on the cloth.

Greet children as they arrive and ask them to put on their name tags. Invite each one to write his or her name on Color Pack 1, using a pen. Display the signed poster in your meeting space, leaving it in place for upcoming weeks, if possible.

Gather around the worship center and light the candle. Lead the children in prayer, having them repeat each phrase:

Dear God, / we are here today / to learn, / to pray, / and to praise. / Thank you / for bringing us together. / Amen.

Sit in a circle. Show Color Pack 2 and invite them to read what it says. Ask:

- ✪ What might happen if a store put a sign like this on its door?
- ✪ What might happen if this sign were on the door at your school?
- ✪ What might happen if our church put this sign on our door?

Show Color Pack 1 and wonder together about what difference this sign would make in each of these situations.

Because the focus scripture contains so many different instructions, this session explores only the verses most applicable to children.

“Stranger danger” is a phrase many children are taught in school. Remind learners to follow their family’s rules about not talking to strangers or letting strangers into their homes unless an adult is present.

EXPLORING

Tell learners that today’s Bible reading is about being welcoming, and comment on how these words are a great way to begin Sunday school. This Bible reading teaches about four things: caring, welcoming, remembering, and sharing.

Ask a child to hold up the paper with “care” written on it and another child to hold up Color Pack 3. Invite the children to read aloud Hebrews 13:1 in unison from the poster.

Ask for two volunteers. Have one sit on the floor and pretend he has just tripped and fallen. Ask the other child to show how she could show love and care like a family. Ask for two more volunteers. Tell them that one child’s team won its soccer game and the other child’s team lost its game. Ask them to show how they could show love and care like a family. Discuss:

✠ What are some ways we can show that we love and care for each other like family here at Sunday school?

Invite another child to hold up the paper with “welcome” written on it. Read aloud Hebrews 13:2a, CEV:

“Be sure to welcome strangers.”

Show the children the photos you took of places in your church that convey welcome or describe these places. Invite the children to look around your meeting space and point out things that seem welcoming to them. Discuss:

✠ What might we do to make our Sunday school area more welcoming and friendly?

Invite a child to hold up the paper with “remember” written on it. Read aloud Hebrews 13:3, CEV:

“Remember ... people who are in jail and be concerned for them. Don’t forget those who are suffering, but imagine that you are there with them.”

Explain that one way we can remember people is to pray for them. Invite learners to tell about anyone they know who is suffering. Assure them that God cares for these people. Take a moment to pray for God’s help for each person named.

Invite a child to hold up the paper with “share” written on it. Read aloud Hebrews 13:16, CEV:

“[D]on’t forget to help others and to share your possessions with them. This too ... pleases God.”

Ask learners to think of something they can share with another person today. Remind them that people can share smiles and hugs as well as things like bikes or video games. Explain that when learners have an idea, they are to “pop up,” say the idea, and then sit back down. Afterward, ask:

✠ What can help you remember to pass along God’s love to others by caring, welcoming, remembering, and sharing?

Assure learners that God still loves them when they “fall short” of being caring, welcoming, and sharing.



RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- Welcome Sign** Children can create a visual reminder to welcome one another to Sunday school each week. Read aloud Hebrews 13:2. Explain that angels are God’s messengers, and that each of them can be messengers of God’s love. Have each child make an angel. Use a pencil to draw around hands on construction paper and cut out the tracings. Take off shoes and stand on a piece of construction paper with feet together. Use a pencil to draw around the two feet together and cut out the tracing. To assemble the angel (see diagram), lay the feet cutout on the table with toes pointing down. Attach one handprint to each side, with fingers pointing away from the body. Cut out a circle for the head and attach it. Use markers to add facial features and write name on robe. If desired, add hair cut from construction paper. To create the welcome sign: Print “Welcome, Angels!” in the center of a sheet of poster board. Have learners glue their angels around the words. Hang the sign on the door or a wall of your meeting space. Invite children to demonstrate what they might say and do to be messengers of God’s love to one another each week.
- Welcome Ways** Sometimes, God’s people need to try to fix a bad situation to make it more welcoming. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Welcome Ways) and crayons. Read the instructions aloud. Talk about each illustration, pausing after each one for children to draw their response. Invite children to show their drawings to the group before moving to the next illustration. Afterward, wonder together about how other people might learn about God’s love through their kind words and actions.
- Living as God’s Family Game** Children will suggest ways to offer the hospitality of God’s love and care as they play a game. Follow the instructions for playing the game on Resource Sheet 2. After pairs have finished, gather the group to discuss: How can sharing a toy or a snack help make a person feel welcome? How can sharing show God’s love?

