



THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

MEETING AIM

To discover something about what is special about God.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 13:44-46

BACKGROUND

These two short parables are packed full of meaning, and we can discover something new each time we come to them. While the whole idea of the 'kingdom of heaven' might be too abstract for younger children, we can certainly start them off on this journey of discovery. At their most basic, these two stories show just how special following Jesus is, and how great it is to be part of his family. It is something worth more than anything else in the world!

CIRCLE TIME

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning). Ask your family what their most treasured possession is. They could even go and find it and bring it back to where you're meeting.

INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

You will need: shopping toys such as food packaging, toy money and a till, plastic fruit and vegetables, dressing-up clothes

Before you start, gather together anything that the children can play with which will inspire shop play. You could set up a supermarket, a clothes shop or a bakery – or all three! Encourage everyone to play together, but let your children lead the play and invite the adults into their imagination. As you play, chat about what your family thinks things are worth.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: all the items you used in 'Play'; a box marked 'Treasure' filled with sweets or other snacks; a marble

or similar; a fancy box or bag (optional); Bible

Before you start, hide the box marked treasure and the marble (your 'pearl') somewhere in your house. (You might want to put the 'pearl' in a fancy box or nice fabric bag, if you have one.)

Share out all the items you played with in 'Play' so that everyone has a similar amount. Ask the family to go in search of both pieces of treasure. When they have been found, bring them back and place them in the middle of the family members.

Ask everyone whether they would swap any of their play items for the treasure or the pearl. How many items would they swap? Is there anything they wouldn't want to swap? Why? Why not?

Get out the Bible and open it up at the book of Matthew. Explain that your story today comes from the New Testament, from Matthew's story of Jesus' life. Read out Matthew 13:44-46. Ask one of your family to hide the treasure and the pearl; read out the passage again and invite everyone else to re-enact the two parables as you do so. (You could do this as often as your children would like to.)

CHATTING TOGETHER

10 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions:

- What is your favourite part of the story?
- What could be so important that someone would swap everything they owned to get it?
- Would you swap everything to get the treasure or the pearl? Why? Why not?
- What might the stories of the treasure and the pearl mean?

CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

You will need: paint; saucers or small plates; paper; toy or real coins; shallow tray; marbles; cover-up and clean-up equipment

Put some different coloured paint onto some saucers or plates. Dip the faces of some coins into the paint and then press them onto the paper to make prints of the coins. (You might find it easier to stick a blob of Blu Tack to the

coin to hold onto as you dip it into the paint.) Use different coins and different colours to create a pattern.

Place the paper into the tray and put a marble on top. Roll the marble around the tray, so that it picks up paint from coin prints and trails it over the paper. You could put extra blobs of paint onto the paper if the marble isn't picking up much paint.

As you work, chat more about the story. You might want to share with your children why following Jesus is important and valuable for you. If you have given something up in your walk with Jesus, then you could tell your children about it now.

When the pictures are dry, stick them up around your house. Each time you pass one, chat about how special it is to follow Jesus.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: praise music and the means to play it; any musical instruments or items that could double as musical instruments (such as pans and wooden spoons, jars filled with dried beans)

Play the praise music and encourage the children to dance around your space, waving their streamers and the play windmills in the air. Enjoy seeing the different colours of the streamers and how the windmills twirl. Stop the music and encourage the children to shout thank you to the Holy Spirit for being with us and helping us every day.

After a few minutes, stop the music and ask the children to tell the Holy Spirit about something they'd like his help with this week. It could be something at school or nursery; perhaps they are going on a long journey or are doing something new. Finish with a short prayer thanking the Holy Spirit for being with you and helping you.

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PAUL AND SILAS

MEETING AIM

To explore the idea of forgiveness.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 18:21-35

BACKGROUND

Jesus tells this parable in response to Peter's question about forgiveness: "How many times should I forgive someone..." (v21). While our children won't be familiar with being in debt and the desperation this can bring, they will be starting to understand the need to be sorry and to forgive. As children play, share and learn how to form relationships, they can start to explore the role of forgiveness needed to be friends.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning).

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: toys that encourage playing together or that can be shared

Before you start, find some games that might encourage playing together well. If your children have started to play board games, these would be ideal, as these involve taking turns, waiting for others and coping with triumphs and disappointments. If board games aren't possible, then use toys that require cooperation – maybe water play (if you have the facilities and the weather is nice) or building blocks, where you build something together.

Let the children lead the play and join in where they guide you. As you play, 'catch' the children showing patience and forgiveness, and praise them for it.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: Bible

Show everyone the Bible and Matthew's Gospel. Say that this story is one told by Jesus about how we should forgive

each other. Ask your children if they know what forgiveness means. If not, try to explain in a way that your children will understand – use examples from your own family's life and relationships to help you. Then go on to read this story, which is an interpretation of Jesus' parable:

Olivia and Noah were playing with the Duplo. They were trying to build a big tower, but Noah kept taking all the bricks that Olivia wanted to use.

"Give me those," Olivia shouted. "I want them!"

"No!" said Noah. "I'm using them."

"But you've got all the best bricks."

Just then, Mummy called from the kitchen. "Olivia, can you come in here?"

Olivia frowned at Noah and went to see Mummy. Mummy was sitting at the kitchen table, a tin of chocolate cupcakes in front of her.

"Olivia, did you take some of these cakes? You know that we were going to share them later. I told you not to take any."

