

Better than TV

Fox Valley Church of Christ

Family Devotionals
May - July 2010



Our Treasure

Activity

Set up a bucket on one end of the room that you will be in for devotional. Either share one small ball that will easily go into the bucket or get a separate ball for each person (if you don't have a ball improvise with a rolled up sock or something else that will function like a ball). Start very close and have each person take a turn throwing the ball into the bucket. If they make it in they get a small treat or piece of candy. Mention once, at the beginning, that they will want to collect their treats for a bigger opportunity at the end. Only say that one time and don't do anything if the kids don't listen and begin to eat their treat. If they ask if they can eat it then tell them, "It's up to you."

Each time every has had a turn move back one large step and take another turn throwing the ball in the bucket with a prize for those who do it. Do this about five times. Once you have completed five rounds tell everyone that you have another prize for them but that they must give up all of the treats that they won during the game. Don't try to convince them, just say it once and have them make a choice immediately. If they give up there treats, take them but don't give them the big treat until after the devotional. Once the devotional is over give them one of their favorite treats or pieces of candy (a big size) that more than makes up for giving up their treats earlier.

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together and then have one child read Matthew 13:44 and another child (if you have more than two children participating) read Matthew 13:45-46 (if your children are not old enough to read the passages easily then either read them yourself or have them read smaller chunks like a verse or two and then you or your spouse read the rest).

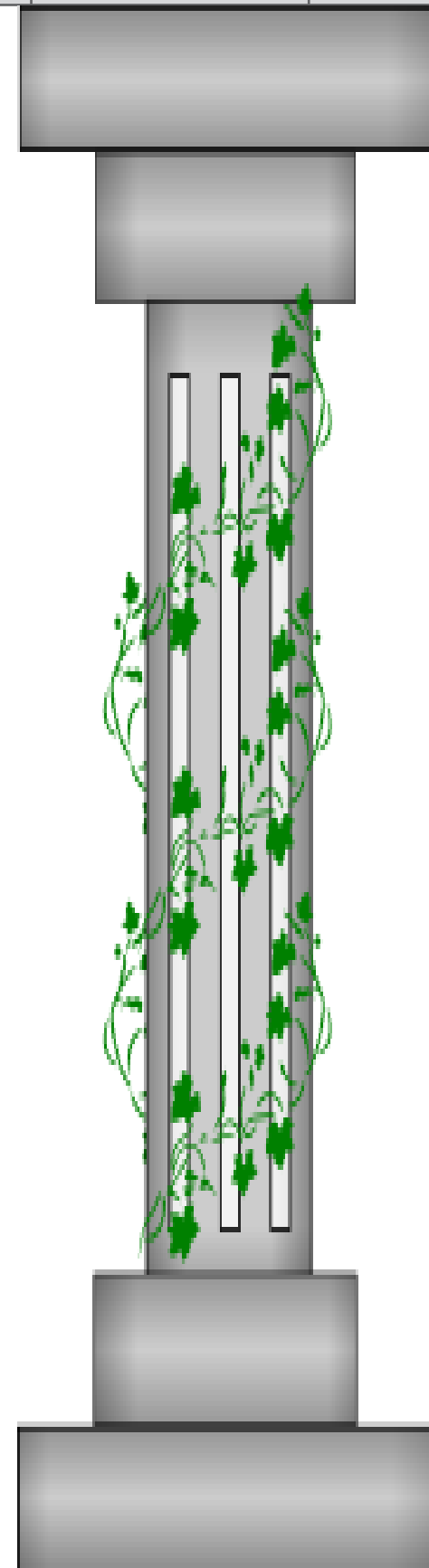
Questions and Discussion

- Have you ever found something really cool that you weren't looking for?
- Have you ever lost something really important but then found it? What did it feel like when you actually found it?
- Discuss with your kids at a level that they can understand that the Kingdom of God/ Heaven is the rule and reign of God in every area of our lives.
- Why would the people in these parables sell everything they had just for the treasure that they found
- What point is Jesus trying to make about what we have to do in order to be in the Kingdom?
- What does it mean to give up everything in order to possess the Kingdom?

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Have each family member determine one area of their life that they would like to improve on in obeying God's word and bringing the Kingdom into their life.

Memorize Matthew 13:44 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



The Owner

Activity

Take an adventure walk together as a family. Try to take a walk together in a place where kids will see as many different types of birds or other animals and will encounter as many different types of trees and plants as possible. Ideally, it would be somewhere where they could collect nature samples.

