

CHILDREN'S CHURCH

VOLUNTEER GUIDE

LISTEN TO JESUS. GROW GOOD FRUIT.

DATE October 4, 2026		SCRIPTURE Matthew 21:33–46		
WONDER TRUTH God calls us to listen to Jesus and live His way.		WORD OF WONDER “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” — Matthew 21:42		
TODAY'S BIG IDEA Jesus tells a vineyard parable about people who forget that what they care for belongs to someone else. God gives us good gifts, gives us Jesus, and invites our lives to grow the good fruit of His kingdom.		CORE TEACHING THEME Jesus is our cornerstone. Because God loves us first, following Jesus can grow love, kindness, honesty, justice, forgiveness, courage, generosity, and mercy in us.		
LESSON SNAPSHOT Total Time: 30–35 minutes Prep Time: 15–20 minutes Age Range: Kindergarten–5th Grade Main Passage: Matthew 21:33–46		SUPPLIES AT A GLANCE [] Bible [] Building blocks or plastic cups [] One larger block/card labeled JESUS [] Purple paper circles or paper grapes [] Markers or crayons [] Tape or glue [] Optional green paper leaves		
CURIOSITY 5 min	BELIEF 10 min	FAITH 7 min	IDENTITY 7 min	CLOSING 3–5 min
5-MINUTE PREP		[] Read the Wonder Truth and Big Idea above. [] Read Matthew 21:33–46 once. [] Gather blocks/cups and craft supplies. [] Skim READ ALOUD, DO THIS, and ASK THIS boxes. [] Remember: do not dramatize the violence; keep the focus on Jesus and faithful response.		

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Jesus tells a parable about tenants who were trusted with a vineyard but began acting as though it belonged only to them. They reject the owner's messengers and finally the owner's son. Jesus then uses Psalm 118's rejected stone/cornerstone image. For children, keep the focus on trust, response, Jesus as our foundation, and the good fruit that grows from following Him.

GRACE-CENTERED REMINDER

Do not teach, "Produce enough good fruit so God will love you." God loves us first. Good fruit is a response to grace: because Jesus is our cornerstone and God's Spirit works in us, our choices can increasingly reflect God's love.

THEOLOGY / SAFETY NOTE

Do not teach this as "the Jewish people rejected Jesus, so God replaced them with Christians." Jesus is speaking within His own Jewish community and challenging leaders about faithfulness. The warning is for every community entrusted with God's gifts. With younger children, summarize the violence simply: "The tenants treated the messengers terribly and refused to listen."

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Vineyards were familiar in Scripture and daily life. The landowner prepares everything and entrusts the vineyard to tenants, who are stewards rather than owners. Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22–23. A cornerstone is a foundational stone that sets direction and stability; Christians understand Jesus as the One on whom our life of faith is built.

KEY WORDS

Parable — a story Jesus used to help people think deeply about God.

Vineyard — a place where grapes are grown.

Tenant — someone trusted to care for property belonging to another.

Cornerstone — a foundation stone that helps a building stay true and strong.

Fruit — the visible results of following God: love, kindness, justice, faithfulness, generosity, mercy, and more.

LEADER PRAYER

"God of grace, thank You for trusting us with Your gifts and for giving us Jesus. Help me teach this difficult story with wisdom, tenderness, and truth. Let the children see Jesus as our strong foundation and Your love as the source of good fruit in our lives. Amen."

BEFORE CHILDREN ARRIVE

- Place blocks or cups where children can reach them.
- Set one larger block or card aside and label it JESUS.
- Put paper grapes, markers, and glue together for later.
- Open your Bible to Matthew 21:33–46.
- Decide where finished crafts can dry or be collected.
- Remind yourself: this lesson is about faithful response, not frightening details.

CURIOSITY

5 MINUTES | GET THEM WONDERING

PURPOSE

Help children feel the difference between a shaky foundation and a strong one, then connect that image to Jesus as the cornerstone.

BEFORE CHILDREN ARRIVE

Set out blocks or cups. Keep the piece labeled JESUS nearby but out of the main structure at first.

LEADER SAYS

“Think about something someone has trusted you to take care of. Maybe a pet, a classroom job, a special object, or helping with something at home. How did it feel to be trusted?”

DO THIS

1. Invite children to build a small tower.
2. Once it is standing, gently remove or shift the bottom piece.
3. Ask what changed and why the bottom matters.
4. Show the piece labeled JESUS and rebuild with it as the foundation.

ASK

Why does the bottom piece matter so much?

What happens when the foundation is weak?

What do you think it could mean to say Jesus is our foundation?

LISTEN FOR

A foundation holds things up, gives direction and stability, and helps the whole structure stay strong. Following Jesus helps guide our lives.

ADAPT

K–2: Keep it concrete: “Strong bottom, strong tower.” Let children point to the bottom piece and repeat, “Jesus is our strong foundation.”

