

The Vineyard Workers

Lesson At-A-Glance

Scripture Reference
Matthew 20:1-16

Church Season
Pentecost

Lesson Focus
God starts at the end of the line.

Bible Memory Verse
**So the last will be first, and the first will be last.
Matthew 20:16**



Tear here for easy use!

Gather (10 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Arrival Activity Kids try to count to a certain number without planning.	Activity Pages 	Pencils
Opening Conversation Kids talk about what's "fair."	Leaflets	None
Opening Prayer Kids compare God to different things as an introduction to parables.	None	None

Open the Bible (20 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
The Vineyard Workers Story Kids wait for a surprise in today's story.	Spark Bibles, Spark Bible Stickers	None
Who Invited You? Kids explore the possibility that God loves everyone.	Spark Bibles, Leaflets	Pencils
Worst Job Interview Ever Kids are subjected to a job interview but don't want to be picked.	None	Ugly clip-on tie (optional)
Remember It Kids memorize the Bible Memory Verse.	Spark Bibles, Spark Bible Stickers, Leaflets	None


Lesson At-A-Glance

Activate Faith (10 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Agreed! Kids think about honoring agreements.	Leaflets	Pencils
Vineyard Maze Kids ask tough questions of the vineyard owner from today's story.	Leaflets	Pencils
Working for Life Kids think of how jobs and wages have changed over the years.	Leaflets	Pencils

Tear here for easy use!

Send (5 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Closing Conversation Kids talk about the difference between humility and dignity.	Leaflets	None
Closing Prayer Kids "stand idle" until they're called to work.	Family Pages 	None



Visit www.sparksundayschool.org for more Spark content! Watch a short Lesson Prep Video that will prepare you and give you confidence to explore this Bible story with the kids you are leading. You will also find four downloadable resources for this lesson: an Activity Page, a Family Page, and two additional in-class activities.

Gather (10 minutes)

Arrival Activity

If some kids arrive earlier than others and you need a lesson-based activity, make copies of the downloadable Activity Page and set them out for kids to try.

When everyone (or nearly everyone) has arrived, have kids stand in a circle for this warm-up game. Explain to the group that the rules for this game are simple: The goal is to have the group count to 30 by having someone shout out "1," then someone else shout out "2," etc. However, you are not allowed to form a pattern or move around a circle. The numbers must come randomly. If more than one kid yells the same number, the group must go back to 1 and start over.

Whether you succeed or not, ask,

- **Did you think that was easy or not? What's a strategy people might use to be more successful at that game?**
- **Would you call that game "fair"? Why or why not?**

Let's talk more about that.

Opening Conversation

Who was able to try a Faith on the Go! activity this past week? Tell us what you did. Allow some time for sharing.

Who can tell me the Bible Memory Verse from last week? If kids remember the BMV, invite them to recite it as a group. Guide kids to help them remember parts they don't.

Distribute leaflets. **Take a look at the front of your leaflets, at the picture with the scale.**

- **Do you think what's happening in this picture is fair? Why?**
- **How do we know what "fairness" is?**
- **If something feels "unfair" to us, does that mean it is? What if it seems fair to us, but unfair to someone else? Who chooses?**
- **What if the unfair thing is the loving thing to do?**

Today, we'll hear a parable from Jesus that says that God isn't always fair by our standards, but God is still God. Curious? Let's get started.

Spark Resources
Activity Pages



Supplies
Pencils

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
None

Tear here for easy use!

Opening Prayer

Explain to your group that you'll be praying a simlie prayer today. Someone starts a prayer by saying, "God, you're like a . . ." and then adds a word. The next kid completes the thought by explaining why God is like that, and then starts another "God, you're like a" prayer, all the way around the circle.

When the prayer has been "Amen-ed," ask,

- **What are some of your favorite images for God? Is God like a father? A mother? A Ferris wheel? Why are these your favorites?**
- **What are some images of God that you've heard people use, and that you find it difficult to relate to? Why do you think this is?**

Over the following weeks, we'll be hearing Jesus compare God and the kingdom of God to a lot of different stuff. Some of these comparisons might make us happy, and some might challenge us. But today they might do both!

