

WHY FAMILIES MATTER



A toolkit for churches
Resources for children

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A Toolkit for Churches

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WHY FAMILIES MATTER

A TOOLKIT FOR CHURCHES

RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN

Understanding God's Context for Families:

God | Child | Family | Church | Community | Commission

"A Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families"

Psalm 68:5-6

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SETTING THE SCENE

David described God as "A Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:5-6).

In a world where there are estimated to be 145 million orphans (UNICEF) to know this feels like refreshing rain on a hot, dry day.

Of the 145 million children estimated to be orphans, only about 9 per cent have lost both parents. Many families are unstable and children are separated from one or both parents due to violence, abuse, alcoholism, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and other conflicts. Too many children are suffering in silence. Millions run away from home, and small babies are abandoned to institutions, the parents perhaps not realising the effects of orphanages on a child's physical and mental development, behaviour, mental health, intellect, social abilities, and emotional wellbeing.

So if God sets the lonely in families, then how should we as the Church respond to God's heart for children? We need to work together to build strong families, to help families in crisis, and to embrace children who have no experience of a loving family. Governments around the world have strengthened the law to protect children, but they cannot manage alone. They need us, and God has called us, to extend the boundaries of our own families and embrace children who need to know the love of Father God.

The Toolkit will help us to study the Bible together to find out how God intends us to meet these immense challenges and to keep children safe in families. It is daunting, because we already feel pressed to the limit and unable to help any more children. Yet God has called us to be the expression of His loving kindness to the world. So, we pray that as we walk this journey together, the Lord would help you to believe that He who called you to be His ambassador here on earth in caring for children will enable and strengthen you for this immense task.

PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

Every child is a precious, unique gift from God. A child thrives when they are raised in a loving family. Yet this is not the experience of every child. This Toolkit will help us to see from the Bible why children matter and how God created families to nurture and care for children. As Christian leaders, we need to help build strong families where children are loved and cared for, and where children without families are embraced into a new family.

This Toolkit has been designed to help us think about understanding God's heart for children to belong in families. It presents a Christian theological perspective as well as some universally acknowledged principles of keeping children safe from harm and parenting positively.

While recognising that families face numerous pressures, problems and issues and that the shape and form of a family differ vastly, we believe that children grow and develop best when they are brought up in the care of loving and nurturing caregivers, in the context of their own communities. There is a strong Biblical mandate to care for vulnerable children, particularly those without parental care. The Bible shows us that the family is the only institution designed by God for the care of children.

The Body of Christ (through the Church and Christian ministries), is in an ideal position to be able support children to remain in families, even if one or more parents are absent. Through the care and support of struggling families, the Church has the potential to influence whole communities with God's values. Where children are unable to stay with their biological family or next of kin, the Church is ideally placed to offer alternative families through fostering or adoption. We believe that when the body of Christ works together as described in Romans 12.5 and 1 Corinthians 12, that there is more potential for the Church to transform situations facing vulnerable children, including those without parental care.

Throughout the Toolkit we draw on 'Understanding God's Heart for Children' as a Biblical framework as a way to organise and clearly communicate what God says about and intends for children. These statements created by a

group of theologians and practitioners are integrated to paint a whole picture of God's heart for children.

1. God creates every unique person as a child with dignity.
2. Children need parental love in a broken world.
3. God gives children as a gift to welcome and nurture.
4. Society has a God-given responsibility for the well-being of children and families.
5. Children are a promise of hope for every generation.
6. God welcomes children fully into the family of faith.
7. Children are essential to the mission of God

In addition, we acknowledge that all children everywhere – without discrimination – have the same basic rights. These rights are spelt out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is the most influential, powerful and respected secular document that promotes the welfare of children. This convention was ratified in the 1980s by all but 2 nations in the world, which means that national governments have committed themselves to protecting and upholding the rights of children included in the document and have agreed to hold themselves accountable before the international community. It spells out that all children have a right to survival, an opportunity for full development, protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, and a right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

HOW THE TOOLKIT WORKS

The Toolkit is intended to be used as a six-week series in your churches. There are two parts to the toolkit.

1. **Part One: A Study Guide** provides a framework for **Pastors** to lead their churches in understanding how to support families and nurture children and can be used to guide discussions in **Small Groups**.
2. **Part Two: Resources for children** is to help Children's Leaders prepare to teach **Children** the same principles about children needing a loving family.

The Toolkit will help you to grow in your understanding as a local church as to why families are so important to children and how you can nurture children and their families to be all that God intends. There is a different theme for each of the six weeks which will help to build a holistic Biblical view of how God intended children and families to operate, and what provision He made within the community of faith when families find themselves in crisis. These are our six themes:

1. **God**: because God has adopted us and is father to the fatherless, he is at the centre.
2. **Child**: every child has inherent value and an unconditional right to holistic development.
3. **Family**: a healthy family is the best environment for a child to develop and thrive.
4. **Church**: the body of Christ is commissioned to care for the children without parental care and has the capacity to lead the local and global effort to end orphan hood
5. **Community**: broad scale collaboration is required to transfer these core values across societies and see transformation occur.
6. **Commission**: The mission is immense so we can only move forward with God's commission to present life in all its fullness.

GUIDANCE FOR CHILDREN'S GROUPS

Six lessons for children have been created for children's leaders to use in the same week that the adults are studying the same theme. This way we hope that children and adults can talk together during the week about the lessons they are learning and how as a family they can respond.

Teaching children is so important. We learn more when we are children than we do at any age. Therefore as a children's teacher it is really important that you prepare well and prepare thoroughly so that you help the children in your care to understand God and how he wants us to live.

