

“The Hidden Treasure”

by Danielle Early

Key Verse: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Matthew 13:44

Faith Story: Matthew 13:44

Faith Focus: After sending the multitude away, Jesus now illustrates what the kingdom of heaven is like through the parable of the hidden treasure. In this parable, the treasure represents the joy of being a Christian, and the man represents those who are willing to give up all in order to receive that joy.

Session Goal:

To help each person to see the value of his or her faith, and to risk giving up wealth and power to obtain this great gift.

Session Objectives:

Each youth will

Hunt for hidden treasure and then discuss the lives of Paul and some contemporary Christians.

Look up Bible verses and define the phrases “kingdom of God”, “treasure”, and “joy”

Watch a video and discuss what the cost of following Jesus really means

Materials Needed and Advance Preparation:

Set up the room to create a comfortable environment:

Have couches available, and couch cushions on the floor for extra seating

Provide tea and snacks

An account of someone who gave up everything – Li Yang’s story

White board

White board markers

Bibles

Bible dictionary

Slips of blue paper equivalent to the number of students (see Connect)

Computer and internet capabilities

A place to dig outside, or small pots with potting soil that can be used inside

Slips of paper that say, ***It is worth everything and it requires everything.***

SESSION OUTLINE

Focus (7-10 minutes):

Greet each person as they enter, and let them sit where they choose. Gather everyone together with these opening questions.

“What is the greatest material thing you’ve ever received?
What would you call your greatest possession or treasure?
Can you remember a time when you were so excited for something to come? A time that you just could not wait for what was to come next?
Take time between each question, letting them reflect on past experiences.

Connect (10-15 minutes):

Say, *“Now, around this room, I have hidden pieces of blue paper that you will try to find. Each one of these is worth a million dollars. Their contents are highly precious and very valuable. Let’s call them hidden treasure. I want you all to get up, look around the room, and find each one. Each paper is folded; so don’t open them when you find them. Just get the paper and come back, and then we will talk about them together.”*

On each piece of paper, write a scenario of a “possible future” – futures that seem unlikely to be desired – drawing on different historical figures as well as people we know today. For example:

“Wrote fourteen Christian books yet was never recognized for it, was seven times put in bonds, was driven into exile, and even stoned while preaching the Gospel” (the Apostle Paul)

“Has worked as a high school youth pastor for the past twenty years and has never once received any fame or recognition for it”

“After inheriting millions of dollars, immediately turned around and gave it all away anonymously and loved doing it”

“After a prestigious career as a professor and theologian, he left all that to spend the last ten years of his life working day in and day out in a facility for people with developmental disabilities” (Henri Nouwen)

“Gave up a successful career, car and home to live among the poor”

Let the students get up and find the blue pieces of paper.

Once everyone is seated again with their paper, say, *“How did you feel when you were looking for those papers?”* Allow the students time to answer.

Have each person go around the room, and read his or hers aloud. Then say, *“What do you think about the contents? After some discussion, ask, “How would it make you feel if I said that each one of these people had such a joy about what they were doing?”*

Now, direct the group to Matthew 13:44 by saying, *“Tonight, I want us to talk about what true joy is and how it applies to our lives. Let’s turn to the Bible to see what it has to say about this joy.”*

Explore the Bible (10 minutes):

Have one person read aloud the verse. Have them repeat the verse.

“What are some words that jump out at you?”

Write these words down on the whiteboard. If the students don't mention these three phrases, write them down anyway: kingdom of heaven, treasure and joy.

Give Bibles to people with which to look up references that you give them (see below). Have three people read aloud from a Bible dictionary to definitions of each word. Write each definition on the white board along with scripture references:

Kingdom of Heaven: the spiritual realm over which God is sovereign; both present today in the Person of Jesus Christ and also future reality (Ephesians 1:20-22; I Cor. 15:24); Jesus makes known the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven but not fully (Matthew 13:11)

Treasure: something that is considered especially precious or valuable, that which is valuable to one; (Job 22:22-23)

Joy: intense and especially ecstatic or exultant happiness, a deep feeling or condition of happiness or contentment; but it is more than an emotion - it combines a sense of happiness with a state of blessedness; it is a characteristic gift of the Spirit (Luke 2:10. Acts 13:52)

Do a mini-lecture based on this information: Burying a treasure in the ground was common in the biblical world (as it has been until the last century or two) because there were no safe places for deposit as we now have in bank and other vaults. Sometimes the person(s) burying the treasure died and its location became unknown. Occasionally modern Christians have been distressed because they felt the person finding the treasure should have notified the owner. The point of the parable is not to tell us what to do when we find treasures hidden in a field (a fairly rare occurrence for most of us). Rather, the parable uses what any person in the ancient world would have done to illustrate how we should respond to the discovery of the kingdom of God. In the ancient world, if a treasure was found in a field, the finder would re-bury it and immediately take whatever steps would be necessary to buy the field. Any price would be worth paying in order to own the field and thus obtain the treasure.

Now, ask, *“In light of the definitions of these words, what does this mean for Matthew 13:44? What meaning can these words imply for what Jesus is talking about? What is the kingdom of Heaven like?”*

APPLY (10 minutes):

Share with the youth the story of Li Yang or find another story or video that tells about a Christian who has given up much and/or has suffered greatly because of their faith and yet—is joyful.

Video:

<http://deidox.com/films/li-yang-new/>

Ask these questions:

Does this story seem realistic? Possible?

What makes Li Yang joyful? What makes any Christian joyful?

What do you hear God saying to you?

Respond (6 minutes):

Now say, *“We can see from both this video and the verse that we looked at that these people found joy. The lesson in this parable is twofold. First: when we encounter the kingdom in our midst, it is worth everything we own, everything we are, and second: it requires a total commitment from us. **It is worth everything and it requires everything.**”*

Give each person a small piece of paper with the phrase: ***It is worth everything and it requires everything.*** Go outside to a place where there is loose dirt. Direct each person to take some time to dig in the dirt and just think about that phrase and spend time in prayer. After 5 minutes, call the group back together for your closing comments and closing prayer. Stay longer in the dirt if you sense persons getting into their reflection time with God.

Insights from Scripture:

Our Scripture today focuses on the kingdom of heaven as Jesus was revealing it. Regardless, we can receive much from this passage in the way that we looked at it today. It can help us to ask these important questions:

How do I view my faith?

Is it an invaluable treasure that I am willing, even joyful, to sell all that I have for?

How do we live out the kingdom of God, which is here and now (through Jesus Christ) and yet still coming (will be fully accomplished through Jesus when He comes back)?

The central issue for the lesson today is how valuable we view the kingdom of God. Some of us have never understood it this way, because we have not had ears to hear. Others believe that God could never have meant what He did for the cost of discipleship. Here in this passage, Jesus speaks to those who understand what the kingdom of heaven is like, and realize that it will cost them everything. It will ask of them to deny themselves in order that Christ may increase in them. But this is worth everything too, and something to be counted as a joy! This is one way that Matthew 13:44 can be looked at.