

Semicontinuous
Exod. 32:1–14
Ps. 106:1–6, 19–23
 Complementary
Isa. 25:1–9
Psalm 23
Phil. 4:1–9
Matt. 22:1–14

It's God's Party

Goal for the Session

Tweens will explore how to live as guests at God's party in response to Jesus' parable of the wedding feast.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Matthew 22:1–14

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Susan Grove Eastman

The parable of the Wedding Banquet is the last of three parables spoken in the temple to the Jewish religious leaders. This, says Jesus, is what the kingdom of heaven is like: the expected guests are absent, and the most unlikely ones are present. Comparison of God's messianic rule with a great banquet, although not particularly a wedding feast, was familiar in Jewish literature (Psalm 107:1–9; Isaiah 25:6–8). It draws on the practice of ancient kings, who gave banquets for their subjects, and on the image of God as the king who feeds God's people.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Andrew Purves

The parable carries us into the subtle relationship between the grace of election (all were invited) and the obligations of obedience (to be clothed with Christ, to live in Christ). Grace is freely given, situating us in God's company by an act of God's loving election. As a consequence, we are obliged to live as God's people, according to God's will for our lives. To do so is to give honor to the king, to God. The failure to do so is to scorn God's love, God's choice of us. It is to assert our autonomy, to live in pride, which means that we are found clothed with ourselves rather than with Christ.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Richard E. Spalding

The crux of the matter—the fault of tenants (Matthew 21:33–46) and the error of the unrobed wedding guest—involves fruitfulness. Gospel living only begins with the invitation. It cannot remain a mere idea; its one essential thing is a transformed life. Though many have been called, the ones who are to be chosen are those who are living in a new way, who have put on life in Christ. Jesus suggests that fruitfulness can indeed be "put on" like a wedding robe—or a baptismal garment—that the outward effects of gospel choices will finally settle in the heart.

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

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Marvin A. McMickle

Within the Christian community there are those members like the ones in the parable who refuse the invitation from God in one way or another. They want the safe, soft side of discipleship, but they shy away from the more difficult work of outreach and social justice. They want blessings from God, but they cannot be found when it is time to share in the work of ministry. God has the authority to bench those who refuse to answer God's invitation for service. If some are unwilling to accept God's invitation, then there are others God can invite into divine service.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Matthew 22:1–14

Focus on Your Teaching

Whether sleepovers or birthday outings or first co-ed get-togethers with music and dancing, even introverted tweens enjoy being invited to parties. A party invitation can mean someone has decided that a celebration isn't complete without you—which is why not being invited can hurt so much. Tweens are also aware, sometimes to an unhealthy degree, that the invitation is just the beginning. Once you get to a party, you have to know how to fit in. Jesus pictures God's coming reign as a party at which "everyone" (Matthew 22:9) is welcome—and also at which proper party manners are expected.

Jesus, help me encourage these young people to answer your invitation to new life with great delight and growing dedication. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ battery-powered candle
- ☐ Color Pack 3, 7, 27, 30
- ☐ prepared puzzle pieces (see Resource Sheet 1, September 10)
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ 2 copies of Resource Sheet 1 per person
- ☐ index cards
- ☐ crayons or markers
- ☐ newsprint
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: card stock, markers, stickers or stamps and stamp pad
- ☐ option 2: Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ option 3: snack mix ingredients and supplies listed on Resource Sheet 2

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, prepare index cards for Exploring by writing a different kind of party or social occasion on each card, such as: black-tie dinner, pool party, slumber party, church picnic, Halloween party, wedding reception, prom, Scout banquet. Leave the other side of each card blank.

Welcome each learner by name. 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 and Color Pack 3 on it. Light the candle as a reminder of Jesus' presence.

Briefly review the significance of the "X" or *chi* image on Color Pack 3—even though each group member is different, all are united in Jesus Christ.

Prepare and lead the activity and ritual on Resource Sheet 1 from September 10 (In Christ, We All Fit Together).

✠ This week's question for discussion: "If you could invite any three people—real or fictional, living or dead—to a party, who would you invite and why?"

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.

The violence in verse 7 is a reference to the Roman Empire's conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE, about forty years after Jesus' ministry and many years before Matthew wrote his Gospel. The temple was destroyed at that time.

EXPLORING

Gather in a circle. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Partygoers). Holding the index cards facedown, ask each learner to take one. Have each learner, using crayons or markers, "dress" the top third of the person on Resource Sheet 1 in a manner appropriate to the occasion written on her or his index card. Tell learners not to show their work to anyone. After one minute, have youth return the index cards to you and fold their sheets so that the figure's top third is hidden. Pass the papers one person to the right. Have each learner draw another card, and repeat the process; this time, students will "dress" the middle third—without peeking at the top third—and fold the paper so that the top two-thirds of the figure is hidden. Repeat the process a third time, so that the figure on the sheet is fully "dressed." When learners have finished, unfold the sheets and enjoy the results!

