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# “It’s Not About You”

## Sunday School Lesson on Matthew 23:1-12

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“Actions speak louder than words.” “Practice what you preach.” We hear these types of sayings, but it can be easy to fall away from them or to begin trusting ourselves rather than God’s grace. Children are likely to witness examples of adults in the world that are similar to the prideful Pharisees in this Gospel text. People will often say one thing and live out another, but we want to instruct our kids to live as true humble servants of Christ. We want to explain to them what it means to be humble. We live not for the attention of other people, but for God.



**Lesson focus:** This lesson focuses on the difference between pride and humility. There’s nothing wrong with taking joy in hard work, but sinful pride occurs when we become self-absorbed, brag, and think that our actions can somehow save us. Being humble doesn’t mean that we beat ourselves up or constantly think negatively. It does mean recognizing that we live for Christ. This lesson reminds students to place others before themselves, and to place God at the head of all things.

**Bible Passage:** Matthew 23:1-12

**Target Audience:** Kindergarten-6<sup>th</sup> grade (variable for activity emphasis)

**Materials Needed:** Construction paper, scissors, decorations, glue, string, hole punch, paper bags, balloons, Bible (optional materials, depending on crafts and activities of choice).

- Watch the video demonstration of this [children’s sermon](#) on our [YouTube channel](#)
- Watch the [Sunday School craft project](#) demonstration on our [YouTube channel](#)
- Compare our [Matthew 23:1-12 Sunday School lesson for kids](#)



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# Game and Introduction Activity

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**Lesson Opening:** This lesson is focused on living lives for God, rather than attention, as well as being humble and not prideful.

Here are some activities to get kids thinking...(select the best ones for your audience and age group):

- How do you use it? Present children with a “grab bag” of various items (shoes, kitchen tools, pencils, etc.) and have them one at a time pull out an item and describe how they can use it to bring glory to God.
- Play “opposite Simon Says...” In this variation, instruct students to do just the opposite of what “Simon says”. Explain that in the Gospel lesson, the Pharisees did not do what they told others to do!
- How high can you go? Take turns stacking blocks or playing “Jenga” with other students. When the tower falls, remind students that pride comes before a fall.

Discuss with students how important it is to put God first and foremost in our lives. When we focus on loving God and loving His people, other things will fall into place. When we try to put our own interests as the main focus, we will likely fail.

**Ask:** Have you ever heard the phrase “practice what you preach” or “actions speak louder than words”? What do you think these things might mean?



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# Sunday School Lesson (Matthew 23:1-12)

## It's Not About You

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**Bible Lesson:** This Gospel lesson is pretty simple and straightforward. It can be read pretty quickly, but we do well to go deeper into detail and consider what these words of Christ mean. Explain to children that Jesus was once again warning people not to follow the ways of the hypocrite leaders. Some people in His time were talking about obeying God, but not really living out what they said others should do.

*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, <sup>2</sup> “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, <sup>3</sup> so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. -Matthew 23:1-3*

Explain that Jesus warned people not to be hypocrites. What does that mean? A hypocrite is someone who says one thing, and does another. God wants us to be sincere. That means we mean what we say, and do as we promise to do. The Pharisees in Bible times told people they needed to follow a lot of fancy rules, but they didn't follow the rules themselves!

**Ask:** Have you known anyone who said one thing, and did another? How can you tell when someone is telling the truth?

Explain that Jesus further delved into the troubles of these “teachers...” Examine the motivation behind their behavior.

*They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, <sup>4</sup> and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. <sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, <sup>6</sup> and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues <sup>7</sup> and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi <sup>8</sup> by others. -Matthew 23:4-7*

Why were the actions of these people wrong? What were they doing things for? Discuss the potential answers with students. The Pharisees wanted attention. They were doing things to be seen and admired by others. What should we be working for? Whose approval do we need, and whose alone? (GOD!)

*But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in*

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heaven. <sup>10</sup> Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. <sup>11</sup> The greatest among you shall be your servant. <sup>12</sup> Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

-Matthew 23:8-12

Discuss the meaning of humility. In these verses, Jesus wants us to remember that we answer to Christ alone. He is the ultimate teacher, and He lived as a servant to let us know how we should live. Being humble means not thinking too highly of ourselves. Sure, we can take joy in things we do well, but we recognize that's not where our strength comes from. We should not think too much of our abilities, but rejoice in God first.

