



October 1, 2017

Dear Church Partners,

In this packet are five free lessons for your use. My hope is that you will find this resource helpful for you as you interpret the "Change for Children" campaign to the young people of your church, though none of these lessons are dependent on your church's participation in Change for Children. While written primarily for a Children's Sermon format, these object lessons could be used in a Sunday school setting, youth group, or even as sermon illustrations!

In over twenty years in children and youth ministry, the object lessons I have used for children's sermon times have been a very effective way of communicating the truth of God's Word. Many of the adults in the congregation would tell me they preferred my children's sermons to my "regular" sermons! Jesus taught in object lessons and word pictures, too, so it should be no surprise to us that this method is highly effective—surely Jesus knew what he was doing and set an example for us to follow!

These lessons have been written with Advent and the Christmas season in mind, focusing on a message of hope and joy, and provide a great opportunity for your church to connect to the ministry of Intermountain. I hope this resource blesses you, saves you time in preparation, and makes your workload a little lighter. It is my hope that our relationship will truly be a partnership of mutual benefit. As Intermountain's chaplain, I want to be a resource to you and an encouragement in your work with children and families.

Perhaps you have already visited our website: [www.intermountainministry.org](http://www.intermountainministry.org) ? It has regular posts about what we've been up to in ministry with the children in residence as well as hosting an ever expanding library of resources **free** for your use! I endeavor to update the content regularly, so I'd encourage you to check back at least twice a month. Any feedback or requests for specific types of resources or content are also welcome any time.

So, enjoy these lessons for now, and let me know what you think. I'd love to hear from you and build a stronger relationship between my chaplain's ministry at Intermountain and the good work you are doing in your church and community.

Blessings,

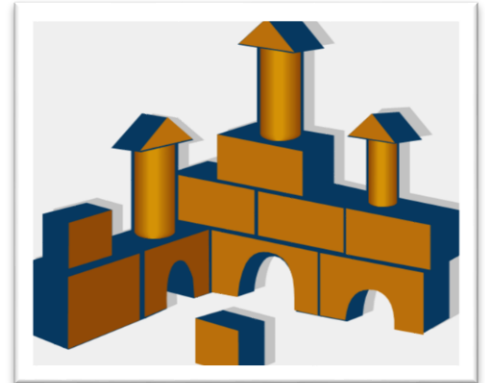
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Haughee", with a stylized, flowing script.

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## **Week 1: “Building Blocks of Hope”**

**Objects needed:** a dozen or so blocks that can be used to build a simple structure that is easily knocked down

**Theme/Main Idea:** Each of us is given one life to live for God and make the most of the time we have. We build something with our lives that either will last and make a difference for God, or will soon fade away. What we build with God gives us hope that our building (and our life!) makes a difference.



### **Presentation:**

“We are beginning the season of Advent, a time we look forward to a celebration of the birth of Jesus. Throughout this season we will talk about the hope that Jesus gives us. As we think about hope, we need to think about why we have hope. We have hope because Jesus gives us a reason to live. If we listen to Jesus, we know that the reason for life is to love God and love other people. And, because we can live forever with God through Jesus, we know that what we do in this life—loving God and loving people—gives us a very real reason for hope, a hope that makes our lives full, purposeful and joy-filled.

I’ve brought something to share with you today... a simple toy that gives many children a great deal of joy no matter where they might live. It doesn’t need batteries and you can play for hours with them. Can you guess what this toy is?

[take time for children to guess, encouraging their participation, then take out your sack or box of blocks that you have brought]

I have blocks! That makes sense, right? I bet you have all played with blocks. You know what I love about blocks? I can build whatever I want [start building your small structure]... there! Isn’t that neat?

But, sometimes blocks make me sad... [make a sad face to emphasize your point]. You see, sometimes when I have built something I think is really cool, someone comes in and knocks my building over or my mom or the teacher would tell me it was time for the blocks to be put away!

And then [knock your building over as you say this] BOOM! All my hard work and my wonderful creation is gone...