The six lessons below give you some suggested ideas for teaching children the same topics as the adults. Try and make the lessons as colourful and interactive as possible. Have activities for the children to do. If the children are young, don't talk to them for more than 2 or 3 minutes at a time. If they are in primary school, 10 minutes of listening is the most they can do. So think about ways to make the lesson fun and memorable.

Each lesson plan gives you the **aim** for the day.

Begin the lesson with a **Bible Story**. This has been put in child friendly language for you.

An **Activity** is suggested for the children. You can find worksheets for this after the lesson outline.

After doing a fun activity, help the children to have a quiet few moments to **Think** about the lesson.

Pray with the children. You can use the suggested prayer. Give chance for the children to also pray if they want to.

Under the **Do** section, the children will be given a challenge for applying the lesson in some way.

Finally, a **Play** session will conclude the lesson. The lesson concludes by identifying the teaching point of the play at the end of the lesson.

On some weeks there is an **additional resources** section to provide learning supplements.

Follow this format every week so that children get used to the routine.

GOD IS OUR FATHER

TEACHING AIM

To help children begin to understand that God has adopted us, he is a father to us

BIBLE STORY

Esther

(from the Old Testament book of Esther)

For children under five years of age:

Esther had no father and she had no mother. She was an orphan. Who would look after her? What would happen to her?

Her cousin, Mordecai, was a kind adult and he took her to his home. He adopted her and treated her like his very own daughter. Esther always listened carefully to what Mordecai said, and she always followed his instructions.

When Esther grew up, she was chosen by the king to be his queen. Even though she went to live in the palace, Mordecai still cared very much about what happened to her.

Mordecai and Esther were Jewish people. They loved God and worshipped him. But the king and the people of the country they lived in did not know who God was, and did not worship him.

One of the king's special helpers was called Haman. Haman did not like Mordecai because Mordecai worshipped God instead of Haman and the king. Haman was very angry about Mordecai not worshipping him. He was so angry that he wanted to kill Mordecai, and all the Jewish people who worshipped God. Haman tricked the king into agreeing to his plan that all the Jews would be killed.

Mordecai told Esther to be brave and talk to the king and ask him not to let Haman kill all the Jews. Even though she was the Queen, Esther was supposed to wait for the king to ask to see her before she even spoke to him. But she knew she must do what Mordecai had said. She asked him and all the Jewish people to pray that the king would let her speak to him.

God answered their prayers. The king listened to Esther. Haman was not allowed to kill the Jewish people.

For children over five years of age:

Esther had no father and she had no mother. She was an orphan. Who would look after her? What would happen to her?

Her cousin, Mordecai, was a kind adult and he took her to his home. He adopted her and treated her like his very own daughter. Esther always listened carefully to what Mordecai said, and she always followed his instructions.

When Esther grew up, she was chosen by the king, whose name was Xerxes, to be his queen. Even though she went to live in the palace, Mordecai still cared very much about what happened to her.

Mordecai and Esther were Jewish people. They loved God and worshipped him. But King Xerxes and the people of his country did not know who God was, and did not worship him.

One of the king's special advisors was called Haman. Haman did not like Mordecai because Mordecai worshipped God instead of Haman and the king. Haman was very angry about Mordecai not worshipping him. He was so angry that he wanted to kill Mordecai, and all the Jewish people who worshipped God. Haman tricked King Xerxes into agreeing to his plan that all the Jews would be killed.

Mordecai told Esther to be brave and talk to the king and ask him not to let Haman kill all the Jews. At that time, kings had so much power, that no one

could even talk to them unless the king invited them in. Even though she was the Queen, Esther was supposed to be like everyone else and wait for the king to ask to see her before she even spoke to him. If she went to see him without him asking for her, he could even decide that she would be killed. But she knew she must do what Mordecai had said. She asked him and all the Jewish people to pray that the king would let her speak to him.

God answered their prayers. Esther was very brave and went to the king. The king invited her in and listened to her. Haman was not allowed to kill the Jewish people. In fact, Haman was killed for being so wicked and for tricking the king. King Xerxes made Mordecai his most important advisor. Mordecai and Esther made good and wise decisions for King Xerxes' kingdom.

ACTIVITY

You can either use the picture at the end of this lesson or children can draw their own picture of God as their Father as you talk about the topic. Make sure you have some paper and colours for children to use.

If you do not have access to pens and paper, get the children to act out the story with you.

THINK

How do you think Esther felt when her parents died? How might she have felt when Mordecai adopted her?

How do you feel knowing that God has adopted you?

When you feel alone, can you ask God to make you feel strong with Him by your side?

Since God is our father, and God is perfect, he must be a perfect father. What do you think a perfect father is like?

What is a safe and caring home? What does this mean to you? How do you think parents should treat their children?

How can you be a good friend to a child who does not have a mum or a dad?
Can they come and spend some time with your family?

PRAY

‘Thank you, God, that you love me and that you have adopted me to be your child. Help me to understand your love for me and to learn how I can be a child who does the things you want me to do, the things that are best for me. Amen.’

DO

This week, when you feel sad or frightened, when you feel glad or excited, tell God about how you feel. He is our perfect father so he likes to hear about good things in our lives, as well as wanting us to tell him about the things are not good.

PLAY

This is a simple game, but might be harder to get the children to organise than you might think! Have the children stand in a circle. (If there are more than 20 children, have them form more than one circle—no more than about 20 children in each circle.)

Choose one child and get them to walk around the outside of the circle. When they get back to the place where they were before, they should take the hand of the child next to that space. That child puts their hands on the waist of the ‘lead’ child and together they go around the circle. When they get back to the starting point, they take the next child to add to their ‘train’ and the train keeps going around, picking up the next child each time until all are included.

When the train is complete and has been around the circle, have the children sit back down.

