



Story: Chocolate Chip Cookies

INCLUSIVE OF ALL

>> Lesson 1: What is Family?

Eight point: By calling ourselves progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who seek community that is inclusive of ALL people.

Affirmation: I am part of the community of life that includes all people.

Getting to the Heart of the Lesson

No matter what our family looks like outwardly, or whether our family is one of blood or one of choice, family is where we have some of the deepest connections of our hearts. Family is our first and lifelong teacher. With our family we get to practice loving, accepting and giving in personal and challenging circumstances that are nearly impossible to get away from. We can also struggle to define ourselves both within and against our family. And yet people all over the world choose to live in family groups, even when it is possible or more convenient to live alone.

We want to teach our children to accept, celebrate and find joy in the family they have, while also expanding their sense of self way beyond the confines of one small family unit defined by heredity or legal bonds. This is an especially important concept for children who may be in a family in which they are being harmed in some way, where there is fear or loneliness. Ultimately, we hope our children will grow to feel part of a spiritual family that approaches all persons in the world as brothers and sisters. Jesus and Paul often talked of such a bond when they called “family” those who followed the way of life advocated by Jesus.

At the time Jesus was alive, it was common to think of God as a harsh judge or an all powerful king. Jesus tried to change that idea and spoke of God as being a father and all of us being like his children. In eastern cultures it is common to speak of God as a divine mother, as a way of affirming the same truth. The idea seems to be that just as children carry physical traits from their father and mother, children of spirit carry the love of God within them to share with all they meet.

Teacher Reflection

Take a quiet moment to consider the following:

- What roles do you play in your family? (See “Building the Lesson”)
- What do you appreciate about each role?
- How have you been able to show love through some of the roles you play?
- As preparation for the discussion after the story, identify several special aspects of your family that you appreciate.

Bible Verses

Matthew 10:34-39

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of

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me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Matthew 12:48-50

Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Matthew 6:8

Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Quotations

You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them.

— *Desmond Tutu*

Rejoice with your family in the beautiful land of life!

— *Albert Einstein*

Opening the Lesson

Read the story "Chocolate Chip Cookies" and use the discussion questions to explore the idea of family. It would be fun to serve chocolate chip cookies as a snack, or as a treat for the children to take home.

Building the Lesson

Being in a family is an opportunity to practice relating to people in different ways. We have words for the different roles people play in families, and most people get to play several different roles at the same time. It is important also to remember that some children may not feel like they have much family at all or that they don't like their family. Some children's experience of family may be very negative. Issues of abuse or violence may come up. Therefore this lesson may be very challenging to some children. Remember to be sensitive to that and to never force participation. Also, you may want to mention that if anyone wants to speak with you about concerns about their family, that they can do so in private at any time. You may also

want to say, "If anyone is ever being hurt by family members, it is very important to tell a trusted adult."

Ultimately, we want to encourage children to have a trusted member of their spiritual family that they can talk with and be supported by. Like Mathew 10:34 says, sometimes we have to choose the spiritual path or community over our inherited family if our family is being harmful or hateful in some way. As we are all part of the divine or sacred family, meaning, from the source of God, those we feel connected with and supported by in a spiritual way are our true families.

Examples of English words we use for family roles:

- Father/mother/parent
- Sister—also half-sister, step-sister, sister-in-law,
- Brother—also half-brother, step-brother, brother-in-law
- Child or children
- Aunt/uncle
- Niece/nephew
- Cousin
- Grandmother/grandfather/grandparent
- Grandchild/grandson/granddaughter
- Great-grandmother/great-grandfather
- Great-grandchild/daughter/son
- Great-great-grandmother/great-great-grandfather/great-great-grandchild
- Relative
- Husband/wife/partner
- Boyfriend/girlfriend
- Fiancé/fiancée
- Foster child/parent/grandparent
- Twin/triplet

Read the list of words to the children and explain any words that may be unfamiliar. There are many more words used in other languages to distinguish all the different ways people can be related or be part of a family group. Encourage everyone to think about the different words that are true about their role in their family. For example, brother, son, cousin, uncle, child, grandson, grandchild, and half-brother may all be

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true for one person. Invite children to draw pictures of themselves and add the words that describe them. Remind children that if they don't feel like any of these roles fit them, or if they are having a hard time relating to their particular family, they can draw a picture of themselves and write the roles that relate to people that feel like family to them but aren't necessarily related.

If you have the preparation time, the words could be written on cardstock or printed from a computer and cut out to have ready to glue onto the pictures. If you do this, be sure to prepare enough words for everyone to add to their picture.

As an additional step, have the children choose words that describe a role that they hope to fill someday and add those to their picture. Distinguish those words in some way, such as writing them in a different color, printing on different colored paper or underlining those words.

If there is time, give the children an opportunity to share their picture and the words they chose.

