



SESSION 1 of 4

The good Samaritan

MEETING AIM

To explore what it means to love God with everything we've got.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 10:25-37

BACKGROUND

This parable is an excellent model for any children's worker. Someone asks Jesus a question, so Jesus directs him to the scriptures and gets a correct answer. Dissatisfied, the questioner asks another question. Jesus answers by telling a story, concluding by asking another question in order to prompt a response and ending with a challenge. How far will this model inspire you in this session?

5 CIRCLE TIME

Produce an interesting object or piece of equipment. Ask the children how many questions they can ask about it. What's it for? Why have you brought it here? Answer their questions, but do so by telling its story or what it means to you.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

Challenge the children to do at least three things as hard, fast or for as long as they can. For example, they could run around the room as fast as they can, jump as many times as they can in 30 seconds or push up against the wall as hard as they can. What did it feel like while they were doing it? How did they feel after each challenge?

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a dark piece of material; a chair; a dark blanket

Sit the children in a semicircle and throw the dark material over the chair to make a rock. Then tell this story:

One day a man came up to Jesus and asked him what he had to do to be a friend of God for ever and ever. "What does God's special book say?" asked Jesus. The man said you had to love God with everything you had, including loving your neighbour. The man wanted to know more. "Who then

are the people I should help?" he asked. Jesus told this story.

The road from the big city of Jerusalem to the smaller city of Jericho was rough. Robbers and bandits hung out there, ready to jump on anyone who was travelling alone. They might hide behind a rock like this one. *Ask a couple of children to hide behind the 'rock'. Can the hiding children peep over the top or around the side to get a better view? Ask who can and can't see them.*

One day a man was walking down this road, on his way home from the big city. Suddenly, two robbers burst out from behind a rock, beat him up, stole his bag and coat, and left him lying in the road. *The hiding children burst out. Lay the dark blanket (a body) on the floor by the rock.*

Along came a man who thought himself very special. He had an important job in the temple. *Everyone walks past the 'victim' one at a time, looking at him with their noses in the air. Everyone sits down.* This man didn't want to touch the man because he had blood and dirt all over him. Ugh!

The man lying in the road was in a very bad way by this time. Then along came a man who had a good job as a cleaner in the temple. *Everyone walks past the victim. They go over to have a closer look, but then walk past quickly. Everyone sits down.* This man was used to cleaning dirty, dusty things, but not people who had blood all over them. Oh no!

Then along came a man with a donkey who never went anywhere near the temple. He came from a place in the north-east called Samaria. That made him a bit of an outsider. He felt sorry for the man and went over to him. *Everyone stands facing the victim. Give each child a different action to perform in turn: 1 Take a closer look; 2 Turn the blanket over; 3 Pick the blanket up and beckon someone over to help; 4 Mime finding ointment and cloths inside a bag; 5 Mime rubbing ointment over the blanket; 6 Mime wrapping bandages around the blanket; 7 Carry the blanket and put it on a 'donkey'; 8 Mime finding two silver coins and giving them to the owner of the safe place. Everyone sits down.*

The Samaritan did all he could to help, even though he was an outsider. He took the man to a safe place and told the owner that if he needed more money to care for the man he would pay the extra.

Jesus asked an important question. Who helped the most in this story?

So what's the answer? *Emphasise that it was the outsider.* That's what it means to love God with everything you've got, even though it might mean having to help someone you don't want to help!

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Discuss the story using these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- What does it mean to put all your effort into loving God as much as you possibly can?
- Who in your life is hard to love? Why?
- How can you show your love to others at school, at home or in church?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

In a circle, sing this song to the tune of 'Here we go round the mulberry bush'. Add in some actions that you can all do together:

Before a man reached Jericho, Jericho, Jericho,

Before a man reached Jericho, he was robbed and beaten up.

A special man walked down this road, down this road, down this road,

A special man walked down this road, and looked the other way.

A cleaning man walked down this road, down this road, down this road,

A cleaning man walked down this road, but didn't stop to help.

An outsider man walked down this road, down this road, down this road,

An outsider man walked down this road, and he did everything he could.

God wants us to love him well, love him well, love him well,

God wants us to love him well, with everything we've got.

5 PRAYER

You will need: sticky labels; pens

Each child draws or writes the name of people they can think of who are in need on the label. Like sticking plaster, stick the labels on one arm. Standing in a circle, say these names out loud. Ask God to be with each person and to enable the children to help these people as much as they can.

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SESSION 2 of 4

The banquet

MEETING AIM

To be assured that the invitation to follow Jesus is on offer to everyone who accepts it!