Go on to the teaching point. Or, if the children enjoyed the game, and you have time, let them do it again, with a different ‘lead’ child.

Teaching point

This game isn't about a winner, or who is the fastest, or picking your friend to join onto the train. It is about everyone being included, about everyone belonging, about everyone getting to be part of the 'train family'. This is how it is with God being our father. Anyone who wants to be part of God's family can join. He doesn't pick favourites, or the fastest or smartest. He wants everyone to be in his family. Pray: 'Thank you, God, that anyone can be adopted into your family. You show your love to everyone. Please help us to show your love to everyone we see this week.'



**God is our father.
He has adopted us.**

CHILDREN ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

TEACHING AIM

To help children understand that each person, each child is made by God and is special to God

BIBLE STORY

Jesus and The Children

(Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)

For children under five years of age:

Everywhere that Jesus went, many people came to see him and to listen to him talk about God.

One day, people came to see Jesus and they brought their little children. They wanted their children to meet Jesus and for him to be able to talk to them.

Jesus' helpers told the people to take the children away. Jesus heard them saying this and he was not pleased. He said:

'Don't send the children away. Let them come and see me. Children are important to God. They seem to know how to trust him. You adults could learn from them. You should trust God like they do.'

The children came to Jesus. He held them and talked to them.

For children over five years of age:

Everywhere that Jesus went, many people came to see him. They asked him to make sick people well, and they listened to him talk about God.

One day, people came to see Jesus and they brought their little children. They wanted their children to meet Jesus and for him to be able to talk to them.

Jesus' helpers told the people to take the children away. Jesus heard them saying this and he was not pleased. He told his helpers:

'Don't send the children away. Let them come and see me. Children are important to God, not just adults. In fact, children are very important in God's family. They believe what he says and they trust him. You adults could learn from them. You should trust God like they do.'

The children came to Jesus. He held them and talked to them.

ACTIVITY

For churches with suitable resources: provide a simple outline drawing of a person and let each child colour theirs in to make a 'self-portrait'. Alternatively: if you have access to large sheets of paper, provide such a drawing in 'life size'—perhaps one drawing per group of 5-7 children and let them colour it in together. If you have enough resources and a very small group: have each child lay down on a large piece of paper. Take a thick marker and draw around them, then let them colour in their 'self-portrait'.

Or you can either use the picture at the end of this lesson or children can draw their own picture as you talk about the topic. Make sure you have some paper and colours for children to use.

THINK

Why do you think that Jesus' helpers/the disciples told the parents to take the children away? How do you think it made the children feel to know they mattered to Jesus?

The Bible tells us that Jesus is always the same—yesterday, today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8) That means that Jesus still loves children and thinks they are important. How does this make you feel?

Think about children you know who don't have families or who cannot go to school. How do you think it would help them to know that Jesus loves them and thinks that they are important? Remember that God also made all the children you see every day and he loves them. When we are adopted as God's children, he wants us to show his love to everyone else around us. Think of ways you can help other children to know that Jesus loves them and thinks they are important. What are some things you could do to show his love to other children this week?

PRAY

'Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you showed your love for children, and you told people that children are important to God. Thank you that you love me, and that I am important to you. Help me to learn to be strong and confident because of your love for me. Help me to show your love to other children around me. Amen. '

DO

Each day this week, remember that Jesus loves you and you are important to him. This will help you to know that you are special—not because of the things you can do, but just because God made you and he loves you.

Each day, do at least one thing for another child that shows Jesus' love.

PLAY

This is a fun game that gets children moving (and usually also laughing and shouting!) It's called 'people to people':

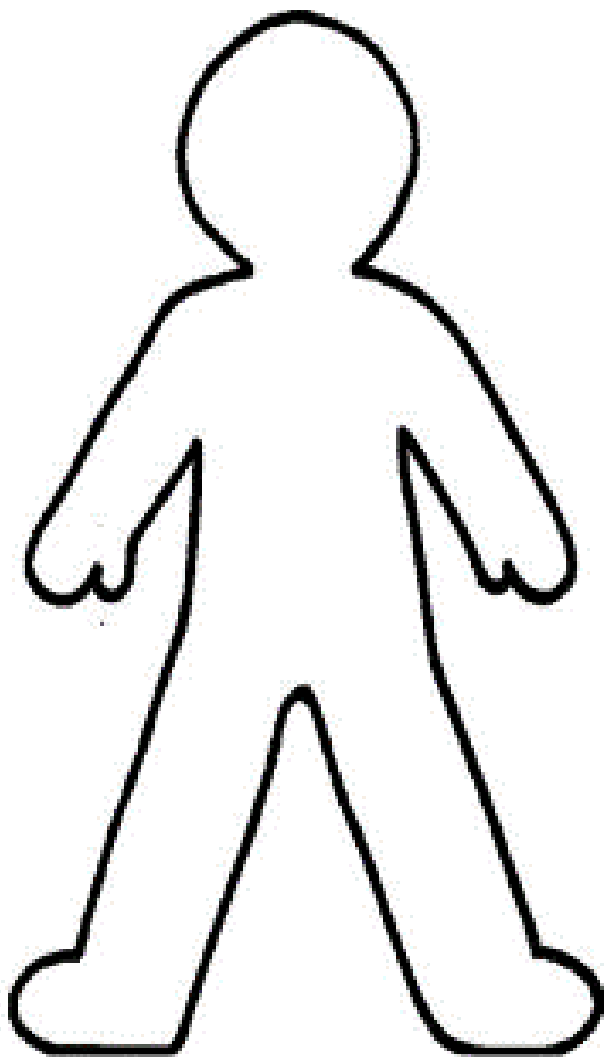
Every child needs a partner. They will be changing partners during the game, so they do not need to worry about trying to be with their best friend, or boys being with girls or whatever. (If there is an odd number of children so someone is left without a partner, have one of the helpers be their partner. It is good for children to see the teachers/leaders/helpers taking part in the games.)

