



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 PASSAGE

Matthew 13:44-46

BACKGROUND

The events of the past few months may have helped crystallise or even change what 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?

This service is designed to be used over video-conferencing software, such as Zoom. Adapt the ideas to fit the way you are doing church during lockdown, including any songs and liturgy you are using. If people need any resources for use during the service, make sure they know beforehand.

SIGNING IN

5 MINS

As people join your service, welcome them and ask them about their week.

WELCOME

5 MINS

OPTION ONE: Treasured possessions

Invite people to show their most treasured possession and describe why it means so much. It could be of sentimental value, rather than being worth a lot of money!

OPTION TWO: Is it worth it?

You will need: pictures of various items; the prices of those items

Before the service, get pictures of different items, such as a sports car, a lawnmower or a necklace, and find out how much each one costs.

Show the pictures on screen one by one and ask the congregation to guess how much each one costs. After you reveal the price tag, ask if people think that the item is worth the cost and why (not).

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: a hat; lots of possessions (such as pots and pans, cushions, chairs, duvets – the more outlandish the better!); a marble; a member of your household to be the person selling the pearl

Make sure your possessions and pearl-seller are just out of shot. Then tell this story:

Jesus loved telling stories. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells lots of stories to show his friends and everyone listening to him what it was like to live in the kingdom of heaven. This is one of them.

Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like when a merchant goes looking for fine pearls. After a finding a very precious, valuable one, he sells everything he owns so that he can buy the pearl."

It's a short parable and it's very easy to miss what's going on. Let's hear it again.

Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like when a merchant goes looking for fine pearls. *Put the hat on and pretend to be the merchant.* Walk around, in and out of shot, as if looking for the pearl. He finds a very precious, valuable one. *Your pearl seller appears, holding the marble aloft. You should admire it and the pearl seller should comment on its rarity and beauty.* He sells everything he owns so that he can buy the pearl." *You should disappear off-screen, get one or two belongings, bring them back and give them to the pearl seller. Continue until you have handed over all your belongings. Then the pearl seller should give you the pearl. Don't rush this; the longer this goes on, the bigger the impact.*

SMALL GROUPS

10 MINS

If your software allows, send everyone off into different breakout rooms made up of a few households. Put these questions into each group's chat box:

- What's your favourite part of the story?
- What would you give up everything for?
- What do you think the pearl represents?
- Read the story of the treasure (v44). How is this story similar (or different) to the pearl?

Give the groups time to chat about these questions, referring to the Bible passage if they need to.

If you can't put people into breakout rooms, ask individual households to discuss them, and link up those who live on their own using another messaging or video calling app.

REVIEW

5 MINS

Get some feedback from 'Small groups', encouraging everyone to take part who wants to.

RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

10 MINS

Invite people to do one of these activities in response:

OPTION ONE: Discussion

You will need: 'Chelsea and the charity shop treasure' (youthandchildrens.work/Resources/Parable)

Read the retold parable either in households or in a breakout room. Chat about the similarities and differences between this and the parables in Matthew. Ask people how they would rewrite the stories..

OPTION TWO: Creative response

You will need: art materials

Encourage people to create a piece of art or writing that reflects what God is saying to them through this parable. Invite the congregation to continue listening to and talking with God as they work.

OPTION THREE: Prayer

If possible, put people into one or more breakout rooms to chat about what they have discovered today and to pray for each other.

CLOSING

5 MINS

Bring everyone back together and ask if anyone would like to share anything from the response time. Thank everyone for taking part and say an appropriate blessing to close the service.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.



ALEX AND THE EARLY ARRIVAL

“Right, we’re ready to go,” said Alex’s mum.

“Come on, Karen!” Kenny, Alex’s stepdad, stood impatiently by the front door.

“I’m coming!” she shouted, before turning to Alex.

“Remember, the twins can watch *Strictly* before going to bed. And you can share the rest of that chocolate cake between the three of you.”

“Yes, yes. I know. Go on, enjoy yourself!” Alex hurried his mum toward the door. “Bye!”

Alex shut the door and watched the headlights of Kenny’s car pull out of the driveway. “Right!” he said, turning back into the hall. “Cake.”