[pause while children feel their own frustration while thinking of similar experiences]

Have you ever had something like that happen to you? Frustrating, isn't it? It can make us feel kind of sad or maybe even mad. But, usually we get over it pretty quickly, especially if we get to build another time and we make something even cooler! [start to build again with your blocks to emphasize the point]

Now, how about thinking past just these blocks? Think about the things people build during their lives. We build houses, buildings, cities, families, we work on educations, careers or jobs, we might write or paint or sculpt something... all sorts of things we could do to build something during our lives. How sad would it be to think about those things being knocked down? We can all probably think of buildings in town we have seen get knocked down to make room for something else... just like my block house here! Getting things knocked down that we've built can leave us feeling pretty hopeless... like all we worked for was a big waste of time!

But, it doesn't have to be that way! Yea! Because Jesus came, he gives us hope that the things we do in our lives to serve him, love God and others... that those things can last and last and last! Those acts of love and devotion really matter and are built on a strong foundation so they will never crumble or get knocked down. Can you think of some things we could do that would last like this? Can you think of some examples of the ways we can show love to God and others that might make a real difference even years from now?

[give children time to think of ideas, encouraging them that even the smallest acts of love can bring hope to someone that lasts a lifetime... even lasting eternally!]

All those ideas are great. Great job thinking of ways you can build something that lasts and might give someone else hope.

As we wrap this up, can I tell you why I am excited about this season of hope? Sure, I am excited because of all the family gatherings and celebrations and the beautiful lights and decorations, yes. But, most of all, I am excited because we get a chance to celebrate Jesus' birth, and because Jesus came to be born, live, died for our sins, and was raised again—because of these things—my life is different. I can be filled with hope and joy and love. And, I can be a part of bringing hope to others!



Before you leave today, I want to give you a “Change for Children” change can. During the season of Advent, we’re going to do our best to fill these up. The money we raise will go to Intermountain, to help children and families find hope by building stronger, healthier relationships. For some children, it will mean having a forever home for the first time in their lives. For other children, Intermountain is helping them be successful in school and in the community, so they can handle their big feelings and the hard things that have happened to them while staying safe and knowing they are loved.

Will you pray with me?

*God, we thank you that each and every life matters. When we share love, hope, and grace with others we know that we are building with blocks of hope. This hope can last because it is based on what you have done, God, not on what we can do! Help us to make loving you and others the center of our Christmas celebrations. Bless our efforts to bring hope to the children and families that Intermountain serves. In your mercy, fill us with your love, grace, and peace. Amen.”*

**Key Texts:** “Jesus replied, ‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39, NLT)

“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:10-11, NIV)

## **Week 2: “Guess Who?”**

**Objects needed:** A copy of the children’s game “Guess Who?” if you can find one.

**Theme/Main Idea:** With Jesus’ birth, God entered into human history and gave God a face! In knowing Jesus, we have a chance to know God. In living our lives with Jesus, we can know true hope no matter what happens.

### **Presentation:**



“Have you ever had to describe a good friend to someone who hasn’t met them? What sort of things did you say to describe them?

[Take time for children’s answers. They are likely going to mention personality traits as well as physical traits.]

These are all great descriptions. I noticed that people mentioned physical characteristics—how tall, what color hair, etc.—as well as personality traits—nice, funny, etc.—when describing their friends. Now, for a stranger who hasn’t met our friend, it might be easier for them to recognize our friend if we just stuck to physical traits.

[Take out “Guess Who?” game]

Do you guys know what this is? Yes. It is a game. Has anyone here ever played this game? Yes? Well how do you play? That’s right, you try and guess the other player’s mystery person before they guess yours. And, it is all about asking questions like, ‘Is it a boy? Does he have a mustache? Does he wear glasses?’ And, as you go... it narrows things down until you can guess who the mystery person is.