The person leading the game will call out two body parts, like 'hand to shoulder', 'head to head', 'elbow to knee', 'back to back', etc. Each time the leader calls out such an instruction, every pair of children must position themselves accordingly—one child's hand on their partner's shoulder, both children head to head, and so on. After several of these instructions, the leader can call out 'people to people'. When they give this instruction, everyone has to let go of the partner they currently have and find a new partner. The last two people to get together are 'out'.

The game progresses for another round, and as children get used to following the commands, the leader can call them out more quickly. Each time the 'people to people' instruction is called out, the last two people to find a partner are out, until there are only two people left as the winners.

Teaching point

This game doesn't really teach anything about the lesson for today, but it is energetic and fun. Games help teach children about being gracious losers as well as gracious winners. This is all part of life, so it is important in the development and growth of children. Pray: 'Thank you, Jesus, that we can have fun together playing games. Thank you that whether we win or whether we lose, you love each one of us and we are important to you.'



I am made in the image of God

LIVING IN A FAMILY IS GOD'S IDEA

TEACHING AIM

To help children understand that families are God's idea and that he wants people to live in loving, safe families.

BIBLE STORY

The First Family

(from Genesis 1-4)

For children under five years of age:

In the very beginning, God made the world. He made the sun and the moon, and the lakes, rivers and oceans. He made all the plants, flowers and trees. He made all the animals. God was very pleased with everything he had made.

God decided to make people. He made a man and named him Adam. Then he made a woman. Adam called her Eve. God told Adam and Eve to live together and be husband and wife. He told them to work together to look after the beautiful world he had made. God planned for Adam and Eve to have children and they had many sons and daughters.

From the very beginning God planned for people to live in families. Adam and Eve had a family. Sometimes they lived the way God wanted them to. Sometimes they did not. But God still loved them, and wanted to help them be the best they could be.

For children over five years of age:

In the very beginning, God made the world. He made the sun and the moon, and the lakes, rivers and oceans. He made all the plants, flowers and trees. He made all the animals. God was very pleased with everything he had made.

God decided to make people. People were different from the other things God made. God wanted people to be able to know him and to love him. He made a man and named him Adam. Then he made a woman. Adam called her Eve. God told Adam and Eve to live together and be husband and wife. He told them to work together to look after the beautiful world he had made. Adam and Eve did this, and God talked to them and they talked to him. Everything was perfect.

God wanted people to be able to choose to know him and love him. But this meant that they could also choose NOT to know God and NOT to love him. God made two special trees in the garden, but he told Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit from them. This was how God gave them a choice. They could choose to do what God said and everything would be good in their lives and in the garden. Or they could choose to disobey God. If they did that, many things would be ruined.

One day, Adam and Eve decided it would be better to find out for themselves what the fruit on the special tree tasted like. They made a bad choice, and when they ate the fruit, many things started to go wrong.

But God still loved Adam and Eve. From the very beginning God planned for people to live in families. God planned for Adam and Eve to have children and they had many sons and daughters. Sometimes they lived the way God wanted them to. Sometimes they did not. But God still loved them, and wanted to help them be the best they could be.

God still loves people and he still wants people to live in safe loving families. He wants us to choose the best way—HIS way.

ACTIVITY

Provide a variety of strips of banana fibre/papyrus/raffia—whatever is available to you. Depending on the age of the children you are working with, let them do some kind of simple weaving of plaiting. Very young children may only be able to twist a few strands together. Older children may already know how, or can be shown how, to braid or weave a simple design.

As the children work, they are developing fine motor skills, which is a valuable part of their physical development. You will also be able to talk with them while they work. Perhaps the braiding and weaving will help you explain how God wants to 'weave' people together in families. Talk to the children especially about how he can weave other children into their family who do not have a family of their own by taking them in as a new brother or sister and loving them the same as the rest of the family.

THINK

Think about your family, whether it is your mother or father, or someone else who looks after you. Are there some good things about your family that you can say thank you to God for? Are there some sad things about your family that you want to tell God about?

What does it mean for you to be a good member of your family? Ask God to help you to be a good family member.

Some children do not know what it is like to have a loving parent. How can we help them to feel loved by God and loved by our families?

PRAY

'God, thank you for planning for people to live in families. Thank you that even when our own families are not quite how you want them to be, you still love us, and we can still be part of your family. Please help us to be good members of our families. As we grow up, please help us learn to make strong families of our own.

DO

Try to find one thing you can do this week to be a better member of your family.

If there is something in your family that makes you feel very sad, or not safe, talk to your church teacher about it.

(Note to teachers: please remember that in this whole lesson we need to be sensitive to so many children whose families may be unhappy, violent or struggling. We also need to affirm children who feel they have no family and are being looked after in some other setting. The way you word this section may well need to be adapted to include such children in your group. If you are going to suggest that children can talk to church teachers about sad or frightening situations, you will need to make sure that you have one or two teachers who are able and prepared to handle such conversations.)

PLAY

Relay races: there are many different ways to do relay races, depending on the size and age of your group. If you have some very young children, you may need to make a separate group of them and play much simpler games since they might struggle physically to do what is required in the relay races. Here are some suggestions for races, involving teams of about 8-10 children. Each team needs to have the same number of children:

1. Over/under: have the children line up one behind the other. Give each team something they can pass from one child to another—a small ball, a balloon, even a short stick. When the leader says ‘go’ the first child passes the item over their head to the child behind them. That child passes it ‘under’—between their legs—to the child behind, who then passes it over their head and so on—over, under, over under, until it gets to the back. The child at the back runs to the front of the line and begins the process again. When the last child in the team has moved to the front and the item has made it to the back of the line, the team shouts out. The first team to finish is the winner.
2. Running relays: the children line up as before. Make a line about 10-15 metres in front of the row of teams. On ‘go’ the first child in each team runs to the line and back. As they get back to their team, they ‘tag’ the next child, who then runs to the line and back. Then the next child and so on until all the children have run. First team to finish wins. This race can be changed several times—first running, then hopping, then walking backwards, etc.