Alex’s brother and sister barrelled down the stairs towards him.

“Can we have cake now?” asked Anna.

“Yes!” added Ashton. “Cake and *Strictly*!” He started singing the theme tune and doing a funny little move that might have been a cha-cha, if Ashton could actually dance.

“Cake? You’re not having any cake. That’s for grown-ups. You can have a half a custard cream and then it’s straight to bed.”

“Half?”

“Bed?”

“I want *Strictly*.”

“I’m allowed cake! Mum said!” They crowded around Alex. They were six years old and only came up to Alex’s hip. He shepherded them away from him and into the kitchen.

“No, she said you could have cake. But I don’t think you deserve it.” The twins started to complain, but he carried on regardless: “Did you or did you not ruin last year’s holiday by pouring strawberry milkshake all over those pensioners from Melton Mowbray?”

“I said sorry!” protested Ashton.

“And did you or did you not break your bedroom window while playing golf with granny’s backscratcher and a marble?”

“I helped pay for that window!” Anna said.

“Not good enough!” said Alex. He reached into a cupboard and took out a packet of digestives. He snapped one in half and gave it to the twins.

“You said custard creams!”

“I hate digestives!”

“Shut up! Bed! Now!” Alex pushed and bullied his brother and sister upstairs, in their room and slammed the door. He held it shut for a while until the protests died down, then he went downstairs.

“Peace at last!” He poured himself a glass of chocolate milk, picked up the entire chocolate cake and took everything through to the lounge. He turned on *Love Island* and was halfway through his fourth mouthful when his mum appeared at the door to the living room.

“Sorry, I forgot—” she stopped and stared at Alex. “What are you doing? Where are the twins?”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chat about the story, what the family members liked and didn’t like. You could use some of these questions in your discussion:

- Why did Alex act the way he did? What should happen to him?
- Have you ever been put in charge of something or someone? How did you act?
- If this was a story of Jesus’, what might he be trying to say?

This story is based on Matthew 24:45-51. If you’d like to add a more explicit faith element to your discussion, then read this passage together. Discuss what Jesus might have been saying, encouraging everyone to think about the parable in a new way.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children’s Work*.



THE TWELVE DISCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

Yesterday my daughter asked me for the millionth time why I chose the university I did. She has lots of decisions to make about her future and she's paralysed by it. Part of it is the phenomenon of FOMO (fear of missing out). It can be crippling.

Having too many options doesn't increase your chances of success, it reduces your ability to make a decision. Many young people are inundated with choice and it can result in apathy and avoiding learning how to make decisions. What tips would you give your mentee for better decision making?

Discuss this with your mentee. If they have a big decision to make you could use this tool. I'm calling it 'The twelve disciples of decisions'.

QUESTIONS

Prayerfully consider and discuss each of the following prompts. Allow God to open and shut doors.

1. **HEAD:** What data is there to inform this decision? What do you need to know and where can you get that from?
2. **VALUES:** Which choice best reflects your principles?
3. **FEARS:** What is putting you off? Are these thoughts valid or not? Scared of criticism? Worried about going against expectations? Petrified of failure, or the unknown, or change?
4. **ARGUMENT:** Discuss with someone you know who holds the opposite view to get their ideas and opinion.

5. **EXPERIENCE:** Who has experience you can learn from? What experience do you have of making similar decisions? What was the right thing to do in hindsight? What will you think looking back on this in ten years?
6. **CONTEXT:** Is this decision just about you or others too? Are you being selfish? Selfless? What is best for you and for everyone around you?
7. **FRIENDS:** Ask those who know you best what advice they would give you. Run your plan by them for their feedback.
8. **GOALS:** You should have both short-term and life goals so run this decision through that filter – which option takes you closer to achieving a goal?
9. **CONSEQUENCES:** What are the outcomes of each option? Evaluate the consequences of your actions.
10. **COST:** Is one path easier than another? Think in terms of time, money, relationships...
11. **ELIMINATE:** What don't you need? Can you get rid of it?
12. **HEART:** What emotions do you feel as you consider each option? Which makes you feel excited? Which gives you most life?