Now... I kind of have a silly question for you. If you were going to play this game and God was your mystery person, how would you describe God? Would you use physical characteristics to describe God like in this game [hold Guess Who? Game up], or would you use personality characteristics—sticking to what God is like... gentle, kind, powerful?

[Give children time to respond]

Yes. We might think about pictures we have seen of Jesus when we describe God, but even those pictures... well, we can't be sure exactly what Jesus looked like. So, more often than not, I think I would describe Jesus or God like some of you did: Loving, kind, peaceful... those kind of things.

Until God came to earth as Jesus, we had a hard time knowing Jesus. The Bible tells us that Jesus is a perfect representation of God—He shows us exactly what God is like because he is God. So, after Jesus came, people could know God better than they ever had before!

Even now, after Jesus has been born, lived, died, rose from the grave and has returned to heaven, we can still know God well by knowing Jesus. We can know Jesus by reading the Bible, by talking to Jesus in prayer, and through worship—what we are doing right now! Yes, he might not be here physically. We might not be able to reach out and touch Jesus, but Jesus is here and we can still know him in our hearts, minds, and souls. And, just like our best friends, we'll find that the words we use to describe our friend Jesus will not focus on how Jesus looks, but on the traits that really make a difference to us. The hope of the whole earth—to know God and be loved by God—*this* hope was met when Jesus was born.

Let's pray:

*"God, thank you for the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus came to us we don't have to guess about who you are and how you feel about us. You love us, care for us, and want us to love you in return. Thank you, God for this season of hope and for the joy you have placed in our hearts. Amen."*

**Key Text:** "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Colossians 1:15-20)



### **Week 3: “The seed and the plant”**

**Objects needed:** Packages of various seeds.

**Theme/Main Idea:** Jesus’ coming brought the start of God’s Kingdom, but that Kingdom is still growing in our hearts, in our lives, and in the world. The Kingdom of God is like a seed that has been planted in our hearts, and as we grow in our experience of God, the Kingdom expands in our hearts and minds, too. As we nurture a seed so that it grows into a strong plant, we need to keep alive our hope in Jesus’ coming Kingdom so it too grows and expands.



#### **Presentation:**

“Today, let’s pretend we’re planting a garden. Now, to keep things from getting too messy, we’re just going to plan our garden today, not do any actual planting. Besides having some soil to plant in... either in a pot or a spot of land, can anyone tell me what I need to plant a garden?”

[take time for children’s responses, until someone suggests seeds!]

That’s right. I’d need lots of those things you mentioned, but if I didn’t have seeds, I wouldn’t have a garden. I just happen to have brought some seeds with me. Let’s see what we have here...

[Allow children to see each package of seeds and tell you what they are]

Now, children, how do you know that these seeds will produce these plants? [grab a seed packet and hold it up] How can we know that when I plant these seeds that I will get flowers, or corn, or a bean plant, or peas, or... well, you get the idea!?

[Children will suggest that you look at the picture, etc.]

We have to trust that whoever put these seed packets together knew what they were doing, right? We have to trust that the picture and the label they put on this package matches the plant that this seed will grow into. Now, maybe if we’ve had a lot of experience planting gardens, we get to the point where we recognize certain types of seeds. That certainly would help, no?

Did you know that Jesus said that one of the things his Kingdom was like was a seed? Yes, it's true. I think he wanted us to know that with as much hope as we have now because Jesus is in our hearts and lives, that there is something more we are moving towards. Our hope is for God's Kingdom—his love, mercy, and grace for everyone, and the peace that will come from God setting everything right—well, there are plenty of places where this kingdom isn't fully grown up and matured. The beginning of the Kingdom has started... like a seed planted in the hearts of people that love him that gets watered by the Holy Spirit.

That seed grows in our hearts and as we grow closer to God, we know that there is an even greater hope to be realized. We trust in the hope of Jesus' return, because we trust the person who put the 'package' together, if you will. Better yet, we know the gardener, and the one who planted the seed in our hearts. We've seen it grow up little by little until it's pushed away some of the dirt in our lives and we can see how beautiful this kingdom 'plant' will be.