Olivia started to cry. "I'm...sorry, Mummy. They looked...so tasty and I...I couldn't wait! I'm...really...sorry."

Mummy looked at Olivia. She knew she was sorry. "OK. Thank you for being honest. You can go and play again."

Olivia went back to Noah and the Duplo. While she had been in the kitchen, Noah had taken all the bricks and built them into his own tower. "That's not fair! You've taken all the Duplo!" she said.

"Sorry," said Noah. "I thought you'd gone." Noah started to take blocks off his tower to give to his sister. Olivia ran over to him and pushed him. He fell onto his tower and it all fell down. Noah started to cry.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions:

- Who is being fair in this story? Olivia? Noah? Mummy?
- What does it mean to be sorry for something you have done?
- What does it mean to forgive someone?
- What might this story tell us about Jesus?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: Bible; art materials; paper

Read Matthew 18:21-35 and remind the children what happened in the story of Olivia and Noah. What is the thing that they remember most about that story? What about Jesus' story from the Bible?

Share out the paper and art materials and encourage the family to create a picture depicting what they remember most about either story. As you work, chat about forgiveness. What does it mean to your children? What does it mean to you? It might be worth telling a story from your own lives that explores the idea of forgiveness in a way that the family can identify with (think about how to tell it before you start). What does it mean to you that God forgives you? How does this affect the way you forgive others?

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: small pieces of paper (or Post-it notes); felt-tip pens or crayons

Ask your family if they have anything that the need to say sorry for. Encourage them to write or draw that on a slip of paper. Hold these pieces of paper in your hands and say a simple pray sorry to God. It might be that family members need to say sorry to someone in the room – help them to do so, if possible.

On a different piece of paper, ask if there is someone that the members of your family need to forgive. Again, write or draw that and hold those pieces of paper while you say a prayer asking God to help you forgive that person. Again, if that person is in the room, provide space for that forgiveness to take place.

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THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

MEETING AIM

To discover that all are important in the kingdom.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 20:1-16

BACKGROUND

This session's parable sheds more light on the kingdom of heaven. As well as being precious and valuable (session one) and a place of forgiveness (session two), in this story, we see that it is upside-down (the last first and the first last) and also open to all in all its fulness, no matter when you make the decision to follow Jesus. This latter concept might be difficult for younger children to grasp, but they will be able to explore the idea that children (often way down the priority list in churches) are key members of the kingdom.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning).

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: soft toys

Go around the house and gather all the soft toys you can find. Include those owned by all family members, not just your younger children. Spend a few moments playing with the different toys. If you have a soft toy for your childhood, then chat about how old it is and how it came into your possession.

Have fun ranking the toys in different orders: smallest to biggest; cuddliest; most precious. Get some suggestions from the children of different criteria they could use to order the toys. If you have time, you could have an extended time of play with the soft toys.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: soft toys from 'Play'; money (play or real)

Show everyone the Bible and Matthew's Gospel. Tell the children that Jesus often told his friends stories and that these stories show people what it's like to be friends with Jesus.

Read Matthew 20:1-7 and use the toys to act out the story. At each stage of 'hiring' encourage the children to choose which toys are going to get the job next.

Once all the toys have been 'hired', ask the children how much money they would give each one for the work that they have done. Use the money to decide the different amounts and give that money to each toy.

Read Matthew 20:8-16 and reallocate the money as you do so, so that all the toys have the same amount. Ask the children what they think of what you have done.

Read the whole story again, this time encouraging the children to give the same amount of money to the toys.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions:

- How do you think the toys felt when they were given a job?
- Was the man being fair when he gave everyone the same money?
- Do you like this story? Why? Why not?
- What happens when people aren't fair? Do you like it if other people are treated better than you? What is it like?
- What might this story tell us about being a friend of Jesus?

CREATIVE TIME

0 MINS

You will need: gold or yellow card; hole punch; ribbon; child-safe scissors; felt-tip pens or crayons; glass or large biscuit cutter

Help your children to draw around the glass or biscuit cutter on the card, and cut out a circle. You might want to help with the cutting if children's fine motor skills are still developing. Punch

a hole at the top of the circle and then encourage the children to write or draw something on the circle to say how important someone is. This could be as simple as writing a large number '1' on the circle or as complicated as the child's imagination! Thread a length of ribbon through the hole and then tie the two ends together to create a medal. (Make sure the ribbon loop is large enough to fit over someone's head).

As you work, chat about how everyone is important to God – it doesn't matter how old they are or young, how much money or possessions they have or anything. Decide who you might want to give your medal to – it could be someone in your family or someone else (you can post the medal to whoever the child wants to give it to).

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: medals from 'Creative time'; praise music and the means to play it

Hold the medals that you made in 'Creative time' in your hands. As you do, ask God to help you recognise that everyone is important to God and is loved by him. It doesn't matter how long they have been a friend of Jesus, how old or rich they are...

Have a moment of silence (you might only manage a few seconds, but that's OK; if your children are happy to sit in silence, don't rush to the next thing, let your family be quiet as long as they wish). Invite your children to look at their medal and talk to God about whatever is on their mind.

Finally play some lively praise music and enjoy dancing around, knowing that you are all important to God.

