

National Junior High Sunday 2018

“Abundant life in Jesus,” based on John 10:10 (NRSV)

Bible Study

by Lauren Seganos Cohen

Opening Activity: Steal the Keys (5-10 minutes)

Materials Needed: Chair, Keys, Small bowl, Blindfold, Newspaper or Magazine

Instructions: Put the keys in the small bowl and place under the chair. Everyone makes a wide circle around the chair. Choose someone to wear the blindfold, and sit in the chair, ready with the rolled-up newspaper/magazine.

The objective is to sneak up and steal the keys from the bowl and return to the circle without being hit. The blind defender must defend the keys with the newspaper/magazine. If he/she connects with someone attempting to steal, that person is out. The person who successfully steals the keys is the next defender.

This can be played in turns or all at once. Play a few rounds or until everyone who wants to get a turn as the defender gets one.

Hear God’s Word (5 minutes)

John 10:10

Invite four different people to choose one of the below translations and read it out loud to the group. Continue until all translations of John 10:10 have been read. (If there are other translations available, feel free to read those as well.)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (New Revised Standard Version)

A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of. (The Message)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (New International Version)

The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life - life in all its fullness. (Good News Translation)

Learn about God’s Word (5-10 minutes)

Take turns or use “popcorn style” to read the paragraphs below out loud. Leaders, feel free to add any other background information if you’d like.

Reader 1: The Gospel of John is one of the four Gospels in the New Testament. John is often thought of as having a different version the telling of Jesus’ life and ministry, compared to

Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Specifically, the author of John uses a lot of symbols and spiritual images to describe Jesus and his work on earth. Jesus often talks in long speeches, as compared to the other Gospels where he tells a lot of short stories or parables.

Reader 2: This particular passage of scripture takes place soon after Jesus had performed a miracle (in chapter 9) of restoring sight to a man who was born blind. The religious leaders of the day were very suspicious about this healing and brought the formerly-blind man in for questioning, as well as his parents. They wanted to figure out who Jesus was and how he was able to perform such a miracle. Becoming frustrated that they were not receiving the answers they were looking for, they drove the man away. Jesus finds the man and has a conversation with him about literal blindness versus spiritual blindness. The religious leaders are eavesdropping and that is when Jesus continues with his monologue about the shepherd, the sheep, the thieves, and abundant life.

Reader 3: Looking specifically at chapter 10 verse 10, our scripture theme for Junior High Sunday, who are the thieves? And what does Jesus mean by “abundant life”? Based on the story this passage follows, we might surmise that Jesus was referring to the religious leaders who were blinded by their own ambition or suspicions and then use stealing, killing, and destroying as methods to get their way. Jesus sets up the comparison: he says that *thieves* come to bring destruction and death, but that *he* comes to bring life and not just life, but abundant life.

Reader 4: So, what does Jesus mean by abundant life? Did you know that the Greek word that the Gospel of John uses for “life” is *zoe*? (Fun fact: Do you know someone named Zoe or Zoey? Their name in Greek means “life!”) This word is used several times throughout the whole Gospel of John, and it can have two different meanings: life in this world and eternal life.

Reader 5: The life in this world that Jesus describes is a purposeful life of service, belonging to a safe and supportive community, finding meaning in relationships both with God and with others, and to live without fear no matter what comes. This is the life, here and now, for the rest of our lives, that Jesus offers us.

Reader 6: The eternal life that Jesus describes is the relationship with God that continues beyond life: sharing with the very being of God through faith in Jesus. Romans 8:38-39 tells us that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.” Nothing will separate us from the love of God. This is the eternal life that Jesus offers us.

Reader 7: When Jesus tells us that he offers abundant life, he is referring to both kinds of “life.” Life in Jesus means that he offers you both the joyful, abundant, meaningful, relationship-filled life with God and other people that you can have today, right now, for the rest of your life... AND the promise of a shared, eternal communion with God even after you die, because God loves you and created you for relationship with Him.

Apply God's Word (20-30 minutes)

Divide into small groups (2-4 people) for discussion.

1. Who or what are the “thieves” in your own life right now? What is stealing from your wholeness and health? What is killing your self-worth as a beloved child of God? What is separating you from your Creator and from the people you love?
2. Saint Irenaeus once wrote, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” What do you think he meant?
3. How do you recognize when the “thieves” are coming to steal, kill, and destroy the abundance in your own life? What are the “red flags” you look for or can begin to look for?
4. What does abundant life with Jesus look like for you, in this life? How can you live your life in a way that looks forward to abundant life with Jesus, even after you die?

Reflect on the Word (5 minutes)

Come back together into one large group. Ask each person to share one word or phrase that describes something they learned or feel led to incorporate into the Junior High Sunday worship service.

Close with Prayer (1 minute)

Feel free to pray this prayer or use your own!

Gracious and Loving God, we thank you for the stories and lessons from the Bible. Thank you for the gifts that Jesus has given us: the gift of abundance and fullness in this life and the life to come. Help us when we struggle to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to you. Thank you for always forgiving us, always loving us, and always drawing us closer to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Resources Used: *Harper Collins Study Bible, Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, Feasting on the Word: John*, and YouthGroupGames.com