Now, the Kingdom of God isn't really a plant... but it is *like* a plant. It's like a great big plant that grows from a little seed. And, I think that's why Jesus used that image for us, to teach us and show us. Jesus knew that we'd be here, years after he lived on earth among us, and we'd look back on Christmas time. We'd see a little baby in a manger and be tempted to miss just how big a deal it really was. It was a big deal, because in that moment, a new hope was planted in the soil of our broken earth. This is a season of hope because Jesus came to bring the seeds of the Kingdom.

Let's pray:

*Jesus, thank you for planting the seed of your Kingdom in our hearts. Water that seed by your Spirit. Help us to grow in our understanding of You and how we need to live as people of your Kingdom. Help us to love, give, and hope as you want us to. In your name we pray, Amen."*

**Key Text:** "He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.'

Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.'" (Mark 4:26-32, NIV)



## **Week 4: “You’re Invited!”**

**Objects needed:** a birthday invitation filled in for several months later, perhaps next summer.

**Theme/Main Idea:** We have some idea of what Jesus’ second Advent will be like based on his first Advent. The first time Jesus came as a suffering servant to save us from sin. When Christ returns, it will be as conquering king to put an end to sin and death forever! As time has passed since Jesus’ first Advent, which we celebrate at Christmastime, it can become tempting to think that the second Advent isn’t real or won’t happen. We can trust that Jesus is coming again because of who he is and what he’s done!



### **Presentation:**

“Hi boys and girls. I have something I would like to show you... something that is pretty small but has me really excited! Would you like to see it? [Children respond] Well, before I show you I’d like to ask a question or two.

First, can anyone here tell me about how long it has been since Jesus was born? [Children respond... if no one gets it “right” you can help them by giving hints that pertain to what year it is.]

That’s right, we know its been about 2017 years since Jesus was born because we mark our years by the amount of time that has passed since that day. 2,017 years is a long time! Wow... can you imagine all the things that have happened over 2,017 years? Over two thousand years have passed since Jesus was born, and almost two thousand years have passed since Jesus died on the cross, was buried in the tomb, and rose on the third day. After spending a little time with his followers, he ascended—that means he went up—to heaven. At that time, he made us a promise and gave us an invitation. Did you know that? Yes. It’s true, and that brings me to my small item that has given me a great deal of excitement!

[take out the invitation to a party or event for next summer]

What is this, boys and girls? [Children respond] That's right! It's an invitation. Can anyone help me read it? I just got this the other day, and I am pretty excited.

[As children read the invitation, make sure you look disappointed as they get to the date... it is such a long time off, after all!]

Oh no! I was excited, but now I am worried! What happens if I lose my invitation or forget about the party? What if they change their mind and decide they don't want me to come? I am not sure I can remember a party that is so far away...

[pause long enough for the children to hopefully console you, make a comment, or at least feel some of the disappointment with you!]

Okay, children, maybe I was acting a little. I am not worried at all... Do you know why? Because I know these people really well, and I know that if they have invited me, they won't change their minds. And, if something changes in the plans for the party, I know they'll let me know! Yes, I am confident in my invitation to go to the party because I know the one throwing the party.

That brings me back to where we started before I showed you my invitation. Remember, I told you that about two thousand years ago Jesus ascended—do you remember what I told you that meant? That's right, he went up to heaven!—well, all that long time ago, Jesus gave us a promise and an invitation. Do you know what it was? Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us, and he invited us to be with him forever, starting right now and ending with a party either when we go home to heaven, or Jesus comes back himself to start the party!

Just think... I pretended to be worried about the party I got an invitation for because it wasn't until next summer. Followers of Jesus might be worried because the invitation to God's party was given nearly two thousand years ago, and we are still waiting. But, just like my worries about next summer's party were relieved when I remembered that my good friend invited me, our worries about Jesus making good on his invitation can be relieved when we realize that he has already made good on his promise—Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to us—and, most importantly, we know Jesus loves us and cares for us, and we can trust that his invitation will still be good no matter how long we wait for the party!



