



SESSION 3 of 4

# The vineyard

## MEETING AIM

To hear that God sent Jesus to save us.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 21:33-46.

## BACKGROUND

This is a difficult story to explore with children. The actions of the tenants are violent and can be upsetting. However, the story reveals an amazing truth about who Jesus is and what he came to earth to do. While children may not understand it fully, you are laying positive foundations for further exploration later in their lives.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome each child by name, and invite them to join your circle and share in the snacks you have brought. Chat together about what has happened since you last met. Ask the children if anyone has done anything surprising or special for them. Perhaps they had a treat or went to a birthday party. If possible, share an appropriate example from your own life.

## 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** grapes of different colours; grape juice; pictures of vines; a potato masher and a large bowl

As today's story is all about a vineyard, give the children chance to explore grapes. Depending on your resources you could let them taste different colours, drink grape juice, look at pictures of vines to see how they grow, or perhaps even squash grapes with a potato masher to see how the juice comes out! Remember to cut any grapes the children are eating in half lengthways to avoid choking, and check for allergies. Decide together which colour of grapes is the best!

## 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** a large piece of paper with a picture of a vineyard on one side and a picture of the world on the other; lollipop sticks; paper; scissors; felt-tip pens; playdough

Before the session, make little puppets using lollipop sticks and paper cutout figures. You will need a group of people, two servants and one reversible puppet with the owner's son on one side and Jesus on the cross on the other. If you have time you could get the children to help you make these.

This story is a tricky one with young children, so it's important to be gentle without changing the meaning for them. Show the vineyard backdrop and tell this story:

Jesus told a story about a man who owned a vineyard. He rented it out to some people. They could live and work in the vineyard as long as they shared the harvest with him. They were the man's tenants. Use a blob of playdough to make the group of people puppets stand up in front of the vineyard.

When the time came for the grapes to be picked the man sent a servant to collect his share. Move the first servant into the vineyard.

But the tenants were bad people. They hurt the servant and would not give him the grapes. The owner sent another servant. Move the first servant away and put the second servant in the vineyard.

The tenants did the same thing again, so the owner decided to send his son instead. "They will surely respect him," he said. Move the second servant away and put the son in the vineyard.

But the bad tenants thought to themselves: "If we kill the son the vineyard will be ours!" And that's what they did! Lay the son down.

When he finished his story, Jesus asked the people a question: "What do you think the owner of the vineyard will do to those tenants?"

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Chat about the Bible story using these questions. Try to involve all the children in your discussion:

- What is your favourite part of this story?
- What didn't you like about it?
- Jesus asked the people listening to the story what they thought the owner should do. What do you think he should do?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** the storytelling materials from 'Bible story'; extra puppets

Tell the children that the people listening thought the man should punish the bad tenants. They felt he should take back his vineyard and give it to some good tenants instead. Do the children agree? Use the storytelling materials from 'Bible story' to explore the story further:

Jesus explained that the story was also about what was going to happen in the world. Flip the vineyard backdrop over to show the world.

God sent the world special people called prophets. Show the servant puppets again.

They came to tell the people about God and help them follow him. But the people didn't listen and sent them away.

Then God sent his son. Who is God's son? What happened to him? Let the children tell you what they think, then show them the puppet of the son. Turn it around so the children can see Jesus on the cross.

God sent Jesus, but the people still didn't listen, and they killed him.

What special thing happened after Jesus died? He came back to life. He died so we could be forgiven for all the bad things we have done and live in heaven with him for ever.

Once you have finished this exploration, let the children play with the story materials. You might want to have some extra puppets so everyone can have a go. Play with the children, but let them lead. This play will help them process the story.

## 10 PRAYER

**You will need:** paper plates; grapes (halved lengthways)

Give each child a paper plate and some halved grapes, and ask them to put the grapes into a cross shape. Encourage the children to think about what they would like to say to God. They could do this out loud or in their heads. Then round up with this prayer:

"Thank you, God, that you sent your son Jesus to earth for us so we could be saved. Amen."

Then enjoy eating the grapes. Jesus didn't stay on the cross, he came back to life again!

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