

My Father's House

Lesson 2

LESSON AIM

To help kids realize that ★ *worship is a special time set apart to honor God.*

OBJECTIVES

Kids will

- ✓ role-play a worship service and experience a surprising interruption,
- ✓ participate in an interactive story about Jesus cleansing the Temple,
- ✓ create a unique folding envelope for recording responses to challenging questions about worship, and
- ✓ commit to and pray about approaching worship with good attitudes.

BIBLE BASIS



John 2:13-22

“Gentle Jesus, meek and mild” does not make an appearance in this passage! In fact, the Jesus who presents himself here is so different from the Jesus we’re used to, we almost need to take a step back, read the passage again, and ask: *What caused such a tremendous change in Jesus’ demeanor?*

Without pretending to understand all of Jesus’ motivations, we can see obvious forces at play here that would ignite Jesus’ wrath.

You’ll need...

- small bags of popcorn*
- tray
- 2 single-dollar bills
- 8 quarters
- clothesline or other soft rope, looped together
- copies of the “Windows on Worship” handout (p. 31)
- scissors
- pencils

* Always check for allergies before serving snacks.

Jesus cared much for the poor and little for religiosity. The keepers of the Temple cared much for show and little for the kingdom of God. This confrontation, though placed early in John's Gospel, had been brewing for some time. The keepers of Israel's holiest place had allowed God's house to become a well-oiled "den of thieves" (Luke 19:46). And Jesus, God's one and only Son, wasn't welcome on the premises.

Were you to walk through the Temple gate, you'd first encounter the court of the Gentiles where non-Jewish worshippers could approach the "mercy seat" from a respectful distance to offer prayers and worship to the one true God. The next place you would enter was the slightly higher court of the women, where Jewish women could worship and interact. Next was the court of the men, where only Jewish men were allowed. Finally, on the Temple grounds' highest plane was the court of the priests, where priests carried out sacrifices on Israel's behalf. Inside the court of the priests stood the Temple building. Its first room, the holy place, was several steps up from the court of the priests. Its inner room, the Most Holy Place, stood yet another several steps above that.

The most privileged in Israel's religious hierarchy could enter all the way in and all the way up to the Temple's Most Holy Place, which was considered to be the throne of God on earth. A priest entered this most holy place only once a year to present a sin offering on behalf of the nation.

The noise of money-changers and sellers of sacrificial animals that Jesus encountered was set up in the outermost court of the Temple—the court of the Gentiles. Yet it was God's purpose that the entire Temple Mount be holy—set apart—for worship. Business should've taken place outside the Temple. And it should've been carried out fairly.

Jesus, who had great compassion for the poor, saw his fellow Jews ripped off by vendors who plied their trade noisily within God's house. While an abundance of currencies were in use in Jerusalem, the Temple tax had to be paid in Temple currency, and the exchange rate was anything but fair to the people.

Other vendors sold animals appropriate for sacrifice at hugely inflated prices. Pilgrims coming to Jerusalem from outlying areas weren't able to bring their own "homegrown" animals. So the Temple vendors were more than happy to supply doves, sheep, and goats at far beyond fair market prices. This created a tremendous hardship for the poor but faithful Jews. It was, as we might put it today, a "racket." It's not hard to imagine Jesus' temper flaring when

he observed this kind of thing going on each time he entered his Father's house.

There's another, deeper issue that may well have been front and center in Jesus' mind. The Temple was his Father's house. Jesus' coming death and resurrection would soon do away with the need for Temple sacrifices altogether. But for now it stood in the hands of frauds and mercenaries. Wasn't it time for him to establish himself as the true heir and fulfillment of all God had promised? His actions left no doubt that he, Jesus of Nazareth, had authority to rule in his Father's house. His actions stated plainly: *Stand back! You who know nothing of my Father; see what he thinks of this! Give proper authority where it's due!*



Isaiah 56:6-8

This beautiful passage tells of God's longing for the Temple to be a place of joy and a house of prayer for all nations. It evokes an image of God tenderly gathering in all the peoples of the world.

Rather than finding the Temple Mount a place of joy and a house of prayer for all nations, Jesus encountered the cacophony of greed. And the priests? They simply looked away. By overturning the money-changers' tables and running out the animals, Jesus demonstrated how woefully the guardians of Israel had failed to follow God's purpose. As God incarnate, Jesus dramatically cleansed the Temple of sinful practices and called to mind this Scripture, which laid out the Temple's original purpose.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDS

Community worship involves a profound case of the wiggles for most kids—even when it's kids' worship designed specifically for them. There's gum to be chewed, secret jokes to be passed, giggle fits to be had, and chairs to be tipped so they nearly fall. Those leading take most of the responsibility for helping kids experience a "God moment."

