

Introduction to the children's activity material for Love Life Live Lent

This material is designed to be used with a group of children alongside the *Love Life Live Lent* children's booklet.

The material links with the themes of the booklets and each week focuses on a well-known parable from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

The material includes ideas for you to choose from to help you plan your own sessions – 'pick and mix' from the ideas to create your own session plans.

Age ranges are a guide only – choose activities that are appropriate for the age and ability of your group and the resources you have available.

There are ideas for telling the parable, discussing the issues raised, activities, prayers and songs – choose ideas from the categories that are most appropriate for your group.

Some of the ideas may be adapted to use in all-age worship.

Outline of the material

The themes link to those in the *Love Life Live Lent* booklets and are as follows:

Week 1: Home & Family

Bible passage: The parable of the lost son (Luke 15.11-32)

Week 2: Neighbourhood

Bible passage: The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37)

Week 3: Community

Bible passage: The parable of the great feast (Luke 14.15-24)

Week 4: School

Bible passage: The parable of the sower (Luke 8.4-8)

Week 5: Global

Bible passage: The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12.13-21)

Week 6: God

Bible passage: The parable of the pearl (Matthew 13.45-46)

Songs

Songs appropriate to the theme are included in the sessions.

However, the following songs can be used with any of the Parables during Lent:

Can we love one another? (KS-22)
Clap your hands (KS-29)
Colours of day (JP-28, KS2-433, SOFK-14)
Give me oil in my lamp (JP-50, KS-66)
God forgave my sin (Freely, freely) (JP-54, SOFK-37)
God loves you and I love you (KS-80, SOFK-42)
I got you Lord (Help me be your eyes) (CD -F-9)
I reach up high (CD - SH2-4, KS-171)
Jesus' hands were kind hands (JP-134, KS-194)
Jesus never, never, never turned anyone away (KS2 602)
Jesus went out of his way (KS2-610)
Make me a channel of your peace (JP-161, KS-248, SOFK-130)
Make me a servant (JP-162)
The way it's gonna be (CD - F-3)
This little light of mine (JP-258, KS-343)
We really want to thank you Lord (JP-268, SOFK-179)

Key

JP Junior Praise (Marshall Pickering, 2004)
KS and KS2 Kidsource and Kidsource 2 (Kevin Mayhew, 1999 and 2002)
SOFK Songs of Fellowship for Kids (Kingsway, 1998)
SH The best of Spring Harvest Kids Praise and Little Kids (Spring Harvest, 2002)
F Fandabidozzie CD – Doug Horley (Kingsway, 2003)
LJ Lovely Jubbly CD – Doug Horley (Kingsway)
WWJH We want to see Jesus lifted high CD – Doug Horley (Kingsway, 1996)
COS Colours of Salvation CD – Jim Bailey (Kingsway)

Please note that we have not provided specific material for the 'Environment' theme. For free resources on this theme, go to www.ecocongregation.org, click on 'Free resources' and then go to Module 4 'Working with children'.

Acknowledgements

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The 'Act out the story' activity in session 1 is based on the story 'The Two Brothers' from Sue Kirby, *Stories Jesus Told Book 2*, CPAS. Copyright permission sought.

The 'Blind obstacle course' in session 2, the 'Thank you' balloon prayer in session 3 and some of the activities in session 4 are taken from Margaret Spivey and Anna Jean, *Step into the story*, Copyright © BRF 2003 and reproduced by permission.
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The 'What did you have for breakfast' activity in session 6 is taken from Phil and Rachel Bowyer, *The Whole Wide World*, Authentic Lifestyle, 2006 and reproduced by permission.

Week 1: Home & Family

The parable of the two sons (Luke 15.11-32)

Theme

Choosing to care for people in your family.

Aims

- To encourage children to understand that everyone needs care – brothers, sisters, adults, in fact anyone who looks after them.
- To help children to realize that it's important to show they care for others through their actions. Jesus is more interested in what they do rather than in what they just say, but don't mean. Like the son in the parable, changing their mind to do something good is not a sign of weakness but a positive choice and a sign of strength.

Telling the parable

- Read the story from an age-appropriate Bible (e.g. *The Lion Children's Bible* for under 5s (by Pat Alexander and Carolyn Cox, Lion, 1991 or *The Good News Bible: Rainbow Edition* for 5-11s, Collins, 2004)
- 'The Two Sons' in *Stories Jesus Told: Favourite Stories from the Bible* by Mick Inkpen and Nick Butterworth (Candle Books, 2005, ISBN 088070148X)
- The rap 'Actions Speak Louder Than Words' from *Rap, Rhyme & Reason* by Anita Haigh, Scripture Union, 1998, ISBN 1859990363
- 'The Son & the Daughter' in *Stories for Interactive Assemblies* by Nigel Bishop, Barnabas, 2006, ISBN 1841014654

Act out the story

You will need: a broom, toy cars and garage, two pairs of wellies, a mock 'TV', a narrator, two brothers and a Dad. The narrator reads the story while the other characters mime their parts.