**Ask:** Do you think you need to practice humility in some area of your life? How can we be sure that we are living for Christ first and foremost?

**Close** with a prayer thanking God for giving us Jesus and the example of His life. Ask for help in being “servant leaders” who live in humility, putting others first and trusting God for every good gift.

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## Sunday School Crafts

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**Crafts:** This lesson focuses on the importance of humility. Pride leads to downfall, but when we have a servant-like attitude, Christ (the ultimate servant) will lift us up. Select crafts that will highlight the importance of living with a humble and kind attitude at the center of our ambition:

- “Humble Pie Recipe” bag
- “Don’t be Puffed up” balloon creature

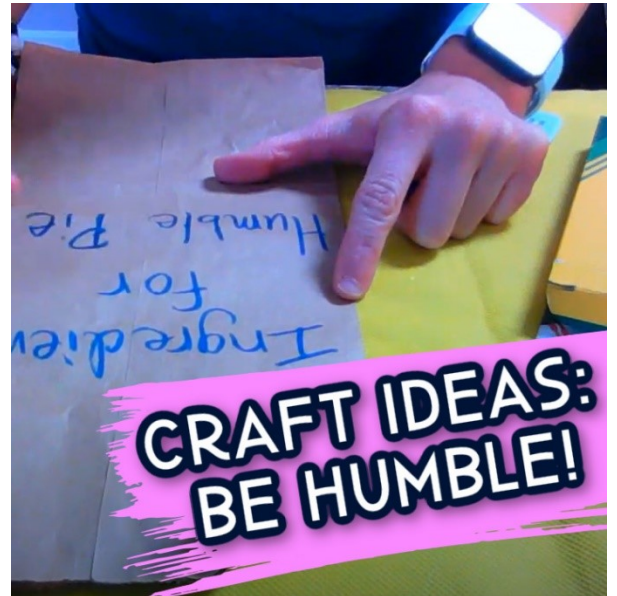


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## “Practicing Humility”

Bible Craft ideas on Matthew 23:1-12

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Don't be Puffed with Pride!

This week's gospel lesson focuses on a warning. We don't want to rely on our own wisdom or teaching. We don't want to "talk a big talk" and lead people astray.

Jesus admonished people to live genuinely and humbly. These two crafts remind children of what it means to live with a humble attitude and recognize that our strength comes only from the Lord.

Bible Verses or Craft Captions to Consider... (Main Text: Matthew 23:1-12)

*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. - Matthew 23:12*

*The greatest among you shall be your servant. -Matthew 23:11*

*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. -Proverbs 16:18*

*Recipe for Humble Pie...Put Others First!*

*Don't be "Puffed up" with Pride!*

*Humility: Look to God for strength!*

*Act like a servant!*

*Put others first!*

*Be kind to those around you!*

### More Teaching Ideas from Matthew 23:1-12

- Watch the video demonstration of this [children's sermon](#) on our [YouTube channel](#)
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- Compare our [Matthew 23:1-12 Sunday School lesson for kids](#)





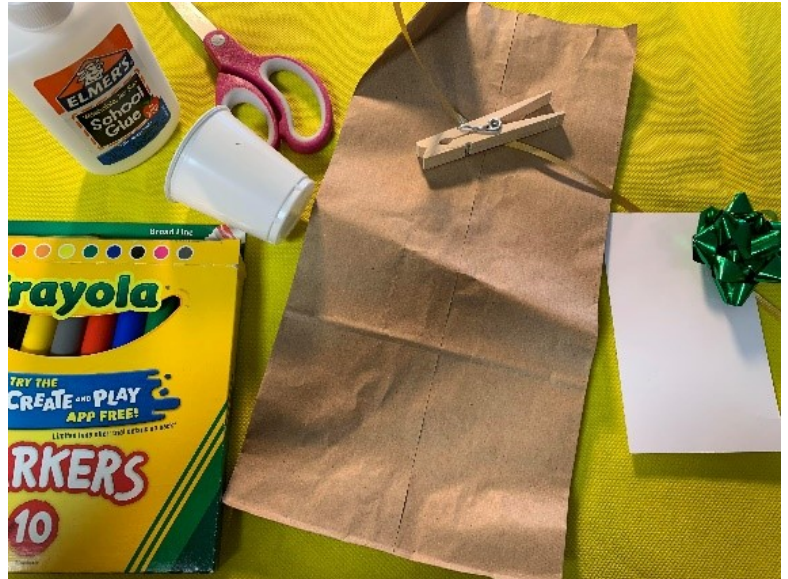
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# Craft one: “Humble Pie Recipe”

