

WEEK 1 OF 8

Punching My Ticket

Grades 3–5 · 60 minutes · Leader Guide · Written by Pastor Rick Melick

Week 1: Punching My Ticket

> **Remember It! truth:** Heaven is God's gift. *Motion: cup both hands open in front of you, like someone is handing you a present.*

Bible: Romans 3:23–24; Romans 6:23; Revelation 21:21, 25 · **Memory verse:** Romans 6:23 · **Comic:** Issue 1 · **Kids' Edition:** Chapter 1

Goal: Kids will understand that nobody can earn heaven, and that eternal life is a free gift we receive from Jesus.

Before You Teach (read this first)

The big idea in plain words. Most people think heaven works like a test: be good enough, answer the questions right, and you get in. The Bible says the opposite. Everyone has sinned (Romans 3:23), so nobody is good enough. But God offers eternal life as a **gift** because Jesus paid for our sin when he died and rose again (Romans 6:23). A gift can't be earned. It can only be received.

Pay vs. gift. Romans 6:23 compares two things. Sin earns "pay," like a paycheck: death and being separated from God. Eternal life is not pay. It's a gift. This is the heart of the entire series, so make sure kids get it.

The pearly gates. Cartoons show St. Peter at a locked gate with a list. That's not in the Bible. Revelation 21 describes God's city, the New Jerusalem, with twelve gates, each made of one pearl, and the gates are **never shut** (Revelation 21:21, 25). The St. Peter idea grew out of Jesus telling Peter he'd have "the keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19), which meant Peter would help lead the church.

Words to know (kid version)

- **Sin:** anything we think, say or do that goes against God's way.
- **Grace:** God's kindness that we don't deserve and can't earn.
- **Eternal life:** life with God that never ends.

Questions kids might ask

- *"If heaven is free, can I just do whatever I want?"* Say: "Jesus doesn't just want to get you into heaven. He wants to be your friend right now. Friends want to please each other."
- *"Is my grandpa (or pet) in heaven?"* Say: "I don't know everything, but I know God loves them and God is good. Would you like to tell me about them?" Don't guess.
- *"What if I'm not sure I'm a Christian?"* Say: "That's a great question. Let's talk after class," and follow "If a child wants to follow Jesus" in the Overview.

Supplies

- Tour Passports (one per child, plus extras) and a hole punch
- A wrapped gift box with a sticky note that says “For you!”
- An envelope of play money labeled “PAY”
- Painter’s tape (for the arrival game)
- Index cards and pencils

Boarding the Tram (0:00–0:10)

Welcome and passports. Hand each child a Tour Passport. Have them write their name. Punch the first stop: “Welcome aboard! Let’s punch your ticket.”

Game: The Longest Line. Tape a “gate” on the floor. Kids line up and must get through the gate by answering a silly question (“What’s 17 × 23?” “How many hairs are on your head?”). Nobody can answer. After a minute, a leader opens the gate and says, “Good news, everyone’s in. Free!” Ask: “How did that feel?” Don’t explain yet. Large group will.

Tour Stop: Large Group (0:10–0:30)

1. Baxter opens (2 min). Baxter: *“Woof! Hi, I’m Baxter, Pastor Rick and Joy’s dog, and I’m your tour guide for the next eight weeks. We’re going on a tour of heaven! But first, a question: do you think you have to be good enough to get into heaven? I’m a good boy... most of the time.”*

2. Story (4 min). Tell Pastor Rick’s story in your own words (Kids’ Edition Chapter 1, Stop 3): Pastor Rick and Joy visited a friend who was very sick. Her Bible was worn soft. Joy held up a phone flashlight so he could read. The friend said, “I wish I had done more for Jesus.” Pastor Rick said, “You haven’t done enough. *(pause)* And I haven’t done enough either. Nobody can.” She smiled: “Oh, I know. It’s all God’s grace.” She wasn’t afraid.

3. Bible teaching with object lesson (8 min). Hold up the play-money envelope. *“If I mow a lawn, I get paid. Pay is something you earn.”* Read Romans 6:23 aloud. *“Sin earns pay too, and it’s bad pay: death and being separated from God.”* Hold up the wrapped gift. *“But God gives a gift. Can you earn a birthday present?”* (No!) Set the gift on a table with a child’s name on the sticky note. Ask: *“Is it a gift? Yes. Is it theirs yet?”* Let them come get it. *“A gift becomes yours when you receive it. Jesus already paid for heaven. You receive it.”* Briefly mention the gates from Revelation 21: twelve pearls, never shut.

4. Remember It! (3 min). Teach the truth and motion: “Heaven is God’s gift” (hands open). Say it three ways: whisper, normal, loud.

5. A-B-C (3 min). Teach the A-B-C: **Admit** I’ve sinned. **Believe** Jesus died and rose for me. **Choose** to follow him. Say: *“If you want to talk about this, tell your small group leader today.”*

Tour Groups: Small Group (0:30–0:55)

Recall warm-up (3 min). Ask: “What did the gift and the envelope stand for?” Let three kids answer.

Talk it through (8 min). Use turn-and-talk for the first question.

1. Before today, how did you think someone gets into heaven? Where did that idea come from?
2. Why can't anyone be "good enough"? *(Listen for: everyone sins; God's standard is perfect.)*
3. What's the difference between pay and a gift?
4. I wonder: why would God give us something so big for free?

Activity: Pay or Gift? (6 min). Read each one. Kids stand for "Pay!" or sit and hold out open hands for "Gift!": an allowance for chores; a birthday present; a paycheck; a surprise hug; eternal life. End on eternal life: "Gift!"

Memory verse game (5 min). Write Romans 6:23 on index cards, a few words per card. Shuffle. The group races to put it in order. Do it twice and time it.

Prayer (3 min). Pray: "Thank you, God, for the gift of heaven. Help us receive it and follow Jesus." Invite anyone who wants to talk about following Jesus to stay a moment.

Next Stop (0:55–1:00)

Exit card: "Heaven is God's _____." Collect cards. **Take-home:** Romans 6:23 and the question "What's the best gift you ever got? How is heaven like that?" Mention Comic Issue 1.