Try to split up into groups and go on a nature treasure hunt. Have each team or individual record every animal that they see. Also ask them to collect as many different items such as acorns, leaves, feathers as they can (They should only collect one of each type of item. Make sure that you go over with your kids what types of items are not wise to pick up).

Once you have completed your walk, you can go home, if you so choose, and create a poster board display of the various interesting items that was collected on your walk. You can use a tri-fold report board and glue the items to the board for display. You might want to put Psalm 50:9-12 as a title for your board.

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together and then have one child read Psalm 50:9-12.

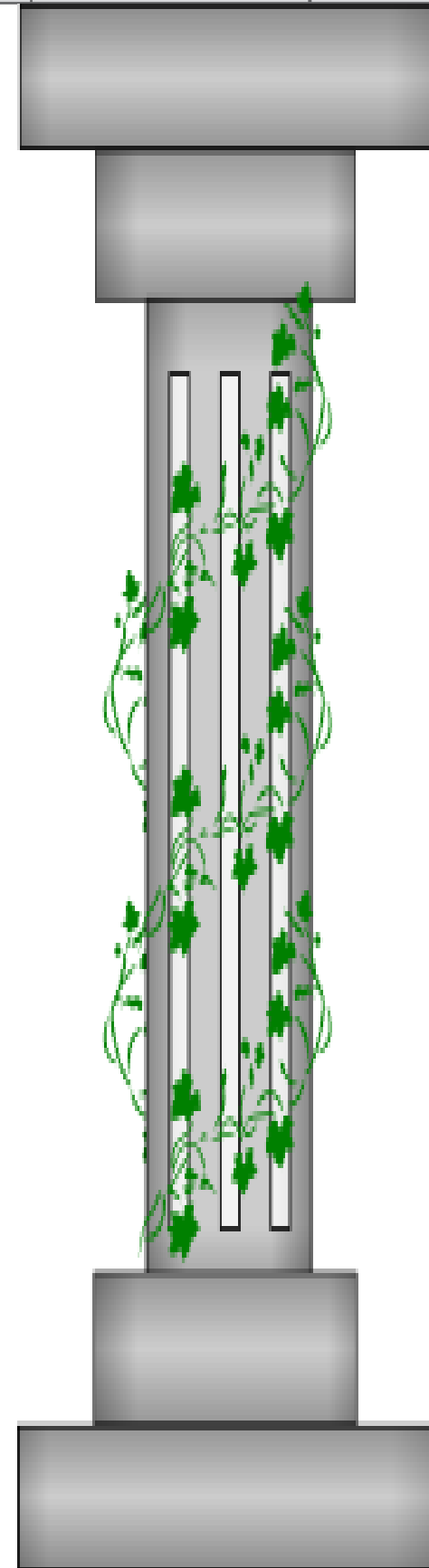
Questions and Discussion

- Look at each of the items written down and collected and ask your kids which of them belongs to God and which don't (If your kids are smaller you might be able to ask about each item to really drive the point home but if they are older you'll probably want to just ask the question one or two times).
- Ask your kids why is it important to understand that everything belongs to God.
- Ask your kids why we pray and give thanks before we eat (because it is a recognition that all things belong to God and we are thankful that he has provided food for us).
- Ask your kids if they think that all money and possessions belong to God.
- Help them to see that everything belongs to God and this includes the money that he provides for us.
- Explain to kids how you as a family recognize God's ownership of even your money and possessions and why that is so important. It is important that kids understand why we give tithes and offerings and how that demonstrates what we believe about God.
- Ask how your kids think that they can put the principles of recognizing God's ownership of everything into their own lives

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Brainstorm as a family and choose one family activity that you can do together to appreciate and recognize God's provision. It might be to take a camping trip together and expand the activity that you did or it may be something more like having a family fundraiser to raise money for special contribution.

Memorize Psalm 50:11-12 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



The Throne or the Towel?

Activity

This will take some forethought and planning but set up for your family (it may not be able to happen directly during your normal devotional time) to engage in a service activity of some type. It may be serving meals at a soup kitchen, making a meal for another family, going over to someone's house and washing all of their windows for them, or something else. Just make sure that it is something that everyone can take part in (even if they're 2 or 3 years old you can usually find some way for them to participate or at least feel as though they are).

Make sure that you choose something that you can all do together and try to have fun while doing. If anyone has a bad attitude don't let it bring the mood down. It can actually serve as an opportunity to talk about things and teach through the concept of servanthood later.

