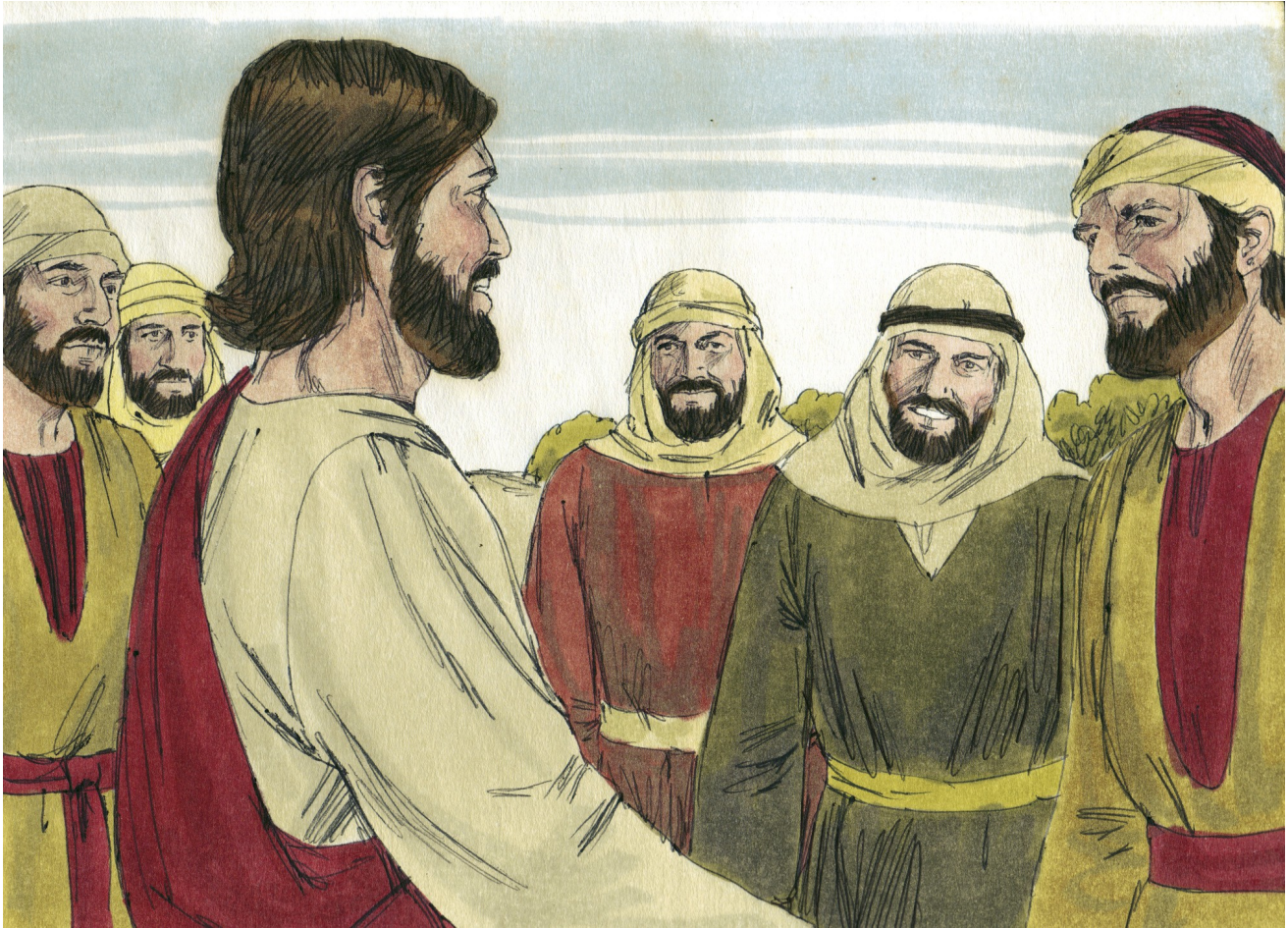


A PUPPET PLAY IN ONE ACT

The Inner Circle

Based on Luke 9 & Mark 9–10 · Written by Carrie Elderberry



SUITABLE FOR
Ages 6 and up

CAST SIZE
5 puppets

PERFORMANCE TIME
10–12 minutes

PROPS REQUIRED
Time Machine

MAIN THEME

The world's inner circles run on power and exclusion — Jesus' inner circle runs on gentleness, love, and care for others.