Grades 3–5: Ask what a “foundation” can mean beyond a building. Invite examples such as values, trusted people, rules, or beliefs that guide decisions.

TRANSITION

“Today Jesus tells a difficult story about people who were trusted with something valuable and forgot who it belonged to. He also gives us the picture of a cornerstone. Listen for what the story teaches us about trusting God and listening to Jesus.”

VOLUNTEER HELP

Short on time: Build one quick tower, remove the bottom piece, show the JESUS piece, and move directly to the Bible story.

Extra time: Let two teams build towers and compare what makes a foundation stable.

Remember: the point is not that following Jesus prevents hard things. Jesus gives our faith direction and a trustworthy foundation.

BELIEF

10 MINUTES | HEAR GOD'S WORD

PURPOSE

Tell the parable in child-friendly language while keeping the focus on stewardship, listening to God, receiving Jesus, and good fruit—not on violence.

PRAY

“God, open our ears to hear Your Word, open our minds to understand, and open our hearts to follow Jesus. Amen.”

BIBLE STORY — LEADER SAYS

“Jesus was speaking with religious leaders in Jerusalem. He told them a parable—a story meant to make people stop and think.

A landowner planted a vineyard. He prepared it carefully: a fence, a place for pressing grapes, and a watchtower. Then he trusted some tenants to care for it while he was away.

When harvest time came, the owner sent servants to receive the fruit that belonged to him. But the tenants refused. They treated the servants terribly and would not listen. The owner sent more messengers, but the tenants still refused.

Finally, the owner sent his son. The tenants should have respected the son, but they rejected him too.

Jesus wanted His listeners to understand something important. God had given them many gifts and had sent people to call them back to faithful living. Now Jesus, God’s Son, was standing in front of them. Would they listen to Him?

Then Jesus quoted Scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.’ A cornerstone helps set the direction and strength of a building. Jesus was saying that even when people rejected Him, God was making Jesus the foundation of God’s kingdom.

Jesus also spoke about producing fruit. He was not talking only about grapes. He meant the things that grow in our lives when we follow God—love, kindness, honesty, forgiveness, justice, courage, generosity, and mercy.”

PAUSE AND ASK

“What kinds of good fruit can grow in someone who follows Jesus?”

Take 3–4 answers.

Then ask: “Do we grow this fruit so God will love us, or because God already loves us?”

LISTEN FOR

Love, kindness, honesty, fairness, courage, helping, forgiveness, generosity, and patience.

If children are quiet, ask: “Would including someone show good fruit, or leaving them out on purpose?”

MAIN TRUTH — LEADER SAYS

“God calls us to listen to Jesus and live His way. We do not do good things to make God love us. God already loves us. Because Jesus is our cornerstone, His love can grow good fruit through us.”

WORD OF WONDER

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” — Matthew 21:42

MEMORY MOTIONS

STONE — make fists and stack one over the other.

BUILDERS — pretend to hammer.

REJECTED — gently push hands away.

CORNERSTONE — place both hands flat and firm like a foundation.

CHECK UNDERSTANDING

Who owned the vineyard? — The landowner.

What were the tenants supposed to do? — Care for what was entrusted to them and return the owner’s fruit.

Who is our cornerstone? — Jesus.

What does “good fruit” mean for us? — Choices and attitudes that show God’s love.

VOLUNTEER HELP

Short on time: Tell the story, explain Jesus as cornerstone, name three examples of good fruit, and practice the memory verse once.

Extra time: Ask children to name one “fruit” that would make their classroom, home, or team more like Jesus’ way.

If children focus on the violent parts, say, “Yes, the tenants made terrible choices,” then redirect to whether people will listen to God and receive the Son.

FAITH

7 MINUTES | PRACTICE THE TRUTH

PURPOSE

Help children practice what faithful stewardship and “good fruit” look like in ordinary choices.

DISCUSSION

K–2: What were the workers trusted to care for? What has God given you to enjoy and care for? What is one kind thing you can do this week? Who is our strong foundation?

Grades 3–5: Why do you think the tenants began acting as though the vineyard belonged only to them? What gifts or opportunities has God entrusted to you? What would it look like to make Jesus the cornerstone of a decision at school or home? Which kingdom fruit do you most want God to grow in you?

FAITH PRACTICE — FRUIT OR NO FRUIT?

Read each situation. Children give a thumbs-up for a choice that shows good kingdom fruit. If the choice needs a better response, keep hands flat and ask, “What could a better choice be?” Never embarrass a child for choosing differently; talk it through.

SITUATIONS

- A child is sitting alone and you invite them to join your group. Good fruit: inclusion, kindness, courage.
- You lie so you will not get in trouble. Better choice: tell the truth and ask for help repairing the mistake.
- You share something you have with someone who needs it. Good fruit: generosity and care.

