

# THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

**Bible Basis:** Matthew 26:26–28, 33–35, 27:46–49; Luke 22:51–62, 23:32–41; John 13:21–30, 14:1–15, 18:4–10, 19:30

**Key Verse:** Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust in me also. —John 14:1 NIV

**Bible Point:** Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. I can accept his love.

**Resource:** *The Story for Children*, Chapter 26: “The Hour of Darkness”

## STEP 1: COME TOGETHER

As children gather, ask if they ever think a punishment is unfair. Then give them a combination of a wrongdoing and consequence and ask if they think the punishment is fair for that offense. Talk about several different combinations, such as: talk back to your mother/lose TV privileges; leave a mess in the bathroom/have to do the laundry; hit your sister/have to go to your room; spill your milk/have to eat outside; lie to your dad/not go to a ballgame. Ask:

- How do you decide if a punishment is fair?
- Tell about a time when you did not get what you deserved.

Say, **In the Bible story today, we’ll hear about how Jesus faced a punishment he didn’t deserve so that we wouldn’t get what we do deserve.**

## STEP 2: HEAR THE STORY

**Stuff You Need:** copies of *The Story for Children*, Bibles, *The Story Elementary Trading Card 26*

Tell the story from *The Story for Children*, Chapter 26. You can have children look up Mark 27 and John 14 and mark it in their Bibles. Either you or a child in your class can read the Scripture passages listed throughout the story.

### God’s Love Plan

In this story, children will hold a series of freeze poses while you tell part of the story. Let children know they should hold the pose as long as they can. If they get too tired, they should sit down and wait for the next pose.

**Our story begins at a busy time in Jerusalem. It was the Passover feast! Everyone in Jerusalem was getting ready to celebrate the way God saved his people from slavery in Egypt many years before. The Passover celebration included a special meal, and Jesus and his closest friends gathered for this big meal. Pause and have children stand and freeze in a pose that shows them eating or drinking. Remind them that if they get tired they may sit down.**

Jesus was thinking about what was going to happen. He knew the time was close when he would have to go away. It was time for him to finish the work God had given him to do. In fact, this would be the last meal Jesus would share with his friends.

Jesus said to his friends, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust in me also. There are many rooms in my Father’s house. If this were not true, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. If I go and do that, I will come back. And I will take you to be with me. Then you will also be where I am.”

Jesus knew his friends would get scared. He said they would run away and they would tell people that they didn’t even know Jesus. One friend, Peter, refused to believe this. He said he would rather die than say he didn’t know Jesus!

*Read John 14:1–3.*

After the meal, Jesus and some of his friends went to a garden. Jesus went off by himself to pray. *Pause to have children pose kneeling and praying.*

Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him. And even though he was the Son of God, he knew it was going to be hard to do what God wanted him to do. Jesus prayed hard to God for help. His friends kept falling asleep while they waited for him to finish praying. Finally, he woke them up because he knew the big moment had come.

Jewish leaders stormed into the quiet garden with soldiers. One of Jesus’ friends, Judas, was with them. *Read John 18:4–6.*

Judas was standing there with them. Now he stepped up and kissed Jesus. That was the signal that they had found the right man. The Jewish leaders had paid money to Judas to turn in his friend. But Jesus knew all this was supposed to happen just the way God planned it.

Soldiers arrested Jesus, and all his friends ran away—just like Jesus had said they would. *Pause to have children strike a pose as if they’re running.*

The soldiers took Jesus to leaders who wanted him to die. Peter secretly followed the soldiers. He wanted to know what was happening to Jesus, but he was also really scared. Some people started a fire in the courtyard near where Jesus was on trial. Peter sat down with them to get warm. Three people said to him, “You’re a friend of Jesus, aren’t you?” And what did Peter say? Three times, he said, “No, I’m not!” Peter did just exactly what Jesus had predicted he would do—he told people he didn’t even know Jesus!

During the night, the religious leaders had a fast trial. People lied about Jesus to make it sound like he’d done something wrong. In the morning, Jesus was led out to be killed. In those days, criminals were killed by being nailed to a cross. *Pause to have children stretch out their arms like a cross.* Jesus hadn’t done anything wrong, but he was being punished with two other criminals. Soldiers made fun of him, like it was all a big joke.