Carrie Elderberry's Gospel Puppets · gospelpuppets.org

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To print just the play on its own, print pages 5-9.

PRODUCTION OVERVIEW

Synopsis

PATTY and LUCY are thrilled to finally be invited to a sleepover by Judy, queen of the school's "inner circle." When Lucy's GRAMMA hears the news, she gently asks the harder question: will the girls have to become mean themselves now that they're in the circle? With the help of a Time Machine, JAMES and JOHN – Jesus' own innermost inner circle – appear to recall how Jesus repeatedly scolded their own ambition and selfishness, and how being great in God's kingdom means being gentle and never mean. PATTY and LUCY return changed, and start to wonder whether God might be working in Judy's heart too.

Spiritual Concept

Belonging to Jesus is the true inner circle. Worldly cliques demand conformity, exclusion, and meanness; Jesus' kingdom calls his followers to gentleness and care for the very people the world pushes out. James and John themselves had to learn this the hard way – repeatedly.

Age Suitability

Best for ages 6-12. The "mean girls" social dynamic is most recognizable to children in 2nd-6th grade, but the gospel application lands for all ages.

Performance Time

10-12 minutes

CAST & TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Characters (in order of appearance)

PATTY – An elementary-school child, a follower of Jesus, who has been working hard to earn acceptance from the popular kids. Excited and a little starry-eyed at the start.

LUCY – PATTY’s best friend and also a follower of Jesus. Slightly more thoughtful – the first to absorb what GRAMMA is asking.

GRAMMA – LUCY’s grandmother. Warm, perceptive, and asks the question PATTY and LUCY are avoiding. Operates the Time Machine.

JAMES – Disciple of Jesus, brother of John. One of the three in Jesus’ closest inner circle. Reflective, a little rueful about his own past behavior.

JOHN – Disciple of Jesus, brother of James. Speaks of writing things down – a nod to his Gospel and letters.

Prop Options

- A Time Machine – any simple prop will do (a cardboard box with knobs, a hand-painted sign, etc.). Used by GRAMMA to bring JAMES and JOHN into the scene.
- Bible tunics for JAMES and JOHN – cut a large cross shape from fabric, cut a slit for the puppet’s head, adjust sleeves and hem, sew up the sides.
- If you have a third puppeteer, JAMES and JOHN’s “seated and watching” puppets at the side of the stage can react silently during the modern-day scenes – a nice touch for older audiences.

PERFORMANCE NOTES FOR PUPPETEERS

New to puppets? General prep, technique, and voice tips live at gospelpuppets.org/getting-started.

Character Notes

The first “Sound of thunder!” lands when PATTY and LUCY realize they may have to become mean to stay in Judy’s circle. Let the thunder do the work – no need for the puppets to react big.

The second thunder lands on JAMES’s line about the “Sons of Thunder” nickname – this one is the joke. Play it.

The third thunder, near the end, is GRAMMA’s segue into naming the nickname for the audience. It’s the bow on the play.

Staging

GRAMMA, LUCY, and PATTY exit to the side when the Time Machine turns on; their puppeteers can stay close by with puppets “seated and watching” on their arms.

JAMES and JOHN re-enter at the very end for one final thunder beat and goodbye – make sure puppeteers are ready.

Reading the Script

CAPS = Volume / intensity.

Extra commas = pause for breath.

Ellipsis (...) = pause for thought.

Sound Effects

- Thunder: A drum, thunder tube, or a sharp offstage “BOOM” works – keep it comedic and let it interrupt. Recorded options: pixabay.com/sound-effects/search/thunder

More options and noise-maker tips at gospelpuppets.org/sound-effects.

THE INNER CIRCLE

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(Enter PATTY and LUCY.)

PATTY: Oh, Lucy! Aren't you so excited?

LUCY: Yeah! Judy is having a sleepover and we both got invited!

PATTY: I can't believe it, it feels like a dream come true.

LUCY: And Patty, you KNOW, Judy is one of the inner circle.

PATTY: We have been working so hard to be nice to those kids, and it has finally paid off!

LUCY: Yes. Maybe this means that we are FINALLY going to be part of the inner circle too!

(Enter LUCY's GRAMMA.)

GRAMMA: Well hello girls!

LUCY: *(do your best puppet hug)* Gramma! I didn't know you were coming over today.

GRAMMA: And this is your friend Patty, right?

PATTY: Yes! I wish I had a grandmother like you. Both of mine live really far away.

GRAMMA: I feel sorry for them. So! What is new with you two?

