



Workers in the Vineyard

Level C
Ages 11-14

Matthew 20:1-16

Lesson Focus: Serving the Lord

Reading Summary: The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who hired workers for his vineyard. In the morning he hired workers for a denarius a day. During the 3rd, 6th, 9th and 11th hours he hired additional workers. All of these workers agreed to accept whatever pay the landowner thought was right. At the end of the day, the workers all received a denarius. Those hired first thought they should have received more, because they had worked longer. The landowner reminded them that they received the agreed amount. The last would be first, and the first last.

Lesson 4		Materials Supplied	Materials Needed
1. Welcome Warm-up Activity (2-3 minutes)	Activity	The Last Will Be First directions p. 2	
2. Focus on the Word Use all activities (5-7 minutes)	Read the Word and Talk About It	see <i>Reading Summary</i> above discussion guide p. 2	Bible or copy of Matthew 20:1-16
3. Learn by Doing Choose 1-2 activities (15-20 minutes)	Game with Discussion throw dice to advance players through a vineyard to a pay station; observe ways in which players were advantaged/disadvantaged; compare equality and fairness	Fair Finish directions p. 3 <i>Fair Finish Directions and Discussion</i> p. 5 <i>Fair Finish Game Board</i> p. 6	two dice, game markers (e.g. coins) if playing on the game board <i>optional:</i> small rewards to act as “wages” such as candy or other snacks
	Service Project give generously through serving others in the “vineyard”	Live Generously directions pp. 3-4 <i>Live Generously Activities</i> p. 7	supplies will vary depending on the project you choose; possible materials include cleaning, gardening, art or music supplies
4. Wrap It Up (2-3 minutes)	Take the Message Home introduce the <i>Take Home Cards</i>	The First and the Last p. 8	

1. Welcome Warm-up Activity

The Last Will Be First

Choose a criterion for lining students up such as age, alphabetical order by first or last name, height, arrival time at church, hair length, etc.

When students enter the room, ask them to form a line (by age or whatever other criterion you have chosen). They *may not talk to each other*, but can use other forms of communication, like gestures.

When they are lined up, check line order. Discuss students' perception of who is at the "front" and who is at the "back" of the line.

Now, tell students that the line will be reversed. Whoever was at the front of the line is now at the back and vice-versa. Does that change the way you feel? Is switching the line fair?

A number of people in today's story were concerned about fairness. Let's find out why.

2. Focus on the Word

Read: Matthew 20:1-16 (See Isaiah 5:1-2 for details about vineyards in Biblical times.)

Have you visited a vineyard—or passed one while on a highway? What did you notice? Grape vines grow in rows supported by fences. Vines live for many years—sometimes more than 100!

Vines require a lot of care. In Biblical times landowners hired workers to weed around the vines, fix walls that kept harmful animals out, and trim vines to increase productivity. The vineyards often had a tower from which people could watch to see if dangerous animals were coming.

The first workers were in the marketplace ready to start their day at 6 a.m. Would you be ready to start your day that early?

The next groups of workers may have been in the marketplace early too—but they were not hired until 9 a.m. (3rd hour), 12 p.m. (6th hour) and 3 p.m. (9th hour). What time was it when the workers were hired at the 11th hour? 5 p.m.—almost dinner time.

The expression “doing things at the 11th hour” comes from this parable.

The Lord calls us to put true ideas we know to work by loving and serving others. True ideas that we don't do anything with are like workers “standing idle in the marketplace”. We know what is right but do not do it.

Was the landowner fair? The workers hired first thought he was unfair, but they received the wages they were promised. They *felt* he was not fair when they discovered that everyone got the same pay for working different numbers of hours.

What reward does the Lord (the heavenly “Landowner”) promise if we love and serve Him? Heaven! Everyone who does what the Word teaches because they love the Lord receives the reward of heaven. Some go as babies; others go after working to be loving and useful for many years.

What did the Lord mean by, “So the last will be first, and the first last”? We should put others first instead of ourselves. **In the spiritual world, the more angels put others first, the more they become the “first”. This means that the more they put others first, the closer they come to the Lord.**

We love and serve the Lord by treating others as He would—with love and kindness and the desire to serve. The more we put others first, the closer we come to the Lord.