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 14:15-24

BACKGROUND

To refuse an invitation in Jesus' time was considered rude, since hospitality was a top priority culturally. There is plenty of feasting in the Gospels. Most children have been invited to a party, a wedding or a special occasion, and most will have gladly accepted the invitation and gone to the party. But for some children this will not have been their experience. How wonderful if today's story can remind them that God's invitation is for everyone!

5 CIRCLE TIME

If possible, welcome everyone personally and make a special effort to ensure that everyone feels comfortable. Share out any refreshments you have brought. Talk about what makes them feel special and welcome at a party or even at school.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: sheets of A4 white paper; stickers; felt-tip pens; something gold or silver for decoration

Give everyone a sheet of paper and ask them to make a special placemat for a grand feast. Each name should be clearly visible on the placemat along with a decorative border, picture or pattern. Carry on your party chat from 'Circle time' as you work.

10 BIBLE STORY

Explain that every time you say "I'm so sorry!" the children should stand up, open an imaginary door, say a silent "No" and then sit down. When you say "A big sigh", everyone should sigh and shake their heads. Tell this story:

Jesus was at a feast with lots of other guests. He had been telling stories about how people behave at special meals. Towards the end of the meal, someone said to him: "The best thing must be to sit and eat at God's great banquet!" So Jesus told the guests the following story.

There was a kind man (let's call him Mr Bighearted). He wanted to invite lots of people to a great feast, so he made a list of everyone he wanted to come and sent them all an invitation. The day of the feast arrived. Just before the meal was ready to be served, Mr Bighearted sent out his servant to tell everyone who had been invited: "Come quickly. Everything is ready!"

But the servant was in for a surprise. The first man he went to said: "I'm not coming. I've just bought a field. I'm sure your master will understand. I've got to take a look at it and check everything's OK. Please excuse me. **I'm so sorry!**"

The servant sighed a **big sigh** and went away. But he thought to himself: 'Surely no one buys a field without first looking at it. This man is just making excuses!'

The servant went to a second house and knocked at the door. This man said: "I'm not coming. I've just bought ten cows. I'm sure your master will understand. I've got to see whether these cows are any good. Please excuse me. **I'm so sorry!**"

The servant sighed a **big sigh** and went away. But he thought to himself: 'Surely no one buys cows without checking whether they're any good. This man is just making excuses!'

The servant went to a third house and knocked at the door. This man said: "I'm not coming. I've just got married. I'm sure your master will understand. I'd forgotten I was getting married. Please excuse me. **I'm so sorry!**"

The servant sighed a **big sigh** and went away. But he thought to himself: 'Surely no one forgets they're getting married. This man is just making excuses!'

Mr Bighearted was shocked to hear that all these people had refused to come to his great feast. He ordered his servant to go out into the streets around his house and invite anyone who was hanging about there. After all, the meal was getting cold.

Plenty of people turned up in a bit of a mad rush, but there was still room for more. So Mr Bighearted sent his servant out into the country with his horse and cart to give lifts to anyone he saw. "Bring them in to my great feast!" he said. "I want my house to be full!"

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Discuss the story using these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- What excuses did the three men give for not going to the big feast?
- We're not told the real reasons why they refused to go. What might the real reasons have been?
- Everyone is invited by God to share in the great feast he has in his kingdom. Everyone is invited to become his friend, but some people give excuses. I wonder what excuses people might give for not accepting God's invitation.
- How do you feel when you hear that God has invited you personally to be his friend?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: plain biscuits; a choice of coloured icing; blunt, flat knives; cake decorations; other food or drinks to add to the feast

Give everyone a biscuit and show them the decorations you have brought. Encourage them to decorate the biscuits in whatever way they like.

Lay out the 'feast' on a table or floor mat using the placemats made in 'Intro activity'. Before everyone sits down, walk together around the 'table' and look at the placemats. Comment on the decorations and also point out that every child and adult present has a placemat. Everyone is welcome.

But supposing someone didn't want to join in. Ask the children what they would do with the person's placemat? What about the space at the 'table'? Might they ask someone to come in the person's place and make a new placemat?

Explain that this is how it was in the story Jesus told. That's how it is when God invites everyone to become his friend. Not everyone who is invited will accept. Still standing around the table, thank God that everyone present (name them all individually) has been invited to join God's feast, and to be his friend for ever.