If you can do this activity right before your devotional then begin a short devotional time as soon as you finish your service. If the service activity is done at another time either hold your normal devotional right after the activity or begin your devotional by reminding everyone of the activity that you participated in.

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together and then have one child read Mark 10:35-45. Have another child read John 13:1-17.

Questions and Discussion

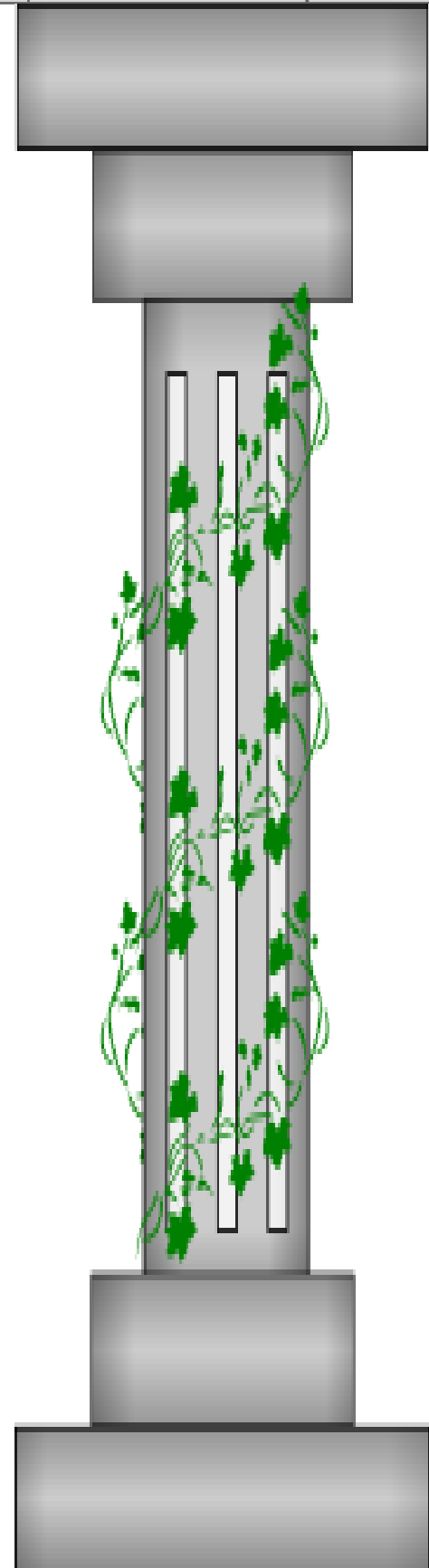
- What were John and James arguing about in Mark 10?
- Why do you think they were arguing about sitting on thrones next to Jesus?
- What does Jesus tell them that he wants from his people?
- Explain that in John 13, a servant would have been expected to wash the dust off of their feet but if one wasn't around then someone should have taken up that job and served the other guests
- Ask your kids why they think there were no disciples arguing to pick up the servant's towel and wash the feet of the others
- Why does Jesus want his disciples to serve others
- What are ways in our life that we try to choose the way of the throne rather than the way of the towel (if you're kids are younger you might have to explain that to them in a way that they can understand).

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Brainstorm as a family and choose another family activity that you can do together to serve someone else.

Discuss the reason why you chose to do the first service activity and why you will be doing another one (and hopefully continue to do these as a regular activity)

Memorize Mark 10:45 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



The Monkey and the Fish

Activity

Begin by telling your kids this old parable. (Have fun with the story and embellish it to make it exciting for them to listen to. You might even want to act it out a bit): "A typhoon stranded a monkey on an island. In a protected place on the shore, while waiting for the raging waters to recede, he spotted a fish swimming against the current. It seemed to the monkey that the fish was struggling and needed assistance. Being of kind heart, the monkey resolved to help the fish.

At considerable risk to himself, the monkey moved far out on the precarious limb of a tree, reached down, and snatched the fish from the waters. Scurrying back to the safety of his shelter, he carefully laid the fish on dry ground. The fish flopped around for awhile until it finally lay still in complete rest. The monkey was very pleased and proud of himself for saving the fish and doing a nice thing for him.

Questions and Discussion

- What are some of the positive things about the monkey?
(Good intentions, compassionate, courageous, decided to act on the need he saw.)
- What were some of the monkey's assumptions?
(Fish was struggling; fish was like him; what was good for him was good for the fish.)
- What was the reality of the situation?
(They lived in different environments and had different needs.)

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together (you might want to sing "Humble Yourselves" and teach it to your kids if they don't know that song) and then have one child read Philippians 2:3-5. Have another child read 1 Peter 5:5.

