

GOD'S GIFT TO US (SALVATION, FORGIVENESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS)

ILLUSTRATION / DEMONSTRATION

PREPARATION:

Prepare a gift by making copies of the "Words to Treasure" feature on page 1297 of the *NIV Adventure Bible*, putting the copies in a box, and wrapping the box with colorful wrapping paper, ribbon, and a bow. (Make enough copies to hand them out to the children after the sermon.)

DURING THE CHILDREN'S SERMON:

Show children the gift, saying, "How many of you like presents?" After they've raised their hands, ask, "How many of you want to know what's inside this one?" After they've raised their hands again, say, "Well, we're going to open this present in a few minutes and see. But first I want to talk to you about a very special gift God has given to all of us." Set down the gift, leaving it in sight of the children.

SCRIPTURE READING

Open the *NIV Adventure Bible*, telling the children, "This is from the book of Romans, chapter 4, verses 4-8."

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

*"Blessed are they
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man
whose sin the Lord will never count against him."*

Say to the children, "This passage is talking about the difference between the wages a person earns for doing work and a gift a person is given for free. Most of you have probably earned a little money by doing some work around the house or maybe for a neighbor. So you understand what 'wages' are, even if you don't call them that. It's what someone owes you for the work you've done for them. And I'm sure all of you have received gifts for your birthday or for Christmas! So you understand what gifts are. People don't give you gifts because they owe them to you; they give you gifts because they love you."

FEATURE READING / MESSAGE

Turn to page 1242 in the *NIV Adventure Bible*. Tell the children, "Now, God's gift to us is like a big box with lots of good things in it. One of these things is salvation, which means God saves us from the bad consequences of our sins. The Scripture passage we just read mentions a couple of other things that God gives us: righteousness and forgiveness. Listen to this 'Did You Know?' article from the *Adventure Bible*, called 'What Is Righteousness?'"

In the Bible, righteousness means either doing what is right or being right with God. Because everyone has sinned, people cannot make themselves right with God by doing good deeds. Yet God forgives people who believe in Jesus, and he says that they are right with him. Then God expects Christians to live holy lives.

Tell the children, "Trying to earn righteousness by doing good deeds is like trying to earn a gift by doing work! It's the same way with forgiveness and salvation." Turning to page 1243 in the *NIV Adventure Bible*, say, "Listen to the first part of this 'Live It!' article from the *Adventure Bible*, called 'Receiving God's Gift.'"

We cannot earn forgiveness. God gives us salvation as a gift. When someone brings you a present at Christmas or on your birthday, you take it and say, "Thank you." This is just how you receive God's gift of salvation. All you do is accept it and say, "Thank you."

APPLICATION

Tell the children, "There are many ways to show God how grateful you are to him for giving you salvation, forgiveness, and righteousness. You can say thanks to him in prayer, or you can sing thanks to him during worship time at your church. You can tell your friends about God's free gift to you, which is available to them also if they put their trust in Jesus. And you can live a holy life, which is what God wants you to do now that he's given you righteousness."

Open the *NIV Adventure Bible* again to page 1243. Say to the children, "The second part of the 'Live It!' article called 'Receiving God's Gift' has an idea to help you remember what God has done for you. Listen to this, and maybe you can do it later at home."

Find an empty box. Write Romans 4:7–8 on a piece of paper and put it in the box. Then wrap the box like a Christmas gift. Keep the gift-wrapped box in your room as a reminder that God has forgiven you. Or use it to show a friend how to become a Christian.

Picking up the gift you prepared, tell the children, "Okay, it's time to see what's inside this gift!"

Open the box, pull out the copies of the "Words to Treasure" feature on page 1297 of the *NIV Adventure Bible*, and read the verse on them aloud to the children.

*By grace you have been saved, through faith—
and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

—Ephesians 2:8

Hand out the copies to the kids, challenging them to memorize these valuable words.