Discuss parties:

- ✂ Do you think that what a person wears to a party matters? Why or why not?
- ✂ What's the worst or weirdest excuse you've ever heard or given for not going to a party?

Tell learners that today's Bible reading is a story Jesus told about some people who were invited to a party. Ask tweens to find Matthew 22:1–14 in their Bibles; assist as needed. Allow time for them to read through the story on their own. Ask: "Why do you think Jesus told this story?" After some discussion, review the story by asking three volunteers to read it aloud in sections: verses 1–7; verses 8–10; verses 11–14. Ask:

- ✂ In Jesus' day, people would accept or decline an invitation to a party far ahead of the actual date. Those who accepted would receive a reminder when the time came. How does this information help you understand the invited guests' behavior and the king's response?
- ✂ What does the presence of "both good and bad" (v. 10) among the newly invited guests tell us about the king's character?
- ✂ In Jesus' day, hosts often provided proper attire for wedding guests who could not afford it. How does this information help you understand the king's reaction to the guest who was not dressed appropriately?
- ✂ Read aloud verse 2. In what ways is the invitation to the king's party like God's call to follow Jesus and live in God's realm?

Give each learner a second copy of Resource Sheet 1. Ask volunteers to read aloud the Bible verses. Ask: "What might we learn from these verses about the 'clothes' God expects us to wear in the kingdom of heaven?" Invite students to decorate the figure in ways that illustrate what they learn from these verses about how God "re-dresses" us for life as God's people. Allow a few moments for learners to tell about their drawings.

EASY
PREP

We Are Dancing in the Love of God

We are dancing in the love
of God,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing in the love
of God,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing, we are
dancing, ooh,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing, we are
dancing, ooh,
We are dancing in the love
of God.

Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos',
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos'.
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos',
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos'.
Siyahamba, siyahamba, ooh,
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos'.
Siyahamba, siyahamba, ooh,
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos'.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. So Inviting** To help tweens consider how God's invited guests invite others in turn, design an invitation to Sunday school, worship, or an upcoming special event in your congregation. Make invitations from card stock, decorating them with markers and stickers or stamps. As a group, decide how to deliver the invitations. How might you welcome those who accept the invitation?
- 2. Party Games** To reinforce Jesus' metaphor of being properly clothed for God's party, play the games described on Resource Sheet 2 (Party Fun). After playing each game, discuss:
 - ✂ Game 1: What are some ways that people fail to "dress properly" for being part of God's party? How does God offer a second chance in such situations?
 - ✂ Game 2: What's one specific attitude or action you will "wear" to God's party this week?
- 3. Party Food** For an edible experience of the image of God's kingdom as a party, create a party snack. Follow the instructions for "Robed in White Party Snack" on Resource Sheet 2. If any students have oat or peanut allergies, substitute another recipe of your choosing. As you work, talk about the food that Jesus gives for our life with God—the Eucharist (Lord's Supper; Holy Communion). Discuss:
 - ✂ The king in Jesus' story feeds his guests. How does God feed us in communion?
 - ✂ What does our congregation do—or what could we do—that makes communion seem like a "first taste" of God's heavenly banquet?
 - ✂ How does communion help us feed others, physically and spiritually?

Enjoy the finished party snack together, perhaps sharing it with the congregation.

CLOSING

Gather together and show Color Pack 7. Tell learners that good party guests thank their host for inviting and including them. Invite tweens to work together to write a brief thank-you note to God, our gracious host, in the open space on Color Pack 7. Display it for the congregation to view, along with a large sheet of newsprint on which others can add their own thank-you notes to God.

Sing a song of celebration, "We Are Dancing in the Love of God" (Color Pack 30; track 23 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024).

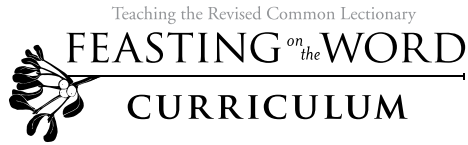
Lead the closing charge:

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

All: Go with God! Amen!