CLOSING

Gather the children around the worship center. Ask the children to listen as you play the song “This Is My Commandment” (Color Pack 27; track 20 on *Singing the Feast, 2019–2020*). Play it a second time, encouraging everyone to sing along. Invite each learner to tell one thing he or she has learned about making people feel cared for and welcome.

Offer a blessing to each child:

“(Name), *God bless you as you make others feel welcome. Amen.*”

This Is My Commandment

This is my commandment
 that you love one another,
 That your joy may be full.

This is my commandment
 that you love one another,
 That your joy may be full.

That your joy may be full,
 That your joy may be full.

This is my commandment
 that you love one another,
 That your joy may be full.

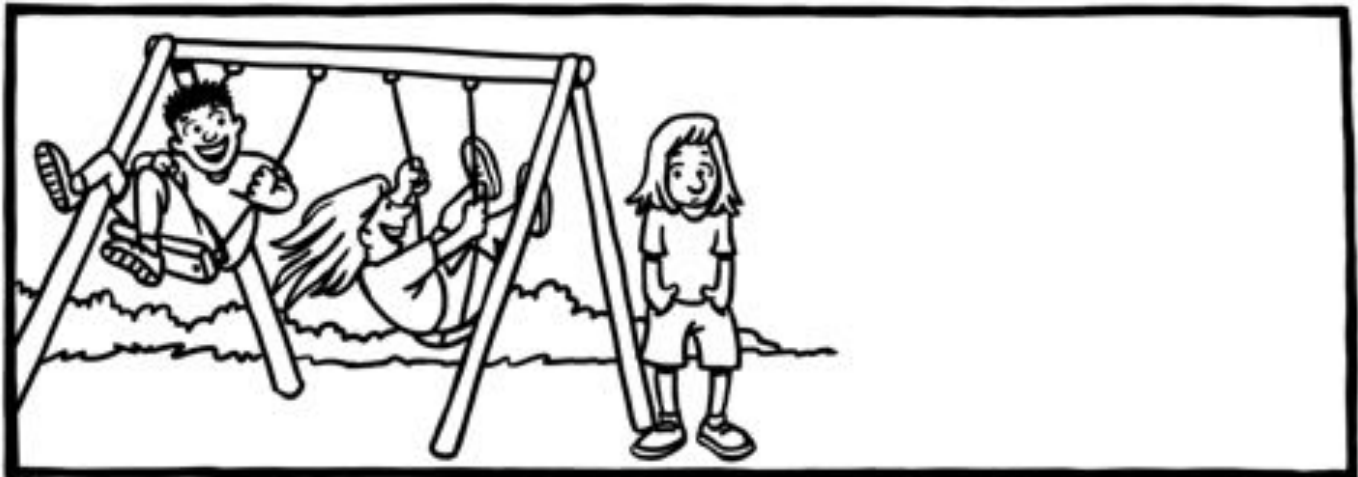
Repeat

September 1, 2019
Welcome!

Grades (K)1–2
Resource Sheet 1

Welcome Ways

You can offer God's love and welcome to people each day by what you say and what you do. Look at each picture. If you were in that scene, what could you say or do to offer God's love and welcome? Draw a picture that shows how you would do this.



Living as God's Family Game

To play: Form pairs. Give each pair of learners two sets of cards. Instruct them to lay the cards facedown on the table or floor. To play, one child turns over two cards. If the cards don't match, they are turned over again. If the cards match, the child names someone with whom he or she could share the item pictured and keeps the cards. Play continues with the other child. Children continue taking turns until all the matches have been made.