LUCY: We just got invited over to Judy's for a sleepover!

GRAMMA: Judy? Isn't that the mean girl who hurt your feelings last week?

(Awkward pause. The girls look down, look away.)

LUCY: Well... it turned out that was actually MY fault.

PATTY: Mine too! We didn't know that...that fashions have changed, and that NOBODY is wearing dresses right now.

GRAMMA: Nobody?

PATTY: Well...none of her FRIENDS! Dresses are right OUT. Judy told us.

LUCY: So I quit wearing dresses!

PATTY: Me too. And it WORKED.

GRAMMA: What do you mean, it worked? You've lost me here.

LUCY: I'll explain. See, Gramma, Judy and her friends were all wearing dresses, and they told us WE should start wearing dresses, if we wanted to fit in.

PATTY: But THAT was a few weeks ago. And NOW, Judy says fashions have changed, and, and, we need to match whatever they do, if we want to fit in.

GRAMMA: Got it.

LUCY: And Judy just invited us to her house for a sleepover! So it WORKED.

GRAMMA: Tell me more about Judy, and her friends. What other things do they want you to do?

(Another awkward pause. The girls look down, look away.)

GRAMMA: Let me ask in another way. Why is it so important to you, to be friends with them?

LUCY: Because...Gramma, if they don't LIKE you, if you are not in their circle, they can be really mean. Right, Patty?

PATTY: Right. Like, if you are sitting at a table, and they want it, they MAKE you move! And... they make fun of you.

GRAMMA: I understand. So...will YOU have to be like that now? Now that you are in their circle?

(PATTY and LUCY look at each other. Sound of thunder!)

LUCY: Yikes. I never thought of that.

PATTY: Me neither! Oh, Lucy.

GRAMMA: I've got an idea. This is a puppet show, right?

LUCY AND PATTY: Right!

GRAMMA: So! We can bring out a Time Machine, and hear from some people who lived a long time ago. People who were friends of Jesus, who were in HIS inner circle.

LUCY: Cool!

PATTY: Yes please!

GRAMMA: This "inner circle" business has been around for a very long time. Let's hear how Jesus managed it with his friends, ok?

LUCY AND PATTY: OK!

GRAMMA: We will need to make room for them. Let's go to the side for a bit, but I want you to listen carefully.

LUCY: Yes, Gramma!

PATTY: Yes, ma'am!

(Add Time Machine and turn it on. Exit GRAMMA, LUCY and PATTY. Their puppeteers can stay close by, with puppets "seated and watching" on their arms. Enter JAMES and JOHN.)

JAMES: Well John, people are going to be curious about the inner circle that has been you and me, and Peter. And Jesus!

JOHN: Yes, of the twelve closest to Jesus—

JAMES: We were always the innermost part of his inner circle.

JOHN: And still we disappointed him, more than anyone—

JAMES: Except Judas.

JOHN: True, that. I'm so glad Jesus did not stay dead! And now, he has given us his Holy Spirit.

JAMES: Everything has changed since Jesus rose from the dead. He has called so many more people! And they have been coming to him, ever since.

JOHN: True, that.

JAMES: It's a very different kind of kingdom than we expected, a very different inner circle. That must be why Jesus kept scolding us.

JOHN: Ha! So, which scolding do you think was the worst? When we wanted to burn up that village? That was SO mean.

JAMES: Oh, man. I think that might be when Jesus gave us the nickname "Sons of Thunder!"

(Sound of thunder!)

JOHN: Ha! Or remember the throne thing, so embarrassing—

JAMES: When we were trying to make him promise to give us the two best thrones?

JOHN: Everybody else was so mad at us.

JAMES: I remember.

JOHN: Or maybe it was when we wanted him to stop that other guy, remember? Who was healing people, in Jesus's name?

JAMES: We wanted to keep all the glory for ourselves, that time too. So selfish.

JOHN: But the WORST was when we kept falling asleep, when Jesus asked us to pray with him...I will always feel sad about that.

JAMES: Me too.

JOHN: We will have to make sure to write all this stuff down. Jesus has promised to come back soon, but he hasn't given us an exact time. Just "soon".

JAMES: Yes! SOON— for God— might be thousands of years from now!

JOHN: Well at least we can make sure everyone knows what the "inner circle" means, for followers of Jesus—

JAMES: Yes! Jesus told us very plainly, if you want to be great in God's kingdom, in his inner circle, you must be gentle and take care of people.

JOHN: Right! Not bossy—

JAMES: And never mean.

