

Semicontinuous
Exod. 16:2–15
Ps. 105:1–6, 37–45
 Complementary
Jonah 3:10–4:11
Ps. 145:1–8
Phil. 1:21–30
Matt. 20:1–16

God's Generosity

Goal for the Session

Tweens will celebrate the radical generosity of God as expressed in Jesus' parable of the vineyard laborers.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Matthew 20:1–16

WHAT is important to know

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Lewis R. Donelson

This parable is bracketed by two versions of the Jesus saying, "The last will be first and the first will be last" (Matthew 19:30; 20:16). This bracketing has always been a bit puzzling to readers, since the parable itself does not quite illustrate the sequence and hierarchies of the Jesus saying. The discussions in Matthew 19:13–30 suggest that this parable is addressing questions of rank and order of entry into the kingdom of heaven. While the parable certainly connects to such issues, the main focus is on questions of grace and justice, not on rank and sequence.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Kathryn D. Blanchard

God's standards of justice and value are consistently presented in both the Old Testament and New Testament as alien to human standards, but God's people are expected to behave according to these alien standards, neither demanding their rights nor begrudging others' good fortunes. There is of course potential for abuse of such teachings, perhaps to uphold an unjust status quo in which oppressed persons are admonished to wait patiently for their reward. It is clear that a responsible theological reading of this parable tends toward radical equality in the church, in which all are equally near to receiving God's gracious reward.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Charlotte Dudley Cleghorn

The landowner begins by giving everyone in the story work. Each of the laborers is unemployed and each is given work to do with the promise of pay. This parable essentially is about the generosity of God. This parable reminds us that God is a lousy bookkeeper and invites us to transform our pride, envy, and hardness into joy by admiring and celebrating God's astounding generosity. This parable calls us to look at ourselves honestly and lovingly, as God looks at us. It invites us to turn to let go of the stuff of our lives that keeps us from being joy-filled and grateful people.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Charles L. Campbell

Those who worked the longest must watch everyone else get paid the same as they do. Their complaint does not simply concern money; it goes much deeper, to what the money represents. It takes us beneath mere economics to the spirit that underlies so much economic competition—a spirit shaped by the metaphors of winners and losers, superior and inferior. This parable calls us to envision God's new order and expose the spirits of the old. Such unmasking and envisioning may interrupt the presuppositions that hold people captive and help create the possibility of something new.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Matthew 20:1–16

Focus on Your Teaching

Generosity comes naturally to tweens. The Harris Poll “Teaching Appreciation Diminishes the Impact of Materialism” (January 8, 2007), found that over 80 percent of tweens enjoy raising money for charity, spending time helping others, and sharing their favorite things. Unfortunately, North America’s consumer-centric culture can sap that generosity: the poll also discovered tweens would rather go shopping than any other activity. Today’s parable challenges materialistic priorities. Where God reigns, people give thanks and rejoice in God’s generosity toward all. Today, encourage learners to nurture their generous spirits.

Ever-giving God, give me wisdom to share with your children, so we can join hands and voices to give glory to you and love to your world. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ battery-powered candle
- ☐ Color Pack 3, 4, 27, 28
- ☐ prepared puzzle pieces (Resource Sheet 1, September 10)
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ candy or other treat
- ☐ kitchen timer
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ pencils, pens
- ☐ index cards
- ☐ offering basket

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ option 2: craft sticks, several colors of yarn, scissors, glue, Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ option 3: Resource Sheet 2 and ingredients listed there

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome tweens by name as they arrive. Ask for one or two volunteers to prepare to read aloud Matthew 20:1–16 later in the session.

Gather the group by playing “Amazing Grace” (Color Pack 27; track 1 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Invite tweens to sing along as they arrange the green cloth in your learning space and place the candle on it. Light the candle as a reminder of Jesus’ presence.

Looking at Color Pack 3, briefly review the significance of the “X” or *chi* image as a symbol or “shorthand” for Christ. Affirm that, even though we are all different, we are all united in Jesus Christ.

Lead the opening ritual on Resource Sheet 1 from September 10 (In Christ, We All Fit Together).

✠ This week’s question for discussion: “When did you *really* want something that someone else had?”

EXPLORING

Announce that you have some candy (or other treat your tweens like) to give away, and five minutes to do it. Ask, “Who wants to earn some candy?” (Use those words.) Choose only one or two learners. Give them some physical task to perform, such as jumping jacks, sweeping, or running in place. Set a kitchen timer for five minutes and tell them to begin. After two minutes, ask, “Does anybody else want to earn some candy?” Choose more learners and assign the same task. (If questions arise, don’t respond. Tell them your offer is “limited time only.”) Choose the rest of the learners after four minutes.