If you have plenty of time to play, you may want to mix the teams around after a few races so that it is not always the same group of children who 'win'.

Teaching point

Again, the game is not directly related to the teaching theme. Games do not need to be linked to the theme. Play is an important part of childhood, so it is valuable just for that reason. Not everything we do has to have a specific teaching point. Part of our work with children is simply to help them grow up into well-balanced and mature adults. Playing games is a good part of that. Relay races are about working together as teams, about including everyone, about each team member having value—those who can run fast and those who cannot. Pray: 'Thank you, God, that you created so many things for us to enjoy. Thank you that we can work together as teams. Help us learn to make everyone feel that they have a part to play—in our families, in our classes at school, wherever we are. Thank you that you include us in your family. Help us to include others so that no one feels left out.'

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

Encourage the children to draw a picture of their family, or use the one below. Talk about their family as they draw. Who is in their family? Who stays with them? This will help you to understand something about the child's context.



Living in a family is God's idea

WHY GOD MADE THE CHURCH

TEACHING AIM

To help children understand that God wants the church to care for people

BIBLE STORY

The Early Church

(from Acts 1:42-47, Acts 4, Acts 6, Acts 9)

For children under the age of five:

The Bible tells us about the first church. The first church was a group of people who met together to learn more about Jesus so that they could live the way he wanted them to live. They knew it was important for them to tell everyone about Jesus and how much he loves people.

They also knew it was important for them to show God's love to people by helping them. In their town there were many people who did not have enough food to eat. Every day the church gave out food to people who did not have enough.

There were also people who did not have enough money to buy the things they needed to live. Some of the people in the church gave things to help the ones who did not have enough.

In a town called Joppa there was a lady names Dorcas. Dorcas loved Jesus and wanted to show his love to others. She was good at making clothes for people who did not have enough. Dorcas did many kind things for the people in her town.

When people who did not know about Jesus saw the kind things that the church did for others, they wanted to know about Jesus. They wanted to be part of the church, too.

For children over the age of five:

The Bible tells us about the first church. The first church was a group of people who met together to learn more about Jesus so that they could live the way he wanted them to live. They knew it was important for them to tell everyone about Jesus and how much he loves people.

They also knew it was important for them to show God's love to people by helping them. In that town there were many women whose husbands had died. They could not work and also look after their children, so many of them did not have enough food to eat. Every day the church gave out food to people who did not have enough.

There were also people who did not have enough money to buy the things they needed to live. Some of the people in the church who had a lot of money gave things to help the ones who did not have enough. The church wanted to make sure that people could hear about how much Jesus loved them. But they also knew that people would understand better about Jesus' love if the people in the church were kind and loving.

In a town called Joppa there was a lady names Dorcas. Dorcas loved Jesus and wanted to show his love to others. She was good at making clothes for people who did not have enough. Dorcas did many kind things for the people in her town. Everyone knew that she loved Jesus and that she cared for people.

When people who did not know about Jesus saw the kind things that the church did for others, they wanted to know about Jesus. They wanted to be part of the church, too.

ACTIVITY

For churches with available resources: younger children could be given a simple picture to colour —Dorcas making clothes, or the church feeding the poor. You can either use the picture at the end of this lesson or children can

draw their own picture as you talk about the topic. Make sure you have some paper and colours for children to use.

For older children, you could do some role play about caring for others: have groups of 5-6 children and give the groups some different situations to role play about. (would need to come up with 4 or 5 scenarios appropriate to the culture—describe a situation, then ask one group to role play a caring solution that would please God and another group to role play a non-caring response?)

THINK

What are some examples of people in our community, either children or adults, who need the church to care for them? Are there any ways that I can help my church care for other people in our community? What about looking after children who do not have families? Do you think that the church in Acts would have done this? Should we be doing this today?

PRAY

‘Thank you, Jesus, that everyone who loves and follows you can be part of your church. Please help our church to find more ways to care for people in our community who need help. Help us to show your love not just by telling people about you, but also by our caring actions. Amen.’

DO

If your church is already doing things to help people in your community, find a way that you can help. Think about someone you see in your community who you know needs help. Talk to an adult about ways that you or someone in your church might be able to help.

PLAY

Play a simple game called ‘Teacher says’. (Use your name, not ‘teacher’.) Explain to the children that you are going to give them some instructions about simple things to do, like raise your hands, touch your toes, turn

around, etc. If you say, ‘Teacher says’ before giving the command, they must all do it, but if you just give the command, then they must not do it. Each time you give a new command, you do the action as you say it, whether you say ‘Teacher says’ or not. Anyone who does the action when you have not said ‘Teacher says’, is out of the game and must go to one side. So it works like this:

‘Teacher says touch your toes.’ (You touch your toes as you say it and everyone touches their toes.)

‘Teacher says put your hands in the air.’ (You put your hands in the air as you say it and everyone puts their hands in the air.)

‘Teacher says clap your hands.’ (You clap your hands as you say it and everyone else claps their hands.)

‘Turn around.’ (You turn around as you say it. Some of the children will also turn around, but some will realise that you did not say ‘teacher says’ and they will not turn around. The ones who do turn around are out, and must sit to the side.)

The game carries on with those who are left. As the children get used to playing, you can go faster and faster with your commands.