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THE TALENTS

MEETING AIM

To discover that God has given us gifts and talents that we can use to serve him.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 25:14-30

BACKGROUND

This kingdom parable explores ideas around the blessings God has given us (money, skills, gifts and talents) and how we should use those to serve him and bless others in turn. Younger children might not yet know what their gifts and skills are, but they are still able to use who they are and what they can do to show God's love to others. Involving children in outreach of this kind, even under lockdown restrictions, can help them to see their growing faith in action: God loves them, and they can love others; this love has a huge impact on the people they reach.

CIRCLE TIME

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning).

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: any toys, games or sports equipment you have which the children have skills at using

Ask the children to go and find whatever they love to play with – games, toys or sporting equipment. Have a fun time playing those games or demonstrating their skills. Make sure you catch children (and other members of your family!) doing well at their chosen skill.

As you play, expand this 'catching' to complimenting the children on playing well together being kind, how they support each other and share. You might also want to share what you see as your family's gifts and skills, and how they have had an impact on others in the past.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: Bible;

Show the family the Bible and the Gospel of Matthew. If you did the other sessions in this series, then remind them that you have already read some stories Jesus told all about the kingdom of heaven. Then tell this story:

Olivia and Noah sat at the kitchen table. They were creating some pictures using paint and crayons and coloured paper.

Olivia was very good at cutting and sticking. She was working on a big picture of their dog, Fozzie. She had cut out lots of pieces of brown paper and stuck them down. She had found some wool and glued it on to make Fozzie's face. Now she was working on the dog's tail.

Noah loved painting. He was using his fingers to make a spotty pattern. There were lots of blue dots. There were lots of red dots. Now he was getting ready to add orange dots to the pattern.

Daddy came in and looked at what they were doing. "What lovely pictures!" he said.

"I'm going to give mine to granny," said Olivia. "She loves Fozzie, but she hasn't been able to see him." Because everyone had to stay at home, Olivia and Noah had not been able to see Granny.

"What are you going to do with your picture, Noah?" asked Daddy. "I know Auntie Katie loves your patterns."

"I'm going to keep it for myself," said Noah.

When you've finished the story, read Matthew 25:14-27 (or continue to verse 30, if you're happy to read verse 30 to your children).

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions:

- Who was sharing their talents with others? Why?
- What talents and gifts do you have (remind the children of what you did in 'Play')?
- How can you use those talents to help others?
- What might this story tell us about being a friend of Jesus?

CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

You will need: art and craft materials; large sheets of paper; cover-up and clean-up equipment

Gather together all the art and craft materials that your children like to use and have special talents with. Enjoy creating pictures and collages together. Praise the children on how they are doing and the effort they are putting in. As you work, tell the family about a time when you used your own gifts to bless others and tell them about Jesus. This might be writing and recording a song, making and sharing cakes, helping people to budget or simply providing a listening ear for someone who needed to talk.

Once you have finished, decide who you might give your pictures and collages to. Chat about why it is good to use our skills and gifts to bless others. What might motivate us to do this?

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: soft balls (such as sponge balls or ball-pit balls) or balloons; praise music and the means the play it

Play some lively praise music and enjoy dancing around. Throw the balls or balloons in the air and as they float or fall to the ground, thank God for something that you're good at (remind your family that it might not necessarily be something concrete like being good at cooking or painting; it could be something like listening to others or being kind).

After a few moments of dancing and throwing the balls and balloons in the air, turn the music off and stand in a circle. Thank God for everything that he has given you and ask him to help you use those things to bless others and show them how much God loves them!

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THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

MEETING AIM

To encourage the children to think of how they are growing as followers of Jesus and how they can reach others and help them grow too.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 13:44-46

BACKGROUND

Imagine trying to describe the sea to someone who had never experienced it. You would start by comparing it to things they knew about: colour like the sky, spray like the biggest rainstorm you've ever been in. When Jesus told his followers about the kingdom of God (also known as the kingdom of heaven) he wasn't talking about a place: he was describing God's reign and the unique experience of living with God, doing things God's way.

Jesus' followers were ordinary folk such as fishermen, farmers, mothers and servants, so he told stories set in everyday situations. He used familiar images to build up a picture of God's kingdom, so that the people who had never experienced it would know what it was like and want to be part of it, too..

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning).

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: a collection of everyday objects

Spread out the objects and encourage your children to choose one to describe God, for example: "God is like...this sticky tape, because he sticks close to you." Choose different objects, be inventive and discuss each other's ideas, adding to them if possible: "God is like this sticky tape, because he can mend things."

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: three buckets of play sand, one with lots of toy treasures hidden in it (gold coins, jewels, fancy shells); a fancy cloth or cushion, on which you have spread a selection of plain wooden or plastic beads and one beautiful toy jewel, pearl or glass bead; two pieces of card with Matthew 13:44 and Matthew 13:45-46 printed on them Show the three buckets of sand.

Encourage the children to take a closer look at each one, using their hands to dig in each bucket and see if there's anything special about it. If they find anything, they shouldn't show anyone else, indeed they should try not to speak or react at all – just bury it back in the sand and move on to the next bucket.

Once everyone has had a good search through each bucket, vote together on which bucket they would choose to keep. Ask them to share the reason why.

Say that you're going to share out the treasure, but not before going shopping for jewels. Show your family the cushion with the jewels or beads. Invite them to decide which one of these they would like to buy if they had all the money in the world.

While everyone is doing this, bury a scripture reading in each of the two 'treasure-less' buckets of sand. Then discuss which jewel they would like to buy if they had all the money in the world.