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SESSION 3 of 4

The sower

MEETING AIM

To recognise that not everyone responds joyfully to hearing the good news, but that those who do are like the good, strong soil.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 13:1-9

BACKGROUND

This is one of Jesus' better-known parables. If your session is on a harvest festival Sunday, make use of any vegetables brought into church to strengthen the harvest link. Mark and Luke's Gospels specifically say that the seed is God's message. The soils that receive the seed represent the different responses people make to God's good news.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children and discuss which vegetables and fruits they like best. Which of these grow on a tree, on a bush, on top of the ground or underneath in the soil? How many fruits and vegetables can they think of that are red, green, brown, purple or orange? Have a few fruits and vegetables for the children to try.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: A4 white card cut into the shape of a bird's body (as large as possible) with a 4cm vertical cut on the body for the wings; scissors; googly eyes; felt-tip pens; a hole punch; A4 white paper; wool; green crepe paper; glue sticks

Work together to make the props for 'Bible story'. Each child should make the following:

A bird: Colour the beak and body, then stick on some googly eyes. Concertina a white sheet of paper to insert through the slit as wings. Hole punch once, just between the wing and the neck, then insert a piece of wool through the hole, long enough to dangle the bird.

A leaf / thorn bush: prepare large leaf shapes on white paper if the children cannot draw or cut out their own. Colour the leaves or stick them on green paper.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: props from 'Intro activity'; large yellow card sun; sunflower seeds; a bag of mixed vegetables; a broom

Gather the children together and tell this story:

One day, Jesus was telling stories to crowds of people who had gathered beside Lake Galilee. In fact, there were so many people crushing close to Jesus that he got into a boat, which was pushed out a short way into the lake. That way, more people could see and hear him. He told the following story.

A farmer was sowing seeds in his field. *Show the sunflower seeds and walk over to one corner of your space.* He scattered some seeds onto the hard pathway at the side of the field. These seeds never stood a chance of growing because along came the birds and gobbled up all the seeds. *Scatter a few seeds on the floor. Give each child their bird to peck at the seeds. Then take a broom and sweep away the seeds.* See, the seeds have all been pecked up. They're all gone.

The farmer also scattered some seeds onto thin and rocky soil. *Move to the next corner of your space.* These seeds never stood a chance as there was nowhere for the roots to grow. And then the sun came out, bright and warm. It dried up all the seeds in next to no time. *Ask a couple of children to wave the sun over the scattered seeds, then sweep them up.* See, the seeds have all dried up. They're all gone.

The farmer also scattered seeds among some thorn bushes and weeds. *Move to the next corner of your space.* These seeds never stood a chance. *Scatter a few seeds on the floor and have the children scatter their green leaves on top.* See, the seeds have all been choked by the thorns and the weeds. They have no room to grow tall and strong or to catch the sun's warmth!

The farmer also scattered some seeds on good, strong soil. *Move to the final corner of your space.* This ground was not hard like the pathway. This ground was not rocky, so the roots could grow downwards. There were no thorn bushes or weeds, so the seeds enjoyed the warm sunshine. These seeds did very, very well and produced lots of vegetables and corn. The farmer was really pleased. *Scatter your vegetables on top of the seeds.*

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Discuss the story using these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- Most of the people listening to Jesus knew that it was important to plant seeds in the good sort of soil. Who can remember the four different types of soil? What happened to the seeds planted in the different soil?

- Jesus told his stories to help people find out more about God, his father. I wonder what he wanted them to know about God...

Explain that not everyone who listened to Jesus was happy with what he said, and that's why Jesus told this story. The people were like the different soil. The age of the children in your group will dictate how far you can take these next questions. With younger children, just explore the fourth kind (the good, strong soil).

- If someone was like the hard pathway, what might they have thought when Jesus told them God loved them?
- What about people who were like the thin, rocky ground or the thorn bushes and weeds?
- What about the good, strong soil? How did they feel when they heard that God loved them?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE AND PRAYER

You will need: small carrot, pepper and cucumber sticks and tomatoes laid out on a tray (the children could prepare these from the vegetables used in the story); fruit (in case you have any children who don't eat vegetables)

Sing a song about how much God loves us, or one that gives thanks to God for our food. The chorus to the old harvest hymn 'We plough the fields and scatter' goes like this: "All good gifts around us, are sent from heaven above, so thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord, for all his love." If you're preparing the vegetables during the session you could sing these songs as you work.

Lay the vegetable tray in the middle of the group. Thank God that he gives us good food to eat. Then encourage each child to say something they want to thank God for, including their food.

Conclude by thanking God that we are happy because we know he loves us. Then eat the vegetables!