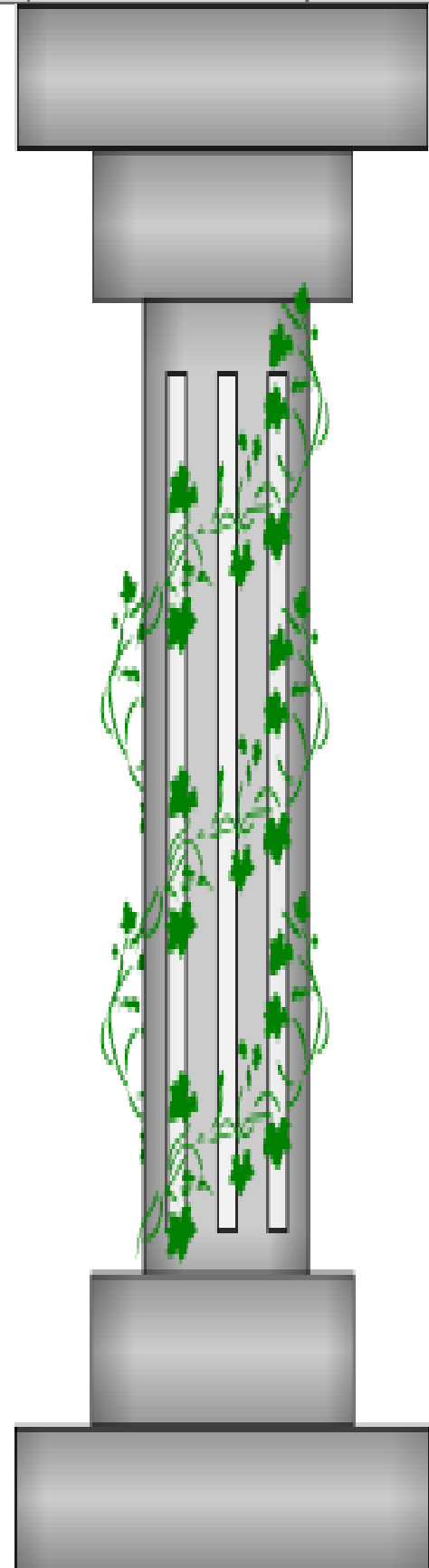
Questions and Discussion

- Ask why we should be humble
- Ask what it means to be humble
- Explain that the monkey actually hurt the fish because he thought that the fish should be just like him
- We can sometimes expect that people should do things or be just like us and we can get upset when they do something different than how we would do it
- Ask your kids if they can think of a time or situation when they have been like that
- Ask what are some things that they can do to be humble towards others and put their interests ahead of our own

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Have each family member decide one thing this week that they can do to demonstrate humility and put the interests of someone else ahead of their own.

Memorize 1 Peter 5:5 (start with the part that says "All of you") as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



Blessed Are Those

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together and then have one child read Matthew 5:3-6. Have another child read Matthew 5:7-9.

Explanation

Explain the meaning of the Beatitudes to your children so that they can understand each one. You might want to use the following simple definitions:

- The poor in Spirit are those who completely depend on God in every way
- Those who mourn are those who show compassion on those in need
- The meek are those who are strong within yet gentle and controlled without
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are those who are passionate about doing God's will
- The merciful are those who take on someone's troubles as their own
- The pure in heart are those who do the right things for the right reasons
- The peacemakers are those who intentionally make peace in a situation that might normally end in conflict

Activity

Split into groups that consist of individuals who are capable of working on their own but put younger kids with a partner who can help them. Divide the above beatitudes equally amongst the groups that you have in your family. Have the groups draw a scene which depicts the beatitudes that they have been given in their group. So for instance, if you have eight groups (which means you have a rather large family), then each group would have one beatitude. The group, then, that had "those who mourn," would seek to draw a poster of a scene in which someone was actively showing compassion on someone in need so they might draw a picture of anything from someone giving aid relief to a victim of an earthquake to a child giving part of their lunch to someone who forgot theirs. Have each group, however, only draw one scene for each beatitude that they are to cover. Once everyone is done have them share their ideas and posters with all the other groups.

