



CHILDREN Have ears to hear



Bible notes for leaders

Old Testament Jeremiah 31.31-34

Psalms 51.1-13 or Psalm 119.9-16

Epistle Hebrews 5.5-10

Gospel John 12.20-33

We see Jesus' obedience here. He admits it would be wrong to ask his father to save him from the cross. He would be putting an end to God's plan that was central to the fulfilment of God's promise to the world. Twice we are told this kind of obedience brings glory to God (v. 23 and v. 28).

The saying concerning the grain of wheat (falling to the ground and dying if it is to bear fruit in v. 24) shows it was necessary for Jesus to die. By his death God reveals his power over evil and the constancy of his love despite the worst that human beings can do to him. God also shows that the gift of eternal life is stronger than any kind of

death we might be forced to endure. Jesus warns us that something similar is true for anyone who would become his disciple. The more you try to take control of your life, the more likely you are to lose it. Those who follow Christ must follow wherever he may lead, even to the point of death.

We depend upon God's grace to receive the forgiveness we need. By grace – 'God doing it for us' – we are granted undeserved forgiveness and God restores us to communion with him. Just as the establishment of the covenant has always been at God's initiative so, when the promise is broken, the restoration is always by God's grace. As we contemplate Christ's passion we cannot avoid being caught up in the glory of God's love.

These same Bible passages were covered in Roots Issue 4 (March/April 2003). Some of the material produced around the Gospel passage may be found on the web site www.rootsontheweb.com under the date: 6 April, 2003.



Set the scene

Present the passage as an occasion when Jesus speaks about his God-given mission. It is a mission to free many people from the power of 'the ruler of this world' and lead them into eternal life – a mission to bring glory to his heavenly Father and not to himself – a mission in which we, his followers, share.

- Display 'astronaut' images and space-related information (see *Be active*).
- In one area place a sand tray with a range of superhero toys (Batman, Superman or The Incredibles) or a 'Thunderbird' island for young children to play with.
- In another area display Christian 'mission statements'. (If possible these should include short statements by members of your church – see *Make connections*.) If your church has a mission statement, this could be central to the display.

Get started

Special mission

Make sure all the children have time to play in the sand with the superhero figures. Chat with them about their imaginary stories and explain that today you are going to find out what Jesus – a real superhero – said about his special mission from God.

Mission match

Write the names of film characters and their missions on separate cards.

For example

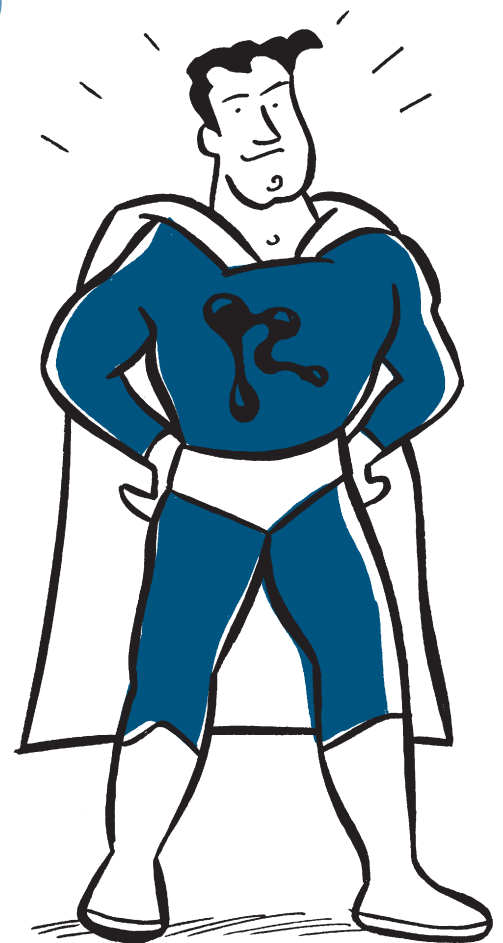
Shrek: mission – to rescue Princess Fiona;
Pongo and Perdita: mission – to save their puppies from Cruella de Vil;
Frodo the Hobbit: mission – to bring the ancient ring with which he has been entrusted to the Cracks of Doom;
Marlin the clownfish: mission – to find his son Nemo.