'Sam and Joe are two brothers. Dad asks Sam, the elder brother, to help him sweep up the leaves from the drive, but Sam says he is too busy playing with his cars and garage. After his Dad has gone, Sam realizes that he can play with them anytime, so he puts on his wellies and goes outside to help. Meanwhile Dad has gone to find Joe, who's watching TV, to ask him to help. Joe says that he will and he'll go and put his wellies on. Sam is sweeping up the leaves when his Dad arrives and soon the two of them have finished. Joe is still watching TV.'

(Based on the story 'The two brothers' from Stories Jesus Told Book 2 by Sue Kirby, CPAS. ISBN 0-9-7750-68-0)

Discussion points

You may wish to use some of the following:

I wonder why the elder son changed his mind and went to help his father.

I wonder how that made his father feel.

I wonder if it was easy for the son to change his mind.

I wonder why the other son said he would help but then didn't.

I wonder how it made a) the elder son and b) the father feel when the other son didn't do what he said he would do.

Do you ever say you will do things and then don't do them?

I wonder how your friends and family feel when you don't do what you have said you will do.

Is it sometimes difficult to change your mind and do the right thing?

Who does what jobs in your house?

Who looks after you at home? What things could you do to help them and show them you care?

I wonder how you think those who look after you would feel if you helped them more often.

How do you feel when you're helping others?

Give out and look through the *Love Life Live Lent* children's booklet. Ask the children which of the actions they think they can do this week to show they care for others.

Activities

Play charades

Ask the children to identify domestic tasks that they think they could do to help care for others at home.

Divide the children into groups of 3 or 4. One group is given one of the identified domestic tasks and mimes it for the rest of the children, who guess what it is.

Play Stuck in the Mud

Choose one child to be the 'tagger'. The other children run around and when the 'tagger' touches them they become stuck and must stand still with their arms stretched out. The children who are still running around try to free those stuck in the mud by running under their arms. The aim is to encourage the children to work together and help to free each other. Have a time limit for each 'tagger' to tag as many as possible then choose another child.

Food activities

8–11s

Show the children how to make pancakes so they can help make them at home as well as sharing them with their family.

5–8s

Help the children to learn how to make a sandwich, which they can then take with them to share with someone at home.

Under 5s

Under 5s can use icing to decorate a cake or biscuit to give to someone who cares for

them.

Guess the domestic item

Divide the children into groups of 3 – 4. Each group chooses a child to be the ‘artist’. The artist leaves the room whilst the remainder of the group chooses a domestic item. The artist returns and has 5 – 10 minutes to draw the domestic item following instructions given to them by the rest of the group without naming the item.

Family coat of arms

Draw a shield and divide it into 4 sections. Give each child a copy of the shield and ask them to complete the sections as follows:

1st section: write their family name.

2nd section: draw a picture of their family.

3rd and 4th sections: draw pictures or write how they can help other members of their family.

How do you spend your time?

The children ask each other what they like to do when they come home after school.

Collate all the answers and put the information into a simple bar chart or pictograph.

Do any of the activities involve helping others in their family? If not, what could they change to show they care about other members of their family?

Prayer

Either:

Cut a simple house shape out of paper and give one to each of the children. Ask them to draw on their paper house stick figures of everyone who lives in their home.

Encourage them to think about what jobs each family member does and pray for the roles they each play within the family. Ask them to pray about how they could show each family member that they care for them in the week ahead.

Or:

On each of two pieces of poster-sized paper draw a shopping basket/trolley. One basket/trolley should be full of food and the other empty. Ask the children to sit or lie down on their tummies in a circle and place the shopping basket/trolley full of food in the centre. Thank God for all the food he provides for them and for the meals they will eat today. Next, place the empty shopping basket/trolley poster in the centre of the circle. Pray for all those people who are hungry because they have very little or no food, wherever they are in the world.

Or:

Give each child a piece of rope or cord. The children think of a promise they could make to a family member to do something for that person during the week to show them that they care about them, and then tie a knot in the rope to remind them of their promise. Say a prayer over the rope asking Jesus to give them the resolve to keep their promises – Jesus, help me only to make promises that I mean and give me the strength always to keep my

promises, especially when they help others, even if that's difficult for them sometimes.
Amen.'

Songs

'As for me and my house' (CD - COS3-10. CD - SH1-2, KS-12,SOFK-5)
'Jesus put this song into our hearts' (KS-209, SOFK-111)

Week 2: Neighbourhood

The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37)

Theme

Thinking about how to care for your neighbourhood.

Aims

- To encourage children to think about practical ways they can contribute to their neighbourhood and community.
- To help the children to consider not only who their neighbours might be, but also the locality where they live and how they can make it a better place.