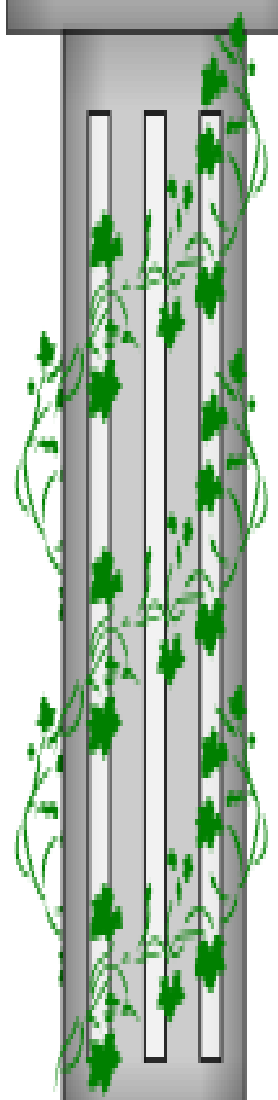
Questions and Discussion

- Ask each person which is their favorite beatitude and have them explain why that is their favorite.

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Each night during the rest of the week pick one beatitude (you'll have to pick two on two nights) to discuss during the evening, perhaps during supper. Take special time to discuss ways in which you could each embody the heart of that beatitude each day.

Memorize Matthew 5:6 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



Open Arms

Activity

It will take a little pre-devotional preparation, but have a number of prizes equal to the number of children present at your devotional (if you have only one child you should still have at least two prizes). Prepare the prizes so that half of them are wrapped in a very ugly way in a paper bag or something else that looks haphazard and thrown together. Have the other half wrapped in as beautiful a manner as you can possibly put together. It is important, however, that the prize inside (some candy or whatever you decided to use as a little prize) is the same for all of the packages.

Play some sort of game that your kids enjoy (it could be anything from a short board game to game of basketball or anything in between). Once the game is over tell the kids that you have a prize for them for competing in the game. Give each child the choice between the ugly package and the beautiful one. Once they have picked, have them hang onto the package but don't open them yet.

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together (Including "Jesus loves the little children" if you know that song) and then have one child read Luke 15:1-2. Have one of the adults present read Matthew 25:31-46.

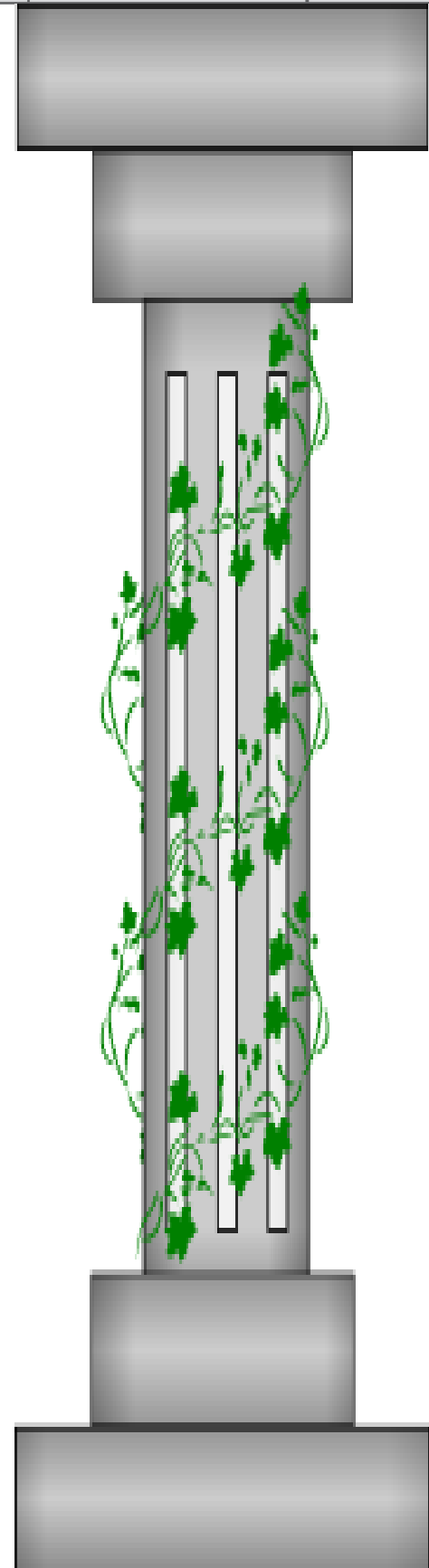
Questions and Discussion

- Ask each child why they chose the prize that they did
- Have them open them and discover that they are the same inside
- Your kids likely chose the nicer looking package (at least most of them will)
- Ask them how what they did with the prizes demonstrates what Jesus did in Luke 15:1-2
- Explain that Jesus didn't judge by the things that humans often do. Jesus knew what people looked like on the outside didn't show who they really were on the inside. God wants us all to be welcome in his kingdom
- Ask why Jesus welcomed all people into his presence and was their friend
- Ask who are the type of people that others sometimes don't like, exclude, or are mean to
- Explain that as God's people we are to love those who aren't liked or loved by others
- Ask if there is anyone they can think of that is not treated very nicely by others at their school or somewhere else, that they can be nice to
- Ask why Jesus wants his people to be open to and loving to everyone

