

All in a Name by Carol Duerksen

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Print copies of the story at the end of this session, or use it from the Fall 2008 issue of *With Magazine*.
- Find out the entire name of each of your students and be prepared to welcome each one with their whole name—first, middle, last—when they arrive.
- White board or something to write on
- Colorful paper to make name tags, markers

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS:

Welcome each student with their entire name when they arrive. Begin class with a prayer thanking God for each student. Again, repeat their entire name as you pray. After the prayer, ask: *Does anybody have an idea of what we'll be talking about today?*

(They will probably guess "names.")

Go around the group and ask each student to say one thing they like about their name, and, if there's something they don't like, they can say that as well. Set the example by sharing about your name.

CONNECT:

Write this name on the white board: Maher-shalal-hash-baz

Ask students to try to pronounce it.

Say: Some kid in the Bible got stuck with this name. Let's find out who and why.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Hand out the copies of the story. Read it together as a class.

Re-read this paragraph from the article: *A name is the first—and one of the most enduring—things that we acquire from our parents, and when we are welcomed into the family of God, the name "Christian" is a name that suggests we will carry the message of the Lord to everyone we*

meet. It's part of our identity as members of the family of God.

Discuss:

- Do you want to be identified as a Christian?
- Are there pros and cons to that name itself?
- Is there another name you'd rather use to describe yourself and your faith?

APPLY/RESPOND:

Ask: When someone at school, church, work, or in the neighborhood hears your name, what message does it carry? Do people think of someone who is honest? Loyal? Hard working? Respectful? Friendly? A follower of Jesus?

What name would you like to have? Make a nametag with a new name—a name that symbolizes who you are. Wear the name tag so everyone can see “the new you.”

Close with an eye-open prayer, reading the “new names” and asking God to be with each person as they strive to be God’s children in the world.

Session Reproducibles

PROUD TO ANSWER TO MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ

by Leola Floren Gee

Two strikes against me before I was born. That's how I see it.

Strike one: Dad's a prophet. Of all the un-cool professions, that has to top the list. He's a smart guy. He coulda gone to law school, or medical school, or engineering school, or business school. But *nooooo*. In the father's occupation space on my school registration form, I have to print p-r-o-p-h-e-t. That's bad enough, but it gets worse. Because she's married to Dad, in Mom's space I have to write p-r-o-p-h-e-t-e-s-s.

I might as well wear a "kick me" sign on my back every time I walk into the cafeteria.

Strike two: I have an older brother. Hand-me-down video games. Hand-me-down winter coats. Hand-me-down computer. Hand-me-down (ick!) underwear. Plus, he bosses me around and swipes the dessert from my lunchbox.

All of this I could deal with. But way, way back, before I learned to talk or walk, right about the time I figured out that those odd babbling sounds coming at me in my cradle meant something, strike three sailed across the plate.

"Oooooo, look at him," cooed Mom. "Isn't he sweet?"

I suppose I was adorable. It's what came next that was every bit as chilling as a Stephen King TV miniseries.

"Our son is destined for greatness," said the bearded guy I took to be Dad. "Our own little Mahershalalhashbaz."

What? What was that? Did Dad accidentally inhale an Altoid?

Sadly, no. Soon enough I learned the truth. Mom and Dad had named me Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and I would never, ever, go into a Hallmark store and find a key ring or a mini-license plate with my name on it.

As soon as I could string enough words together to ask a question, I cornered my brother, Shear-jashub. "So what's with Mom and Dad? They couldn't afford a baby name book, even with a Borders coupon?"

He just laughed, but to me, it wasn't funny. There are about a zillion great Hebrew names to pick from. Why Maher-shalalalalala ... you know.

"Hey, Dad," I said one day when I couldn't stand it anymore.

"Yes, son?" he replied.

"Why didn't you call me Daniel? It's a perfectly good name, and as you know, it means 'my judge is the Lord.' I know you're big on the *deeper meaning* of things. I could hold my head up on the ball field if the guys could call me Dan."

Session Reproducibles

"Daniel is an excellent name," agreed Dad. "But you should be proud to answer to Maher-shalal-hash-baz."

"Let's try this again," I said. "How about Aaron. 'Shining light. High mountain. Exalted, on high.' Aaron is an outstanding name."

"Yes, it is," said Dad. "And?"

Sometimes Dad drives me crazy, the way he answers a question with a question.

"What about Isaiah?"

"What about it?"

"Well, it's your name, and it's only three syllables, and it doesn't have any hyphens in it."

"What's your point?"

"Dad, why don't you get it? You've stuck me with a name that's impossible to pronounce. Everybody makes fun of it, and by the time I write it at the top of a test, time is up!"

Dad was strangely silent. He is known throughout Judah for his gift of speech (Okay—what they usually say is, "Why won't that guy shut up?!?"), but he took his time answering.

"Son," he said, "I know it hasn't been easy living with the name your mother and I gave you. Do you know its meaning?"

I shook my head.

"Your name—Maher-shalal-hash-baz—means 'Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.'"

"And?" I said. Two can play that game.

"And in your name is contained God's sermon to our countrymen. When they hear your name—or any part of it—they will be reminded that judgment is coming."

Ouch. What was I going to say? That I didn't want to be a living sermon to anybody?

Dad wasn't finished. "Your brother's name means 'a remnant shall return.'"

"Well, at least that's a little more positive," I said. "Doesn't that tell the people who find themselves in captivity that at least some of them will get to come home?"

"Exactly," said Dad. "Every time they hear your name, they will be reminded of God, and of their disobedience, and of judgment. And every time they hear your brother's name, they will remember God's promises."

Somehow, I had a feeling I had lost an argument, but I wasn't sure how. That happens a lot when your dad is a prophet.

Session Reproducibles

Postscript

Maher-shalal-hash-baz is the longest name of any person identified in the Bible. When his father gave him that name, Isaiah knew his son would carry the message of the Lord to an entire nation, and it's likely he was pleased to see his own witness for the Lord passed down through another generation.

When someone at school, at church, at work, or in the neighborhood hears your name, what message does it carry? Do people think of someone who is honest? Loyal? Hardworking? Respectful? Friendly? Righteous? Then whatever your name's meaning according to the baby name book from Borders, your name is a good one.

A name is the first—and one of the most enduring—things we acquire from our parents, and when we are welcomed into the family of God, the name "Christian" suggests we will carry the message of the Lord to everyone we meet. It's part of our identity as members of the family of God.

The concept of "family" is important to the Lord. In fact, he invented it. The prophet Isaiah introduces us to his sons in chapters 7 and 8 of the book that carries his name, which means "salvation is of the Lord" and "the Lord keeps me." Even more important, he introduces us to God's son in chapter 53 of the same book. Although the chapter may be familiar to you, read it carefully, paying close attention to the information Isaiah includes regarding someone who will not be born for hundreds of years.

Read Isaiah 53:6 in several translations, if you have access to them. This version is from the King James: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

How did Isaiah know all of those details about the man who would be called Jesus? How did he know that our iniquity—our sin—would be placed upon Jesus? God himself revealed his plan to the prophet, who wrote down the things he was told, and God has preserved those words for us for about 2,700 years.

Isaiah ... Maher-shalal-hash-baz ... Jesus. They're all part of our family album. Makes you want to flip to the next page, doesn't it?