DEEP-DIVE LESSON · ABOUT 70 MINUTES

The Potter and the Clay

BIG IDEA	We can't fix ourselves, but God can. He is the Potter who shapes us, and he came down to save us.
READINGS	Isaiah 64:1–9 and Mark 13:24–37
MEMORY VERSE	Isaiah 64:8, "We are the clay and you our potter."
YOU WILL NEED	Modeling clay or play dough for each child, a picture or short video of a potter's wheel, a dry leaf, a broken toy or cracked cup, paper and crayons
BEFORE CLASS	Read Isaiah 64:1–9 and Jeremiah 18:1–6 (the potter's house). Practice making a simple pinch pot so you can show the children.

1 Something broken 5 min

Hold up a broken toy or cracked cup. Ask: "Can this fix itself?" (No.) "Who could fix it?" (Someone who knows how.)

Say: "A long time ago God's people felt broken. Their city, Jerusalem, had been wrecked, and they knew it was partly because they had turned away from God. So they prayed one of the most honest prayers in the Bible. Let's read it."

2 Isaiah's prayer 15 min

Isaiah 64:1 Oh that you would tear the heavens, that you would come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence.

1. **What does the prophet want God to do?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   Tear open the sky and come down. He wants God to come and help, the way God came down on Mount Sinai long before, when the mountain shook (Exodus 19:18). Children may enjoy imagining the sky being ripped open like paper.

2. **Has God ever "come down" for real?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   Yes! At Christmas God came down as a baby, Jesus. Mark's Gospel even says the heavens were "torn open" at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:10). And Jesus will come again. That is what Advent is all about.

Isaiah 64:6 For we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Hold up the leaf. Crumple it a little. Say: "The prophet says we are like a dry leaf blowing away. Even the good things we do have dirt on them, because our hearts are not perfect."

1. **Can we make ourselves clean and new by trying harder?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   No. That is why we need God. Gently make the point that everybody sins, even grown-ups, teachers and pastors. Avoid making any child feel singled out; say "we," as Isaiah does. This verse is a big Reformation verse: Luther and Calvin both taught that we are saved by God's gift, not by our good deeds.

Isaiah 64:8 But now, LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay and you our potter. We all are the work of your hand.

1. **What does a potter do with clay?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Shapes it, smooths it, fixes it and makes something beautiful and useful. Read Jeremiah 18:4: when a pot went wrong, the potter didn't throw it away; he reworked it into another vessel. That is a picture of God's patience.

2. **What does it mean that God is our Potter?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> He made us, he owns us, and he keeps working on us to make us more like Jesus. Notice Isaiah also calls God "our Father" in the same verse. A potter and a father both care about what they have made.

3 Clay hands 15 min

Give each child clay. Ask them to make a small cup, but first, as a joke, to make it "perfect" *without using their hands*. (They can't.) Laugh together, then say: "Clay can't shape itself. Only the potter can. That's us with God."

Let them make their cup. Show them how to press a thumb into a ball and pinch up the sides. Have them scratch "Isa 64:8" on the bottom with a pencil or toothpick.

> **Teaching tip.** Air-dry clay lets them take the cup home. Put each child's name on a piece of masking tape under their cup.

4 Watch! 10 min

Mark 13:35–37 for you don't know when the lord of the house is coming, whether at evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he might find you sleeping. What I tell you, I tell all: Watch."

1. **Name the four times the master might come.**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Evening, midnight, when the rooster crows, and morning. These were the four "watches" of the night in Jesus' day, when guards changed shifts. Peter would remember "when the rooster crows" for the rest of his life (Mark 14:72).

2. **How does God the Potter help us stay awake?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Through his Word, prayer, church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the people who love us. Even staying ready is God's gift. We don't keep ourselves awake alone.

5 God keeps working on us 10 min

1 Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Say: "Paul wrote that to a church full of people who argued and made a lot of mistakes. He was sure God would keep working on them until Jesus comes back. God doesn't give up on his clay."

Then say: "God forgives us all the way, every time. But he forgives us so we can become more like Jesus, not so we can stop trying. A potter who loves his pot keeps shaping it."

> **Keep the balance.** Christ's coming is good news because he comes to save sinners, not to reward the good. But "watch" is a real command. Grace that makes no one watchful is not the grace of the New Testament. God forgives us in order to make us like his Son (1 John 3:2–3).

6 Live it and pray 15 min

Hand out paper. Ask each child to draw himself or herself as a clay pot and, inside the pot, write or draw one thing they would like God to shape in them this Advent: being

patient, being brave, being kind to a brother or sister, telling the truth.

Suggest a family idea: put the clay cup on the kitchen table, and each day of Advent drop in a slip of paper with one thing you are thankful for. Read them together on Christmas Eve.

> “Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay. You are our Potter. Come down and help us. Shape us to be like Jesus. Amen.”

Pray it line by line, with the children echoing you.

Scripture: World English Bible (public domain). Free to print and copy.