3. Learn by Doing

Choose one or two activities

Choice Fair Finish

A group of laborers rose early and went to the marketplace, hoping to be hired. Some were hired at daybreak while others were hired when the day was almost over. Yet all received the same wages.

Play a game based on this story either on a game board or by walking from one area to another. Work with the goal of helping all students complete the day and earn their wages. Follow the game with a discussion of fairness.

1. Explain that students will be reenacting the story either moving around the room or using the *Fair Finish Game Board* (p. 6).
2. Assign a number to each player. Players should be numbered 3, 6, 9 or 11. It is fine to assign the same number to more than one player.
3. If playing the game by moving in the room, show students the areas marked as the marketplace, vineyard and wages stations. Ask all students to go to the marketplace. If playing on the game board, give each student a marker. All the markers should be put on the marketplace part of the board.
4. Players take turns throwing two dice. Each player moves (or moves their marker) only when they throw the number they were assigned (3, 6, 9 or 11). No player may advance into the wages area until all the players have first reached the vineyard. Players waiting in the vineyard skip their turns until everyone has made it there.
5. Once all players have reached the wages area, discuss the game. (See *Fair Finish Directions and Discussion* (p. 5).



Materials Needed

Two dice, a copy of *Fair Finish Game Board* p. 6, game markers (e.g. coins) if playing on the game board or space to set up three physical areas for students to move between *optional*: small rewards to act as “wages” such as candy or other snacks

Prepare in Advance

Read through *Fair Finish Directions and Discussion* p. 5. Decide if you want to have students move around the room or use markers on the game board. Set up the room if that is your choice.

New Church Concept Hours of Work

“Laboring in the vineyard” is acquiring spiritual life by the knowledges of truth and good from the Word applied to the uses of life. Instead of times of day, the angels perceive the states of life of people who die in old age, adulthood, youth or childhood, and who have equally acquired for themselves spiritual life. See *Apocalypse Explained* 194

Choice Live Generously

The laborers who worked a full day counted the cost of their work and complained that their reward was unjust. We sometimes have similar feelings, expecting praise, payment or other advantages from our efforts. The Lord encourages us to give generously, without counting the cost. Explore the topic of generosity and practice being generous by doing a service project.



Materials Needed

Materials will vary depending on the service project you choose from the *Live Generously Activities* p. 7

Prepare in Advance

Coordinate with others in your congregation as needed, e.g. if singing, cleaning, gardening

Live Generously *continued*

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “generous”?
2. What characteristics do you associate with generous people? (e.g. generous people ask “What can I do for you?”. They are positive, optimistic, leaders, fun to be around, etc.)
3. The Writings describe people who are motivated by love for the Lord and for others. Their qualities are like people we would describe as “generous.” The prayer of St. Ignatius expresses the attitudes we need to embrace in order to live generously:

Teach us, good Lord,
 To serve You as You deserve;
 To give and not to count the cost;
 To fight and not to heed the wounds;
 To toil and not to seek for rest;
 To labor and not to ask for any reward,
 Save that of knowing that we do Your will.
 16th century

4. Choose a service activity to practice generosity from the list provided on *Live Generously Activities* (p. 7).

New Church Concept First Will Be Last

People who place merit in their actions wish to be saved not because of the Lord’s righteousness, but because of their own. Some like this, after death, say they have worked in the Lord’s vineyard, but they have continually had in mind their own superiority, glory and gain and thought that they might become the greatest in heaven. They have no mutual love, in which heaven consists, but only love of self, and they do not know what heaven is. They wish to be first, but become last. See *Arcana Coelestia* 2027



4. Wrap It Up

Take the Message Home

Choose one or two questions to help bring the message home.

- How do our attitudes about being “first” or “last” affect our interactions with other people?
- How can we reconcile the appearance that life is not fair with the idea that the Lord is always fair?
- Angels welcome all newcomers to heaven. What is more important to them: how much a person loves the Lord, or how long a person has loved the Lord?
- In what ways can treating others generously bring us happiness?

Give *Take Home Cards* (two per page, p. 8) on “The First and the Last” to the students as they leave and suggest they put them up where they will see them this week.

Fair Finish Directions and Discussion

Students will reenact the story of the laborers in the vineyard with the goal of helping everyone get an opportunity to work for wages. To play you will need a copy of the *Fair Finish Game Board* (p. 48), two dice, and either space to move physically from one area to another *or* game markers (e.g. coins) for each player. If you are having students actually move around the room, cut out the three pictures from the *Fair Finish Game Board* and use them to mark three different areas to represent a marketplace, a vineyard, and a place to receive wages.

