

Website ready

Treasure Hunt, by Ona Matulionyte

Key Verse: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Matthew 13:45

Faith Story: Matthew 13:44-46

Faith Focus: This passage may be interpreted in at least two major ways. First, it speaks about the value of the kingdom of heaven, which is worth giving everything away in order to get it. The second interpretation may be seen when taking into consideration the larger context of the biblical story. For instance, in light of John 3:16, the merchant is God and the treasure or the pearl is humanity.

Session Goal:

To invite students to focus on the value that God sees in us and respond by accepting that love.

Session Objectives:

By the end of this session students will have:

- Named some valuable objects or relationships in their life, in their society and the society of Jesus’ time

- Observed some valuable items

- Looked up Mt 13:44-46

- Practiced silent prayer

- Signed (optional) a commitment for silent prayer

- Developed a plan to practice regular silent prayer

- Received another Bible verse that speaks of one’s worth

Advanced preparation and materials needed:

- Bibles for all students

- A small treasure box/chest

Some items that are deemed valuable in today's society (money, car keys, precious stones, jewelry, credit card, family picture)

A pearl and a shell (optional)

Prayer commitment cards for all students

White/blackboard

Chalk or marker

Pens for all students

Have ready a personal story about giving a gift that cost you a lot of money (or you may use the story provided)

Background music

Video set for showing a movie clip (optional)

The Little Mermaid or *Pirates of the Caribbean* DVD (optional)

Supplies to make fake pearl bracelets (optional)

SESSION OUTLINE

Focus: (10 minutes)

Ask the students to think about the most valuable things they have or would like to have. Have they spent a lot of money in order to get something valuable? Are they planning or dreaming to do so in the future? When they are ready, let them share. Write some points on the board. Ask the students to classify these valuables, i.e. items, people, states of being and traits. Then place before them a treasure box with treasures inside and a shell with a pearl. Let them observe, touch, think about the items.

Connect: (5 minutes)

Ask the students what they think about the items: which ones are recent inventions and which ones would have been valuable 2000 years ago when Jesus lived? Why? Discuss the reasons for their value. Here are some points you can make:

Gold does not corrode and diamonds are the hardest material, so they can be used in polishing and cutting. For instance, dentist tools are covered with diamond grains.

Pearls and precious stones are also valued for their beauty, like a diamond's capacity to catch and disperse light.

Explore the Bible: (20 minutes)

Read the passage aloud. Ask students what the parable could mean. Use these questions:

Who is the merchant? (Most likely, youth will say that we Christians are to be the merchant and that is a good interpretation.)

What is the treasure?

Tell your personal story or use this story (from Ona Matulionyte): Few years ago, I had an impression in my heart that my best friend was like a pearl in God's eyes. Therefore, for some time, I kept repeating to her that she was a pearl and a treasure. But later I had a chance to get a confirmation of my feeling. When I was in mission school in Australia, my friend from Torres Strait Island told me that she knew a pearl retailer who sold seawater pearls. I got very excited and I wanted to buy one pearl for my best friend. And because I had no spending money, I prayed to God: "God, if you want me to buy a pearl for my friend as a sign that she is a pearl for you, please provide enough money for me by the end of the day." The day passed and I went to sleep thinking that God did not want me to buy a pearl. However, during the night I got a text message from my mom. Since in Australia the day finishes earlier than in the rest of the world, it was still daytime for my family at home (in Lithuania). My mom wrote, "I have put some extra money on your bank account – just for you if you need anything." When I read that message in the morning, I realized that God wanted me to get a pearl, so I ordered the largest and most round one that 70 dollars could buy. I brought it to my friend and gave it as a present from God.

Now ask the students to look at the passage again and look for the second interpretation. Use these leading questions:

Which character of the story could be God?

If God is the merchant, then who is the pearl?

When you think about the rest of the Bible, how did God buy those treasures? (By the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.) Relate this interpretation to John 3:16 if that helps. If the students found both interpretations in the beginning, tell the story as a confirmation of their findings).

Apply: (15 minutes)

Option A: Watch the song "Part of Your World" from the *Little Mermaid* or the scene from the *Pirates of the Caribbean, Curse of the Black Pearl* that shows cursed pirates desiring to

die. Discuss how these characters have treasures but are still missing something very valuable in their lives (mermaid wants to walk and cursed pirates want to die and rest). Tell to the students that God can “buy” anything, but He desires to be loved by people, and it is only their choice to love Him back.

Option B: Ask the students to sit comfortably and think about themselves as treasures and pearls in God’s eyes. Ask them to close their eyes and pray silently, trying to answer if they are willing to let God find them as a treasure. Also are they willing to find a relationship with God as treasure for themselves? If the circumstances allow, the silent prayer may be done while everyone is lying on the floor. Some background music is also appropriate.

Option C: If the session is only for girls, let them make pearl bracelets.

Respond: (10 minutes)

No matter which option you choose for Apply, end that time with some silent prayer. After a few minutes, give out little cards and pens. (See the sample card on the next page) Encourage students to respond to God by committing to pray and reflect on his love. Provide some ideas how often they could do it, such as every morning or evening or every Sunday. Tell them that if they want to commit, they may put their signature on the card and keep the card as a reminder. Give out some cards with Bible verses as a stimulus for the next time they will practice silent prayer.

Examples for Bible verses:

God's love is like a safe hiding place

"How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings." Psalm 36:7

God knows me well

O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways. Psalm 139:1-3

God created me

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well. Psalm 139: 13-14

Where is my treasure?

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Luke 12:34

Seek God

Come near to God and he will come near to you. James 4:8a

God is with me in prayer

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand.
When I awake,
I am still with you. Psalm 139: 17-18

God cares for me

Cast your cares on the LORD
and he will sustain you;
he will never let the righteous fall. Psalm 55:22

Insights from Scripture:

The parable of the hidden treasure: In the ancient times, people did not have banks or safe places to keep their money and their treasures. So some people would hide their treasures under the ground. If the owner of a treasure had died without telling about his possession, it was possible that nobody knew about the true value of his field. Therefore, when a person found the treasure, he would sacrifice all in order to get what does not look very valuable for those who do not know about the hidden treasure. This parable symbolizes the value of the Kingdom of God because it requires a sacrifice. In addition, others may not understand what its true worth is.

The parable of the pearl: This short parable can take on two interpretations. On one hand, we as Christians are the merchant, buying the precious pearl in order to have the only thing worth having—the kingdom of God. But it is also true that God could be the merchant, who also gave everything in order to have us. Here buying the pearl reflects the life and death of Jesus. The interpretation of the parable where God is the merchant is supported by 1 Peter 1:18-19, where Jesus' blood redeems all people. In fact God is often the main actor in other parables in Matthew.

Educational notes:

A special note for teachers: It is very important that a teacher is also practicing the silent prayer/ listening to God's voice and asking for affirmation from God. Knowing the value in God's eyes is not the same as knowing a Bible fact. This knowledge has to be accepted by faith, nurtured in one's heart and even embraced emotionally. When a teacher is comfortable in God's love, the students will feel it and be more encouraged.

This lesson could be followed by another connecting lesson on discipleship and hardship, where the teacher explains how pearls and precious stones form (mussel coats an irritation and in this way pearl forms; diamonds form in extremely high temperature in magma; gold is purified in fire as well). See YMRoadTrip.org for this second lesson.

I commit to silent prayer every
.....

I will remember how I am valued
by God and will try to value
Him more.

Signature

Date