JOHN: And we can't love THAT way unless Jesus lives in us!

JAMES: We had better get back to our time now. We have some writing to do!

JOHN: Let's go!

(Exit JAMES and JOHN. Enter GRAMMA, PATTY, and LUCY. Turn off Time Machine.)

LUCY: Gramma! Patty! That was AWESOME!

PATTY: I've been forgetting all about Jesus, when I'm with Judy and those other kids.

LUCY: Gramma, do you think we should tell Judy we don't want to go to her house?

GRAMMA: Well, do you think you could go for a DIFFERENT reason? Could you remember the inner circle you ALREADY belong to?

PATTY: Oh! Lucy! We could tell her all about Jesus!

LUCY: And invite her to come to church with us!

PATTY: Maybe...maybe THAT is why she invited us. She knows we go to church, and that we are followers of Jesus.

GRAMMA: Maybe Jesus has been whispering to her heart. He has to open the eyes of her heart.

LUCY: We have been praying for God to give us courage— to share our faith, at home and at church, but I never thought it might be with somebody like Judy!

(Sound of thunder!)

GRAMMA: James and John were given the nickname Sons of Thunder by Jesus. You can learn more about that in the Bible, in the books called Luke and Mark. And that's all for today! Goodbye!

GRAMMA, PATTY AND LUCY: Goodbye!

(Enter JAMES and JOHN. Sound of thunder!)

JAMES AND JOHN: Goodbye!

THE END

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been part of a group where some kids are “in” and other kids are “out”? How did it feel?
2. Why do you think PATTY and LUCY were so excited to be invited to Judy’s sleepover?
3. When GRAMMA asked, “Will YOU have to be like that now?” – what was she really asking?
4. Jesus called James and John the “Sons of Thunder.” What do you think that nickname meant?
5. Jesus said that to be great in his kingdom, you have to be gentle and take care of people. Who is someone you could be gentle with this week, even if your friends might not be?
6. At the end of the play, the girls wonder if Judy invited them BECAUSE they go to church. Have you ever thought about being a friend to someone hard to get along with, in case God wants to use you?

Related Bible Passages

Primary Text: Mark 10:35-45 – James and John ask Jesus for the best thrones, and Jesus teaches that whoever wants to be great must be a servant.

Additional Scripture:

- Luke 9:51-56 – James and John ask Jesus if they should call down fire to burn up a village that rejected him. Jesus rebukes them. (Summarized – the passage is too long to quote here in full.)
- Mark 9:38-41 – John tells Jesus they tried to stop a man casting out demons in his name. Jesus tells them not to stop him: “Anyone who is not against us is for us.” (NLT)
- Mark 3:17 – “James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Jesus nicknamed them ‘Sons of Thunder’).” (NLT)
- Matthew 20:26-28 – “Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (NLT)

Song Suggestions

- “Open the Eyes of My Heart” – Michael W. Smith –
<https://open.spotify.com/track/6p664oBDmsbrkS7z3s1zSA>

- “Step by Step” – Rich Mullins –
<https://open.spotify.com/track/1rQi8B1ImtyXwbyb2ClsPH>
- “Jesus Loves Me” – Cedarmon Kids –
<https://open.spotify.com/track/4RQHs94Y99QaGuYDzzSoS0>

Ministry Context

This play speaks directly to the social dynamics children face from about 2nd grade onward – cliques, fashion pressure, and the cost of fitting in. It works well for back-to-school services, anti-bullying weeks, and any series on friendship, kindness, or the kingdom of God. The Mark 10 “servant leadership” passage pairs naturally with the play, and the closing turn – wondering if Judy herself might be reachable – opens space for a conversation about evangelism among peers.

Bible Background

James and John, sons of Zebedee, were fishermen called by Jesus alongside their brother-in-trade Peter. The three formed the “inner three” of the Twelve – present at the raising of Jairus’s daughter, the Transfiguration, and Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane. Jesus nicknamed the brothers “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17), almost certainly a wry comment on their temperament: Luke 9 records them asking permission to call down fire on a Samaritan village, and Mark 10 records them angling for the best thrones in the coming kingdom. Both moments earned them sharp correction. After the resurrection, James was the first of the Twelve to be martyred (Acts 12), and John – by tradition the longest-lived – wrote the Gospel of John, three letters, and Revelation. The arc from “Sons of Thunder” to the Gospel writer who emphasized love above all else is, in itself, one of the New Testament’s quiet miracles.