Assign each option a score out of ten for each of these prompts. Add up the scores. If you find yourself trying to fiddle the scores to make one option come out on top, that's your answer!

JOEL TOOMBS

has an MA in Christian mentoring and wrote the *Mentoring and Young People* Grove booklet. He is a volunteer youth worker.

THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

These two incredibly brief parables have so much in them to explore creatively. The craft ideas below will help children connect with themes of searching and finding, treasure and what the kingdom of heaven is like.



HIDDEN TREASURE JAR

You will need: jam jars or empty plastic water bottles with all labels removed; sand; small items that will fit inside the jar such as buttons; Lego bricks; beads (try to find some pearl-like beads if possible)

This craft is all about searching, keeping your eyes open and eventually finding what you have been looking for. Choose eight or ten small items to put in your jar and make a list of what they are. Make sure that they will all fit through the neck of the jar or bottle! Fill about a quarter of the jar with sand and then add half of your small items. Now fill the jar half way and add the other items. Cover with a bit more sand so that the sand fills about two thirds of the jar. Screw the lid on the jar and shake. When the sand settles you will be able to see some of the items but not all of them. Keep shaking until you have found them all. Alternatively, if you have managed to find 'pearl' beads, shake the jar until you catch sight of the pearl. How does it feel to want to keep going? the craft as a starting point to talk about the power of fire and how that might connect with the Holy Spirit.



HIDDEN PEARL BISCUITS

You will need: plain biscuits (eg rich tea or digestive); icing sugar; water; colourful sprinkles; white fondant icing; cupcake cases

Food craft activities are always very popular and this is a very simple way to think about the focus of the parable of the precious pearl. With the icing sugar and water, make icing of a spreadable consistency. Spread some icing on a biscuit and decorate with colourful 'treasure' sprinkles. Take a tiny piece of white fondant and roll it into a pearl shape. Put the pearl on top of the biscuit. Turn a cupcake case upside down and place it over the top of your biscuit so that the decoration is covered. Encourage children to give the biscuit to someone else in the family and to explain how it relates to the story they have heard.

KINGDOM PICTURES

You will need: paper; glue sticks; PVA glue; sequins; glitter; card; wool; lolly sticks; fabric; felt-tip pens; foil; feathers; other collage materials

This craft is very open-ended and gives children space to explore the nature of God's kingdom. Think about what the kingdom of God must be if it is like the two incredibly valuable treasures in the parables. What is so precious and so important that you would give everything you own to be part of it? Let your children use any of the collage items they want in order to make a representation of what they think the kingdom is like. They might want to use shapes and textures as well as pictures to show their ideas. Leave some space at the end of the creative time so that children can share what they have done if they would like to.



TREASURE HUNT COLLAGE

You will need: a box or bag to collect 'treasures' in, or access to a camera

The concept of what is a precious or a treasure can depend very much on the person you are talking to. This craft will help children to think about what a treasure actually is. How would they define what is precious and why? Take everyone outside for a walk and challenge them, as they walk along, to find three treasures. They can use a box or a bag to help them carry what they find or alternatively they can take photos. When the walk is over, let your children share their treasures and explain why they think each one is special. Group all of the objects (or photos) together into one big picture and see if there are any common threads. Print any pictures out and stick them up around the house to remind you of the treasures you found.



Watch the whole film together or concentrate on the clip:
00:19:20 – 00:26:07

SYNOPSIS

Set a few years after Woody and his friends found a new home with Bonnie, Woody is adjusting to life as no longer the lead toy. Woody, Buzz Lightyear and the rest of the toy gang go on a road trip with their owner Bonnie. Joining them is a new toy 'Forky', a creation of Bonnie, who thinks he is just rubbish and doesn't understand that he is a toy. Whilst on the road trip Woody is reunited with his long-lost friend Bo Peep. Surprised by her new independent spirit and lifestyle of not having an owner, Woody finds himself faced with a decision, and a future, he never imagined.

Ask your children or young people if anyone can recap the events and plot of any previous *Toy Story* films to bring everyone up to speed. Once this has happened, chat about the films:

- Who is your favourite character in *Toy Story* and why?
- How would you describe the character of Woody in *Toy Story*?
- What is the most memorable moment from all of the *Toy Story* films and why?
- Do you or did you have a favourite toy growing up? What was it and why was it your favourite?