FEASTING on the WORD

CURRICULUM

God's Generosity

Ask your congregation's worship leaders about including the tweens' cheers, chants, and raps from "Our Generous God" in worship, so that tweens can lead all God's people in a celebration of God's giving.

Amazing Grace

Amazing grace, how sweet
the sound,
That saved someone like me.
I once was lost but now am
found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Through many dangers,
toils, and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace that brought me
safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

When we've been here ten
thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing
God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

EASY
PREP

Call time. Give the youth who started last some candy. Proceed to give exactly the same amount to all the other learners. If and when youth complain that you are not being fair, point out that it's your candy to do with as you please! Ask how those who were recruited late in the game felt about getting the same amount as those who were chosen at the start; then reverse the question.

Ask learners to find Matthew 20:1–16 in their Bibles; assist as needed. Before reading the story, take a quiet moment to look at Color Pack 4. Ask:

✂ What words would you use to describe this person's work?

Ask the volunteers recruited earlier in the game to read aloud Matthew 20:1–16 while everyone follows along in their Bibles. After hearing the story, ask:

✂ Do you think the landowner in the story is fair or unfair? Why?

✂ Would you have done anything differently if you had been the owner of the vineyard? If so, what?

✂ Do you agree or disagree with the complaint of the workers who were hired first? Why?

✂ What do you think Jesus is teaching about God and the ways of God's kingdom by telling this story?

✂ How do you think your experience with the candy affected how you heard Jesus' story?

✂ In what ways is God generous with us and with all creation?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Eyes). Read aloud the quotation in "The Evil Eye." Explain that the landowner knew the first worker was "giving him 'the evil eye'" because that worker envied what the landowner paid the others. Take a moment for individuals to write or draw inside the eye shape about a time they felt envious. Do not ask youth to share their responses. Then offer this prayer:

Amazing God, forgive our evil eyes. May we see and celebrate your generosity toward everyone with good, godly eyes. Amen.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Our Generous God** Encourage tweens to give voice to their celebration of God's generosity. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Session Resources) and read together the verses listed in "Our Generous God" from your Bibles. Form groups of three. Ask each group to choose one of the verses on which to base a cheer, chant, or rap, and then teach it to the rest of the group.
- 2. God's Way of Seeing** To think more about God's good, generous eye (Matthew 20:15), make Ojos de Dios, according to the instructions on Resource Sheet 1. As tweens work, discuss: How does God see the world differently than we sometimes do? How might we learn to see the world more like God does? Encourage learners to take their completed projects home, either to keep for themselves as a reminder to seek God's vision for the world or to give to someone else.

- 3. Parable from the Pantry** If you have access to a kitchen with a stovetop range, help tweens celebrate the good news of God's generosity by making cookies to share. Follow the directions on Resource Sheet 2, being sure to ask about any food allergies before choosing this activity. Involve each learner in making the cookies. As the cookies are cooling, discuss: "How might making these cookies remind us of Jesus' story?" Responses might include: some people did more than others to make the cookies, but everyone will get to enjoy them; the peanut butter and corn flakes were added later than the sugar and corn syrup, but all the ingredients are equal in the finished product. Share the cookies with others, perhaps a younger class or church members after worship. Be mindful of possible allergies in those who will make and receive the treat.

Learn about ministries your congregation leads or supports to serve the working poor, especially day laborers like those in Jesus' story. As part of your celebration of God's generosity, plan a way your group can volunteer or raise money to help these ministries.

CLOSING

Invite learners to tell one new thought they have had about God's generosity as a result of today's session. Distribute index cards. Invite learners, on one side, to write or draw something for which they give God thanks. Then, on the other side, write or draw an act of generosity to which they will commit this week.

Pass an offering basket to collect the cards. Lead this litany, which adapts Psalm 145:2 as a refrain, to dedicate the offering:

Leader: Generous God, we praise you for your blessings.

Tweens: Every day we will bless you, and praise your name forever!

Leader: Generous God, give us strength, by your Spirit, to live as blessings to others.

Tweens: Every day we will bless you, and praise your name forever!

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

I'm gonna live so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!
I'm gonna live so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

I'm gonna work . . .

I'm gonna share . . .

I'm gonna care . . .