Tape a card to each child's back. They should then see how quickly they can find their partner and share the story of the

book or film they are from. What does their character have to do to accomplish their mission? Do they succeed? You could make it more difficult by saying they can't speak but can only sing the theme tune to their film.

To the rescue

Place a table in the centre of the room, with a line of chairs on either side dividing the room in two. Explain that one side of the room represents safety and the other danger. The children should then stand on the danger side. Appoint one child to act as 'a rescuer'. The idea is that the rescuer can rescue others by crawling back under the table, taking them by the hand and leading them to safety. Those rescued then become rescuers and join them in their mission. Anyone who is on the wrong side of the table (including the main rescuer) when the whistle blows is trapped and is then in need of rescue themselves. Play the game, blowing the whistle every 30 to 40 seconds. After several minutes, see how successful the rescue mission has been.





Use the Bible

Object lesson *(this can be used with all age groups)*

Before telling the story you will need to make eight pipe cleaner figures (see *Be active*) dressed to represent: two Greeks, Jesus, Philip, Andrew and a crowd (of three). You will also need a seed, an ear of corn (any grass with a head will do), a drum and a wooden cross.

Begin by clearing the toys out of the sand tray and ask the children to imagine that the tray now represents the city of Jerusalem where lots of people have come for the feast of the Passover. Jesus and his disciples are there too. Then give out the objects or figures and say that they will be used to act out the story. Explain that this is a story in which God speaks in a loud voice, and when you reach that point, the child with the drum will need to make a sound like thunder.

Tell the story as follows:

Lots and lots of people have come to

Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Some Greeks have come to the city.

(Child 1 places Greeks in sand tray.)

They have heard that someone called Jesus has done lots of wonderful miracles and they want to meet him.

So they go to Philip, one of his disciples. *(Child 2 places Philip into tray.)*

'Sir, we want to see Jesus,' they say.

Philip passes this message on to another disciple, Andrew.

(Child 3 places Andrew in tray.)

And Andrew passes the message on to Jesus. *(Child 4 places Jesus in tray.)*

Jesus knows that lots of people are expecting him to do miracles. They are hoping that he will become a great earthly king. But that is not what his mission is about.

'I am here to bring glory to God,' he says. 'Think about what happens to a grain of wheat. If you keep it out of the ground it remains one small seed. But you put it into the ground and it dies,

(child 5 pushes seed into sand)

so that it can grow up and produce lots more seeds.

(Child 6 plants ear of corn in sand.)

Jesus says this because he knows his life is like the grain of wheat. He knows that his mission is to rescue lots of people from sin and make them happy. So instead of praying that he would be saved from death, he prays: 'Father, glorify your name'.

And immediately a voice comes from heaven *(Child 7 gives a roll on the drum)* saying, 'I have glorified it and will glorify it again'.

The sound fills the crowd with amazement and they ask each other what it could possibly mean?

(Child 8 puts three final figures into tray.)

Jesus explains that God has spoken like this to help them have faith in him. He says he is about to win a mighty battle. Evil will be driven out of the world and many people will receive happiness through him.

But in order to fulfil his mission, like the grain of wheat, he must die.

(Child 9 puts cross into tray.)



Be active

Finger paint harvest

Enlarge the ear of wheat template (see page 24) and photocopy and cut out two copies on thin card for each child. They should use yellow finger paints to make thumbprints to colour in the first one. The second ear is left blank. Both heads are then attached to yellow straws and set to one side for the prayer activity (see *Pray it through*).

