

November 2024 – What can Jesus do?

Please note Bible stories and themes may occasionally differ from this overview.

This November we use lots of verbs as the New Testament shows some of the things Jesus does. He **teaches** about forgiveness through the story of the farmer and his two sons; **contrasts** greatness and humility through the Pharisee and the tax collector; **explains** how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven using a child as an example; **declares** he would give up his life for others and heals a blind beggar. Jesus teaches, contrasts, explains, declares and **heals** – plenty of verbs to show what Jesus can do this November.

Session 1 Nov 2/3

Session Aim: To learn how God forgives
Bible Ref: Luke 15:11–32

Today's fruit

Kindness is shown by the welcoming father.

A story of forgiveness

Jesus taught about forgiveness through a story of a farmer and his two sons. The younger son wanted his inheritance of the farm early, which his dad shared before he went off travelling. Although he let his son go, the farmer was sad.

The young son enjoyed travelling at first, visiting cities, eating lovely food, and going to parties – but then his money ran out. Then a famine hit the land caused by a drought, so the son had to find a job and became a pig-keeper.

Eventually he decided to return home and ask his dad's forgiveness. As he approached, his dad ran to greet him, overjoyed at his return. He threw a party with a feast and music!

This angered the older brother who had been working hard in the fields all day; he felt his brother didn't deserve this treatment. But the farmer said, 'Everything I have I give to you, too. But your brother was lost and is found, he has come home.'

Think about

When we want what others have, it is called jealousy. How do we feel when others seem to get special treatment that we want for ourselves? Why was the older brother so angry? Why was he not pleased that his younger brother had come home? Is there anything unusual about the farmer in this story for you?

Who is the kindest person you have ever come across and how did they show this?

Does God prefer some people over others, or can we let this story change our view of all people as equally valuable to God?

Session 2 Nov 19/10

Session Aim: To find that being right with God comes through humility
Bible Ref: Luke 18:9-14

Today's fruit

Gentleness is shown by the tax collector's humble prayer.

The Pharisee and the tax collector

Pharisees looked down on people who did not follow their strict laws about religion. Jesus told a story to help them see that it was wrong to do this. It featured a Pharisee and a tax collector – a very unpopular job because they collected money for the Roman occupiers. Both went into the Temple to pray.

The Pharisee did a very public prayer, making sure everyone could see, and he thanked God that he was not like 'that greedy tax collector over there'. The tax collector, however, did not want to be seen by anyone. Whispering he prayed, 'Lord, forgive me.'

Jesus taught that the tax collector went home with God's blessing because he didn't show off or shout about how good he was. We call this humility.

Humility makes us right with God; it's not about how great we are. You cannot 'earn enough points' to be made right with God.

Obviously this was unwelcome news for the Pharisees listening to Jesus' story of God's forgiveness.

Think about

How do we make our lives right with God? Is it about doing lots of good deeds, remembering to pray, even raising money for charity? What if we cannot do those things – how do we find God's forgiveness then?

Do you know of any charities and the work they do? Perhaps your school might donate to some of them.

The tax collector prayed quietly but very honestly. His gentle approach met with God's forgiveness. We cannot all be loud. Personalities differ, but we can watch out for thinking we're good enough and showing off, especially about our good works.

Gentleness shows humility, when we know we haven't got everything perfectly sorted and come to God as we truly are. Do you know people who demonstrate this kind of gentleness in their lives?

10 November: Remembrance Sunday

On this day we remember the brave deeds of those who have fought in world wars and other conflicts. This is another opportunity for us to consider the humility of self-sacrifice.

Session 3 Nov 16/17

Session Aim: To see how Jesus used children as an example
Bible Ref: Matthew 18:1-5; 19:13-14

Today's fruit

To **love** children is to love humility.

Jesus and the children

Sometimes the disciples would argue about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is similar to last week, when the Pharisee compared himself with the tax collector.