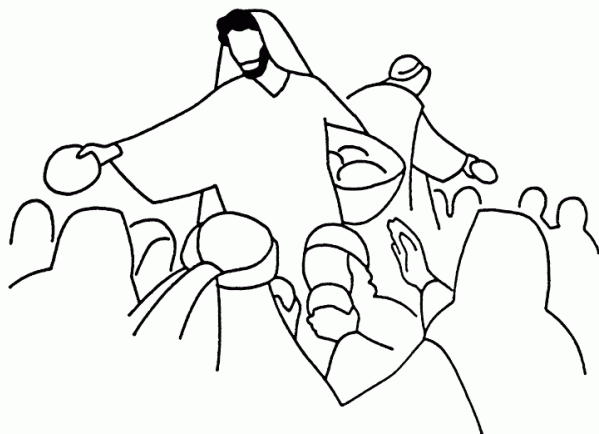
If you are playing with older children, once they understand the game, one of them might like a turn to be the leader.

Teaching point

It is important for children to learn to follow instructions and listen carefully. It is far more important for them to listen carefully to what the Bible says, and to obey it! Pray: ‘Thank you Jesus for this fun game we have played. Help us learn to be good listeners—listening carefully to our teachers and to our parents. But most of all, help us to listen to what you tell us in the Bible and help us to obey it in our lives.’



Darcas helped God by making clothes and giving food to poor people.



The church cares for people

CREATING COMMUNITY

TEACHING AIM

To help children understand that God planned for people to live in communities as well as in families.

BIBLE STORY

Living Together As People

(from Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

For children under five years of age:

When God made people, he planned for them to live together in families. But he also knew that lots of families would live together in villages and towns. God told people how they could live together in good ways—ways that would help them love God, and help them love each other.

God wanted to make sure that all people knew how much he loved them, and he wanted them to know what he had said about living his way. So God told the people to make sure that they reminded each other about these things.

God told the adults in villages and towns to make sure that they told their children about him. His love for people and his way of living isn't just for people who are grown up, it is for children, too.

So God told the people that they should tell the stories about him in their homes, and as they ate their food, and as they went for walks. He wanted whole towns and villages to work together to make sure that children were looked after, and that they grew up knowing about him.

For children over five years of age:

When God made people, he planned for them to live together in families. But he also knew that lots of families would live together in villages and towns. God told people how they could live together in good ways—ways that would help them love God, and help them love each other.

God wanted to make sure that all people knew how much he loved them, and he wanted them to know what he had said about living his way. So God told the people to make sure that they reminded each other about these things.

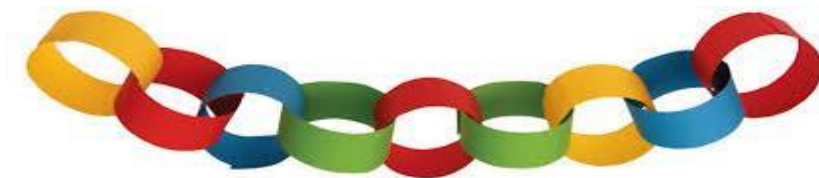
God told the people to remember that he is the only true God, and that they should love him more than anything. Keeping God's rules and living the way he wants us to live is the best way to show God how much we love him.

God told the adults in villages and towns to make sure that they told their children about him. His love for people and his way of living isn't just for people who are grown up, it is for children, too.

So God told the people that they should tell the stories about him in their homes, and as they ate their food, and as they went for walks. He wanted mothers and fathers, aunties and uncles, and grandparents to all be part of helping children know his love. God wanted whole towns and villages to work together to make sure that children were looked after, and that they grew up knowing about him. God knew that the best way for people to live was to love him and follow him. His plan was for communities to work together to make sure that everyone was looked after.

ACTIVITY

Make paper chains to decorate the room where you are meeting.



You can make simple paper chains by cutting lots of strips of paper, about 25 cms long and 5-7 cms wide. If you do not have coloured paper or even white paper, you can cut strips from newspaper, especially pages that have colour pictures on them. (If you do that, make sure that once you have cut the strips, you check that none of them have disturbing or inappropriate images on them.) If you have time, and crayons or pens are available, let children decorate some strips before they make the chain. Young children can simply colour them in. Older children may want to make colourful patterns and designs. Once all the strips are ready, let the children work together to either glue, staple or tape the strips together to make chains. This activity illustrates the role of the individual, but also teamwork and community.

Instructions for making paperchains

What you need coloured paper, scissors, stapler, stickers, crayons

1. Cut the coloured paper into strips.
2. However wide you choose to make the strips will determine how thick the rings of the chains will be.
3. However, many strips you cut, will determine the amount of rings in the paper chain.
4. Decorate the paper strips with patterns, stickers, drawings or words using crayons.
5. Fold one of the strips into a circle.
6. Staple the ends together to form a ring.
7. Slip another strip through the previously formed ring.

8. Staple the ends of the new circle together.
9. Repeat this process until you've made a long chain.
10. Hang up as decoration.

THINK

The Bible tells us about God's plan for people and for communities. He still wants us to know his love today, and live his way today. He still wants people to work together in churches and in towns and villages to make sure that children are looked after and learn about his love.

How could we, as children, help to make sure that other children in our community learn about God's love for them? How could we help to make sure children are looked after and have the things they need?

PRAY

'Thank you, God, that you have given us communities to live in. Thank you for churches, clubs and schools that work to help children. Please help us and our church to make sure we work with others in our community so that children can hear about your love and be looked after well.'

DO

Could you be part of a club in your community that helps children? Are there child ambassadors in your area—could you become one?

Sometimes it is harder for children to do some of these things, but we can be learning to work together with others. This week, look around in your home and your school for ways that you can work with others to do good things.