Join the company

For this activity you will need to decide on your preferred method for making a pipe cleaner figure. (Instructions may be found on www.familyfun.go.com.) You will need up to four pipe cleaners per child and a selection of different coloured tissue paper, scraps of material and lengths of wool.

Give each child pipe cleaners and show them how to make a figure. (Younger children could be given a ready-made

figure.) Then suggest that they dress their figure in modern clothes. When the figures are dressed, place them alongside the figures in Bible dress around the cross in the sand tray. Make the point that the disciples were some of the first people who were drawn to Jesus, but today he is still drawing people from all over the world into a right relationship with God.

Grain – ground – grow

Remind children of Jesus' words in John 12.24 as follows:

Before the grain of wheat is planted it is a single grain on its own. *(On the command 'grain' children walk around the room separately.)*

It falls into the earth and dies. *(On the command 'ground' they drop to the floor.)*

But then it grows and multiplies. *(On the command 'grow', they get into groups and hold hands.)*

Repeat the exercise as a game, telling the children the size of group they must multiply into, for example 'grow into

threes', 'grow into fours'. Each time when the groups have formed, those who aren't part of a group are out.

Stardust mission

On 7 February 1999, Nasa launched the spaceship Stardust with a mission to capture comet dust and bring it to earth. You will find up-to-date information of the mission on the children's section of the Nasa web site (see *Resources*). Visit the web site and use the information you find there to compile a short multiple choice quiz suitable for the ability level of your group. *(There is a ready-made multiple choice quiz on comets and the stardust mission in the 'Tails of Wonder' section of the site.)*

Talk with the children about the mission and do the quiz (on-line if possible). Chat about how humans will benefit from the success of this mission. (We will know a lot more about comets). Compare with how we benefit from the success of Jesus' mission.

Make connections

- Write the words 'Mission Statement' on a flipchart.
- Explain to the children that these days almost every business and organisation has a mission statement. People looking for jobs are encouraged to write mission statements too. A mission statement should be no more than four sentences long and answer three main questions: What are we here for; what should we be doing; what do we believe? Note the three questions on the flipchart and then ask children to look at the Bible passage and decide which verses show us how Jesus would have answered them. Ask the children what sorts of thing they think he would want his followers to put into their mission statements. After noting their suggestions on a flip chart, compare them with the mission statements on the display board (see *Set the scene*). Finally give the children individual cards with the three questions on and encourage them to write or draw their answers to create their own personal mission statement.



Pray it through

Mission control

Ask children what they think an astronaut needs most (apart from a space ship and space suit) to complete a mission successfully. Bring out the fact that she or he needs regular contact with mission control.

In today's reading, Jesus was in regular contact with mission control. He prayed, he heard God speak and he always did God's will. In the Bible passage we read that God spoke in a loud voice. More often, though, he speaks to us quietly through his word and in our hearts.

Explain that you are going to ask God to bring to your minds some things that he wants to do in the week ahead. Then, with some music playing softly, lead into a time of quiet with the words:

**Father, our aim is to love and serve you.
Please show us the things you want us to do.**

Bring the 'listening' time to a close saying: **Thank you, Lord God, that you hear us when we pray.
Help us to hear you and to do as you say.
Amen.**

Drawn to him

(This is to be used along with option 'Fingerpaint harvest' from *Be active*.) Draw a cross on a large sheet of paper. Write the words of John 12.32 across the top and ask the children to read the verse aloud. Then ask each child to write the name of one of their friends on to their blank 'ear of wheat'. With some worship music playing in the background, invite them to bring their 'ears of wheat' and stick them around the cross. Finish with a prayer thanking God that Jesus was willing to die so that all people could be drawn to him.