- Someone is embarrassed and other children laugh. Better choice: do not join in; protect dignity and offer kindness.
- You tell the truth even though it may have a consequence. Good fruit: honesty and courage.
- A friend apologizes after hurting you. Good fruit can include forgiveness; serious or unsafe situations may still require adult help and boundaries.

LEADER SAYS

“None of us makes the loving choice every time. When we mess up, Jesus does not stop loving us. We can tell Him the truth, receive forgiveness, make things right when we can, and ask the Holy Spirit to help us choose a better way. Good fruit grows because God is at work in us.”

TRANSITION

“Now we are going to make a reminder of the kind of fruit we want Jesus to keep growing in our lives.”

VOLUNTEER HELP

Short on time: Use only the first, second, and fourth situations.

Extra time: Let older children invent a situation and have the group decide what good fruit could look like.

Keep “fruit” focused on actions and attitudes, not on judging whether another person is a “good” or “bad” person.

IDENTITY — ACTIVITY

7 MINUTES | MY KINGDOM FRUIT CLUSTER

PURPOSE

Give each child a concrete reminder that Jesus is the cornerstone and that God can grow faithful qualities in their life.

SUPPLIES

Purple paper circles or paper grapes, markers or crayons, glue or tape, and optional green paper leaves.

DO THIS

1. Give each child several paper grapes.
2. Ask them to choose qualities that show Jesus’ love.
3. Write or draw one quality on each grape.
4. Arrange and attach the grapes into a cluster.
5. Add a leaf at the top that says, “Jesus is my cornerstone.”

LEADER SAYS WHILE THEY WORK

“You are not trying to earn God’s love with these grapes. God already loves you. These are reminders of what His love can grow in us.”

ASK

Which fruit would be easy for you this week? Which one may take courage?

ADAPT

K–2: Let children draw simple pictures—a heart for love, helping hands for kindness, a smile for joy, a truth-telling mouth, or two people making peace.

Grades 3–5: Ask children to choose 3–5 fruits and add one specific example beside each.

IF THEY FINISH EARLY

On the back, write or draw: “One gift God has trusted me to use well is _____.”

LEADER SAYS

“You are loved by God before you ever do anything to earn it. Because you belong to Jesus, He is shaping your life. You can ask Him to grow love, kindness, courage, honesty, justice, and mercy in you.”

GROUP RESPONSE

Leader: “Who is our cornerstone?”

Children: “Jesus!”

Leader: “What can grow when we follow Him?”

Children: “Good fruit!”

VOLUNTEER HELP

Short on time: Use plain circles and let each child choose only two fruits.

Extra time: Invite children to share one grape and explain what that fruit could look like this week.

Do not compare children’s projects or praise one as “better.” This is a personal reminder, not a performance.

CLOSING

3–5 MINUTES | SEND THEM WITH THE TRUTH

WONDER TRUTH

God calls us to listen to Jesus and live His way.

LEADER SAYS

“Jesus told a story about people who forgot that the vineyard they cared for belonged to someone else. He reminded His listeners that God had given them something precious and called them to respond faithfully. Jesus is the cornerstone—the strong foundation—of our life with God. Because God loves us, His Spirit can grow good fruit in the way we live.”

ASK

What is a cornerstone?

Who is our cornerstone?

Name one kind of good fruit God can grow in our lives.

What is one safe, loving way you can use something God has given you to help someone this week?

LISTEN FOR

A cornerstone is a foundation stone that gives direction and strength. Jesus is our cornerstone. Good fruit includes love, kindness, honesty, courage, justice, forgiveness, generosity, and mercy.

WORD OF WONDER

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” — Matthew 21:42

TAKE-HOME CHALLENGE

Choose one “fruit” from your craft. During the week, look for one specific opportunity to practice it. Tell someone at home what happened.

CLOSING PRAYER

“God, thank You for loving us and giving us Jesus. Thank You for the people, abilities, time, and opportunities You place in our lives. Help us build our lives on Jesus. Grow love, kindness, courage, justice, forgiveness, and generosity in us so other people can see Your love through the way we live. Amen.”

DISMISSAL

“Jesus is your cornerstone. Go grow good fruit.”

VOLUNTEER HELP

If the group gets loud: Say, “Freeze and find my eyes.” Wait quietly, then repeat the Wonder Truth together.

If no one answers: Give two choices or offer your own example first.

If one child answers everything: Say, “Thank you. I want to hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet.”

If a child shares something serious: Listen calmly. Do not promise secrecy. Follow your church’s child-safety procedures and notify the appropriate ministry leader.

If time runs short: Keep the Bible story, Wonder Truth, and closing prayer. Everything else may be shortened.

AFTER CLASS

Reset the supplies and room. Report any safety concern or important disclosure. Remember one thing that worked well.

Connection matters more than perfect execution. Be calm, caring, and point children toward Jesus.