Say that Jesus told a story about treasure to describe what God's kingdom is like. To hear it they first have to find the two parts of the story! Invite everyone to dig for the two pieces of scripture in the first two sand buckets. The finders read them aloud.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- Which part of this story do you like best?
- Would you rather find buried treasure or the most precious jewel in the world?

- What questions would you like to ask Jesus about this story?
- What do you think is special about God?
- What do you think is special about God's way of doing things?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: slips of paper and pens; plain boxes with lids, eg clean takeaway tubs; self-adhesive toy jewels, shiny stickers or a selection of beads and sequins and PVA glue

Encourage children to decorate their own treasure chest. As you do so, talk about how both people in the story gave everything they had in exchange for the treasure they found. Jesus said that God's kingdom is like this treasure. Has anyone in your family experienced something special that seemed to come from God? What can we give to God? How might we show him that we are grateful for all the special things he has done for us? Children can write or draw their answers on slips of paper to keep in their treasure chest.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: the sand bucket with buried treasure from 'Bible story'

This is a quiet, thoughtful prayer activity. Invite children to think about something special that God has done for them as they take it in turns to dig out a piece of treasure from the sand. In a time of quiet, use the pieces of treasure to spell out 'GOD' on the floor.

You may like to add extra treasures or lighted tealights to the letters.

Pause briefly once everyone has arranged their treasure, then say this prayer:

"God, help us to treasure your way of doing things above all else. May your kingdom come."

Together, finish by saying: "Amen."

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THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

MEETING AIM

To learn that God is hugely forgiving, and we need to practise forgiveness.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 18:21-35

BACKGROUND

This parable really packs a punch when children grasp the significance of the sums involved: Jesus' original audience must have gasped! We may also wonder just how rich this king is if he can write off a debt equivalent to £3 billion. This mind-boggling number offers the way into this session, because everything about God's kingdom is mind-boggling, including the limitless extent of his forgiveness.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning).

INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

You will need: song words or YouTube recording of 'Our God is a great big God'; play money

Sing 'Our God is a great big God' together. Then suggest that God is worth more than just one "great": ask how many greats there should be and try to sing: "Our God is a great great great etc big God."

When the number is too many to sing, talk about the biggest numbers that children know, and what they are called. Play with the money for a while, seeing how much money you can all imagine!

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: large sheet of paper; marker pen

Ask the children: "If someone stole your chocolate, would you forgive them?" "If they stole it again, would you forgive them again?" "If they kept stealing it, how many times would you forgive

them?" Jesus's friend, Peter, wondered if there was a limit to forgiveness.

He asked Jesus: "How many times do I have to forgive someone?" Write the question on the paper and invite answers. Then tell this story:

First Jesus teased his friend with some numbers: "The answer's not seven. It's 77 (or 70 x seven)." Invite a volunteer to write the numbers up on the paper.

Then Jesus told his friends a story about two men who owed money. One owed 10,000 talents and the other owed 100 denarii. Write these two sums on the board with their modern equivalents (you could ask a volunteer to write these). Depending on your children, you could share the fact that 1 talent = 6000 denarii and one denari = about £50 then ask them to work out the answer: 10,000 talents = £3 billion (nine noughts); 100 denarii = £5,000.

God's kingdom is like this: there was once a king who was counting all his money and everything he was owed. One man owed him £3 billion! He had nowhere near enough to pay back the king, even if he sold everything, including his wife and children. He begged: "Please be patient! Give me more time and I'll pay you back!" The king felt sorry for the man and let him off every penny of the £3 billion he owed.

As the man left the palace, he bumped into a servant who owed him some money, so he grabbed him and snarled: "Gimme that £5,000 you owe me!" The servant begged: "Please be patient! Give me more time and I'll pay you back!" But the man threw the servant into prison until he could pay back every penny he owed.

The other servants were so upset that they reported the man to the king. What do you think the king did when he found out? Invite responses.

He threw the man into prison until he could pay back every penny of the £3 billion he owed! Jesus finished his story with this warning: "God will treat you as harshly as this if you don't truly forgive people!"

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Ask your children these questions:

- Which part of the story do you like best?
- What questions would you like to ask God about this story?
- When is it easy to forgive someone?
- When is it hard to forgive someone?
- I wonder when we need to be forgiven?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: pens; sticky tape; scissors; strips of paper

Give everyone a strip of paper and each write 'FORGIVING' on it. Form the strip into a loop but give one end a half-twist before you stick the ends together: this makes a Möbius strip. Demonstrate that it has a never-ending edge: if children pinch the strip just above the F, then pull it through gently so that their pinched fingers slide along the edge, they will find that their fingers travel above the word 'Forgiving', then below it, then back to the beginning, without once letting go. As you experiment with the Möbius strips, talk about how we all mess up, but God is endlessly forgiving. Talk about how we can practise and keep on forgiving other people in the never-ending way that God forgives us.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: a bowl of warm soapy water; towels

Gather everyone around the bowl. Explain that the Bible sometimes describes God's forgiveness as 'making us clean' or 'washing our sins away'. Think about how often you have washed your hands during lockdown. Why do you keep washing them? Wash your hands as a sign of asking for God's forgiveness, which he promises to give us however many millions and billions of times we need it.

