COURAGEOUS
BAPTIST WOMEN



PRAYER, PERSPIRATION AND PATIENCE

The Life of Helen Barrett Montgomery

BAPTIST HISTORY & HERITAGE SOCIETY

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OVERVIEW



Helen Barrett Montgomery was a pioneering Baptist educator who made a new path for others, worked to improve society and supported Christian mission work. In 1921, she became the first woman to lead a large group of Baptist churches in the United States, serving as president of the Northern Baptist Convention. Through prayer, patience and hard work– the "perspiration" in the title–Helen changed many lives. Her life was marked by a deep Christian faith, a passion for helping others, courageous leadership and a determination not to give up.

BIBLE VERSE

James 2:14-18: My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity. Someone might claim, "You have faith and I have action." But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I'll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action.

SESSION OUTLINE

Prepare

- Make copies of the Student Handout.
- Review the Story and Bible Verse.

Welcome

- Greet students as they arrive.
- **Ask:** How do you practice your faith?

Engage

- Distribute the Student Handout.
- Read and discuss the Bible Verse.
- Work on the Handout Activity.
- Transition to Story Time.

Share

- Tell the story, "The Life of Helen Barrett Montgomery."
- Share the photo and caption.
- Discuss the story and pray.
- Watch videos about Helen.

Conclude

- Lead students in Bonus Activities as time permits.

STORY

The Life of Helen Barrett Montgomery

Helen Barrett Montgomery was born in Ohio in 1861. Her family later moved to Rochester, New York, where her father studied at a seminary—a school for ministers—and pastored Lake Avenue Baptist Church. Helen attended Wellesley College and studied Greek and literature. In 1887, she married William A. Montgomery. They lived in Rochester and adopted a daughter, Edith. Helen started a women's Bible class at her church and taught it for 44 years. In 1892, the church officially gave Helen permission to preach, when very few churches allowed women to do so.

Helen worked closely with Susan B. Anthony, a leader for women's rights. In 1893, they founded the Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Rochester, a group that helped women and children living in poverty. It created public playgrounds, a safe lunchroom called "Noon Rest" for working women, a place where people could get legal help and "milk stations" where families could get safe milk for babies.

Helen and Susan also worked to open the University of Rochester to women. University leaders agreed to admit women if they raised money to help pay the costs. After two years, they met their goal! The first 33 women enrolled. Helen also became the first woman elected to the Rochester School Board, a group that helps lead the city's schools. She worked to give children better lives and a better education.

Later, Helen focused on Christian mission work in other countries. She believed women should help decide how mission money and programs were used. Helen raised $1 million for missions—about $23 million today! The money established Christian colleges for women in Asia. Wherever she traveled, Helen urged people to start or strengthen Christian schools for girls. After seeing the power of people praying together, she helped establish the World Day of Prayer, a special day held each year that continues today.

Helen served in many leadership roles. In 1921, she became the first woman president of the Northern Baptist Convention, a large group of Baptist churches. She led the group through serious disagreements and helped its members stay united. Her motto was "agreed to differ, but resolved to love." This meant people could disagree and still choose to love one another.

Helen Barrett Montgomery worked for women, people living in poverty and everyday people. She taught, spoke up for others and translated the New Testament from Greek into plain English so more people could understand it. Through prayer, hard work and patience, Helen improved many lives, created safe places and inspired women who came after her. Even when people opposed her work, she did not give up. She kept praying, leading and working to live out her faith.

DISCUSSION AND PRAYER

- **Ask:** What are some ways that Helen Barrett Montgomery showed courage?
- **Ask:** How did Helen Barrett Montgomery help others?
- **Ask:** What can we do to help others as well?
- **Say:** Helen Barrett Montgomery stood up for others. She worked hard to help people living in poverty have what they needed, to help women have more rights and to help everyone be able to read Scripture. She showed courage by not giving up and by standing up for others. She wasn't afraid to be different, and she used her influence to help others who had less than she did.
- **Pray:** Dear God, thank you for Helen Barrett Montgomery and the courage she showed in standing up for others. Help us to show courage as well. Amen.

LEARN

To learn more about Helen Barrett Montgomery and to see pictures of her, check out:

- *https://www.thebhhs.org/hbm1*
- *https://www.thebhhs.org/hbm2*
- *https://www.thebhhs.org/hbm3*

FACT CHECK

📖 Helen Barrett Montgomery published the *Centenary Translation of the New Testament*, the first full New Testament in English ever translated and published by a woman scholar. This New Testament was written in everyday, accessible English for the ordinary reader.

🌟 Helen Barrett Montgomery was the first woman president of the Northern Baptist Convention, becoming the first woman to lead any major religious denomination in the United States. She was chosen for her proven capability, including her ability to fundraise.

🍼 In 1893, Helen Barrett Montgomery and Susan B. Anthony founded the Women's Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU) of Rochester, NY. It provided practical support for poor women and children, including creating public playgrounds, a safe lunchroom for working women and infant "milk stations" to ensure babies had safe milk.

🙏 In 1915, Helen Barrett Montgomery and Lucy Peabody asked churches to set aside a universal day of prayer for women's missions. It sparked a movement, and now, over 100 years later, the World Day of Prayer continues.

🍲 Helen showed Rochester, NY, that Christian love isn't just a feeling, but is also something active, like providing warm meals, education, justice and healthcare to those who need it most.