This lesson dives into the ideas that we find great joy in God's presence and that we can each set our minds and hearts on seeking God and setting distractions aside as we approach God's house. Use this story of Jesus cleansing the Temple to encourage kids to approach worship with joy, with a purpose to set distractions aside and be gathered into the presence of God, who's more than ready to meet them.

ATTENTION GRABBER

Worship Interrupted

Greet kids warmly as they arrive.

Say: **To start off today we're going to set up something that looks like our worship service here at church. I'll need a couple of volunteers to lead songs together at our worship service.** Choose two or three child volunteers and send them off to decide which songs they'll lead.

Say: **The rest of us can sit like we would at our worship service.**

Sit in the back of the group so you can sneak away unnoticed. Support the kids leading the songs, but sometime into the second song, place your bags of popcorn on a tray, go to the back of the "worship area" and disrupt the singing by shouting: **Popcorn! Get your popcorn here! Fifty cents a bag. Tastiest popcorn in town. Step right up and get your popcorn! Don't wanna be without it! G-e-e-e-t your popcorn!**

When the children stop and look at you, ask: **What's wrong? Can't I sell a little popcorn if I want to? I mean, what's wrong with making a little money?**

Give kids a chance to respond to your interruption.

Pout a little for effect and say: **Hmm. Don't you think you're being a little hard on me? What's so bad about selling popcorn?**

Set the popcorn tray aside with assurances that you'll enjoy the popcorn later in class.

Say: **You might be surprised to know that Jesus encountered a situation something like this when he went to the Temple—like our church today—to worship. And he wasn't too happy about what he saw because ★ *worship is a special time set apart to honor God.* In today's passage, Jesus was just about as angry as we ever see him in the Bible! Let's go along with Jesus to find out why and what happened.**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

My Father's House (John 2:13-22)

Explain to kids that In Jesus' time the center of worship for all Jews was the Temple in Jerusalem. It held all the precious items from

Prep Box

Prepare a small bag of popcorn for each child. Hide the popcorn bags in a tote bag. Have a tray large enough to hold the bags of popcorn.

Jewish history long ago and was the most holy and sacred place imaginable.

The Temple was built on the highest spot in Jerusalem, called the Temple Mount. Not just anyone could visit all parts of the Temple. Tell kids you're going to take a "tour" to see what a visit to the Temple would be like.

Have kids help you drag a table against one wall of the room. Gather kids at the table and point to the top. As you give kids the "tour," gesture and encourage kids to use their imaginations.

Say: **This is the very highest part of the Temple Mount, inside the Temple building itself, behind a thick curtain. This was called the Most Holy Place and only the high priest went in here, and only once a year, to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people.**

Now we step back and down several stairs to the first room of the Temple building. Lead kids in taking a few steps away from table. **Priests work here day and night to set out fresh bread offerings and to keep the lamps lit and the incense burning.**

Now we go backward out of the building and down more steps to the courtyard of the priests. Lead kids in taking another few steps away from the table. **Here the priests offered sacrifices to God.**

Another step backward finds us in the court of the men. Lead kids in taking one more step away from the table. **Regular Jewish men could come this far, but no farther.**

Now let's step backward, through a gate, and down just a bit. Lead kids in taking a few more steps away from the table. **This is the court of the women. Jewish women could come this far, but no farther. Treasuries and tall storerooms surround this large courtyard.**

Finally we're ready to back out through a low wall to the last and largest court: the court of the Gentiles. Lead kids in taking a few more steps away from the table. **People who were not Jewish but still believed in the one true God could come here to pray and worship. And *this* is where all the trouble started with Jesus.**

Invite the children to join you in a story circle.

Say: **In those days, people had to pay their Temple tax with special Temple coins. But the money-changers who sold the Temple coins cheated the people who came to worship. Let's see what that looks like.**

Give a one-dollar bill to two different children and prompt them

Prep Box

Gather the dollar bills, quarters, and clothesline.

to come to you and ask for Temple coins. Spread eight quarters out on your lap. When the first child comes and asks for Temple coins, give only two quarters in return for the dollar. Repeat with the second child. If they protest, wave them off to their seats.

Ask:

• **Describe what you saw that was wrong with how I exchanged the money.**

• **How do you feel about the way I did business?**

Say: **That's exactly how the money-changers in the Temple worked! They cheated people day after day. Right there in the court of the Gentiles that was meant for worshipping God.**

And then there were the animal vendors. You see, people who came from far away needed doves, lambs, and goats to offer as sacrifices. And each animal needed to be perfect. Back in the days of traveling by foot, people couldn't bring animals with them, so the travelers had to buy them in Jerusalem. But guess what? The animal vendors set up shop right there in the court of the Gentiles, a place that was meant for prayer and worship. Let's try to get an idea of the noises that would have been there.