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THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

MEETING AIM

To learn that God is totally generous.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 20:1-16

BACKGROUND

This parable plays on our notion of what is 'fair', which makes it a treat to explore with children, who are especially quick to spot apparent unfairness. In the original audience for Jesus's story there would have been many experienced agricultural workers, who were well acquainted with the backbreaking work of harvesting grapes in the hot sun. Imagine the heckling at the end of the story! The point, however, is not our idea of fairness but God's limitless generosity.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning).

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: a long piece of rope or string; small prizes

Arrange the rope in a heap, with both ends showing. Explain that this is a challenge and there will be a prize. Ask your family, if you pulled one end of this rope and someone else pulled the other, would the rope pull straight or would there be a knot in it? Without touching the rope ask everyone to look carefully and decide: knot, or not a knot?

Invite each family member to make their case. Listen seriously, then say: "Well, who knows?" Pick up the tangle of rope and put it away. There will be outrage! Remind them that you said: "If you pulled..." and give everyone a prize, as promised.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: lots of grapes (or pictures); a basket or pot and a bank-note-sized piece of paper with £50 written on it for each child

Before you start, hide the grapes (or pictures) all over your house and garden (if you have one). Make the hiding places tricky, so that children must work to find the grapes and the activity lasts for the whole story. Then tell this story pretending to be the farmer:

I'm the farmer who owns this vineyard, and my harvest is ripe. I need lots of workers to pick grapes! It's very early in the morning – who can I find? Pick someone and show them one £50 'note'. You! I'll pay you the usual rate for a day's work – £50. Shake hands, give them a basket and set them to work collecting the hidden grapes.

Now it's midday and the sun's getting really hot! These workers are going to need some help. Pick someone. You! You'll get fair pay. Shake hands, give them a basket and set them to work.

Now it's 5 o'clock and the working day's nearly done. I just need a bit more help to get this harvest in before nightfall! Pick the remaining people. You! You'll get fair pay. Shake hands, give them a basket and set them to work.

Right, job's done! Time you all got paid. Line up in order, starting with the workers who came last! Give the last worker(s) £50 each. Invite responses, then invite the rest of the workers to say what they think they should each get paid.

My vineyard, my rules! Here's £50 for everyone, just like we agreed. Hand out the money and encourage responses!

I don't know why some of you are cross! You got the money we agreed on – it's my choice to give the same to the others! Why are you angry because I'm generous?

Jesus said: "This is what God's kingdom will be like. The last will be first, and the first will be last."

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions:

- Which part of the story do you like best?
- Does anyone in this story remind you of someone you know?
- What would you like to say to the farmer in this story?
- What questions would you like to ask Jesus about this story?
- I wonder what: "The last will be first, and the first will be last" means?

CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

You will need: plain fairy cakes (home-made or shop-bought); lots of icing, buttercream and cake decorations

Share out the fairy cakes and talk about how we would normally expect them to be. Then explain that you are going to decorate them God-style, by being as generous as possible with the decorations. Share out the decorations and let everyone get stuck in. This will get messy! How much decoration can you fit on one little cake?

As you decorate the cakes, remind children that the farmer in Jesus' story surprised everyone with his generosity, and Jesus made the point that God is like this: he is totally generous. Talk together about times when you have been given much more than you expected. When has God given you much more than you asked for? How can we be generous to other people? Enjoy eating the cupcakes together.

PRAYER

5 MINS

Gather everyone together. After all the activity and mess, it's time to be still. Invite everyone to sit with their hands cupped together, as if ready to receive something. After a moment, say this prayer.

Father, we ask you for things all the time, and you give us more than enough. We praise you for your wonderful generosity.

Together, say: "Amen."

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THE TALENTS

MEETING AIM

To learn that we shouldn't be afraid to show our faith in what we say and do.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 25:14-30

BACKGROUND

This parable can distract us with some troubling questions. Is God like a tough investment banker who has no time for those who don't show entrepreneurial spirit? The challenge here is to lead children through the financial dealings to the heart of the story, which is about being ready to use what God has given us. The money image recalls earlier parables about the treasure and the pearl, reminding us how precious God's kingdom is. This parable is an opportunity to explore with children how they can be bold in putting their faith into practice, rather than hiding it away.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning).

PLAY

10 MINS

This is an improvised drama game which encourages children to accept and build on each other's suggestions. Invite someone to suggest a scene, eg: "Let's go camping!" Everyone shouts: "Yes, let's!" and joins in by pretending to put up a tent. Someone then adds to the scene, eg: "Let's put this tent on wheels!" Everyone shouts: "Yes, let's!" and mimes turning the tent into a vehicle. Someone then builds on that idea, eg: "Let's fly this tent to the moon!" Everyone shouts: "Yes, let's!" and acts out a journey into space. Practise with this example and then start again with a new suggestion. Encourage lots of energy and imagination!

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: paper; envelopes; three lidded boxes – large, medium and small; marker pen

Before you start, write out the messages below on separate pieces of paper and put each one into an envelope. On the top of the large box write '£1.5 million', and on the bottom 'Have a pay rise!'. Atop the medium box, write '£600,000'; on the bottom 'Have a pay rise!'. On the small box, write £300,000 and (on the bottom) 'You're fired!'. Inside the first two boxes, place a piece of paper that reads: 'Double your money'. Set out the boxes on the floor.

Give someone in your family the first envelope to open and read: "You all work for a very rich man. He is about to go away on business, so he gives three of you these sums of money to look after. What will you do with it while he is away?"