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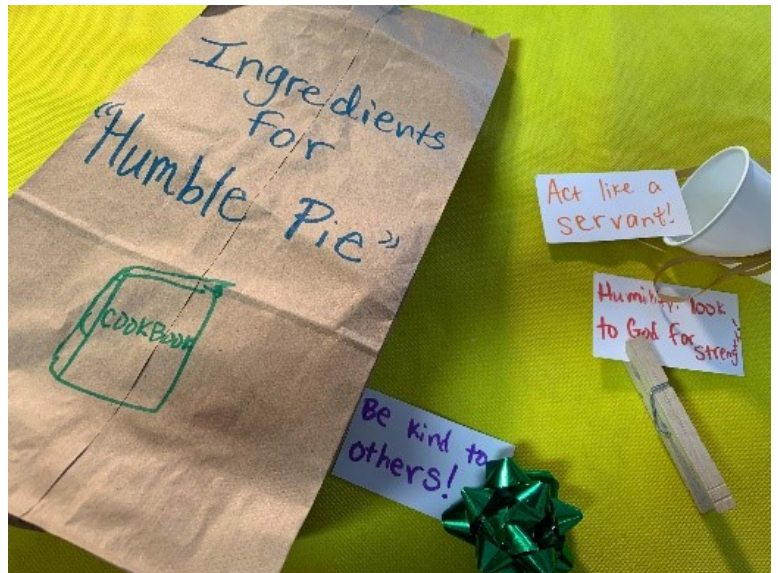
## You will need:

- Construction paper or card stock
- Markers, stickers, or other decorating materials
- Bows, ribbons, or other decorations
- Glue
- Paper bag
- Scissors



## Procedure:

1. Decorate the paper bag to be a “recipe bag” or “ingredient bag”, making it plain but fun!
2. Decorate notecards or papers to nestle within the bag, including notes about “ingredients” needed to be humble and not prideful. Add small tokens or decoration (bows, cups, etc.)
3. Place the “humble pie ingredients” inside the paper bag.
4. Seal the bag with ribbon or string. Add captions or verses.
5. Use your bag to recall what humility means, or use it as a prayer request receptacle!



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# Craft Two: “Don’t be Puffed up with Pride! Balloon ”

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## You will need:

- Balloons, any color
- Paper (construction) (optional)
- Popsicle sticks
- Markers or crayons
- Glue
- Yarn or pipe cleaners
- Sharpie markers



## Procedure:

1. Blow up the balloon and tie it off.
2. Draw a face on the balloon (optional), perhaps a prideful or rude-looking one.
3. Carefully attach a string or pipe cleaner to the balloon.
4. Glue the popsicle sticks into a cross shape (or cut the paper likewise). Add a verse and/or caption.
5. Place the “puffed up” balloon on the cross, and remember the importance of receiving our strength and power from God alone!





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# “Don’t Let Pride Puff You Up”

Children’s Sermon on Matthew 23:1-12

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Children’s Message: Live with Humility

Main Objective: “Practice what you preach” ....it’s a common saying, but what does it mean? This message explains to children the importance of humility. The Pharisees Jesus warns about in this Gospel passage did not practice what they preached. They trusted in their own strength, and pridefully worked to be seen by others. That kind of pride and self-assurance can only lead to downfall, as the object lesson here illustrates.