Please coo like a bunch of doves. Let kids make dove sounds.

Now bleat like a bunch of goats. Let kids bleat like goats.

Now baa like a bunch of sheep. Let kids baa like sheep.

Now bicker like people arguing over prices. Let kids argue.

Gather kids' attention and say: **The Temple had been turned into a very noisy, stinky place.**

So this is what Jesus saw when he came into the Temple: tables of money-changers cheating people, cages full of noisy, smelly animals, and people arguing over their prices.

Jesus was *not* happy. In fact, he was downright *angry*! After all, the Temple was his Father's house, a place for worship and prayer. ★ *Worship is a special time set apart to honor God.*

Say: **Jesus drove the animals and their sellers right out of the Temple! People were amazed. They'd never seen Jesus act this way before.** Have kids stand up and decide whether they'll be a sheep, a goat, or a dove. Wave a looped clothesline around your head and begin driving the "animals" toward a corner of the room. Stop after a step or two and invite the kids to return to the story circle.

Then Jesus turned toward the money-changers. He scattered their money all over the floor.

Toss your money into the center of the circle and have kids with quarters do the same.

Say: **Then he turned over their tables and said, “My Father’s house is a house of prayer, but you’ve made it a den of thieves!”**

People in the Temple could hardly believe their eyes—they’d never seen Jesus this angry. But they were glad, too. They knew about all the cheating that had been going on in God’s Temple for years.

Ask:

• **Why do you think what Jesus saw in the Temple made him so angry?**

Say: **Jesus wanted everyone to know that ★ *worship is a special time set apart to honor God.* The Temple was to be a holy place, but the priests had allowed it to become a noisy marketplace where people who came to worship got cheated day after day.**

By his actions, Jesus was also teaching another important lesson: Because he was God’s only Son, he had the right to say what should be going on in his Father’s house.

LIFE APPLICATION

Windows on Worship

Ask:

• **What kinds of things do you think should be happening in a church, or God’s house?**

Say: **Jesus knew that it was God’s plan to fill worshippers in the Temple with joy. We think about singing and praying and listening to God’s Word, but we don’t always think about joy. When we come into God’s house to worship, we can expect God to be here with us. And there’s joy in God’s presence. Let’s hear what the Bible has to say about that.**

Distribute the “Windows on Worship” handout. Ask a child volunteer to read aloud the passage from Isaiah.

Say: **Jesus quoted part of this passage when he cleared the Temple.**

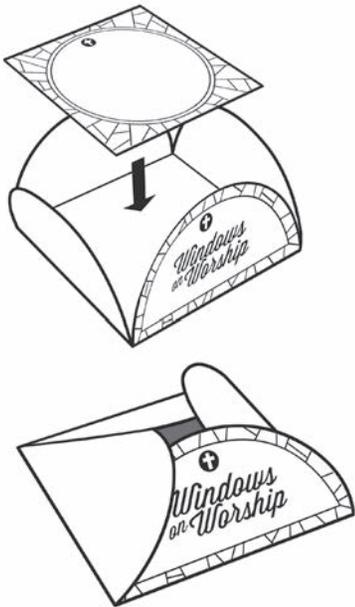
Prep Box

Set out copies of the “Windows on Worship” handout, scissors, and pencils.

Ask:

• **Why do you think we experience joy when we worship God?**

Say: **Let's cut out and put together our Windows on Worship folders and then get together in groups to discover what else we've learned about worship today.**



Have kids cut out the Scripture square and the folding envelope. Show kids how to lay the envelope blank side up and then fold in each of the half circles. When each half circle is tucked into the preceding half circle, the envelope will stay closed on its own. The Scripture square will tuck inside the envelope.

Have kids form groups of two or three. Say: **In your groups, take turns discussing each of the questions on your envelope flaps. Then write or draw what you've learned about worship from Jesus' actions and from the Scripture square on the blank part of your envelopes. Make sure everyone gets a turn to talk.**

After kids have had plenty of time to work and talk, ask a volunteer in each group to report their responses to the entire group.

COMMITMENT

One Thing to Do

Pass out the popcorn bags that you showed kids during the Attention Grabber.

Say: **Here's the popcorn I promised you! Help yourselves while we talk about one last thing.**

Think back to what kind of distraction this popcorn caused when we were having our mini-worship service earlier.