Invite your family to choose and stand by one of the boxes, but don't touch the boxes yet. Remind them that this is their boss's money and that he'll be coming back! Discuss together what they might do with it and what the risks or rewards might be. If they need guidance, give them two options: use this money to make more money (how?) or hide it to keep it safe. Ask the children to decide what they will do.

Give someone in your family the second envelope to open and read: "You remember that your boss is a hard man who will do anything to make money. You are scared of him. What will you do with his money while he is away?"

Invite children to discuss and reconsider their decisions if necessary.

Give someone in your family the third envelope to open and read: "In this story, the workers with £1.5 million and £600,000 did business deals with their boss's money. The worker with £300,000 was scared, so hid the money. Now the boss is back and wants to know they have done!"

Invite children to find out how much money each made by opening the boxes and doing the sums as necessary. Then turn over the boxes and find what happens to each worker: two get pay rises, while the third is fired.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Use these questions to chat about the story:

- Which part of the story do you like best?
- If you were in this story, who would you be?
- What do you think about the way the boss rewarded and punished his workers?
- What questions would you like to ask God about this story?
- The money in Jesus's original story wasn't called pounds, it was called talents – does that change how you think about the story?

CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

You will need: sunflower seeds; small plant pots; potting compost

Show the seeds and ask what might happen if you planted them, or kept them in a drawer. What might happen?

As you plant seeds together, chat about the story and what it shows us about doing things God's way. Talk about whether we put our faith into practice or hide it. Have you ever been teased or criticised because of your faith? How can we show that we are Christians in what we say and do? Come up with some practical examples together.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: pots from 'Creative time'; watering can

Gather everyone in a circle, holding your plant pots. Say this prayer:

Loving Lord, you have planted us like these little seeds, not so that we can hide away, but so we can grow more than we can possibly imagine. Make us bold to grow and show the life that you have given us. Amen

Pass the watering can around and water your seeds.

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THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

MEETING AIM

To consider what the parables of the treasure and pearl reveal to us about the kingdom of God.

BIBLE PASSAGES

Matthew 13:44-46

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like Facetime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

The events of the past few months may have helped crystallise or even change what young people think is important. Relationships, hobbies, friends or even just the freedom to do what you want might have emerged as the most important, but these two parables challenge us further. What is the kingdom of heaven like?

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days.

INTRO ACTIVITY 5 MINS

You will need: list of objects of varying value (such as a chocolate bar, a mobile phone charger, a pen, a key or a £5 note) Before the session, create a list of different items that the young people might have in their homes. Split the group into teams, or play individually, depending on the size of your group. Shout out the items on the list one by one. The first player to return to their screen with each item gets a point. The person or team with the most points is the winner. The point of this activity is not the hunt itself, but the questions and reflections that follow. When they have gathered all the objects they can challenge them with the following in a random order:

How would you feel if you had to:

- Swap all you have found with the other group?
- Take one object from the other group?
- Hide one object you have found to

ensure it cannot be stolen by the other team?

- Identify one object from the other group's collection that you would be prepared to swap all you have for?

Then ask the following questions.

- How did it feel to be told to swap what you had gathered with the other team?
- How did you decide which to take?
- How did you decide which object to hide? Was this easy or challenging?
- How did you decide which object was worth swapping your entire collection for?
- Did this activity reveal anything to you about the things you value?

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: pens and paper; video of the parables from [youthandchildrens.work/links](#)

Make sure your young people have a pen and paper and ask them to list all the things they value; anything from possessions to friendships, relationships, people and time. Ask the young people to show the three things they value most. Have a time of sharing and discuss the following questions:

- Was it easy to list the things you value? What was your starting point?
- Are the things on your list mostly possessions or people? What does this say about the things you value?
- Why is it important to think about what we value?

Show the video of the parables from [youthandchildrens.work/links](#), then go on to read Matthew 13:44-46. You might also want to read the retold parables from the 'Ready to use parable' series: Chelsea and the charity shop treasure or Frankie and the football find. Challenge the group to retell either of the parables to fit their own lives.

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Continue your discussion of the Bible passage by with the following questions:

- What do you think these two short parables tell us about God's kingdom?
- Who, or what, do the treasure and the pearl represent?
- Do you think it is important that the

treasures are hidden? What does this suggest about God's kingdom?

- Why do you think the merchant stopped looking when he found the pearl of great price?
- Why do you think Jesus uses these two short parables together? What might this say about the importance of his message?

CREATIVE RESPONSE 15 MINS

You will need: lists of valuable things from 'Bible exploration'; large sheets of paper; art materials

Having explored the teaching of Jesus in these two parables, return to the list of things you compiled earlier and ask the following questions:

- Would you like to change anything on your list as a result of what we have looked at today?
- If you would change your list, what might that mean for how you live your life from now on as a result of what you have learned?

Comment that Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God forces us to question the things we value. Are we prepared to ask ourselves difficult questions? Make sure everyone has sheets of paper and art materials and ask the young people to focus on what they have discovered about God, the kingdom, their lives and their priorities and write or draw about it. Give as much time and space as you can for this, and be available for the young people to chat to you online if they would like to.

PRAYER 5 MINS

You will need: playdough; reflective music and the means to play it

Ensure the young people have some playdough and choose a song that will create a reflective atmosphere. Ask the young people to use the playdough to shape something that they have learned this session. Encourage them to take a photograph of it, or display at home as a reminder of the message they have taken from this session. Close with a prayer.