Telling the parable

- Read the story from an age appropriate Bible (e.g. *The Lion Children's Bible* for under 5s (by Pat Alexander and Carolyn Cox, Lion, 1991 or *The Good News Bible: Rainbow Edition* for 5–11s, Collins, 2004)
- 'The Good Stranger' in *Stories Jesus Told: Favourite Stories from the Bible* by Mick Inkpen and Nick Butterworth, Candle Books, 2005, ISBN 088070148X
- 'Parable of the Good Samaritan' in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 3* by Jerome W. Berryman, Living the Good News, 2002, ISBN 188910897
- 'Good Sam' in *Telling Even More Tale: Interactive Bible stories and readings* by Dave and Lynn Hopwood, CPAS, 2000, ISBN 1902041119
- *A Teddy Horsley Book. Neighbour: Betsy Bear helps her neighbours* by Leslie Francis and Nicola Slee, Christian Education Publications, 1994, ISBN 071970846X
- 'The Class Pain' in *Stories for Interactive Assemblies* by Nigel Bishop, Barnabas, 2006, ISBN 1841014654

Act out the story

In a cloth bag put props to represent each character in the story.

Suggestions:

- Traveller – rucksack
- Robbers – masks
- Priest – cross
- Levite – Bible
- Samaritan – item of clothing or symbol from a foreign country
- Innkeeper – apron

As you tell the story remove that character's prop from the bag. 'Walk' the traveller's prop down an imaginary road and encounter each of the other 'characters' along the way.

Discussion points

You may wish to use some of the following:

I wonder how the traveller felt a) when he set out, b) when he was attacked, c) when the priest and the levite walked past him and d) when the Samaritan helped him.

I wonder why the priest and levite didn't help the injured man.

I wonder why the Samaritan helped.

I wonder how each character felt.

I wonder who you think your neighbours are.

I wonder who needs help in your neighbourhood.

I wonder how far you think your neighbourhood extends.

I wonder how we can do the same as the Good Samaritan.

I wonder how you could make your neighbourhood a better place.

I wonder what it would cost you to care about your neighbours and neighbourhood.

Look through the *Love Life Live Lent* children's booklet. Ask the children which of the actions they think they can do this week to show they care about their neighbourhood and those who live, work and worship within it.

Activities

Local people

Invite someone who does a job serving the local community to talk to the children about what they do.

TV interviews

Ask children in the group to role play the different characters in the story. Each character is interviewed by a TV journalist to get their 'take' on the incident.

Questions the journalist could ask are:

Where were you?

What did you see?

What happened to you?

How do you feel about it now?

What do you think about what the thieves/priest/levite did?

If you have the resources you could video or record the interviews.

Litter pick

If the location of your church and the number of supervising adults you have permits, organize the children into teams of 3 – 4 and take them out into the church grounds or nearby streets to pick up litter.

Who are our neighbours?

Collect lots of old magazines/newspapers. Ask the children to cut out pictures of who they think are their neighbours and then stick them on a large piece of paper or card to make a collage of 'neighbours'.

Blind obstacle course

Set up a mini obstacle course using beanbags, cushions, cones, boxes etc. Divide the children into pairs. One is the wounded traveller and the other the good Samaritan. The traveller has been temporarily blinded in the attack by the robbers and so this child needs to be blindfolded. The good Samaritan guides the wounded traveller around the obstacle course and gets him/her to the end without mishap.

(Based on an activity in Step into the story by Margaret Spivey and Anna Jean, ISBN 1-84101-002-2)

Prayer

Either:

Draw the outline of a bed on a large piece of paper. Give each child a plaster and ask them to write on it the name of someone they know who is unwell, in hospital or feeling sad and lonely. Stick all the plasters on to the bed. Pray collectively for all the people mentioned, that Jesus would care for them and comfort them. Pray also for all the people who are caring for them – their families, doctors, nurses.

Or:

Have props for people who do jobs in the local community (e.g. milk bottle – milkman, letter – postman, toy fire engine – fireman, spanner – car mechanic, etc.). Ask each child to hold a prop and say a one-line prayer for the people who do that job – e.g. ‘Thank you, God, for postmen who deliver our letters.’

Or:

The good Samaritan shares his oil, wine, donkey and money with a complete stranger who has been injured. Give each child a small lump of air-dry clay or plasticine and ask them to model something they are willing to share, with someone they know, during the week to be a Good Neighbour – e.g. a favourite toy, game, snack, pocket money, etc. When everyone has finished pray together:

Jesus, we offer you the models of the things we wish to share in the coming week.

Help each of us to be ready and willing to share whenever we can.

Amen.

Songs

‘Pressed down, shaken together’ (CD - COS 1-12, SOFK-149)

‘If you see someone lying in the road’ (JP-95)

‘When I needed a neighbour’ (JP-275)

Week 3: Community

The parable of the great feast (Luke 14.15-24)

Theme

Caring for those who are left out or hidden in the wider community.

Aims

- To encourage children to have an understanding of what it feels like to be in the shoes of those who are left out and hidden in the wider community.
- To help children to appreciate those people in the community who help us – e.g. police, ambulance service, fire service, the caring professions.