ACTIVITIES

Enjoy a New York Breakfast

Items needed: *Bagels (include gluten-free option, if needed), cream cheese, lox (optional), napkins, plates, plastic knives, water.*

Give each child a bagel and allow them to choose if they wish to have cream cheese or any other toppings you have. As they eat their snack, talk about the history of the bagel. It is believed that Eastern European Jewish immigrants brought bagels to New York in the late 1800s, and bagels became popular in the early 1900s. They were so popular, in fact, that there were a few times when there were city-wide bagel famines in New York City! (***https://www.thebhhs.org/nybreakfast***)

Read the Bible

Items needed: *different translations of the Bible (i.e. the NIV, the New Living Translation, The Message, the KJV, etc.) or access to www.biblegateway.com*

****If using an online version, print copies of various translations of James 2:14-18, John 3:16-17, and Matthew 5:1-12.*** Encourage children to look at the various translations. Ask children to take turns looking up each passage (James 2:14-18, John 3:16-17 and Matthew 5:1-12) and reading them out loud. Talk about how the translations differ and ask children to point out some of the different words used. Talk about how in Helen Barrett Montgomery's time, the Bible that was used was the King James Version. The old-fashioned language was hard to understand; so Helen used the Greek she had learned to create a new translation in plainer language for the everyday readers.

Play Outside

Items needed: *Playground or other play equipment*

Take children outside and let them play. (If the weather doesn't allow this, play indoor games like hide and seek and relay races.) At the end, talk about how Helen Barrett Montgomery, alongside Susan B. Anthony, founded the Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Rochester, NY. This provided practical support for women and children in the city, including the creation of public playgrounds. Before that, there weren't any playgrounds where everyone could go play!

DESIGN TEAM

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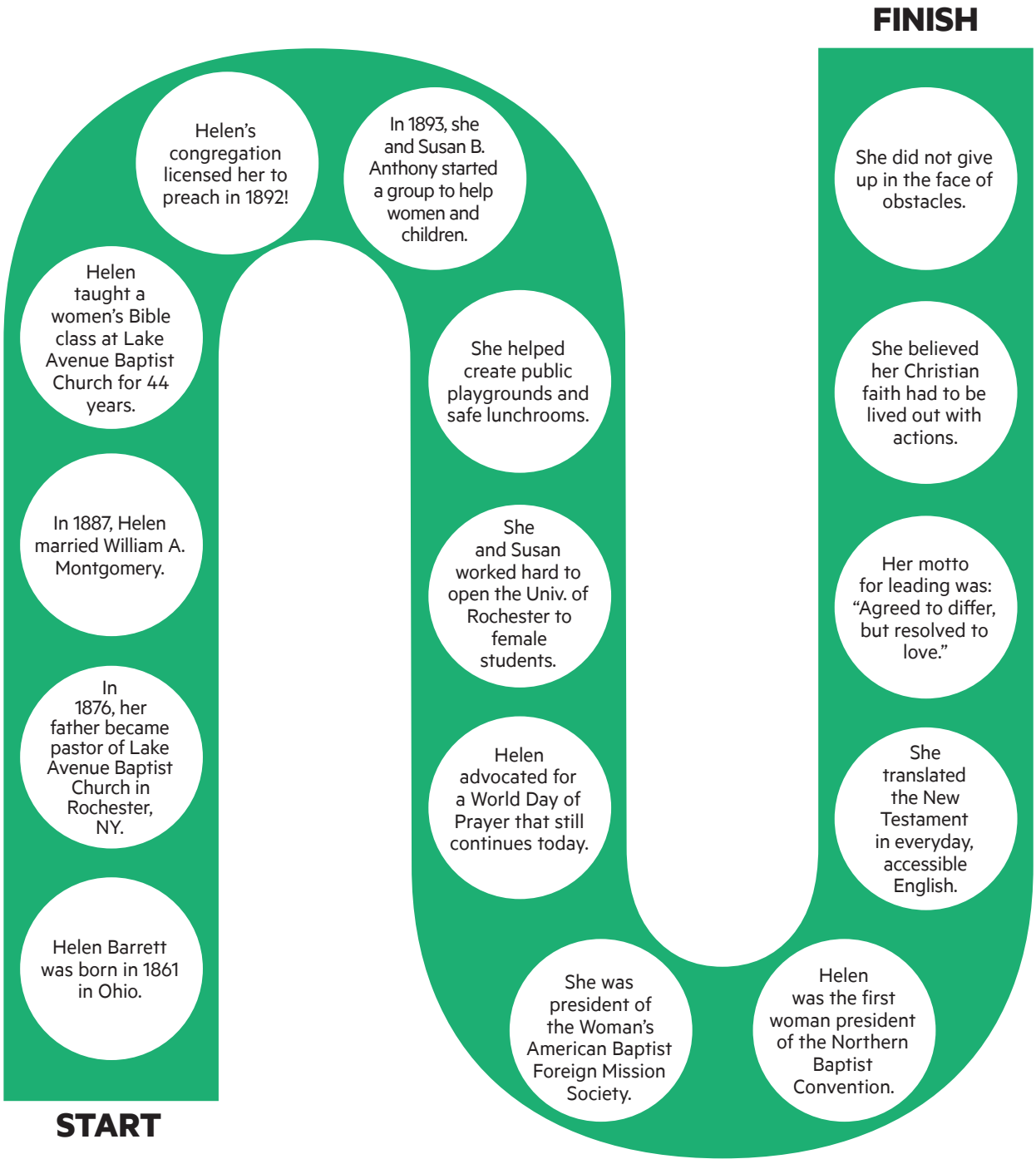
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STUDENT HANDOUT

Helen Barrett Montgomery Game

Choose one end of the path as START and the other as FINISH. Take turns rolling the die and moving that many spaces. Read each space aloud. The first player to reach FINISH wins.



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Help share the Baptist story.

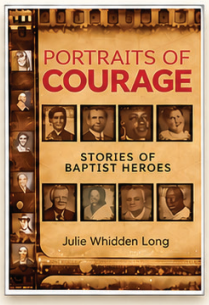
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