This session was inspired by ideas from the [Premier Youth and Children's Work](#) archive, adapted by **ALEX TAYLOR**.



THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

MEETING AIM

To explore the concept of forgiveness in Christian discipleship.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 18:21-35

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like Facetime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

The parable of the unforgiving servant mirrors the 'process' of salvation. We are in a debt of sin, and can never repay that debt. Yet, Jesus comes and pays the price – our slate is wiped clean. What then do we do with that forgiveness and freedom? The actions of the servant in the parable highlight the requirement to forgive others. How much have the young people explored this issue? It leads us to look beyond ourselves and see how important this overflow of forgiveness is.

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Ask the young people if they have ever been forgiven or let off, when they fully expected to be punished. If you have an appropriate story from your own life, share that with the group.

INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

You will need: pens and paper

Make sure each young person has a pen and paper and ask them to make ten vertical marks across the top. Explain that every young person has a 'starting debt' of ten marks. They must try to repay their debt by winning games of rock-paper-scissors.

Stakes can be as high as they wish, but make it clear that all debts must be repaid by the end of the game. Those who run out of marks can come and get more from you, but this must be written down and added to their debt.

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: parable video from youthandchildrens.work/links and the means to play it; Bibles; three sheets of paper per person; pen; list of forgiveness situations

Use the video to introduce the parable and create an opportunity for discussion and conversation around it. Then read Matthew 18:21-25 and ask:

- How do you think it felt to be in debt?
- Have you ever been in a situation in real life where you've run out of money?
- What makes a good steward of money?

Go on to read Matthew 18:26-27 and ask the group for any immediate reactions.

Ask the group to write 'Yes' on one piece of paper, 'No' on the second and 'Unsure' on the third. Prepare a list of forgiveness situations beforehand and ask the young people to show which word represents their opinion for each situation. Tailor these questions to general, small issues that may affect your youth group. Before moving on to the next question, make sure you get the view of one young person from each opinion represented. Be flexible and allow relevant debate to flow.

Finally, read Matthew 18:28-35 and Galatians 5:13-14, and ask the group for any immediate reactions. You might also want to read the retold parable 'Jamie's big mistake' from our 'Ready to use parable' series.

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Continue your discussion of the Bible passage by chatting through the following questions:

- Which character in the parable do you most identify with? Why?
- Which part of the story made the biggest impact on you?
- What is Jesus really talking about when he is telling this story?
- What does this story tell you about God and your relationship with him?

- Now that you've heard this story, are you going to change anything in your life?

CREATIVE RESPONSE 15 MINS

You will need: Bibles; art materials; paper

Read the Lord's Prayer from Luke 11:1-4 and draw the young people's attention to verse 4. Give them a moment to reflect on the need to forgive others as we have been forgiven. Invite the group to write out the verse on a sheet of paper and decorate that verse however they wish. They can use simple patterns or illustrations of what forgiveness looks like. (If you need to, deliver some art materials to the young people before the session.)

Encourage the young people to use this time to reflect on what they have explored today and continue to process that. When you have finished, if they would like to, have a time of sharing of what the young people have done and thought about.

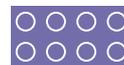
PRAYER 5 MINS

You will need: a recording of 'Amazing grace' and the means to play it

Play 'Amazing Grace' in the background. Ask the young people to focus on the grace and forgiveness received by the servant. Ask God to forgive us for the things that we've done wrong, but also to help us fully realise and accept his forgiveness. Secondly, ask God to help us be ready to forgive others and to share the forgiveness he offers with them, too.

Chat about how, if we want to receive forgiveness freely, we have to offer it freely, too. Use this time to make peace by asking or offering forgiveness of the other people in your youth group. If you can't think of anything you need to be forgiven for, or to forgive, simply share the peace of Jesus with them by saying: "Peace be with you."

This session was inspired by ideas from the [Premier Youth and Children's Work](#) archive, adapted by **ALEX TAYLOR**.



THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

MEETING AIM

To explore the kingdom of heaven through the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 20:1-16

BACKGROUND

These sessions are designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like Facetime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

On first reading, this parable doesn't appear to be fair at all. Everyone gets the same wage, no matter how long they have worked. However, on greater exploration, we discover a definition of 'fairness' that goes beyond our human score-keeping. Salvation is offered to everyone, no matter who they are; eternal life with God is for those who have been following him all their life and for those following for just five minutes.

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Ask the young people if anyone has treated them unfairly. What happened? Why did they feel hard done by?

INTRO ACTIVITY 5 MINS

You will need: prizes that can be posted

Pick a volunteer to do 50 press-ups for the promise of a prize in the post. As the young person is doing these, choose someone else to do 20 for the same promise. As both are doing their press-ups, ask another young person to do five for the same promise. Make sure each participant has an adjudicator to ensure they do their full quota. You could alter this game so that everyone in the group takes part. When everyone has finished, show the identical prizes you're going to post; from those who started last to

those who started first. Ask those who took part in the challenge:

- How did it feel doing a lot of press-ups for the same as those who did fewer?
- How did it feel doing fewer press-ups for the same as those who did the most?
- Do you think the challenge was fair?