Resources

Music

- Father we love you, we worship and adore you (MP)
- I will offer up my life (MP)
- Jesus Christ (Once again) (KS)
- My Jesus, my Saviour (KS)
- Seed, secret sown in the earth (*Story Song*, Stainer & Bell Ltd & Trustees for the Methodist Church Purposes, 1993)
- The greatest thing in all my life (MP)
- The journey of life (JP)
- When I'm feeling down and sad (BBP)
- When there's hard times (KS)
- Whenever I'm afraid I will trust Jesus (KS)
- When the road is rough and steep (JP)
- Were you there when they crucified my Lord (JP)

Web sites

Information on comets and the Stardust mission www.kids.msfc.nasa.gov.

Instructions on making pipe cleaner figures may be found at www.familyfun.go.com.

Film

Story lines for the *Get started* option 'Special mission' are available by typing the film title and date into your search engine.

- Shrek* (2001);
- Finding Nemo* (2003);
- The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001);
- The Incredibles* (2004);
- 101 Dalmations* (1996), (the name of Pongo's wife 'Perdita' differs from the name 'Missus' in Dodie Smith's book).

Story

'The Big Wave' by Bob Hartman is a moving story of how an old man was willing to burn his precious rice fields to raise the alarm and save the lives of many villagers. It is found in:

Bob Hartman, *The Lion Storyteller Bedtime Book*, Lion, 2003, ISBN 0745946542.

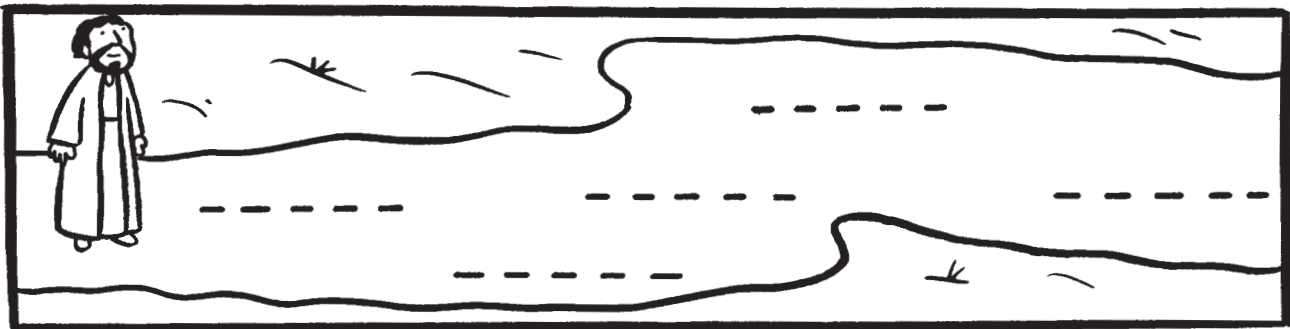


Jesus said, 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.'
John 12.24 (NRSV)



In autumn Kerry planted five grains of wheat in her garden. Put the five grains in the ground and then show what happened to them in the spring. (The first one has been done for you.) Colour the pictures in.

Jesus calls everyone to follow him, no matter who they are or where they are from. Write the names of everyone you would like to follow Jesus in the spaces behind him.



One of the Greeks who heard Jesus speak in Jerusalem has sent a letter home but some of the words have been smudged. Fill in the blanks.

Dear Mum,
Jerusalem is full of people, all here to celebrate P_____. Today I met a man called J_____ who has done lots of wonderful miracles. He said his mission was to bring p_____ to God. He talked about how a grain of wheat needs to d__ to produce fruit. I think he was trying to tell us something about his own life. He prayed to God, 'Father, glorify your n_____'. And guess what, Mum - God answered! There was a voice from heaven. Some people said it was th_____ and others said an a_____ had spoken to Jesus! But I know better. I still don't understand why Jesus talked the way he did but I know for sure that he has a very special relationship with G___ the F_____. I'll write again soon. L_____

Activity sheet for extra time, or to take home. Photocopy and/or enlarge.

Answers: Pentecost, Jesus, people, die, name, thunder, angel, God, Father, love
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