Telling the parable

- Read the story from an age-appropriate Bible (e.g. *The Lion Children's Bible* for under 5s (by Pat Alexander and Carolyn Cox, Lion, 1991 or *The Good News Bible: Rainbow Edition* for 5–11s, Collins, 2004)
- 'The Great Banquet' in *Young Children and Worship* by Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989, ISBN 0664250408
- 'The Best Party Ever' in *Stories for Interactive Assemblies* by Nigel Bishop, Barnabas, 2006, ISBN 1841014654

Act out the story

Ask the children to bring with them a doll or cuddly toy they want to invite to the feast (have some squash and biscuits as the feast). Have other dolls/toys around the room who are not invited and on the outside of the group – they could have labels on saying that they are blind, lame, homeless etc. or have props – a walking stick, bandaged legs, cardboard box. Each invited 'guest' makes an excuse not to come to the feast (the children can make these up or, for younger children, have some prepared excuses) and leaves the group (place them outside the room or have a separate area for departed guests) until they have all gone. Ask the children to choose another 'guest' from outside the group and bring them to the feast. Have fun sharing the 'feast' together with the new 'guests'.

Discussion points

You may wish to use some of the following;

- I wonder how the man felt as he was preparing for the feast.
- I wonder how you feel when you're getting ready for your party.
- I wonder how the man felt when his guests made excuses not to come.
- I wonder what excuses you might make not to go to a party.
- I wonder how you feel about these excuses.
- What excuses do people make today not to listen to Jesus and accept his invitation?
- Have you ever been unexpectedly invited to something at the last minute?

I wonder how you felt.

How would you feel if you were at a party with people you believe didn't deserve to be there?

I wonder how the left-out people felt when they were invited.

I wonder how popular people might feel when they found out who went in their place.

How does this parable make you challenge the way you think about the left-out/hidden in the community?

Look through the *Love Life Live Lent* children's booklet. Ask the children which of the actions they think they can do this week to show they care about those who serve their community and those who are left out in their community.

Activities

Heart-shaped biscuits

Bake in advance enough heart-shaped biscuits for your group. Ask the children to decorate the biscuits with icing, rainbow sprinkles, chocolate chips, buttons etc. Ask them to think about people less fortunate than them that they'd like to give the biscuits to – perhaps someone they know who is unwell, or an adult could take them to a local care home or refuge.

Pass on a smile

A good way of cheering up those who are sad is to smile at them. Ask the children to sit in a circle. The leader smiles at the person next to them and says 'this smile is for you [name] and [someone who is left out/hidden, e.g. a homeless person] – pass it on.' The smiles are then passed around the circle with different people who may need cheering up being mentioned each time. If the children are present for the Peace during the service they can pass on a smile as well as a handshake to the rest of the congregation (this will need to be explained by the president to the congregation in advance).

Ask younger children to make a head (or whole person) out of Play Doh or air-dry clay and to draw a smiley face on it using plastic modelling tools. Explain that when we smile at each other it makes us feel happy, and get them to pass their smiley faces to each other to make everyone feel happier.

'Left out' games

Piggy in the middle – two children throw a ball or beanbag to each other and a third tries to intercept it.

Play music and when the music stops ask the children to get into groups of three (or a number that results in someone always being left out).

All the children except one form a tight circle and attempt to keep out the one child on the outside who tries to break in.

Following these games discuss with the children what it feels like to be left out and to keep someone out.

Have a party

Have party hats, decorations, food, bubbles, games, balloons, music etc. Explain to the children that Jesus wants everyone to go to his party and doesn't want anyone to be left out. Ask the children about the best parties they've been to and how they might feel if they couldn't go to a party.

'Big Issue'

With older children, look at some copies of the *Big Issue*. Discuss who sells the *Big Issue*, and how it helps them. Look at some of the articles together to get a different 'worldview' and see how many 'disadvantaged' groups are mentioned in that issue.

Party invitations and replies

Divide the children into three groups. One group represents the man hosting the feast and designs an invitation to his party. A second group represents the invited guests and writes replies making excuses why they can't go. A third group represents the people in the streets and writes replies expressing delight at their unexpected invitation and accepting. All three groups act out the story using what they've written.

'Being blind'

Get the children to experience what it might be like to be blind. Lay out on a table pencils and paper, plastic cups and water in jugs, toothpaste and toothbrushes, items of clothing with plenty of fastenings. Take it in turn to blindfold groups of children and explain that, using the items on the table, their task is to write their name, pour themselves a cup of water without spilling any, put toothpaste on a toothbrush and do up all the fastenings on the item of clothing. Discuss with the children what it felt like afterwards.

Imagining you're someone else

The Cherokees have a saying 'Grant that I may never find fault with my neighbour until I have walked the trail of life in his moccasins'. Discuss with the children what it might be like to live the life of those left out/hidden in their community, e.g. someone physically/mentally disabled, blind, deaf, an asylum seeker, imprisoned, homeless, bullied/unpopular at school, etc

Prayer

Either:

Build a house out of toy building bricks or Duplo and place a doll/cuddly toy inside. Next to it place a cardboard box with a doll/cuddly toy inside. Give thanks for all of us who have warm, comfortable homes and pray for all those who are homeless and live out in the cold in doorways or cardboard boxes. Pray for all who help those who are homeless.

