

May 19, 2024

Bible Passage: Matthew 20:1–16
(Parable of the Workers in the Field)



God Is Gracious

Remember Verse

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! Isaiah 30:18

LESSON OVERVIEW

CONNECT//
10 minutes



Chenille Wire
Creatures

SUPPLIES

- Chenille wires (1 per child)

GATHER//
30 minutes



Remember Verse

Game: Remember Verse
Tic-Tac-Toe

SUPPLIES

- Paper (9 sheets)
- Sticky notes (2 colors)
- Masking or painter's tape
- Coin

Storytelling

SUPPLIES

- Optional: Investigate Questions*
- Bibles
- Male figurines (6 identical, 1 different)
- Coins (6, identical)
- Basket (small)
- Cluster of grapes
- Tape
- Candy (3 identical pieces)

Discussion Questions

RESPOND//
15 minutes



Finger Labyrinth Prayers

SUPPLIES

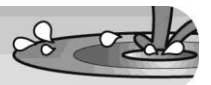
- Finger Labyrinth template*

(Optional)
What Am I?

SUPPLIES

- Stopwatch or timer

BLESS//
5 minutes



SUPPLIES

- Remember Verse cards*
- At Home Weekly: Lesson 12*
- Bible

Further Resources

To help you plan and lead:

**Customizable copy of Lesson 11
2018–19 Scope and Sequence
TruStory How It Works
Small Group Enhancement**

At Home Weekly: Lesson 11

The weekly for the next lesson—to be sent home for preteaching by parents—is found in BLESS.

LEADER PREP

Each week you'll find a list of resources along with encouraging articles that help you prepare your heart to present the lesson.

Inspire *Shares personal stories from fellow ministry leaders about how God has worked in their lives*

Rows of dainty plants stood protected within yellow tubes and wire. The seedlings were frail, but soon they would be beets, chard, squash, and even some lettuces. All this growth would be under the careful care of my dad, or “Papa” as my children call him. Papa composts beautiful soil out of things I’d sooner throw in the trash: eggshells, coffee grounds, watermelon rinds—even dryer sheets. He is committed. I too want to be a committed gardener. But I forget to water on a hot day, I don’t weed properly, I place the seeds too close together—and the plants die.

That summer, Papa gave me the best advice for my adventure with tomatoes. I had arranged too many plants too close together and hadn’t put up the stakes in time, so the tomatoes were growing into a tangled mass. I had even given them too much water, so some plants were getting mushy. As Papa and I surveyed my mess, I felt embarrassed and discouraged. But he told me to leave them alone and they would get what they needed. Sure enough, within a couple of weeks we began harvesting luscious ripe vine tomatoes. After all of my failed attempts, I saw these tomatoes as a gift.

God’s spiritual gift of grace is like my beautiful summer tomatoes. While I, for the life of me, can’t work my way to have better fruit, God gives it to me anyway through His Spirit. In the midst of my tangled attempts, God alone produces beautiful fruit in my marriage, with my children, and in the many wonderful friendships I enjoy. God is gracious, and He gives grace in abundance.

Amy Palmerton
ROCKHARBOR Church

Equip *Offers perspective and context to the lesson’s Bible passage*

God is gracious, but His grace doesn’t always look like what we expect. Through the parable of the workers in the vineyard (or “field,” Matthew 20), Jesus gently reminded His listeners to approach God with gratitude for all He’s given His people, because salvation and even our next breath are gifts from Him. While it’s tempting to compare ourselves with others concerning what we think is fair, Jesus shows how God graciously gives to all of us as He chooses.

Before Jesus told this parable, a rich young man had approached the Lord to ask how he could earn his way into heaven (Matthew 19). Jesus told the man that if he wanted to earn eternal life, he needed to be perfect. The young man went away sad. In response to this, Jesus explained to His disciples that “kingdom economics” differed from what people were used to—that rich men have a difficult time entering the kingdom of heaven. In response to this, Peter wanted to know what the reward would be for the disciples who gave up everything to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:27). Jesus said that in the kingdom there would be rewards, but those rewards would look different from what the disciples expected: many of the last would be first and the first, last.