The clip focuses on Forky's desire to stop being a toy and return to being 'trash'. Despite Woody's best efforts to keep him with Bonnie, Forky escapes from the family RV and Woody has to leap out of the van to save him. Later the clip follows Woody and Forky walking down the road trying to find Bonnie again. During their walk, Woody tries to explain to Forky the important role he has to play in Bonnie's life. Forky is convinced that he is trash and nothing more, but Woody explains that because Bonnie created him he is special and important to her. After some discussion Forky decides to go back to the group and be the toy that Bonnie needs.

DISCUSS

After showing the clip, chat about these questions:

- How does Woody describe his conscience? Do you think we all have one?
- How does Woody feel about his new role as Bonnie's toy compared to when he was with Andy?
- Is it wrong for Woody to try and persuade Forky to be a toy if he doesn't want to be?
- Forky realises that he is Bonnie's 'trash' (a positive thing!) – who or what is your 'trash' in your life right now?

If you'd like to extend this into a family Bible time, introduce the book of Ephesians. Give some context to the book and then ask someone to read Ephesians 2:10. Discuss the following questions:

- What is the message of this passage?
- What good works could we do this week for others?
- What does it mean for us to be God's handiwork – what are the implications for how we live our lives?
- Do you think that everyone has a purpose in life?

Woody is committed to helping Forky and Bonnie connect, as well as helping Forky to realise his purpose. How can your family commit to helping others connect this week?

Toy Story 4 is available on DVD and Disney+.

TOM WADE

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THE OTHER SIDE

ARTIST: SZA and Justin Timberlake
SUITABLE FOR: unde-tens

INTRODUCTION

The Trolls return for their sequel film, released directly for home viewing during lockdown. This song speaks to some of the emotions our children may be experiencing, particularly at this time. It reminds us all that God will set our feet back on the rock.

As you begin this activity, provide paper and marker pens and invite your family to doodle how they may be feeling right now. Don't be too directive in questioning, but rather allow conversation to flow and pick up on any particular points raised. Use this as an opportunity to gauge how children may be feeling.

LISTEN AND DISCUSS

If you have seen Trolls World Tour, then chat about the film for a moment. Play the track, checking out the lyrics online, or use the music video version. Allow plenty of time to discuss some of these questions, being led by the questions that mean most to your family:

- Which words stand out to you and why?
- Can you relate to any of the lyrics in this song?
- What does it mean to feel like we're losing our shine?
- What does it actually mean for us to think that the grass is greener on the other side? Why isn't this true?
- What does it mean for us to get back on our feet again?

If you want to extend this activity into a family Bible time, look together at Psalm 40:1-5. Ask your family which lines in this psalm stand out to them. Are there any of these words which they can particularly relate to? Is there anything here that they really needed to hear? Explain that no matter what we are going through or how we are feeling, God is with us in every circumstance and his desire is to set us back on our feet again. David wrote this psalm not as a story of what might be true but as a testimony of what he had experienced God doing for him.

Take the opportunity to pray for each other, for any particular situations you may be experiencing. You may wish to ask about what you prayed for in a few days.

Alternatively, take the time to pray together as a group that God would come and be at work in your lives in the situations you are facing.

BECKY MAY

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MEDITATING ON THE GOOD STUFF

The Bible tells us that we should 'fix our eyes' on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2) – meaning, to keep him, his teachings and his way of life in the forefront of our minds.

So often, we think, or meditate on, things that make us anxious and sad: what that person said to us, the trouble in the world, the upcoming exam and so on. News outlets and social media rarely point us towards the good things in the world because bad news generates more clicks! So, with God's help, we need to put good things in our minds to think about.

Use the list from Philippians below and write down or doodle as many things as you can for each category. They can be things you remember about Jesus, or good gifts from God in your life and the good things you see in the world around you.

“Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things

True, →

← **Noble,**

Reputable, →

← **Authentic,**

Compelling, →

← **Gracious,**

– The best, not the worst;

The beautiful, not the ugly;

**Things to praise,
not things to curse.”**

(Philippians 4:8 MSG)