Or:

Ask the children to close their eyes and imagine they're huddled up in the doorway of an empty shop. It's dark and beginning to rain. They can't get comfortable because the ground is hard and cold. They can't get to sleep. They have no belongings except the torn, old clothes they're wearing. They haven't eaten for three days and their stomach aches because they're so hungry. How do they feel? Pray for all those who feel like this every day, that

Jesus will comfort and heal them with his love. Pray for all who work to help those who have no home, that God will end their suffering.

Or:

With a permanent marker write party 'Thank You's' on inflated balloons – Thank you, God, for yummy food, fun games, music, friends, etc. Gather the children into a circle and explain that they are going to talk to God and say thank you to him for giving us parties to enjoy. Give a balloon to each child and tell them to hold on to it carefully. Ask an adult to pray each thank you prayer whilst the child throws the balloon repeatedly up in the air. Finish with an 'Amen' together.

Songs

'One leg Greg' (CD - COS 2- 9)

'Jesus never, never, never turned anyone away' (KS2 602)

Week 4: School

The parable of the sower (Luke 8.4-8)

Theme

Choosing to allow the seeds of what we learn to grow and bear fruit.

Aims

- To encourage the children to recognize that they are the seeds that God has planted and that they can choose how they grow and bear fruit.
- To help them to realize that God is planting seeds in them and they have a choice in what they hear and how they respond to God's word.

Telling the parable

- Read the story from an age appropriate Bible (e.g. *The Lion Children's Bible* for under 5s (by Pat Alexander and Carolyn Cox, Lion, 1991 or *The Good News Bible: Rainbow Edition* for 5–11s, Collins, 2004)
- 'Parable of the Sower' in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 3* by Jerome W. Berryman, Living the Good News, 2002 (ISBN 1889108979) Page 28 of *Telling Even More Tales: Interactive Bible stories and readings* by Dave and Lynn Hopwood, CPAS, 2000 (ISBN 1902041119)
- 'The Maths Investigation' in *Stories for Interactive Assemblies* by Nigel Bishop, Barnabas, 2006, ISBN 1841014654

If you have different ages in the group ask the older children to read the story to the younger ones.

Act out the story

Tell the parable using the following sound effects:

Seeds being scattered – shake rice or dry beans in a plastic box.

Birds pecking – stretch an elastic band around a ruler and 'ping' it.

Wind blowing – wave around large pieces of thick cardboard.

Seeds landing on the rocks – shake a small wooden or metal box filled with stones.

Plants growing quickly – rustle a large plastic bag.

Plants suddenly shrivelling up and dying in the sun – blow up a balloon and then let the air out of it.

Thorn bushes growing – rub together pieces of rough sandpaper.

Plants growing among thorn bushes – screw up paper and rub it against sandpaper.

Nice 'plant growing' sound – balloon pump, pushed in and out.

Seeds made from the plants in the good soil – shake a large packet of seeds.

(Based on an activity from Step into the story by Margaret Spivey and Anna Jean, ISBN 1-84101-002-2, p. 85)

Discussion points

I wonder how the man felt about the seeds that didn't grow.
I wonder how he felt about the seeds that grew.
I wonder who is like the path.
I wonder who is like the rocky ground.
I wonder who is like the thorny ground.
I wonder who is like the good soil.
I wonder how you can be more like the seed that falls on the good ground.
I wonder how you can learn more about how God wants you to grow.
I wonder how you can hear God's word.
I wonder what difference it would make to your life if you heard and responded to God's word.
I wonder how you can be a good friend/neighbour to others at school.

Look through the *Love Life Live Lent* children's booklet. Ask the children which of the actions they think they can do this week to show they care about their school and everyone who works and learns there.

Activities

Good neighbour garden

Play soft, sunny background music. Ask the children to imagine they are in the garden, scattering seeds like the farmer did. It's spring and the sun is shining. The seeds are 'good neighbour' seeds. What will these seeds look like when they've grown straight and strong? Allow about 3 – 5 minutes.

Ask the children to either draw a picture of a grown good neighbour seed, or write some things that good neighbours might do on a postcard-sized piece of card or paper. Attach the postcard to a lollipop stick and 'plant' all of them in a tray of soil to make a 'Good neighbour garden'.

Farmer's field

Ask each child to make a farmer's field on a polystyrene plate. Use sandpaper for the path, dried beans/pulses for the rocky ground, screwed-up black paper for the thorns and cotton wool for the good soil. Sprinkle some mustard and cress seeds over the plate and water. The children can watch where the seeds grow.

Planting seeds

Encourage the children to plant seeds to give to someone at school/Sunday school/nursery/playgroup.

For each child you will need:

- A small plant pot
- Potting compost
- Seeds
- Name label

Explain to the children that the seeds will need sunlight and regular watering to grow. Discuss where they might put their plant pot at home and how often they need to water it. Ask them what **they** need to grow. How does hearing and responding to God's word help them to grow? How might they grow differently if they choose to ignore God?