Law/Gospel Theme: The Pharisees were headliners of the Law. They told people how to live their lives, and they preached the importance of rules and regulations. Yet their actions were not genuine. They wanted attention for their teaching. The good news of Jesus reminds us that we are forgiven through Him. We don’t have to worry about making ourselves look good, and we shouldn’t! We can’t brag about our own ability, but rest in the work of Christ.

Optional Materials: Stacking blocks or several items to balance; a soft surface (pillow) and hard surface.

Bible Passage: Matthew 23:1-12

Message: Note: As with most messages, the details of how you choose to communicate this are adaptable and should cater to timing as well as to your audience and student needs. Use your judgment and ideas to best serve students.

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# Children's Sermon (Matthew 23:1-12)

## Pride and Humility

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*Greet children, and have at the ready several blocks, such as wooden blocks, a "Jenga" tower set, or large Lego stackers. Act boastful about your block-building ability...*

Hello, children of God! I brought something with me today that I would love to show you. You see, it just so happens I am a fantastic block builder! I have my blocks here, and I plan to build an incredible tower out of these. Have you ever used blocks like this? I'll bet you can't make a tower quite as tall as mine. Here, I'll just prop these up on this pillow to show you a better view... *(As you continue to talk, stack the blocks one on top of the other, balancing on a soft surface like a pillow).*

See, I've made plenty of these block structures before. It's pretty simple, really, you just put them like this, and then add another here.... *(precariously position the blocks to topple)*

Whoa! Okay, let's see, maybe I'll try again. I really am good at this, you'll see. Okay, so I'll put some this way, and then add more on top here, and pile a few more over here....uh-oh! You know, maybe I talked a bigger game than I really knew how to do. Maybe I should try to put my blocks on a more solid foundation, for one thing. Maybe I was too confident in myself, and didn't really know what I was talking about. Let's try this differently...*(Begin stacking the blocks on a more solid surface, explaining as you go).*

You know, the Bible talks a lot about pride and humility. Jesus warns us not to get too full of ourselves. We don't want to brag about our ability or think we're better than other people. If we build our confidence on our own strength and power, it winds up being pretty wobbly, just like putting our blocks on this pillow. It will topple over because it doesn't have a strong foundation! The Pharisees, those church leaders who thought they were pretty special and didn't like Jesus, often tried to tell others how to live their lives. They talked a big game, but didn't really practice what they preached. They didn't truly love other people, but just wanted attention. Jesus told His disciples not to be like that, and we don't want to be like that either. We shouldn't boast about things, especially about our salvation. Nothing that we have comes from our own power, but from God. HE is the source of true strength. He is a more solid foundation than personal pride or ability. So rather than trusting in ourselves, we want to practice humility. That means we think of others as better than ourselves. We treat other



people with kindness, rather than looking down on them or trying to tell them what to do. We recognize that every good thing comes from God. When we build our lives on His solid foundation (*hopefully by now a better block tower has developed*), we are able to do more than we might have ever imagined! And when we don't act like we know it all or can do it all, that's when God can work through us. We rejoice that it's not all about us, but about Him! Why don't we say a prayer and ask God to help us live with humility?

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## Children's Prayer Moment

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Dear God,  
Help us to remember that you are our leader and teacher  
Let us not become puffed up with pride  
But grant us attitudes of true humility  
Help us to live as your Son  
Thank you for your love  
We love you, God!  
In Jesus name, Amen!

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## Bible Verses: Matthew 23:1-12

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*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, <sup>2</sup> "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, <sup>3</sup> so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. <sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. <sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, <sup>6</sup> and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues <sup>7</sup> and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. <sup>8</sup> But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. <sup>10</sup> Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. <sup>11</sup> The greatest among you shall be your servant. <sup>12</sup> Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. -Matthew 23:1-12*





This lesson was prepared by [Kristin Schmidt](#), who serves at the Epiphany Lutheran Church in Castle Rock, CO.

She has shared her teaching gifts through *Ministry-To-Children* since 2014 and now serves as our lead curriculum writer.

Kristin has a professional background in elementary and pre-school education. A graduate of Biola University, she holds a Master of Education and will receive the Master of Theology degree from Concordia University, Irvine, California, in May

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