Knowing this context helps us understand what Jesus was trying to say through this parable: If we want to deal with God on the basis of fairness on our terms, we’ll be in for a shock. No one in the parable of the workers in the vineyard was dealt with unfairly. Everyone got at least what he’d been promised. Though God’s grace doesn’t always look like what we expect, we can always be sure it’s His best for us.

Support *Provides reflection and assessment through encouragement, prayer, and time in God’s Word*

God tells us plainly in Scripture that the tangled mess of our lives allows Him to demonstrate His amazing grace. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 12:9, He says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” What things

in your life do you consider weaknesses or shortcomings? Do you feel discouraged by a difficult situation or relationship? If so, perhaps it's time to surrender to God's amazing grace. The apostle Paul's response to 2 Corinthians 12:9 was one of empowerment, even in his flawed state: "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Maybe it's time to share with a trusted friend your desire to live more fully in God's grace. Maybe God desires to show you, through your faith community and through His Spirit, that His strength is made perfect in your weakness. May God give you the strength you need to see that His grace is more than sufficient for you.

CONNECT//10 minutes



Children develop relationships with their leaders and one another through simple activities and conversation starters.

Chenille Wire Creatures

Children will make their own personal creatures out of chenille wire.

SUPPLIES

- Chenille wires (1 per child)

RELATE

CONNECT QUESTION: Welcome and greet children. Open your time by asking this question: **Have you ever visited a farm or another place in the country? What was it like?**

Invite the kids to sit with you in a circle. Give each child a chenille wire. **Today's part of The Big God Story is set in a field. Lots of creatures live in fields. What are some of your favorite creatures?**

Encourage the kids to discuss their responses to this question. Afterward, give them the chance to create their own personal creature out of their chenille wire. Their creature can be real or imaginary. After a minute or so, go around the circle and invite the kids to share their name, what they created, and why they created this particular creature.

GATHER//30 minutes



Children experience and learn more about God through prayer, storytelling from The Big God Story, an investigation into God's Word, and creative ways to memorize Scripture.

Remember Verse

Each week children will spend time memorizing a portion of Scripture together. The Remember Verse focuses on a character trait of God that's highlighted in today's portion of The Big God Story.

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! Isaiah 30:18

Game: Remember Verse Tic-Tac-Toe

SUPPLIES

- Paper (9 sheets)
- Sticky notes (2 colors)
- Masking or painter's tape
- Coin

SET UP

Arrange the nine sheets of paper into a three-by-three grid on the floor to create a tic-tac-toe grid. Leave some space (about a foot) between each sheet. Tape the sheets to the floor.

RELATE

Invite the kids to play this fun game of tic-tac-toe as they remember their verse. Before you start playing, say the Remember Verse a few times until the kids remember it. Then split the kids into two teams. Stick one color of sticky notes on one team's shirts and the other color of sticky notes on the other team's shirts. This way they'll remember who

is on each team once they're standing on the tic-tac-toe squares. Then invite the kids on each team to stand in a line on either side of the grid. Flip a coin to see which team goes first. Choose a member of the first team and ask her to recite the verse. If she can recite it, she gets to stand on a square. Then choose a member of the second team and ask him to recite the verse. If he can recite it, he gets to stand on another square. Continue until one team wins the game. Play as many times as you'd like. Consider switching up the teams—making sure to change out the team members' colored sticky notes.

Storytelling

Bible Passage: Matthew 20:1–16

Storytelling Technique: Figurine Puppets

God Is Gracious

SUPPLIES

- Optional: Investigate Questions (see Resources)
- Bibles
- Male figurines (6 identical, 1 different)
- Coins (6, identical)
- Basket (small)
- Cluster of grapes
- Tape
- Candy (3 identical pieces)

SET UP

Stand the six identical figurines next to the basket in your Storytelling space. These figurines will be the “workers.” Place the one different figurine next to the cluster of grapes. This figurine will be the “landowner.”