God's word

Draw 4 pictures on large sheets of paper and put them up on the 4 walls of the room:

1. Birds pecking at the seeds
2. Withered plants on the rocks
3. Plants among the thorn bushes
4. Straight, strong plants

Explain to the children what the pictures represent:

1. God's word being snatched away – not listening very carefully to God's word so it's quickly forgotten.
2. God's message not taking root – not wanting to find out and learn more to deepen your faith.
3. God's word being choked out – filling our lives with so many worldly things, there's no time for God.
4. God's word being heard and understood – listening, understanding and responding to God's word.

When a leader calls out 'God's word' followed by:

1. 'is snatched away'
2. 'has no roots'
3. 'is choked out'
4. 'is heard and understood'

The children have to run as quickly as they can to the picture that matches the phrase. After you've played the game ask older children to relate the pictures to what not listening and responding to God's word might mean in terms of creating (or not creating) a good neighbourhood by asking them to give an example of what could happen in their neighbourhood if God's word was snatched away, choked out, had no roots or was heard and understood.

(Based on an activity from Step into the story by Margaret Spivey and Anna Jean, ISBN 1-84101-002-2, p. 84)

Strip cartoon

Explain that the seeds that fell on the good soil and grew straight and tall and strong represent those who hear and respond to the word of God. How might someone who listened to God be a good neighbour at school? Draw a follow-on cartoon story of a good neighbour seedling at school. What might the seedling say to his/her classmates? How would he/she behave? What 'good deeds' might he/she do?

Dear agony aunt ...

Ask some of the children to write letters from the farmer to an 'agony aunt' asking what he/she should do about the seeds who fell on the path/on the rocky ground/amongst the thorns. Ask the other children to write replies to the farmer, giving advice on what he should do.

Prayer

Either:

Action prayer: Children form a circle and start curled up in a ball on the floor, then stretch up tall with their arms in the air at the appropriate times and end standing with their arms upwards, holding each other's hands. A leader reads the words, whilst the children do the actions.

I'm just a little seed and I want to grow up straight and strong and tall.

But I've fallen on to the path and the birds are pecking me so I can't grow.

I'm just a little seed and I want to grow up straight and strong and tall.

But I've fallen on to stony ground and my roots are too small so I can't grow.

I'm just a little seed and I want to grow up straight and strong and tall.

But I've fallen on to something thorny that's choking my roots so I can't grow.

I'm just a little seed and I want to grow up straight and strong and tall.

At last I've fallen on to some really good soil. I can feel the sun and there's plenty of water to drink. At last I'm growing and growing and growing and now I'm straight and strong and tall.

(Based on an activity from Step into the story by Margaret Spivey and Anna Jean, ISBN 1-84101-002-2, p. 90)

Or:

Ask the children to sit or lie on their tummies in a circle. Light a candle and place it in the centre. Ask each child in turn to say the name or job of someone at school (or nursery, playgroup, toddler group) they want to pray for.

Pray for each person/job: 'Thank you, Jesus, for look after him/her and keep him/her safe. Thank you too for all the children and all the people who work in schools, nurseries and playgroups in our neighbourhood.'

Or:

Ask the children to sit or lie on their tummies in a circle. Put symbols of different world religions in the centre, explaining to the children what they are as you place them down. (e.g. Islam – Koran, Judaism – Star of David, Hinduism – Brahma, Buddhism – Buddha, Christianity – Cross) Pray for peace between all people no matter what religion they are. Ask the children to pray for someone they know of a different faith, if they wish.

Songs

'I can do all things' (CD - COS 1-9, KS-124, SOFK-72)

'I want to be a tree that's bearing fruit' (WWJH-4 KS-180, SOFK-101)

Week 5: Global

The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12.13-21)

Theme

Being aware that our global responsibility to all peoples and to our planet is more important than the things we have.

Aims

- To encourage children to be aware of people living in other countries who have different life experiences, e.g. those suffering the effects of drought and famine, those who don't receive a fair wage for their work.
- To help children to realize that it is more important to look after people than to acquire more and more things.
- To help children to understand that our greed can affect people on the other side of the world.

Telling the parable

- Read the story from an age-appropriate Bible (e.g. *The Lion Children's Bible* for under 5s (by Pat Alexander and Carolyn Cox, Lion, 1991 or *The Good News Bible: Rainbow Edition* for 5–11s, Collins, 2004)
- 'The Rich Farmer' in *Stories Jesus Told: Favourite Stories from the Bible* by Mick Inkpen and Nick Butterworth, Candle Books, 2005, (ISBN 0551016698)
- *The Gospels Unplugged* by Lucy Moore and Francis Blake, Barnabas, 2002, ISBN 1 84101 243 2

Act out the story

You will need three cardboard boxes, small, medium and large, enough shredded paper to fill the largest box, a 'cocktail' drink, 'comfy' chair, an MP3 player or a mobile phone, a narrator, a farmer and the 'voice of God'.

The narrator tells the story whilst the farmer fills each box in turn with the shredded paper, ripping up each box as it gets too small to hold all the shredded paper. When the largest box is full the farmer sits back in his 'comfy' chair with his 'cocktail' drink and MP3 player or mobile phone. Whilst he is enjoying himself the voice of God speaks to him to tell him he will die. The farmer 'dies'.