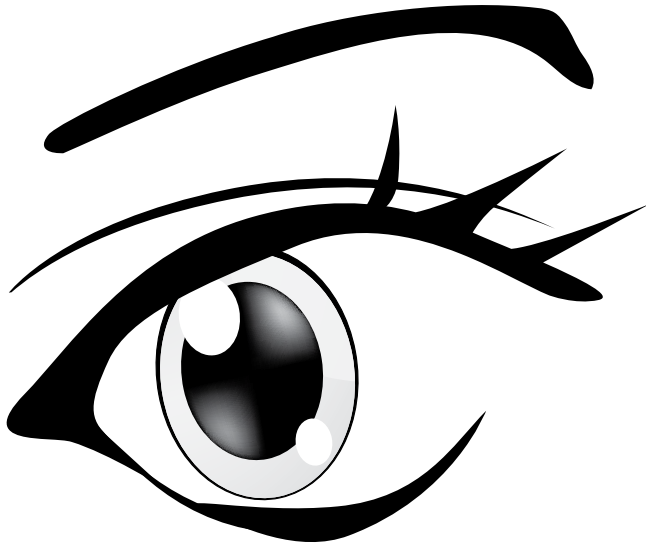
Sing "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" (Color Pack 28; track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Lead the closing charge:

Leader: We are ready to live so God can use us.

All: Go with God! Amen!

Extinguish the candle. Say good-bye to each tween by name.

Eyes

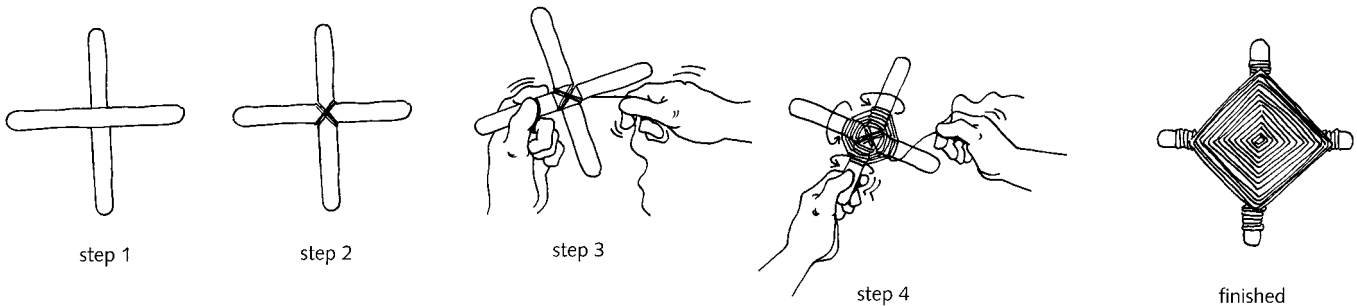


The Evil Eye

The last sentence of the story [Matthew 20:15b] . . . literally reads, "Is your eye evil because I am good?" The evil eye is a serious matter in Mediterranean societies. It is the eye of envy, and one must be on constant guard against the damage it can cause.

—Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 125.

Making an Ojo de Dios (Eye of God)



You will need 2 craft sticks and yarn of several colors.

1. Place one craft stick on top of the other, forming a cross with arms of equal length.
2. Tie the sticks together with yarn, or glue them together and let the glue dry.
3. Starting from behind the intersection of the sticks, pull your first color of yarn around to the front.
4. Proceed to wrap the yarn once around each arm of the cross in turn. You may go clockwise or counterclockwise. Repeat, making sure the next row of yarn is alongside, not on top of, the first.
5. Keep wrapping yarn around the arms until you are satisfied with the width of this first layer. A diamond-shaped "eye" will begin to form at the sticks' intersection.
6. Cut off the first color, tie on a new color, and repeat steps 3–5.
7. Build up your "eye" using as many colors as you like. When using your last color, leave some free space at the end of the arms. Finish by tying a knot in the loose end of the yarn.

Session Resources

Our Generous God

Genesis 1:29–31	The generous Creator
Psalms 104:10–15	God gives to all living creatures
Psalms 105:37–42	God's generosity in the Exodus
Psalms 145:9, 16	God is good to all
John 3:16	How God loved the world
Romans 8:31–32	God did not hold back God's Son
2 Corinthians 8:9	The generosity of Jesus
1 John 4:11, 19	Why do we love?

Parable from the Pantry



1 cup white sugar
1 cup light corn syrup
12-ounce jar of smooth peanut butter
4 cups corn flakes

1. Mix the sugar and corn syrup, and heat over low heat. Stir it constantly. Remove from heat when sugar is dissolved.
2. Stir peanut butter into the corn syrup mixture.
3. Carefully stir in the corn flakes.
4. Drop by spoonfuls onto an ungreased cookie sheet.
5. As the cookies cool, they will solidify. Refrigeration will speed the process but is not necessary.