Ask:

- **How was my selling popcorn like or unlike what Jesus saw going on in the Temple?**
- **How might Jesus have reacted to what I was doing?**
- **Why did Jesus want to get rid of anything that took people's minds off God?**
- **Since we know that ★ *worship is a special time set apart to honor God*, what can we do to turn away from distractions and draw close to God?**

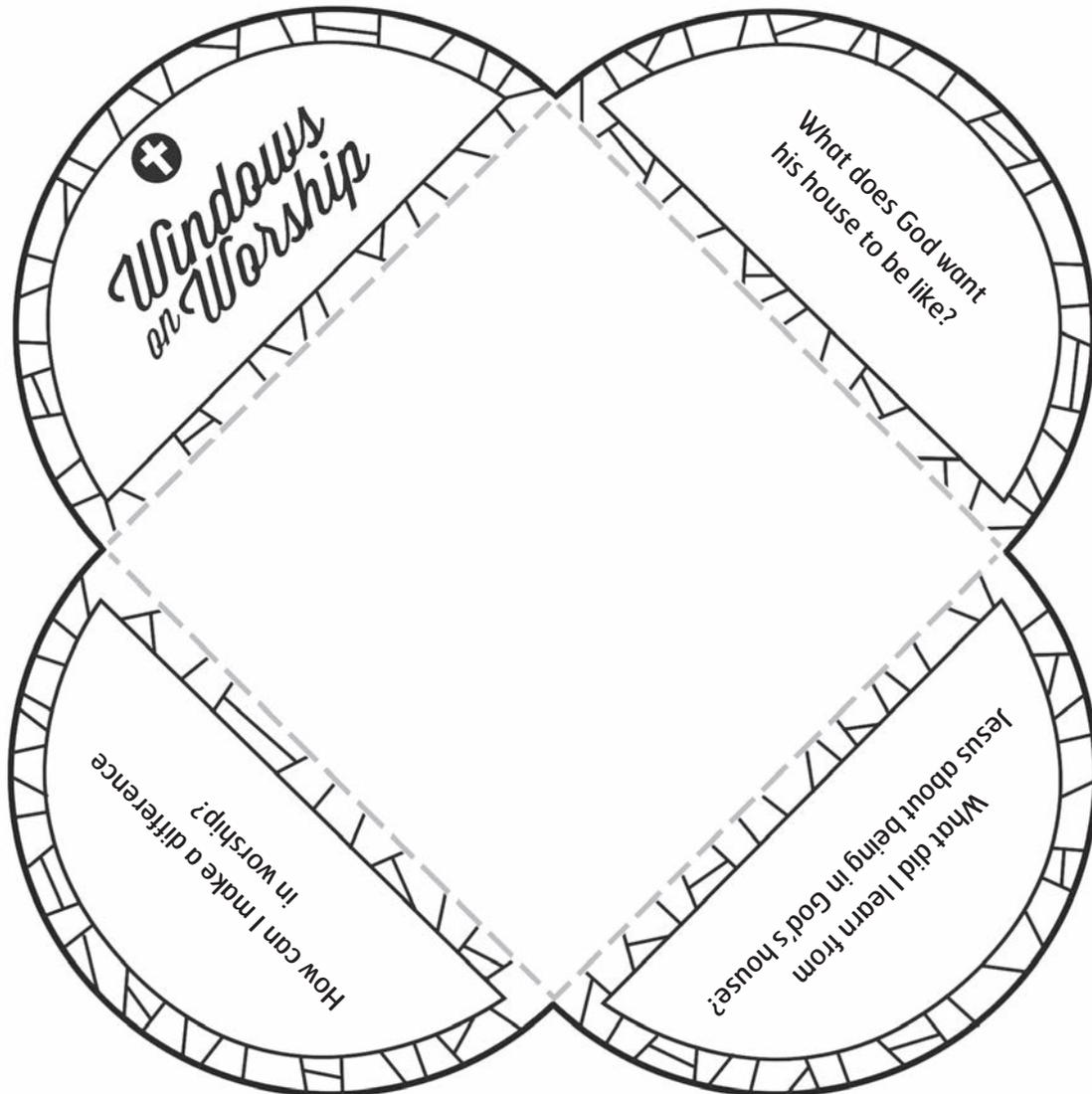
Say: **Turn to a friend and tell one thing you'll do to focus on God the next time you're in worship.**

Windows on Worship

Jesus' surprising actions in the Temple caused quite an uproar! But what did you learn from what Jesus said and did that day?

Put the Windows on Worship mini-folder together with your teacher's help. Then get together in groups of two or three to discuss the questions. Write or draw your answers inside the folder and on the back of the Bible passage square.

Be prepared to be a new you in worship!



CLOSING

Silent Response Prayer

Say: Our closing prayer has a place for you to respond silently or in a whisper. When I pray, I'll leave a little time for you to do that. Then let's all finish together by praying, *in Jesus' name, amen.*

Dear God, thank you for this Scripture that shows us that ★ *worship is a special time set apart to honor you and that you want to meet us there and fill us with your joy.* When we worship you, help us focus on you by...

In Jesus' name, amen.