Discussion points

- I wonder why the rich farmer wanted so much wealth.
- I wonder why the rich farmer was not satisfied with what he had.
- I wonder why the rich farmer did not share his wealth.
- I wonder if the rich farmer had any genuine friends.

I wonder if the rich farmer would have done things differently if he knew he was going to die.

I wonder what you are greedy for.

Do you share what you have with others?

I wonder how you feel when your friends don't share what they have with you.

I wonder if being greedy pushes God out of your life.

I wonder how our greed affects people in other countries.

What does it mean when goods are fairly traded?

I wonder how this makes life better for people in other countries.

I wonder if there is a luxury item you could live without for a week. Could you give the money you save to a charity?

Look through the *Love Life Live Lent* children's booklet. Ask the children which of the actions they think they can do this week to show they care about other people around the world and how what they do can affect them.

Activities

Eating with chopsticks

To help raise awareness of how children in other countries do things in different ways, get the children to try eating a variety of different foods, e.g. rice, marshmallows, crisps, fruit etc. with chopsticks.

Fair trade goods

If your church sells fair trade goods ask the person who is responsible to come and talk to the children about the goods, how they are produced, and how the producers benefit. Have some samples of fair trade products and their non-fair trade equivalent for the children to try and to compare. Explain to the children that there may be very little difference in taste, but a lot of difference to the producers when they buy fair trade goods. Ask them to think about whether they can afford to give up a little bit of their money to pay more for fair trade goods so that producers in other countries can have a much better life.

Developing countries

If your church has a link with another church in a developing country find out the cost of things there compared to what they would cost here. Can children buy the same kind of things there as children can here? What kind of things do children play with in the developing country? Discuss with the children what they think about the differences.

God gives us what we need

To help the children to understand that God provides for our needs and that our needs are often different from our wants, make a poster with the title 'God gives us what we need'. Draw two columns, one with the heading Our Wants and the other with the heading Our Needs. Give the children a selection of old Argos catalogues, toy catalogues, newspapers, comics and magazines. Ask them to cut out a selection of pictures and stick them under the 'wants' or 'needs' column. Discuss the differences between the two columns and where God is in their wants and/or needs.

Grape harvest

Choose a group of children (who like grapes) to play farmers at a grape harvest. Explain that one year there was a small harvest for most – one grape each – apart from one productive farmer who had ten grapes (in a small bowl). The next year the farmers harvest one grape each again, but because of his/her production methods the productive farmer harvests another ten (and needs a bigger bowl). The same thing happens the year after too. At each stage ask the ‘farmers’ how they feel. What do the farmers with little feel about each other and about the farmer with the biggest harvest?

How does the one with plenty feel? Does he/she feel part of the group or different?

Ask the rest of the children what they think.

What happened next?

Ask the children to speculate what happened after the rich farmer died. Was he so busy working to make money that he didn’t have any friends or family? Was all his effort in building a fortune worth it in the end? What is going to happen to all his money now he’s died?

The children can act out a ‘what happened next’ scenario based on their discussions.

What did you have for breakfast?

Ask the children to think about what they had for breakfast this morning. Have some breakfast-type food products available – cereal, bread, marmalade, fruit, orange juice, milk etc. Ask the children to think about which parts of the world these products may have come from and mark them off on a poster-sized map of the world. Discuss with the children what conditions might be like for people who produce these products in other parts of the world. Is there anything they can do to make a difference to their lives? Look up on the internet beforehand about conditions for farmers in other countries and the work of agencies such as Tearfund, Christian Aid and the Fair Trade Foundation, so that you can suggest ideas to the children.

(Based on an activity in The Whole Wide World by Phil and Rachel Bowyer, Authentic Lifestyle, 2006, ISBN 1-85078-657-7, p. 110)

Prayer

Either:

Make ‘prayer boxes’ out of variety-sized cereal boxes. Cover them, and write the name of a country on the outside. Leave the flap at the top open. Ask the children to write prayers for the people of that country on small pieces of paper and post them into the box. Collectively pray for each country in turn, for all the poor people, for all those who are sad or hurt. Ask God to hear all the prayers that have been posted inside the box.

Or:

Throw a beach ball, with a map of the world printed on, around the circle. The catcher prays for the country their hand touches.

Songs

'Give me a heart of compassion' (Enable your servants) (CD - COS 3-4, KS-65)

'Over all the earth' (KS2-681)

'We are a new generation' (CD - SH2-10, KS2-747)

'Any kind of weather' (CD - LJ -14)

Week 6: God

The parable of the pearl (Matthew 13.45-46)

Theme

God and his kingdom are worth more than anything else in the world.

Aims

- To help children appreciate how valuable God's love is for us.
- To help children to understand that God is like the merchant's pearl – it costs everything to know him, but he is worth more than anything in the world.