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

None

Tear here for easy use!

Open the Bible (20 minutes)

The Vineyard Workers Story

Ask kids to find Matthew 20:1-16 on pages 1082-1083 in the Spark Bible. Have a volunteer get ready to read today's story. Ask the volunteer to take her or his Spark Bible somewhere private (a hallway works) and read it through once to get used to it. While he or she is out in the hallway, instruct the rest of the kids to get ready for a surprise. After the reader finishes verse 10, have everyone stand up and shout "Surprise!" and immediately sit back down like nothing has happened.

When you've read the whole story, ask the reader, **Did we surprise you? How did it make you feel?**

Ask the group,

- **Why are the all-day workers in this story upset? Do they deserve to be angry?**
- **Why is God's grace something worth celebrating?**
- **Who didn't feel like celebrating in this story? Is the vineyard owner's decision "fair"?**

I would say that, no, the vineyard owner's decision isn't fair. But sometimes grace doesn't seem fair, either. God offers forgiveness to everyone, even those who are late to the party, or people we don't like. Let's explore this some more.

Spark Resources

Spark Bibles
Spark Bible Stickers

Supplies

None

Who Invited You?

Invite kids to find Who Invited You? on the third page of the leaflet. Ask kids to close their eyes and imagine this scene: **You've been invited to eat a meal with Jesus, but when you arrive, your worst enemy is there, too. Picture this in your head. How does it make you feel? Do you have questions you'd like to ask Jesus? Now open your eyes.**

Have kids fill in the thought bubble in their leaflets, and share their questions with the group. The best way to debrief this activity is by discussing the tougher questions together about the nature of grace, and why it's entirely possible that someone unexpected will be invited into God's love!

Explore the Look it Up! activity on the third page of the leaflet. Read it, discuss it together, and answer questions. Isaiah 55:1-9 is on page 797 in the Spark Bible.

Spark Resources

Spark Bibles
Leaflets

Supplies

Pencils

Tear here for easy use!

Worst Job Interview Ever

For this game, you'll play the role of a boss hiring a new employee. If you have a hideous clip-on tie, you might want to wear it for this.

Explain to your group that you'll go down the line asking them two important job interview questions, and it's their goal to come up with the *worst* possible answers.

Go through the group asking,

- **What did you learn from the last job you had?**
- **If you were hired for this job, how would you spend a typical day?**

Feel free to enhance this activity by making up further details about the company you've recently founded. What does your business do? Who are some of your famous clients? The sillier you act, the more fun it will be for the kids!

Once everyone has had a turn, pick the response that was your favorite, go up to him or her, and say,

I must say that, I've had a lot of bad interviews, but you are the worst person for the job!

Then ask,

- **Is working in God's kingdom about being unprepared for the job?** (*No, it's about being ready, even when we think our chance is past us.*)
- **Why is God willing to use people who want a second chance?**
- **How can we welcome those people who have been standing around doing nothing until now?**

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

Ugly clip-on tie (optional)

Remember It

Ask kids to look up Matthew 20:16 on page 1083 in the Spark Bible. They can also look at the last page of the leaflet. This is an easy verse to memorize, so add a little confusing action to the activity. Ask the kids to form a line with the first kid standing in front of you and the rest of the kids lined up behind the first kid.

As you read, **“So the last will be first,”** pause and have the kid who is last in line move to the front. Continue the pause as the new last kid in line moves to the front. After this goes on for a while, continue reading, **“and the first will be last.”** Pause again as the kids move in reverse—the first kid in line moves to the back.

Once the verse is memorized, invite kids to put I Memorized It stickers in their Bibles.

Spark Resources

Spark Bibles
Spark Bible Stickers
Leaflets

Supplies

None

Tear here for easy use!

Activate Faith (10 minutes)

Agreed!