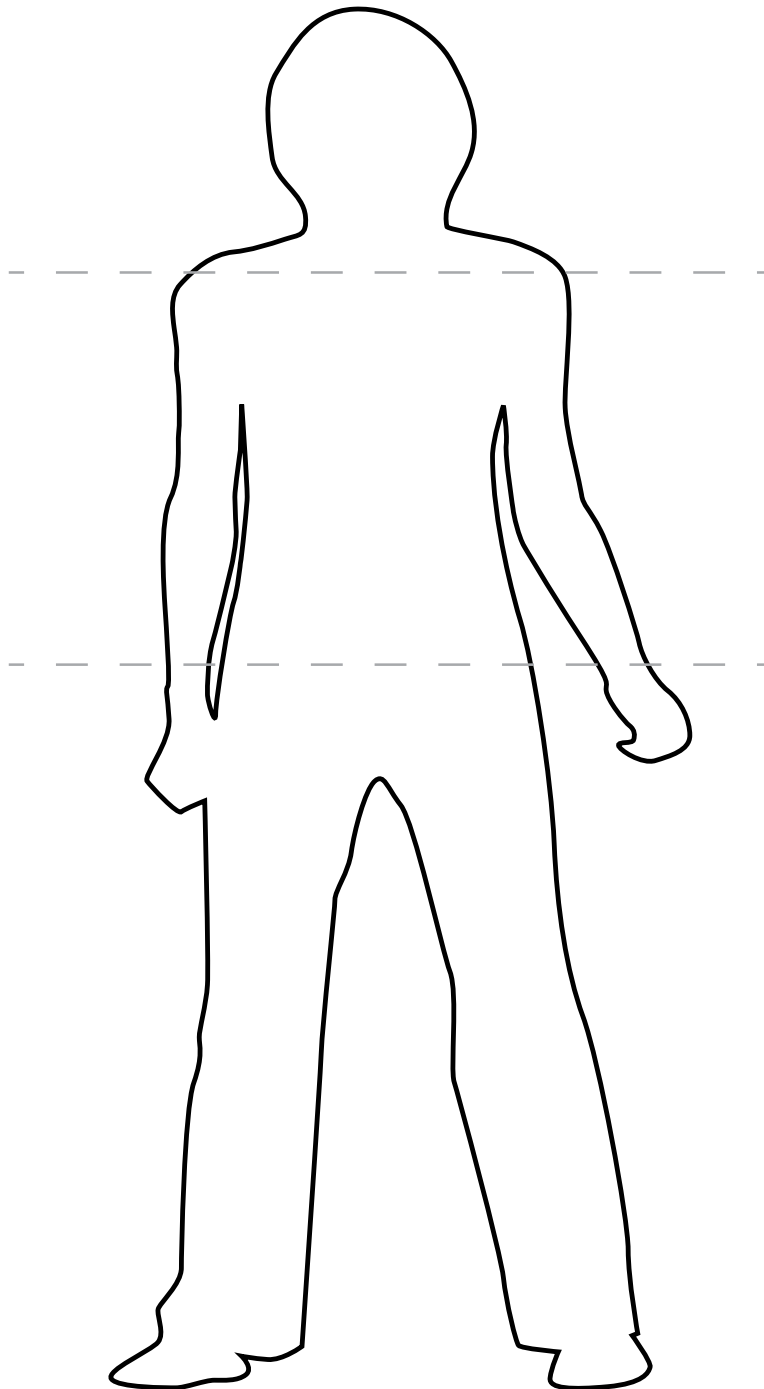
Extinguish the candle. Tell tweens you will pray for them this week, and ask them to pray for you.

October 15, 2023
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Twins
Resource Sheet 1

Partygoers



As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3:27)

You were taught to put away your former way of life, . . . and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22, 24)

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. . . . Above all, clothe yourselves with love. (Colossians 3:12, 14)

October 15, 2023
It's God's Party

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary
FEASTING on the WORD
CURRICULUM

Tweens
Resource Sheet 2

Party Fun

Robed in White Party Snack

Ingredients

- 1 pound white chocolate
- 3 cups rice cereal squares
- 3 cups corn cereal squares
- 3 cups toasted oat cereal
- 2 cups thin pretzel sticks
- 2 cups halved or chopped peanuts
- 1 (12 oz.) package mini candy-coated chocolates

Supplies

- *stove and double boiler or microwave oven
- large bowl
- mixing spoon
- waxed paper

1. Melt the chocolate in the top of the double boiler over simmering water.
 2. Combine remaining ingredients in the large bowl.
 3. Pour melted chocolate over the mixed ingredients.
 4. Stir to coat the ingredients evenly with the melted chocolate.
 5. Spread the mixture onto the waxed paper and allow it to cool.
 6. When cool, break the mixture into small pieces for eating and sharing.
 7. Store the mixture in the refrigerator in an airtight container to keep it fresh.
- * Note: If a stove is not available, melt the chocolate in a microwave oven. Use 50 percent power or low setting to avoid scorching, and stir frequently. Or omit the white chocolate and simply mix the ingredients like trail mix.

Party Game 1: Fashion Explorer

Players sit in a circle; one player is chosen as the "fashion explorer." The officer spends one minute looking at what the players are wearing, and then leaves the room. While the explorer is absent, players decide which one of them will make *one* change to her or his apparel. The explorer returns to the room and must notice this difference within a set time limit. Repeat until all have a turn as the explorer.

Party Game 2: What Will You Wear to the Party?

In this memory game, players take turns completing this statement: "I'm going to a party and I will wear a(n) ____." The first player names something that begins with "A." The second player repeats the first player's answer and adds her or his own that begins with "B," and so on to Z. You may want the group to repeat the list as it gets longer!