

Cloud of Witnesses



**Sojourner**  
Truth



# Cloud of Witnesses: Sojourner Truth

## Main Idea

**We can use our voices to proclaim love and call people to justice.**

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## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

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### Luke 12:11-12

When they bring you before the synagogues, rulers, and authorities, don't worry about how to defend yourself or what you should say. The Holy Spirit will tell you at that very moment what you must say.

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## BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

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Hebrews 11 tells the stories of people of faith throughout the Bible, offering encouragement to the original audience that they can step forward in faith surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. In the creeds of the church, we profess belief in the "communion of saints." These are both ways of saying how important our foremothers and forefathers of faith are to our own relationships with God. Their stories offer wisdom for living, inspiration and encouragement, and a sense of spiritual companionship.

Sojourner Truth was born into slavery at the end of the eighteenth century, the daughter of slaves taken from Ghana and Guinea. She faced numerous obstacles in her life, from cruel and physically abusive slave masters, to the loss of her children, to religious and social persecution. Sojourner is most well-known for her speech, "Ain't I a Woman?" in which she asserted the equality of a black woman, formerly a slave, with the white suffragettes of her time. Sojourner Truth worked tirelessly giving speeches, advocating, and organizing for social change, meeting with great leaders like Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. She even worked on an idea (although it was not passed in Congress) for granting land to freed slaves, to help them get a better start. Her work reminds us that when we consider people who are suffering or oppressed in society, we need to pay close attention to intersections of oppression.

Sojourner was disadvantaged because she was a slave, but also because she was a woman, and worked against the damage and bias against both of those identities.

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## GATHERING ACTIVITY

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### *Giving a Speech*

For this activity, use the “Speech Topics” handout on page 6 to cut out strips of paper with speech topics. You will need a bowl, hat, or bag to hold the slips of paper so that the learners will reach in to select their topic at random.

For this game, each learner will have a chance to give a thirty-second speech. It can be anything from an informational speech to a made-up story. Be particularly encouraging! It takes a lot of courage to speak in front of people.

After everyone has a turn, **ask:** How did it feel to give your speech? Have you ever done anything like this before?

**Say:** Today we’re going to hear about someone who gave many speeches, using her voice to talk to big crowds of people and invite them to justice.

#### Supplies:

- “Speech Topics” handout on page 6
- Bowl, hat, or bag
- Scissors

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## STORY CONNECTION

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**Say:** Today we’re going to learn about Sojourner Truth, a woman who never stopped standing up for what was right and taking care of the people she loved, even when things were difficult. She lived in our country during a time when most African-Americans were enslaved by white Americans, and when no women could vote. Sojourner was born into slavery and was owned by several masters before finally running to freedom. She left for some states in the northern part of the country that were safe for escaped slaves, a place where people who ran away would be safe from harm or from being sold back into slavery. Sojourner didn’t stop with helping herself, though, but became an activist for others. After she was safely away, Sojourner found out that one of her children had been sold farther south in the country in a way that was against the law. She sued the man who sold her son and won! This was one of the first times that a black woman won against a white man in court. Then Sojourner and her son were reunited. She continued to advocate for slaves to be set free, giving speeches. Sojourner also worked as part of the movement for women to have better rights, like the right to vote and the ability to be financially independent. But Sojourner didn’t have much in common with some of the other advocates, wealthy white women who had resources and education. So she said in a very famous speech called “Ain’t I a Woman?” that there is more than one way to be a woman, and that people of all kinds and ways of being deserve respect and justice.

TIP: Telling the story in a calm, smooth voice will draw the children into the story.

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## PRACTICE AND REFLECTION

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### *Questions for Discussion*

**Ask:** Have you ever had to speak up about something important? If so, how did it feel? Do you think you could give speeches like Sojourner?

**Ask:** What is something that helps you feel like you are being listened to? How do you show this to other people?

### *Prayer of Blessing*

**Pray:** Dear God, thank you for Sojourner Truth, who witnessed your faithfulness and justice as she worked for women and slaves. Give us the strength to speak up for respect, justice, and equality for everyone no matter their gender or the color of their skin. Amen.

### *What's in a Name?*

For this activity, provide the learners with adhesive nametags or small pieces of paper and tape to make their own.

**Say:** Here's a fun fact about Sojourner Truth: She chose this name for herself. When she was born, her name was Isabella Baumfree, but when she became a Methodist and began her work of advocacy, she chose a name that represented her identity of faith and call to journey toward truth.

**Say:** If you could choose a name, what would it be? Use a pencil or marker to write a name on your nametag that represents your faith. *(You can write the name you go by now if you want!)*

After the learners have chosen and written down their name, have them go around the room to each other, introducing themselves by their name and explaining why they chose it.

### *Younger Children Option*

**Say:** Sojourner Truth knew that she was a child of God, even when other people discouraged her.

Have the children sit in a circle, with one child in the center. The child in the center calls out a descriptor that is true about himself or herself, followed by the phrase "is a child of God"; for example, "Everyone wearing red is a child of God." Everyone in the circle who fits that description must switch places in the circle, while the child in the center tries to steal a seat. Whichever child is left without a seat in the circle

#### Supplies:

- Adhesive nametags or small pieces of paper and tape
- Pencil
- Marker

becomes the next person in the center. If a child in the center calls out, "Everyone is a child of God!" then all the children must find a new place in the circle.

*Older Children Option*

**Say:** Sojourner Truth went around the country giving speeches to persuade others that slaves should be freed and women should have the right to vote. We can also speak up about what we believe in. Let's spend some time writing our own speeches about something we want to see changed in the world.

Invite the children to work in pairs to write a short speech speaking out against something unfair or unjust that they see happening in the world.

Have the children come back together. Invite any students who desire to read their speech aloud to the group.

*Send home the "Reflecting at Home" sheet on page 5 with each child. This will help engage the whole family in this spiritual practice together.*

Supplies:

- Paper
- Pencils

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**REFLECTING AT HOME**

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Today your child learned about Sojourner Truth, an advocate for abolition of slavery and women's rights. She is most famous for her speech, "Ain't I a Woman?" Read this line from the speech: "If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?" This week, sit down with your child and share this quote. Pour two cups of water to share and ponder what each one of us needs and can hold. Wonder together if there's someone you know who isn't getting their little measure full, and if you can help fill it.

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**FURTHER READING**

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Check out Acts 6–7 to read the story of Stephen, a deacon in the early church who unexpectedly had to give a speech in court, testifying to the love of God for God's people and the resurrection of Jesus.

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**SPEECH TOPICS**

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My favorite food	My family
Sports and games	If I had a super power . . .
What I like to do in the summertime	A good book
Once upon a time . . .	My favorite show
Pets	If I could go anywhere in the world . . .
My sibling	Candy