For long painful hours, Jesus hung on the cross. It was getting hard to breathe, and his whole body was hurting. *Read Matthew 27:45–46, 50.*

At the same moment, the earth shook so hard that rocks broke apart. A curtain in the holy temple, where God's people worshiped, ripped into two pieces. Dead people starting coming out of their tombs! All this showed that everything that happened to Jesus was part of God's plan. It was no accident.

Our sins get in the way of knowing God—all our bad thoughts and bad attitudes and bad actions and bad choices. When Jesus died, he took the punishment that we deserve and cleared the way for us to know God and live forever in heaven. Jesus loves us so much that he was willing to do what God asked him to do—to take our punishment for us. We don't get what we deserve; instead, we get to be with Jesus. Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. The best choice we could ever make is to accept his love.

After you have told the Bible story, give each child a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 26*. Ask the children to look at the picture and tell you about why Jesus was crucified. As a class, read the key verse from the back of the card or from the Bible. Ask:

- Who deserved the punishment that Jesus had?
- Why did God send Jesus to take our punishment?

Say, **Jesus died for our sins. He wants us to accept the gift of God's love.**

Collect the cards for now. You'll send them home with the children later.

### STEP 3: EXPLORE MORE

Choose from these activity options to help your class explore the lesson further.

#### OPTION 1: ENVELOPE BOOKMARKS

**Stuff You Need:** Verse Tags Activity Sheet, envelopes, safety scissors, glue, markers

Ahead of time, duplicate and cut apart the activity sheet. Say, **Our Bible verse tells us that Jesus wants us to trust in him. He died for our sins. He took our punishment so that we can experience God's love. We're going to make a heart-shaped bookmark to remind us of God's love.** Depending on the age and ability of your class, you can prepare envelopes ahead of time or demonstrate and have children follow your actions. Cut the bottom corner out of an envelope so that each side is about three inches. Hold the corner in your hand and trim the open edge into the shape of a heart. When you slip the heart over the edge of a page, the heart-shaped edge will point down. Glue a verse tag from the handout onto the heart. Let children decorate with markers. Read the verse together and ask:

- Why would someone volunteer to take another person's punishment?
- What does it feel like when your heart is troubled?

Say, **Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. He wants us to accept the love God gives us.** You may want to invite children to speak with you privately if they want to know more about accepting God's love and living with him forever.

## OPTION 2: CROSS TOSS

**Stuff You Need:** 3 or 4 small rectangular boxes; tossing items (coins, pebbles, buttons, or beans)

Have children stand in a circle. In the middle of the circle arrange the rectangular boxes in the shape of a cross. Say, **Jesus died for our sins so we can be with him forever. He wants us to trust in him and not have troubled hearts. In this game, we're going to toss our sins and troubles into the cross and let Jesus take care of them there.** Give each player a supply of items to toss. If you think your children are mature enough to name specific sins or troubles, ask them to do so as they toss.

*Variation:* Set up more than one cross and have only four players at each cross. Give each player a different item to toss so that at the end of the game players can compare how many items they got in the box. Ask:

- If you could wipe out every wrong thing you've ever done, how do you think you'd feel?
- When you see a cross, what does it remind you of?

Say, **Because of what Jesus did when he died for us, we can live with him forever. God wipes out every wrong thing we ever do and helps us do the right things.**

## OPTION 3: Yes, LORD!

**Stuff You Need:** Yes, Lord Activity Sheet, markers

Give an activity sheet to each child. Talk about why the children would say "yes" to the Lord and when. Instruct the group to color the letters in joyful colors and hand back in for the teacher to hang in the hallway or classroom.

## OPTION 4: CRUCIFIXION

Popsicle-stick cross

**Stuff You Need:** popsicle sticks, glue, yarn

1. Give each child two popsicle sticks and a length of yarn.
2. Add a dab of glue to one end of the popsicle stick.
3. Adhere one end of the yarn to the glue.
4. Start wrapping the yarn around the popsicle stick.
5. When you reach the end of the stick, cut the yarn and glue to the end.
6. Repeat for the second popsicle stick.
7. Glue the two popsicle sticks together to form a cross.

## STEP 4: GOING HOME

Pray in small groups thanking Jesus for dying for our sins. Make sure each child takes home a copy of *The Story Elementary Trading Card 26*, Activity Sheet(s)/Crafts, and the Parents' Page.