1. All players start in the marketplace. Each player is given a number. Players are numbered 3, 6, 9 or 11—to correspond with the hours at which laborers were hired.
2. Players take turns throwing two dice. In order to move into the vineyard, a player must throw the number of the hour at which he or she was hired as a combination of the dice, (i.e. 3, 6, 9, or 11). When the correct number is thrown, the player advances one space.
3. No player may advance further until *all* players have moved into the vineyard. Players already in the vineyard skip their turns until everyone is there. Players who reach the wages area first must also skip their turns and wait for their “pay” until all players have reached the wages area.
4. The game ends when all players are in the wages area. *Optional*: hand out small treats as “wages”.

Discussion

1. Was this game fair? Why or why not?
2. Which numbers are harder to roll? (3 and 11.) Why is this? (Only one possible combination of dice results in 3 and 11: $3 = 1+2$, $11 = 5+6$.)
3. Which number is easiest to roll? (6) Why? (A score of 6 is possible in more ways than any of the other numbers, e.g. $6 = 3+3$, $2+4$, $1+5$.) (9 has two possible dice combinations: $3+6$ and $4+5$)
4. Did this advantage/disadvantage affect your game?
5. Compare equality and fairness. How are equality and fairness similar? How are they different? Here are a few examples to help you think:

- Equality is saying that all workers must take the stairs. Fairness is giving the handicapped a ramp or elevator.
- Equality is giving every human an equal share of everything. Fairness is rewarding hard work.
- Equality is when everyone’s opinion is given the same vote. Fairness is giving an expert’s opinion more voting power.

6. Are all people equal in the Lord’s sight?
7. Was the landowner in today’s story fair?
8. Does the Lord treat all people fairly?
9. Does the Lord treat all people the same?
10. Which is more important: fairness or equality?

Fair Finish Game Board



Live Generously Activities

Choose a service activity to do with your group to practice living generously.

Serve the Church

1. **Prepare a song to sing** at the close of church—either a familiar hymn, or a new round or song. Ask an usher to let you know when it is time to sing.
2. **Beautify your church grounds.** Sweep, rake leaves, mulch, plant flowers or bulbs. Clean up an outdoor area that can be used for a church service or for groups to gather.
3. **Tackle a once-a-year deep cleaning job** such as washing windows, wiping baseboards, wiping light switch plates, cleaning the church kitchen or nursery, or organizing Sunday school supplies.
4. **Repair** broken toys, nursery books, etc.

Cook for Others

1. **Prepare soup** for a family in need. Some soups can be frozen and thawed later when needed. This is great for a family with a new baby, or with sick or elderly family members.
2. **Bake for your congregation.** Use a mix that can bake during church. (You may want to start your class time by mixing this and getting it into the oven first and have your reading discussion while it bakes.) Serve after church.
3. **Prepare snack foods.** If your congregation serves snacks after church have students set up, serve and clean up. Teach them where to find supplies, how to make coffee and tea, and how to clean up.

Reach Outwards

1. **Record a message or make a video** to send to someone who is shut in. Think about what might cheer them up and aim to lift their spirits. Consider including a song.
2. **Make cards** for your church's care team to send out as needed *or* make and write cards for a specific person or family in need.
3. **Assemble "Blessing Bags"** for people in need. Fill closable bags with new supplies such as toothpaste, shampoo, hairbrush, socks, gloves, etc. that can be dropped off at a shelter.
4. **Distribute holiday boxes that can be filled** for an organization such as the Samaritan's Purse. Go to [samaritanspurse.org/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/](https://www.samaritanspurse.org/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/) for more information.



The First and the Last

Read: “Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last, I am He.” Isaiah 41:4

Reflect: Every person can make the choice to go to heaven. The landowner in the parable of the workers in the vineyard gave every worker one denarius, no matter how long they had been working. So, too, the Lord finds ways to lead as many people as possible to be with Him in heaven.

The parable reminds us that we can choose to follow the Lord, and if we are sincere, we will be rewarded.

Respond: Try saying, “The Lord wants me to be happy with Him in heaven. I can choose to follow Him” to yourself as you wake up and as you go to sleep.



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