Materials needed: drawing paper, pencils, markers, crayons, scissors, glue, list of words

Fun with Books

There are books available that have photographs of family groups around the world. It can be quite fun to see the wide variety of families types represented in different cultures. Some examples that may be in your library:

- *Children Just Like Me*; DK Publishers
- *Families*, by Ann Morris; HarperCollins (2000)
- *Families*, by Susan Kuklin; Hyperion Book CH (2006)

Fun with Music



- “There is Love” — Ladybug, Butterflyfish CD
- “Now That I Wander With Thee” — I Came From Joy CD

Movement Break

Use the word list from the last activity for a movement break. Explain that you will call out a word and do a movement, then all the children who put that word on their picture need to do the same movement as quickly as they can. The children who did not put that word on their picture should squat down until the next word. Stand in a circle and do standing movements that are controlled and can be done in one place. Again, please remind children that they can feel like a cousin with some close friends. They can feel like a sister to some non-blood related friends. If you notice children feeling left out of this activity, give them some leeway or let them know that you feel like family to them. Request an honorary role, like aunt, uncle or second cousin. Examples:

- “Brother!” Arms stretched out far to the side, feet wide apart
- “Aunt!” Arms upraised, hands clasped and feet together
- “Cousin!” Arms wrapped around self in a hug, legs crossed

Closing the Lesson

Family Blessing

Have a prayer and blessing time at the altar in your classroom, to express gratitude for our earthly families as well as for the people in our lives that feel like family, even if they don't fit into any particular family role, and to express devotion to the one source of all families everywhere.

Let each child choose a flower from an assortment that you provide. They can hold their flower and look at it while a candle is lit. Lead a prayer of your own or use the one in this lesson. Then invite each child to list the names of those in his/her family that they would like to pray for. Let the children know that even if someone is related to us by blood, they can still be family. Let the children also list those people. As each child finishes

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saying the names of their family members they can place their flower in a vase on the altar. (Allow them to take their flower home later if they wish to.)

To help the children focus, encourage them to sit up straight, to feel warm energy in their heart, and to close their eyes and imagine the people in their family happy and smiling and surrounded with light.

Heavenly Father, Divine Mother, Light of all Life, Thank you for our families. Help us to remember that the love flowing through our families is just a small part of the love that flows through all creation. We are your children of light — shine through us to our families and to everyone we meet. May we treat our families with love and patience. Help us see all people in the world as brothers and sisters. Amen



Tip: If a bouquet of flowers is not practical, an alternative would be for each child to light a candle for their family. Small tea lights could be used on a beautiful platter or tray.

Story: Chocolate Chip Cookies

Amy and her four brothers were having breakfast. They had finished off a bunch of bananas, a loaf of walnut-raisin bread, the last jar of almond butter, and all the yogurt and cereal her mom bought that week. One brother had football practice before school, another worked as a lifeguard, and her oldest brother would work outside doing construction all day. Amy had to go to water polo practice and she ate just as much as the boys did.

As Amy stuffed her backpack she called, “Mom! Is it okay to invite Marci, Lila and Camilla to stay overnight tomorrow? There’s no school on Monday.” She was happy her mom agreed; sleepovers were Amy’s favorite fun thing, next to swimming. Her little brother made a goofy face about the plan — he thought girls giggled too much.

Marci said yes to the sleepover right away. She loved all the boisterous energy of Amy’s family. Marci didn’t have brothers or sisters and with just Marci and her grandmother, her house was usually quiet.

But Lila was shy around boys. She lived with her mom and aunt and shared a room with two girl cousins. There were boys at school, of course, but never at home. Boys were a little like aliens from another planet to Lila.

Amy gently teased her friend, “I promise you can stay in my room and I won’t let my brothers near you.” Lila blushed and agreed to come.

Camilla said, “This is my weekend with my dad, but he’ll let me come because I know he wants to practice with his band and they’ll probably stay up all night.”

On Saturday, the girls spread their sleeping bags on the floor of Amy’s room. There was barely room for all of them, but that was okay. Amy’s mom let them bring their dinner of homemade pizza into the bedroom as a special treat. It was pretty crowded in the kitchen too, because all Amy’s brothers were home and one had brought his friend, Pedro.

Lila had stayed in the bedroom while they all fixed their pizza. Too many boys! As Amy handed her a plate Lila asked, “What was all the laughing about? It sounded like a party out there.”

Amy explained, “I know I promised you could stay in my room, Lila, but you missed out on Pedro telling us what dinner is like at his house. It was so funny! Pedro lives with his foster family and his foster parents have three adopted kids from other countries. At dinner they practice languages and Pedro was imitating his dad using words in four languages to say, “Pass me the pizza please.” But his dad is from Texas, and all his words in any language sound Southern! It was funny, but I think having dinner in several languages would be so cool.”