Invite kids to complete Agreed! on the last page of the leaflet. Encourage kids to help each other. It may be helpful for your group to hear some examples from you. For instance, **“With my friend Sue, I have an unspoken agreement that, whenever we’re together on 5th Street, we’ll eat at that one little coffee shop.”**

When everyone has explored the possibility of unspoken covenants, ask,

- **What’s the difference between an agreement and a promise? When God says that God will love us always, which is that?**
- **Why do you think God would let the last be first? Again, isn’t this unfair? What other things has God done in the past that showed us that he loves the least of all?**
- **How can we imitate God’s mercy, even to the “last” of these?**

Spark Resources

Leaflets

Supplies

Pencils

Vineyard Maze

Give kids time to complete Vineyard Maze on the second page of the leaflet. Some kids will get the work done quickly, but some will take their time—sound familiar?

When everyone has finished, debrief by asking,

- **How would you feel if everyone was given a prize for finishing this maze, no matter how long it took you and them? Would it change the amount of effort you put into it?**
- **Can you think of a time in your life when everyone received a prize, and you thought it was unfair? How did it make you feel?**
- **Do you think only first-place finishers deserve a prize? Why?**

Next, work together as a group to come up with a list of tough questions to ask the vineyard owner from today's story. If your group is struggling to come up with good questions to ask, some of these examples can be used. See what kind of answers your group can come up with, as well.

- **Did you like giving the same amount of pay to everyone who worked that day?**
- **If someone who came to work for you worked all day but didn't work hard, would you still have paid him or her?**
- **Did you hire the people late in the day because you felt sorry for them, or because you needed the workers?**

Take a look at the trivia in Did You Know? on the second page of the leaflet. Challenge the kids to consider how few people actually work on farms to provide our food. For your information, only 7 percent of Americans work on farms (22 million out of 308 million).

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
Pencils

Tear here for easy use!

Working for Life

Have kids find Working for Life on the second page of the leaflet. This activity will open kids up to thinking about how jobs have changed over time. Work together as a group to guess at the answers to this short quiz.

Answer Key

\$760 (Plumbers) - \$33.00

\$625 (Interior Painters) - \$28.60

\$926 (Typesetters/Newspaper Graphic Designers) - \$24.00

- **Was that difficult? What clues did we have about which job matched up with the other?**
- **Today's story was about a vineyard worker. Are there still vineyard workers today? What about people who wait all day to be hired for a job? Tell us more about that!**
- **What do you think made these wages change so much over time? Who decides which jobs make the most money?**

Spark Resources

Leaflets

Supplies

Pencils

Tear here for easy use!

Send (5 minutes)

Closing Conversation

In this story, the vineyard owner is humble (allowing the late workers to earn a generous wage), but he also possesses dignity (sticks to his guns and defends himself).

- **If the owner had backed down and changed his mind, what would that tell us about the value of his workers? His character?**
- **Is mercy still mercy if we don't stand up for it?**
- **What if God changed God's mind and said, "Y'know what, never mind—the first are first after all. The people who come into the kingdom first can shut the door behind them." Would God do that? Why?**
- **If God changed, would it change the way you feel about God?**
- **When we meet people who are coming from a different place than us, how can we be humble? How can we stand up for our own opinions?**

Spark Resources

Leaflets

Supplies

None

Invite kids to find Faith on the Go! on the last page of the leaflet. Encourage them to complete the assignment and report back next week.

Closing Prayer

This closing prayer is simple. Have the group stand against a wall, doing their best to look “idle.”

Stand in front of the group, and hold your arms like a clock, pointing as if it’s 9:00. You say, **“It’s 9:00 in the kingdom of God!”** They respond by jumping up with smiling faces, and saying, **“We’re ready to work!”** and then they return to looking idle.

Repeat it three more times (for noon, 3:00, and 5:00) and then say, **Amen.**

Be sure to send a leaflet and a Family Page home with each kid.

Spark Resources

Family Pages



Supplies

None

Tear here for easy use!