To their surprise, Jesus used a child as an example. He explained that entering the Kingdom of Heaven meant becoming like a child. The disciples forgot his challenge to them; but some time later, while Jesus was teaching, lots of children wanted to get closer to him. The disciples tried to get the children to move away, but Jesus wanted them to come to him.

Again, Jesus reminded the disciples that accepting children was as good as accepting him. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are humble and have qualities like a child.

Think about

What do you imagine the Kingdom of Heaven to be like? Where can we find it? Perhaps use your senses to try and describe it.

What do we need to enter Heaven? Is it about who prays the most or who lives the perfect life? How do you feel about the disciples arguing over this?

Today's teaching is again about humility. In what ways are children less powerful than adults, and perhaps even more vulnerable?

What are the qualities of being a child that you enjoy? Why do you think that Jesus uses this example?

Session 4 Nov 23/24

Session Aim: To learn that Jesus was prepared to give up his life
Bible Ref: John 10:1-21

Today's fruit

Goodness is seen when we serve others without a reward.

Jesus the good shepherd

One of Jesus' stories was about a shepherd who was hired to look after sheep. But if a wolf attacked, the shepherd would run away leaving the sheep unprotected – he did not care enough to stay. In contrast, Jesus described himself as a good shepherd; he cared deeply for his sheep and would sacrifice himself to look after them.

Jesus knew that if he gave up his life to God, God would give him life again. This was tricky to understand. Confused, his listeners thought Jesus was mad or had a demon inside him. But others said, 'A man who is crazy with a demon does not say things like this. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'

Jesus had healed people and was too caring a person to be unkind. Instead, he was trying to explain that he was willing to die for everybody. This was simple goodness, a kind they had never seen before.

Think about

Why did Jesus explain such difficult teachings using stories? Why did he choose a story about a shepherd and sheep? Would he choose something else today?

Jesus explained: 'A thief comes to steal and to kill and destroy. But I came to give life – life in all its fullness.' What does fullness of life mean for you? Are there parts of your life that do not always feel full?

What sort of job would you like to be paid to do for just one day? Paid workers don't care as much for the sheep as the shepherd who owns them. Is there anything you would do for free as you grow up, simply because you care for others?

What did Jesus mean when he said that giving up his life actually meant getting it back? Serving others like Jesus shows a goodness we don't often see. Why not?

Session 5 Nov 30 / Dec 1

Session Aim: To learn that Bartimaeus was healed by Jesus
Bible Ref: Luke 18:35-43

Today's fruit

Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, experienced by Bartimaeus.

Blind Bartimaeus

Bartimaeus was a beggar in Jericho who sat beside the road. He heard lots of people coming his way and he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was arriving. He had heard the stories of what Jesus had done and wondered if Jesus could do the same for him. So he called out to Jesus.

Despite the crowds blocking him, Jesus heard his shouts and came to Bartimaeus, asking him what he would like him to do. Bartimaeus wanted to see.

So Jesus healed Bartimaeus and he could see again. Jesus said this was because he believed. Bartimaeus followed Jesus, thanking God.

Of course, this looks like joy in terms of happiness; but can we have a joy in terms of 'peace', even when things are not going so well for us?

Nobody has a constant feeling of happiness in their lives – there are ups and downs and unanswered prayers. Perhaps, like Bartimaeus, it is the waiting with Jesus that leads to joy?

Think about

This looks like another amazing event in the works of Jesus. But what do you notice about Jesus' question to Bartimaeus? Do we need to name what we need when asking God? Does this impact how we might pray?

Even if we have eyes that work, it might be difficult to 'see' who Jesus is. What is blocking you from seeing him today? How do you see Jesus – as a friend, helper, guide – or king perhaps?

1 December: First Sunday in Advent

Before all the rush of Christmas starts on 25 December, what steps could you take this Advent season to see Jesus more clearly this year?

Is it about slowing down, reading something each day, or getting used to praying a little? Or doing something that makes us calm? How will you find joy and a sense that God has everything under control this Advent?