RELATE

Invite the kids to join you in a circle. Invite a volunteer to stand. Explain that you will give this volunteer a piece of candy after he does jumping jacks for one minute. Then invite him to start the jumping jacks. After about 20 seconds, invite another volunteer to stand and also start doing jumping jacks for a piece of candy. After about 20 more seconds, invite another volunteer to stand and also start doing jumping jacks for a piece of candy. Encourage the group to cheer on the jumpers. About 20 seconds after the third person started jumping, tell all three kids to stop. Give each child a piece of candy, thank them for participating, and have them take their seats.

Each of these volunteers did jumping jacks for a set amount of time. The first person did jumping jacks for 60 seconds, the second for 40 seconds, and the third for 20 seconds. Do you think it was fair for me to give all three kids the same amount of candy? Invite responses. **Good thoughts. Today we're going to hear a parable in which people experienced a similar situation. It's the parable of the workers in the field. First, let's ask God to teach us.** Lead kids in a Prayer of Release to pause, be still, and ask the Holy Spirit to quiet their hearts and minds.

Before we begin, what's a parable? Invite responses. **Right! A parable is story that teaches spiritual truth. Jesus often told parables to reveal important things to His listeners. In last week's parable, Jesus taught His followers about God's forgiveness. Jesus told the parable we'll hear about today to express the fact that God is gracious—and that His grace is for everyone. What does *grace* mean?** Interact with responses. **Grace means getting something you don't deserve. Okay, let's look at this part of The Big God Story.** Invite children to open their Bibles to Matthew 20:1–16. You can either read the parable straight from Scripture or follow the script below.

Invite kids to follow along as you read Matthew 20:1. **“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.” A vineyard is a field where farmers grow grapes.** Move landowner figurine next to the worker figurines.

Encourage children to follow along as you read v. 2. **“He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.” A denarius was a small coin used in Bible times. It was worth the pay for about one day's work.** Move two worker figurines near the cluster of grapes.

Invite kids to follow along as you read vv. 3–5. **“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.”** Move two more worker figurines near grapes.

Invite kids to follow along as you read vv. 5–7. **“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ‘Because no one has hired us,’**

they answered. He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’” Move last two worker figurines near grapes.

Invite children to follow along as you read vv. 8–10. “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.” Place one coin in front of each worker figurine.

Hold up one of the worker figurines as you speak the next line as if he’s the one speaking. Invite kids to follow along in vv. 11–12. “When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’”

Continue with vv. 13–16. “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

What do you think about this parable? Invite responses. How is this parable similar to the game we played at the beginning of our Storytelling time? Interact with kids’ responses. Good thoughts. Each of the workers received the same pay even though they worked different amounts of time—just like each of the volunteers received the same amount of candy even though they did jumping jacks for different amounts of time. We learned earlier that Jesus told this parable to teach His listeners about how God is gracious. How do you think this parable shows God’s grace? Invite answers.

What does *grace* mean? Pause for responses. Right. It means getting something that you don’t deserve. The landowner in the parable represents God the Father. The landowner gave a fair wage to the first men—what he had promised them—and a generous wage to the other men. You see, the landowner didn’t have to hire the men; he could’ve let them stand there all day without work. But because he was gracious and generous, he gave the men work.

In a similar way, God didn’t have to send Jesus to save us from our sins. He did so because He is gracious, He loves us, and He wants to be in relationship with us. Invite kids to look up Romans 3:23–24 and follow along as you read. The Bible says “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

What amazing news! God is so gracious that He gave us the chance to be in relationship with Him even though we don’t deserve it. We can be thankful for the fact that He loves us equally but treats us uniquely. We can rejoice in each unique way God shows grace to every member of His family. Share a story from your life about a time God was gracious to you.