PLAY

You will need: a plastic bowl/basin of water, an empty bowl/basin, 5 plastic cups.

Put the basin of water on the ground, and the empty basin about 3-4 metres away from it. Put all the cups on the ground beside the basin of water.

Choose one child to start the game. Explain to them that they will have one minute to use the cups to get as much water from the full basin into the empty basin. At the end of one minute, measure how much water they managed to move.

Then choose another child to work with them. Give them one minute to see how much they can move when they work together. Measure the amount.

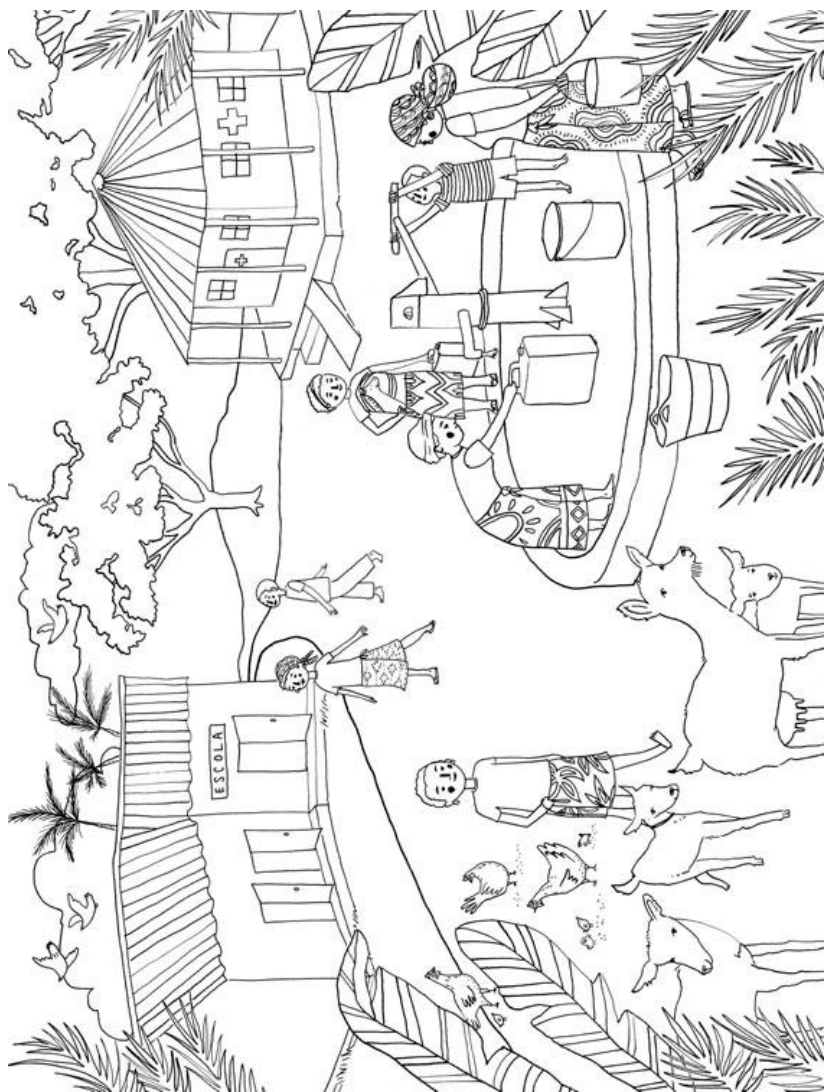
For the final time, choose three more children to help the first two. Give them one minute and see how much water they can move.

Teaching point

Hopefully, each time there will be more water moved! This will show how much more we can do if we work together than if we just do things on our own. If you have time, you might do the game a second time, using different children, to see how different groups choose to work together. Pray: 'Thank you, God, that you did not make us to do everything y ourselves. Thank you for planning that we would work together. Help us to work well with others in our homes, our schools, our churches and our communities.'

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

Encourage the children to draw a picture of their community, or use the one below. Talk about their community as they draw. Who is in their community? Who stays near them? This will help you to understand something about the child's context.



My Community

COMMISSIONED TO RESCUE AND RESTORE

TEACHING AIM

To help children understand that God wants us to be part of sharing his love and life with others

BIBLE STORY

Jesus The Good Shepherd

(John 10, with Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8)

For children under five years of age:

When Jesus was teaching people about how much he loved them, and how he wanted them to live, he often told stories. One day he told the people that he is a good shepherd, and they were like his sheep. A good shepherd knows all of his sheep. He leads them to places where they can find good grass to eat and fresh water to drink. He protects them if wild animals attack them.

The sheep get used to the shepherd and they know what his voice sounds like. When they hear him calling them, they follow him.

Jesus said that some people might pretend to love you or look after you, like a shepherd looks after sheep, but they don't really want to take care of you. Jesus is not like that. He really does love us and he wants us to love him and live his way. He knows that is the very best thing for us to do. When we know Jesus, we learn about the best kind of life.

And Jesus wants us to tell other people about this. He wants us to help other people know about his love and about living the best kind of life.

The Bible tells us that Jesus said that we should tell people who live in our village about his love, that we should tell people who live in our country

about his love, and even that he wants the whole world to know about his love.

For children over five years of age:

When Jesus was teaching people about how much he loved them, and how he wanted them to live, he often told stories to help them understand. One day he told the people that he is a good shepherd, and they were like his sheep. A good shepherd knows all of his sheep. Sometimes he even gives them names! He leads them to places where they can find good grass to eat and fresh water to drink. He protects them if wild animals attack them.

The sheep get used to the shepherd and they know what his voice sounds like. When they hear him calling them, they follow him.