Let's pray:

*God, we know that you keep your promises. You promised that Jesus would come, and He did. We celebrate his birth only a few days from now. Jesus told us that he would come again for us, and he will. We can trust in the hope of living forever because of who you are and what you have done for us. For all the gifts that will be exchanged this Christmas season, this gift of new life and hope for a future is the best gift of all. May the offering we are collecting in our Change Cans help make it possible for Intermountain's children to receive this gift as well. Thank you, God. In Jesus name, Amen."*

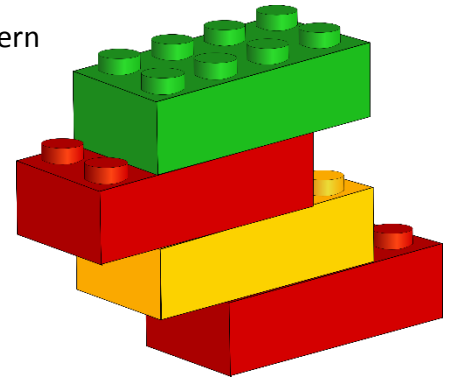
**Key Text:** "Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'

...But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (from 2 Peter 3:3-9, NIV)

## **Christmas Eve: “A pattern of promise-keeping”**

**Objects needed:** Colored Legos that you can stack and make a pattern with. (Also... your filled change can if collecting on Christmas Eve)

**Theme/Main Idea:** God’s established pattern is that of a promise keeper. Because God is a promise keeper, and we have seen the promise of Jesus’ birth fulfilled, we have hope that the future promises God has made us will also be fulfilled.



### **Presentation:**

“Hello, boys and girls, how are you this evening/today?”

[as kids respond, take out Legos and start building one on top of another in a pattern... red, blue, yellow. Red, blue, yellow, etc. This will be most effective if you sort of ignore the kids as you are wrapped up in your building.]

Oh, I bet you are wondering what I am doing. I am just building with my Legos. See? [hold up the stack of Legos with a clear pattern to your building]

I’d like to keep building... What color should I use next? [MOST likely, the children will notice the pattern and will select a brick that “fits” in the pattern you have started. If not, give some hints, or keep building using your pattern and ask again] That’s right! How did you know?

[Children respond... some may suggest that you can see the pattern, and that’s how they knew.]

Sure... you saw the pattern I was using and you could tell what was coming next. Today is a special day, it’s Christmas Eve. Our season of hope and our collecting of change in our cans (hold up your CFC can) has led up to this point. There are certain patterns we have seen over the last few weeks, and there is a pattern to how God works with us. God makes a promise, and he keeps his promise. God makes a promise, and he keeps his promise. God makes a promise, and... [wait for kids to chime in] he keeps his promise. That’s right!

Our promise-keeping is nowhere close to this pattern. We might make promises to God or others, but we don't always keep them. Isn't it good news that God's pattern of promise-keeping is better than ours? I sure think so. But, even though we aren't perfect in how we do it, we—together—carry on a pattern in the church. We carry on a pattern with each year and each retelling of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. We are passing on the hope we have received in Jesus. This pattern was started with Jesus' first followers, and we carry it on today. Listen to what John wrote:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete." (1 John 1:1-4, NIV)

And, just like John and Jesus' early followers, we can make our own joy complete by passing on the news of Jesus' birth and the hope that Jesus brings. Just like the song we often sing in this season, we proclaim: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King!"

Let's pray:

*God, let each of our hearts prepare room for the coming King, our Lord, Jesus. Thank you for the joy you bring us. Thank you for the gift of Jesus. Make our joy complete, now, as we carry on the pattern of telling again the story of your coming into our world through the baby of Bethlehem. May our telling and retelling of this story give you glory and honor and praise. In Jesus name, Amen."*

**Key Text:** "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete." (1 John 1:1-4, NIV)