Discussion Questions

- What does the word *grace* mean?
- Do you think it was fair that all of the workers got the same amount? Why or why not? Matthew 20:12
- In what way did the landowner show grace to the workers? Matthew 20:13–15
- Share a time you were treated unfairly. What was that like?
- How has God shown you grace in your life?

RESPOND//15 minutes



Children reflect on what the Holy Spirit is teaching them and respond to God through creative activities and games.

Finger Labyrinth Prayers

Using a template as a guide, kids are invited to pray and ponder God’s grace.

SUPPLIES

- Finger Labyrinth template (see Resources)

PREPARE AHEAD

Print a copy of the Finger Labyrinth template for each child.

RELATE

Jesus' parable about the workers in the vineyard gives us a picture of God's graciousness. Grace means getting something you don't deserve. We don't deserve God's love for us. We did nothing to earn God's love or Jesus' death on the cross for our sins. Even so, as those who have put our faith in Him, we get the amazing benefit and joy of being in relationship with a God who loves us so much.

Let's listen to some verses that describe God's great love for us—and His grace toward us. Read the following passage over the kids: **"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus"** Ephesians 2:4–6.

Invite the children to sit quietly as they think about the words they just heard, talk with God, and praise Him for His grace. If you want, read the verse slowly once again. As the kids ponder, pass out the Finger Labyrinth templates. Have kids find a quiet place in the room and take time to slowly trace their finger along the path of the labyrinth—all the way to the center and back out. As they move their finger along the path, invite them to spend time thinking about God's grace—how they've seen His grace in their lives or the lives of the people they know. Invite them to thank God for His gracious gift of relationship with them and for all of the good gifts He's given them.

(Optional) What Am I?

Invite your kids to play a fun game similar to Charades.

SUPPLIES

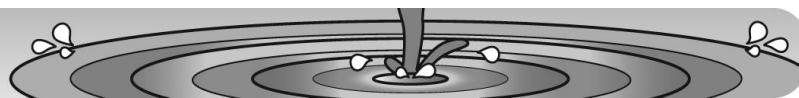
- Stopwatch or timer

RELATE

Today we heard a parable about some people who worked really hard in the fields—and all got paid the same amount. The amounts the workers received were fair, but they were also generous. God is a gracious, generous God. Reinforce what the children have heard as they play this fun game like Charades.

Split the kids into two teams. Choose one team to go first. Explain that one member from each team will act as a person, a place, or a thing that he heard about in today's parables. For example, a child might act as the landowner, a bunch of grapes, or the marketplace. (If she struggles to think of a person, place, or thing, whisper a suggestion to her.) As she acts out her person, place, or thing, her teammates will yell out who or what they think she's acting as. The team will have 30 seconds to guess. If her teammates guess correctly within 30 seconds, they get a point. If they don't guess correctly within 30 seconds, they don't get a point. Then the other team gets to play. Make sure each child gets a chance to act as a person, place, or thing. Then add up the points and see which team won!

BLESS//5 minutes



Children receive a blessing from their leaders and sometimes one another. A blessing can be a prayer of commission, a portion of Scripture, or words to encourage and guide.

SUPPLIES

- Remember Verse cards (see Resources)
- At Home Weekly: Lesson 12 (see Resources)
- Bible

RELATE

Gather the children and read the following blessing from 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17:

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

After you have spoken the blessing over the kids, invite them to join you in an echo prayer. To do so, simply speak one line of prayer and then pause and allow the children to repeat that line. Explain to the kids that when they speak the prayer, they're using their own unique voices to bless the group.

God, You are gracious.

Repeat.

God, You love each of us equally.

Repeat.

God, You created each of us uniquely.

Repeat.

God, You are good. We praise You. Amen.

Repeat.

May you see God's graciousness in your life. May you notice the ways He shows love and kindness to you.

Send home Remember Verse cards and the At Home Weekly with your kids.