Jesus said that some people might pretend to love you or look after you, like a shepherd looks after sheep, but they don't really want to take care of you. They might tell you things that sound good, but they are not telling the truth. Jesus is not like that. He really does love us and he wants us to love him and live his way. He knows that is the very best thing for us to do. When we know Jesus, we learn about the best kind of life.

And Jesus wants us to tell other people about this. He wants us to help other people know about his love and about living the best kind of life.

The Bible tells us that Jesus said that we should tell people who live in our village about his love, that we should tell people who live in our country about his love, and even that he wants the whole world to know about his love. Sometimes it is hard to tell other people about Jesus and his love. Sometimes it is hard to live the way he wants us to live. But Jesus promised that he would always be with us, and that he would help us to live his way.

ACTIVITY

Children never seem to get tired of colouring. Give them a simple outline of a shepherd with sheep. Include some simple text that they can colour as well:

You can either use the picture at the end of this lesson or children can draw their own picture as you talk about the topic. Make sure you have some paper and colours for children to use.

THINK

Can you think of things a shepherd does to look after his sheep or goats? Can you think of things the Bible tells us about how Jesus cares for us?

Think about someone in your community or maybe your school who does not know about how much Jesus loves them. Can you think of ways you can be kind to them and ways you can tell them about Jesus and his best way of living?

PRAY

‘Thank you, Jesus, that you know each one of us and that you love us. Thank you that you want us to live the best kind of life. Help us learn how to follow your ways and live the way you want us to live. Please help us learn how to share your love with others.’

DO

Did you think of someone who does not know about Jesus? This week, pray for them every day, that they would want to hear about Jesus’ love. Did you think of ways you could share Jesus’ love with them? If you did, pray that you can have a chance to share with them this week.

PLAY

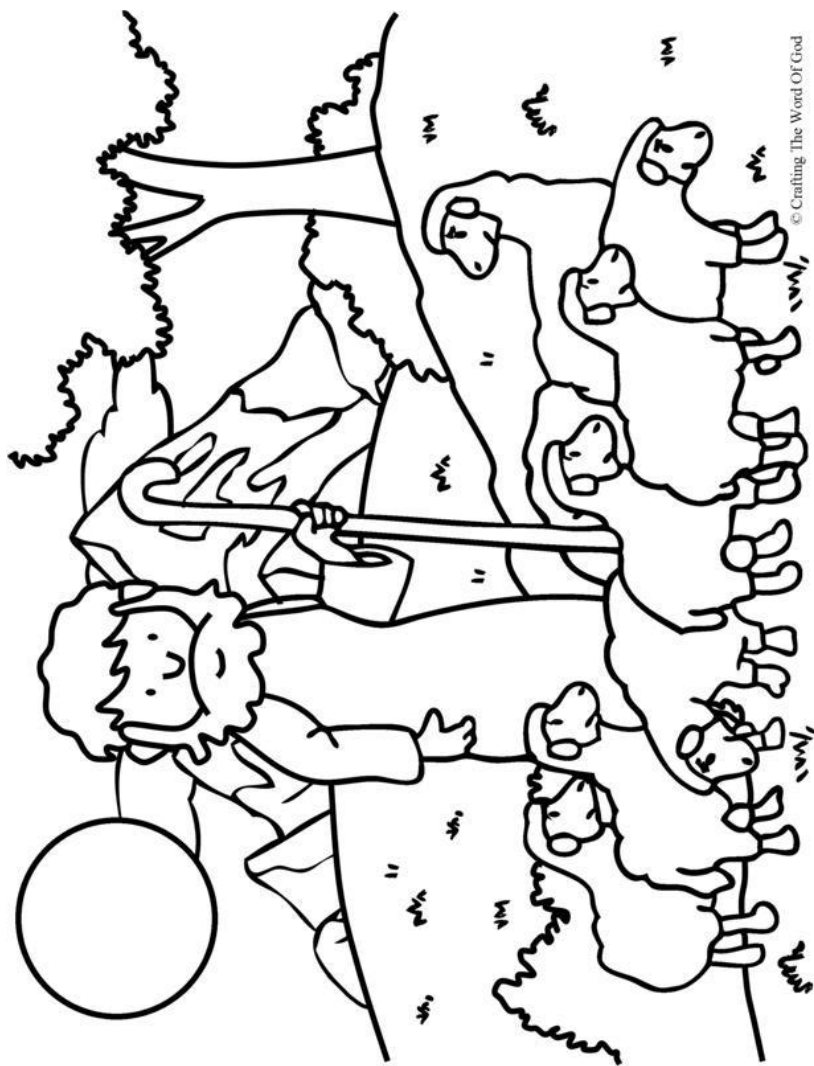
Play a game called ‘Goat, Goat, Cow’.

Have the children sit in a circle. Choose one child to be the ‘farmer’. That child stands up and walks around the outside of the circle. As they pass each child, they gently tap them on the head and say ‘goat’. At some point, (they can choose when) they tap the next child and say ‘cow’. As soon as they do that, they need to start running around the outside of the circle. The child

who has been called 'cow' must jump up and chase them around the circle. The 'farmer' is trying to get back to the gap in the circle and sit down before the 'cow' catches them. If the 'farmer' manages to do that, they sit down and the 'cow' becomes the farmer. If the cow manages to tag the farmer before they sit down, then the cow sits down again and the farmer has another go with 'goat, goat, cow'.

Teaching point

Like some of the other games in this series, the game has nothing to do with the story. It's just fun! But part of the 'life to the full' that Jesus wants to give us includes laughter, friends and enjoyment. Pray: 'Thank you Jesus for the fun we can have playing games. Thank you for friends to play with. Thank you that you love us and want us to have the best kind of life.'



Jesus looks after us like a good shepherd



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