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Have each family member try to pick one person that they can think of that is not treated very kindly by everyone else at their school, job, etc. How can they be open and inviting to that person and be kind to them?

Memorize Matthew 25:40 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



Appreciation

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together and then have one child read Philippians 1:3-5. Have another child read Philippians 4:10-19.

Questions and Discussion

- Ask what was Paul expressing to the Philippian church in these passages?
- Make sure that if someone doesn't answer "appreciation" that you suggest that answer
- Ask what the word "appreciation" means
- Take some time to discuss the concept of showing appreciation to others
- Ask why it is important to show appreciation to others
- Ask how everyone thinks Paul showing appreciation to the church in Philippi would have effected them
- Have each person share at least one person that has really done something wonderful for them and for whom they would really like to show some special appreciation for

Activity

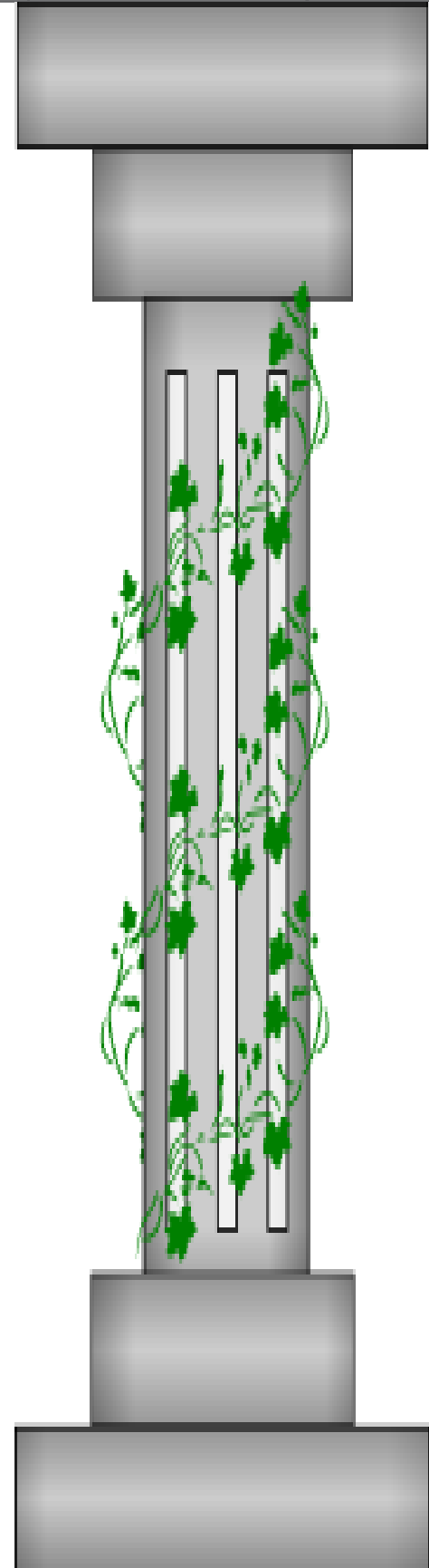
Get some supplies ready ahead of time so that you can work on a family activity of showing appreciation. Have each person (younger kids will need some help) create a special card or poster of appreciation for the person that they mentioned in the discussion time that they would like to show appreciation for.

Be creative with the cards and really encourage everyone to work hard on them and make them look really nice. Make sure that the cards are specific to the person to whom they are being given and that they express why you are showing appreciation for them. Point out that Paul showed general appreciation for the Philippians at the beginning of his letter but then was also very specific about his reasons for appreciation at the end.

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Although the activity time this week was certainly a time of taking action, challenge your family to really think about several other ways that they can specifically show appreciation for others during the week. Have a discussion each night about how you all were able to show appreciation for someone else.

Memorize Philippians 1:3 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



Accepting Others

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together and then have one child read Romans 15:7.

