**GROWING TOGETHER:** FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Session 3 of 4

# The workers in the vineyard

### MEETING AIM

To learn that God is totally generous.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 20:1-16

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your situation.

This parable plays on our notion of what is ‘fair’, which makes it a treat to explore with children, who are especially quick to spot apparent unfairness. In the original audience for Jesus’ story there would have been many experienced agricultural workers, who were well acquainted with the backbreaking work of harvesting grapes in the hot sun. Imagine the heckling at the end of the story! The point, however, is not our idea of fairness but God’s limitless generosity.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Welcome the children as they arrive and share out any refreshments you have provided. Chat together about what has happened since you last met; share in the triumphs and difficulties of the children’s lives and share something appropriate from your own life. Ask the children if they have experienced something unfair this week.

### INTRO ACTIVITY – 10 mins

**You will need**: a long piece of rope or string; small prizes

Arrange the rope in a heap, with both ends showing. Explain that this is a challenge and there will be a prize. Ask the group: if you pulled one end of this rope and someone else pulled the other, would the rope pull straight or would there be a knot in it? Without touching the rope, ask everyone to look carefully and decide: knot, or not a knot?

Invite each person to make their case. Listen seriously, then say: “Well, who knows?” Pick up the tangle of rope and put it away. There will be outrage! Remind them that you said: “If you pulled…” and give everyone a prize, as promised.

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**You will need:** lots of grapes (or pictures); a basket or pot and a banknote-sized piece of paper with £50 written on it for each child

Before you start, hide the grapes (or pictures) all over your meeting space. Make the hiding places tricky, so that children must work to find the grapes and the activity lasts for the whole story. Then tell this story, pretending to be the farmer:

I’m the farmer who owns this vineyard, and my harvest is ripe. I need lots of workers to pick grapes! It’s very early in the morning – who can I find? *Pick someone and show them one £50 ‘note’.* You! I’ll pay you the usual rate for a day’s work – £50. *Shake hands, give them a basket and set them to work collecting the hidden grapes.*

Now it’s midday and the sun’s getting really hot! These workers are going to need some help. *Pick someone.* You! You’ll get fair pay. *Shake hands, give them a basket and set them to work.*

Now it’s five o’clock and the working day’s nearly done. I just need a bit more help to get this harvest in before nightfall! *Pick the remaining people.* You! You’ll get fair pay. *Shake hands, give them a basket and set them to work.*

Right, job’s done! Time you all got paid.Line up in order, starting with the workers who came last! *Give the last worker(s) £50 each. Invite responses, then invite the rest of the workers to say what they think they should each get paid.*

My vineyard, my rules! Here’s £50 for everyone, just like we agreed. *Hand out the money and encourage responses.*

I don’t know why some of you are cross! You got the money we agreed on – it’s my choice to give the same to the others! Why are you angry because I’m generous?

Jesus said: “This is what God’s kingdom will be like. The last will be first, and the first will be last.”

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

* Which part of the story do you like best?
* Does anyone in this story remind you of someone you know?
* What would you like to say to the farmer in this story?
* What questions would you like to ask Jesus about this story?
* What do think: “The last will be first, and the first will be last” means?

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** plain fairy cakes (homemade or shop-bought); lots of icing, buttercream and cake decorations

Share out the fairy cakes and talk about how we would normally expect them to be. Then explain that you are going to decorate them God-style, by being as generous as possible with the decorations. Share out the decorations and let everyone get stuck in. This will get messy! How much decoration can you fit on one little cake?

As you decorate the cakes, remind children that the farmer in Jesus’ story surprised everyone with his generosity, and Jesus made the point that God is like this: he is totally generous. Talk together about times when you have been given much more than you expected. When has God given you much more than you asked for? How can we be generous to other people? Enjoy eating the cupcakes together.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

Gather everyone together. After all the activity and mess, it’s time to be still. Invite everyone to sit with their hands cupped together, as if ready to receive something. After a moment, say this prayer:

“Father, we ask you for things all the time, and you give us more than enough. We praise you for your wonderful generosity.”

Together, say: “Amen.”

**CLAIRE BENTON-EVANS**

writes for Kevin Mayhew and is a children’s and youth worker in the Scottish Episcopal Church.