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SESSION 4 of 4

The lost son

MEETING AIM

To reflect on how much God loves us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 15:11-32

BACKGROUND

This is another of Jesus' well-known parables. Our outline doesn't reflect on the older brother (Jesus doesn't tell us what happened to either of the brothers), but focuses on the father's love for his younger son. The concept of losing contact with someone offers a means of understanding the 'lostness' of the son.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children. Talk about going away for the weekend or on holiday, or about someone in their family going away. Even if it's for a short time, most people stay in contact with the people they love. How might they do that? Talk about when you go away and use your mobile, laptop or send postcards. How many children FaceTime someone they know or look at WhatsApp photos on a parent's mobile?

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: several 50-pence pieces or several items that are special to you
Before the session, hide your treasured items or money around the room or outside. Explain that you've lost some special things and you need help looking for them. Keep looking until everything is found and cheer when you've recovered it all.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a rucksack
Gather the children together and tell this story:

As usual, crowds were gathering around Jesus, wanting to hear what he would say about God. Some in the crowd weren't the sort of people you would like to have as friends: people who were in trouble with the law or were poor, sick or smelly! Others in the crowd thought Jesus was wrong to welcome people like that. So Jesus told the following story.

Here is a farmer with two sons. *An adult sits beside you, pretending to be the father. Divide the children into two groups, either side of you, facing each other. One side pretends to be the big brother, Large, and the other is the little brother, Little.* The two sons help the dad on the farm.

Large works hard, but he doesn't get on with Little. In fact, the two brothers don't speak to each other. *Large acts out digging, driving a tractor and cutting a hedge.* Little is angry all the time because he doesn't like working on his dad's farm. He wants to go travelling. Actually, Little doesn't like his dad either. *Little turns his back on Large, then turns back on his Dad.* This is not a happy family.

One day, Little goes to his dad and says: "When you die, part of this farm will become mine. I can't wait for you to die, so give me the money now." *Little turns towards Dad.* When Large hears about this he is furious! *Large stamps his feet.* Dad loves both his sons. He listens to Little, then goes to his cupboard and brings out some money bags, which he gives to Little.

Little immediately sets off on his travels. *Little picks up a rucksack, moves away a couple of metres and sits down. Large turns to face Little, arms folded and looking angry. Dad stands up, waving at Little.*

Little lives far away and goes to fantastic parties. He thinks he's happy. *Large works hard and keeps stamping his foot angrily. Dad looks sad facing Little. Little sits on floor, drinking and eating imaginary food.*

Little's money runs out. He has no job, no home and no food, and Dad's far away. He ends up taking shelter with some pigs and eating their food. Yuck! *Little sits there looking glum. A couple of children pretend to be pigs.*

Little wakes up one morning and says: "I'm stupid. Anyone who works for my dad lives better than this. I'll go back to my dad's farm and ask if I can work on it. I don't deserve to be treated like his son any more." *Little gets up, picks up his rucksack and trudges home on a roundabout route.*

As Little gets close to home his dad sees him. *Dad is still standing, sees Little and runs to meet him.* He hugs him and welcomes him back to the farm. Dad gives his son a special coat, new shoes and a ring for his finger, and they have a big party! *Dad guides Little to sit in front of the narrator. Pretend to eat and drink and dance!*

But guess who doesn't join in the party. Large! *Large turns his back on Little and Dad.*

"I've always loved you," Dad says. "I don't want you as a servant, but as my son! You were lost but now you're found. We'd lost contact with each other, but now you've come back we can talk together and love each other!" Dad is very happy. So is Little.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Discuss the story using these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- How did you feel as the story was told?
- How did Little feel? And Large?
- How did Dad feel? Imagine being out of contact with someone you love. It's like losing them. (Refer to the earlier discussion.)
- Why did Jesus tell this story? (Reflect on God's love for us, but say that we often forget him or do what is wrong, just like in the story.)

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: rings of card wide enough to go around a child's wrist; wool, ribbon or tinsel; felt-tip pens

Dad gave Little a ring to put on his finger as a sign that he was treating him like a son rather than a servant. Give each child a ring of card and ask them to decorate it with the pens, wool, ribbon and tinsel. The aim is to make it as beautiful as possible. Talk about how happy Dad was to welcome his son, and how happy God is to welcome us. (Remind the children of the great banquet parable if you did that session.)

5 PRAYER

Sing a song about the greatness of God's love for us.

Say the Lord's Prayer together; the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. Comment that we can call God, who is in heaven and here with us as well, our Father. Also in this prayer we can ask God to forgive us for anything we've done wrong...and he will forgive us. If the children don't know this prayer they could repeat each line after you.

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