Activity

Play the game "My Ship Sails" as a family. The game is a fun and simple verbal game that demands no preparation or supplies. You will begin the game by explaining that you are going to make a statement. Your statement will be as follows: "My ship sails with . . . ". The statement would end with a word that starts with the first letter of your first name. So if your name was Jeff, you could say "My ship sails with jelly beans." You could say absolutely anything as long as it starts with the first letter of your first name (you can pick a different criteria than the first letter of the first name but this is a pretty good standard to start with).

Once you have made that statement, each person (going in a predetermined order) will have to copy that statement. Don't tell anyone the clue to getting it right (the first letter of their first name). If the next person's name is Alyssa and they say that their ship sails with apples or acrobats, or something else that starts with "a," tell them that their ship can sail and give them a little treat. If they get it wrong and their item doesn't start with "a," then tell them that their ship cannot sail and they get no treat.

Keep going around the circle until everyone finally figures out the riddle to getting it right or until it becomes clear that they just aren't going to get it.

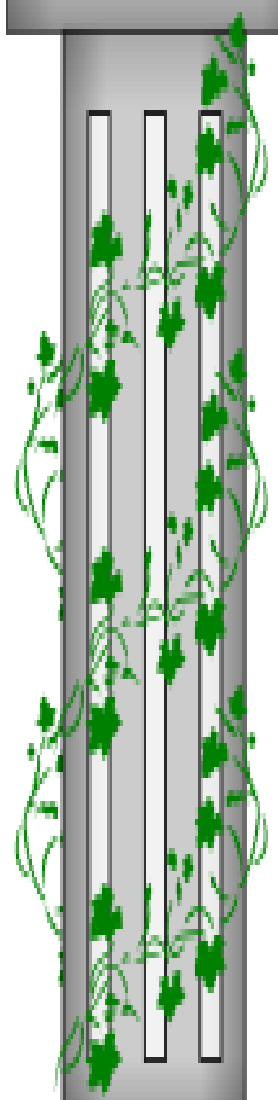
Questions and Discussion

- What does it mean to accept one another?
- What are ways that we do not accept other people sometimes?
- What types of people do we often not want to accept?
- How does Jesus accept us?
- How did it feel in the game when you were excluded and had no idea why?
- How does it feel when you are not accepted?
- What type of heart do we have to have in order to truly accept other people?
- How can we prepare ourselves to be the type of people that accept others and make them feel loved?
- Why does Jesus want us to accept others that are different from us?

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Although the activity time this week was certainly a time of taking action, challenge your family to really think about several other ways that they can specifically show acceptance for others during the week. Have a discussion each night about how you all were able to show acceptance to someone else.

Memorize Romans 15:7 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



Our Family

Activity

Ask everyone who is old enough to work by themselves to draw a picture of their family—don't give any other instructions than that. Once everyone is done let everyone share their picture and show what they have drawn

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together and then have one child read Mark 3:31-35. Have another child read Ephesians 2:19.

Questions and Discussion

- What was the hardest part about going through the course?
- Ask who Jesus says is our true family?
- Ask why would Jesus say that those who do God's will is our family. Give your kids a chance to answer and then help them fill out their answers if they don't quite fully understand this concept
- Explain that this doesn't mean that our physical families are less important or that we love them less, but that our church family is every bit as much our real family as our physical family
- Ask what are some ways that we can show our church family that really love them like our family
- Explain that this is the one family of many nations that God promised to Abraham in Genesis 17
- Ask your kids what they think it means to act like members of God's household
- What does that mean for how we think about other disciples?

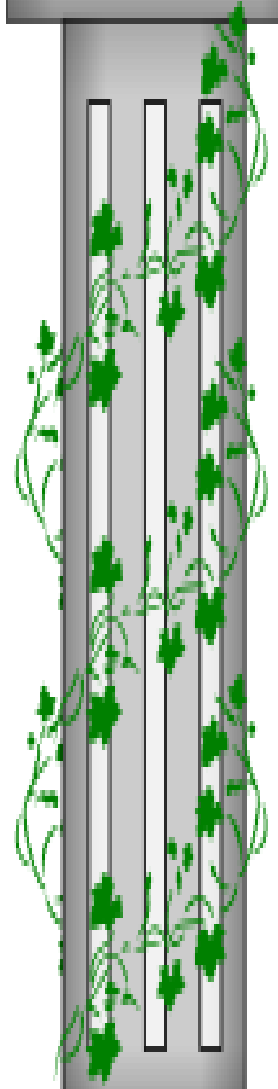
Activity

Take a poster board and work together as a family to create a family tree. Be creative in somehow showing that this is God's family through Jesus Christ and then depict the family of God of which you are a physical part of. If you are in a very small church it might be fun to put everyone in it; if you are in a bigger church you might want to stick to your small group or something similar and somehow represent everyone else in your church. The more work that put into this poster, the more fun it can be; be creative and have a lot of fun.