Telling the parable

- Read the story from an age-appropriate Bible (e.g. *The Lion Children's Bible* for under 5s (by Pat Alexander and Carolyn Cox, Lion, 1991 or *The Good News Bible: Rainbow Edition* for 5–11s, Collins, 2004)
- 'Parable of the Great Pearl' in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 3* by Jerome W. Berryman, Living the Good News, 2002, ISBN 1889108979
- 'The Precious Pearl' in *Stories Jesus Told: Favourite Stories from the Bible* by Mick Inkpen and Nick Butterworth, Candle Books, 2005, ISBN 0551012781
- 'The Perfect Guitar' in *Stories for Interactive Assemblies* by Nigel Bishop, Barnabas, 2006, ISBN 1841014654

Act out the story

You will need 'Monopoly' money or children's play money, a selection of children's toys/possessions, a pearl, a market stall/table, a narrator, a pearl merchant and a pearl seller. The narrator gives each child in the room some money and explains it is his/her money that they can look after for the story. The narrator then tells the parable whilst the pearl seller and pearl merchant mime the action. The pearl merchant goes to the market stall and buys things with his/her money. He/she sees the pearl that the pearl seller has on his/her stall, turns his/her pockets out and looks sad when he/she can't buy it. Then he/she cheers up, rushes to the other children and sells/swaps all his/her belongings for their money. When she/he has collected all the money in the room he/she goes back to buy the pearl from the pearl seller and stands gazing at in awe and wonder.

Discussion points

- I wonder how the merchant felt when he saw the finest pearl ever.
- I wonder how hard it was for him to sell everything he had.
- I wonder if the merchant was happy with the pearl once he'd bought it.
- I wonder why the seller was willing to give up something so precious.
- I wonder what is precious to you.

I wonder how difficult it would be to sell everything you had.
What would be the last three possessions you would part with?
I wonder what the pearl could really be.
I wonder where the kingdom of heaven could really be.
I wonder who our neighbours would be in the kingdom of heaven.
I wonder if we can love anything more than we love God.

Look through the *Love Life Live Lent* children's booklet. Ask the children which of the actions they think they can do this week to appreciate how valuable God's love is.

Activities

I know Jesus loves me

Give each child individually, in turn, a heart-shaped card that says on one side 'I know Jesus loves me'. As you give them the card, say to them 'Jesus loves you'. On the back of the card they draw a picture of themselves or write their name. Make a hole in the top of the card and thread through some red ribbon to make a loop. They can take the heart home and hang it up in their bedroom to remind them of Jesus' love.

Make Easter cards

The children can either give them to a neighbour they know or the cards could be taken by a leader to a local community group – e.g. a residential home for the elderly.

Word search

Devise your own word search based around the Parable of the Precious Pearl, God's love for everyone including all of our neighbours, including those hidden from us. Ask the children to think of the words and then visit http://www.teachnology.com/web_tools/word_search/ for advice and help on how to make the word search itself. Print copies off for the children to take home and do.

Shoe polishing

After the service, ask the children to offer a shoe polishing service to the congregation, who can make a small donation to be given to a charity of the children's choice, if they wish.

'God loves me' bracelets

Make 'God loves me' bracelets using thread and letter beads (available from craft shops).

How are pearls made?

Google oysters and pearls and find out how pearls are made, (or try visiting <http://science.howstuffworks.com/question630.htm>). Explain to the children how pearls are grown in a living organism and how rare and expensive some of the finest ones can be. Can they see any comparisons with what the kingdom of heaven might be like?

Crucifixion

Have a collection of pictures of Jesus on the cross (use posters, postcards, photographs of the crosses in your church, books, the internet, etc.) for the children to look at. If possible, have pictures that reflect a range of different periods in history, different cultures and different traditions. Discuss with the children how Jesus is portrayed in the pictures and how the pictures make them feel. What do the picture essay to them? Do the pictures reflect God's love for us?

Treasure hunt

Ask the children to plan a treasure hunt following a trail of clues (based around the story of Holy Week from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday) to find the treasure of Easter Day – the discovery of the risen Jesus. What 'treasures' would they hide to convey the story? Where would they hide them? Ask them to write the clues that will lead them to find the next part of the story. If possible they could actually do the treasure hunt on Easter Sunday at church.

Prayer

Either:

Give each child a small piece of card or paper and a pen. Ask them to write down or draw the things that they really like/are the most important to them. Pray that God will help us to share them and not let them be more important to us than he is.

Or:

The children form a circle and a child on one side of the leader is given a very long thin piece of paper and a pen. He/she writes down which of their belongings is the most important to them and then folds the piece of paper over and passes it and the pen to the next child, who does the same. The children continue passing the paper along until it comes back to the leader, who unfolds it, turns it over and writes on the back 'God is worth more than anything in the world'. The paper is placed in the centre of the circle and the group quietly prays that God will help them to understand the truth of these words.

Or:

Ask the children to lie on their tummies in a circle, light a candle and place it in the middle. Have quiet contemplative music playing in the background and ask the children to think silently about God's love for them.

Songs

'We are kingdom kids' (CD - COS 1-1, SOFK-173)

'Jesus put this song' (SOFK-111)

'God made a boomerang' (KS-82)

'God made this world' (KS2-483)

'Let your kingdom come' (KS2-630)