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: video of the parables from youthandchildrens.work/links, and the means to play it; Bibles; volunteers to play the landowner and the labourers

Use the video at this point in the session as a way of introducing the parable. Then read Matthew 20:1-16 and compare the video to the text. You might also want to read the retold parable 'Chloe and the crazy paving' from our 'Ready to use parable' series.

Choose one volunteer to be the landowner and three to be the labourers. Spotlight them one by one on your video call. Encourage the other group members to ask the spotlight person questions about the story. These could be about their feelings, motivations or life situations. What conversations might they have had?

Let the young people lead the kind of questions they want to ask, but don't let it get out of hand! After everyone has been interviewed, ask the group about their initial responses to the story, then ask: "What is the kingdom of heaven?"

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Continue your discussion of the Bible passage by chatting through the following questions:

- Who do you think the labourers and the landowner symbolise?
- Why do you think the landowner paid all the workers the same wage?
- What does this say about the landowner?
- What does this tell you about God and your relationship with him?
- What might this parable mean to your life?

CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

You will need: creative resources (such as art materials, filming equipment or drama props)

Challenge the young people to create something that describes what they think the kingdom of heaven is like, following on from what they have discovered. This could be a straight retelling of the story, a retelling set in their own neighbourhood or something that explores what the kingdom means for them and their own lives.

If the young people would like to, allow some time at the end for them to share what they have created. It might be good to discuss any new ideas that this time of sharing sparks.

PRAYER 5 MINS

Ask the young people to get comfortable and close their eyes. Use the following script to help facilitate an encounter with God's grace:

As you sit, become aware of God's presence and care for you. Concentrate on your breathing. *Pause.* Slow it down, and again become aware of God's presence, sustaining and holding you.

When you are ready, ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you to remember any moment in your journey with God. *Pause.*

As you reflect on your experience, let the following question arise: Where did I experience God's grace in this moment? Allow little things to emerge: a smile, a greeting, a kind word, the sunlight in the room, an emerging conversation. Then stay with whatever moment God seems to give you. Don't force anything, just be open and let the moment arise that seems to hold the most grace.

Let all else fall away as you spend a few moments just holding that experience. What does this feel like? *Pause.* What are you like? *Pause.* What are the other people like in this experience? *Pause.* Thank God for this, and slowly open your eyes.

This session was inspired by ideas from the *Premier Youth and Children's Work* archive, adapted by **ALEX TAYLOR**.



THE TALENTS

MEETING AIM

To discover that God has given each of us different resources, and intends that we use them for his kingdom.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 25:14-30

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like Facetime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

The treatment meted out to the final servant by the master here might initially seem cruel. After all, he hasn't stolen the money, and has returned exactly what he was given. However, the servant has hidden from his responsibility; he has been fearful to use what he has been given to make more. Each of our young people is uniquely talented; during this session, help the group think carefully about what those talents are and how God is calling them to use those to multiply his kingdom. Think carefully about your own talents too.

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days.

INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

Ask the young people if they have any hidden talents or party pieces that it would be safe for them to perform on screen. Have fun sharing what the young people can do. Make sure you or one of your fellow team members has something they can show off to get the ball rolling. If the young people are comfortable with each other, then you could turn it into a competition. Don't let anyone belittle another member of the group though..

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: parable video from youthandchildrens.work/links and the means to play it; Bibles; art materials; pens; paper; any suitable props
Use the video at this point in the session as a way of introducing the parable. Then read Matthew 20:1-16 and compare the video to the text. You might also want to read the retold parable 'Tia and the wasted talent' from our 'Ready to use parable' series.

Challenge the group to retell this story in a different context. What you do will depend on the interests of the young people. They could devise a drama (perhaps placing the three servants in a game-show setting), they might prefer to create a cartoon strip of the story, or write their own version.

When the young people have finished their own retellings, invite them to perform, show or read what they have created (if they are happy to, don't force anyone to share). How has the process of coming at the story from a new direction helped their understanding of what Jesus is saying?

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Continue your discussion of the Bible passage by chatting through the following questions:

- What hits you the hardest about this passage?
- Why do you think different amounts are given to the three servants?
- Do you think the master was unfair?
- If the third servant had doubled his talents do you think the master would have been just as pleased as he was with the other two?
- Can you see yourself in this parable?
- What point do you think Jesus was making?

CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

You will need: Post-it notes; pens
Ask the group if they know what their talents are. Chat about how talents are sometimes described as the things you can't help but do. For example, if there is a piano in the room, some people are quite happy to just walk past and not

really notice it, whereas others have to sit down and play something.

If you have a lot of young people, break into smaller groups as your video calling software allows. Otherwise work all together. Start to explore what the young people think their gifts are. Choose one person at a time and ask the others to tell that person what they think he or she brings to the group, both in personality and talents. Let them know that the group is richer when they are there because of the things they bring. Encourage them to write these things down, each one on a separate Post-it note, so that when they doubt themselves they can remember them. If anyone struggles to think what their gifts are, ask others to call out the talents in that person.

PRAYER 5 MINS

God has left clues inside us about how he wants to involve us in his kingdom work. That will be different for each of us, according to our skills and the things we feel strongly about. Ask the group to reflect on these two questions:

- In which areas you would love to make a difference?
- How can you make a start on that now?

We may not be called to lead vast churches or be a Christian superstar, but God will use us to make a difference if we let him. Give the young people some space to think about where God might use their gifts and skills.

Pray a closing prayer asking that God would help them be aware of how he has made them and things that he's asking them to be part of.