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Decide as a family to have another family that is part of your family in Christ over for dinner. Make sure that it is a family that you don't already get to spend much time with.

Memorize Ephesians 2:19 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



Like the Master

Activity

Draw or print out a picture of something (or you may already have one that is usable) but don't let anyone else in the family see it right away except for one person that you have chosen (it cannot be a picture that everyone would be familiar with; it should be something they've never seen before). The picture should be something that could be fairly easily duplicated (to at least a recognizable level) by the one person that you have chosen.

Verbally describe the picture to everyone else but don't let them see it. Now ask everyone to draw the very best imitation of the picture that they possibly can. The person who actually got to look at the picture should have an advantage over those who only heard a description of the picture so their picture should be a much better imitation of the original.

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together and then have one child read Philippians 2:1-8. Have another child read Mark 10:45.

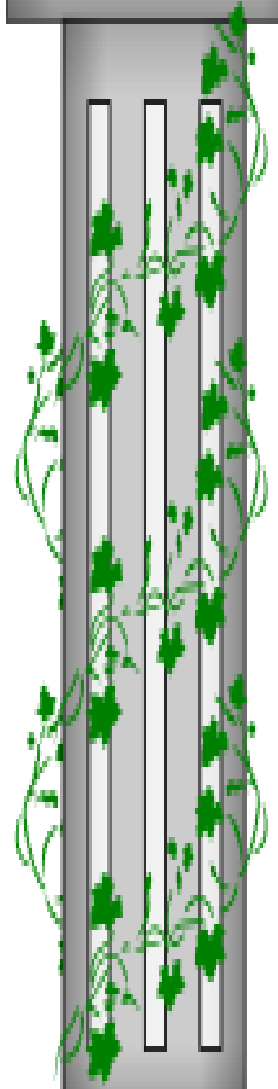
Questions and Discussion

- What aspect of Jesus' character are we called to imitate in the Philippians passage?
- If looking at Jesus tells us what God is like, what can we learn about God from the Philippians Passage?
- Why will looking at Jesus help us to better be able to imitate God's character?
- What are some ways that we can imitate Jesus and serve others in our house?
- What are some ways that we can imitate Jesus and serve others in our neighborhood?
- What are some ways that we can imitate Jesus and serve others in our job or school?
- What are some ways that we can act that do not imitate Jesus' desire for us to always act like servants to others?

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Have each person make a list (younger kids will need help) of one thing that they can do to serve another person each day this week.

Memorize Philippians 2:3-4 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.



His Way, Not Our Way

Activity

Read and discuss the following poem:

*i asked the Lord for a bunch of fresh flowers
but instead He gave me an ugly cactus with many thorns*

*i asked the Lord for some beautiful butterflies
but instead He gave me many ugly and dreadful worms.*

*i was threatened
i was disappointed
i mourned*

*but after many days, suddenly,
i saw the cactus bloomed with many beautiful flowers
and those worms became beautiful butterflies
flying in the spring wind.
God's way is the best way.*

Chun Ming Kao, From Prison

After you have read the poem and everyone understands as best they can for their age, make a family project of creating a poster that both has the text of this poem as well as depicts it. You can do it however you want but be creative. You might even make it look like a comic strip with different scenes for each idea.

Singing and Bible Reading

Sing a few songs together and then have one child read Matthew 6:33. Have another child read Psalm 139:17.

Questions and Discussion

- God calls us to seek his way first and always
- We often want to do things our own way, though
- When it comes to serving, what are some ways that we can do things our own way rather than God's way?
- Why is it important to do things God's way rather than ours
- How we show God that his thoughts are precious to us?
- Whose ways are better in the long run, ours or God's?
- The poem reminds us that we think we know what is best and God doesn't often work the way we would choose, but God's way always proves to be the best in the end

TEA Time (Taking Energetic Action)

Have each person choose one area that they struggle with doing it their own way rather than seeking God's righteousness and his way. Determine to focus all week on doing things God's way. Each night have each person in the family give a little report on how things are going.

Memorize Matthew 6:33 as a family. Write the verse out on a large sheet of paper or placard of some type and put it somewhere visible to all family members. Quiz each other each day this week and make sure that everyone has it memorized.

