



Session 10
Spring 2016
Early Childhood

Seeds and yeast

LUKE 13:18-21

prepare



PRAYER

God, in your kingdom, the smallest things can grow into great things, the vulnerable find protection, and the hungry are fed. May your kingdom come. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To hear and respond to the stories Jesus told

STORY SUMMARY

Jesus described the mustard seed as a metaphor for God's reign. Despite its size, the tiny seed grows to become the greatest of all shrubs. The large branches provide a shady place for birds of the air to make their nests. Jesus also compared the kingdom of heaven to the leavening of dough. A woman took yeast and mixed it with flour until the whole batch of dough was leavened and increased in size.

teaching tips for early childhood

Many young children instinctively treasure small items, tucking their special things into pockets or boxes. Small things are of great value in God's kingdom. In today's stories, a tiny seed grows into a tree that shelters birds, and a small amount of yeast makes a batch of dough rise into nourishing bread. Gather leaves or another small nature object for the Build community activity.

Decide which Explore activities you will do, and check Supplies and To do throughout the session to see what needs to be prepared. Go to www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras to find tips for working with younger children.

The presence of the kingdom

In Luke 13, Jesus is attended by very large crowds as he travels. Seemingly in response to the large numbers of would-be followers, Jesus speaks of the need to discern the nature of the kingdom and to count the cost of discipleship. Though all of the parables in this quarter relate in some fashion to the kingdom of God, the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast speak of the unexpected nature of how the kingdom is present and growing in Jesus' ministry.

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast fall on the heels of the parable of the unfruitful fig tree and the synagogue healing controversy. The fig tree is sometimes used in the Old Testament as a symbol of covenant faithfulness and fruitfulness. It is also used as a symbol of judgment when Israel is unfaithful. In the account of the fig tree, God's character is preserved as long-suffering and compassionate, yet there is an increased sense of urgency. Jesus' actions in the synagogue and his teachings that follow seem to underscore that the kingdom has already come and is presently at work in the world. The leader of the synagogue appears blind to this reality.

Jewish understandings of the kingdom

Some background on Jewish expectation of the coming of God's kingdom will be helpful. While other Jewish groups and writings spoke of the nearness and expectation of the kingdom, Jesus' preaching announced the presence or arrival (already-ness) of the kingdom.¹ Though Jewish groups had various expectations about the nature of the kingdom, all Jews believed that the kingdom would be universal and that the kingdom would be characterized by justice and righteousness.

Most Jews believed that history would be divided into two separate ages, this age and the age to come—the kingdom of God. This present, evil age would come to a swift, dramatic, and decisive end through God's direct intervention, and then God would establish the kingdom. Because of this popular expectation, Jesus' announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God raised



questions for many. If the kingdom of God is here, where is it? How is it that this present evil age has not ended? How is the kingdom manifest?

Jesus answers the question

These two parables in Luke 13 speak to the unexpected manifestation of the kingdom. Both the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast are drawn from small acts that are a part of normal peasant life.

Comparing a spiritual reality to an illustration from daily life was a typical rabbinic method of teaching. There is some debate about whether the mustard seed Jesus speaks of is the typical weed-like mustard plant or another plant that may grow 10 to 20 ft / 3 to 6 m in height.² Nevertheless, everyone would have understood that even though a mustard seed is nearly imperceptible, its growth is prodigious. The parable of the yeast presents a similar image. A small amount of yeast eventually permeates a very large batch of dough. Three measures would roughly equal a 50 lb / 22 kg loaf.

The point in both parables is the contrast between small, imperceptible beginnings and large, expansive endings. Both parables call for a new way of thinking about the kingdom of God and suggest that this dynamic, sometimes imperceptible process is presently at work in the daily routines of life. A true perception of God's kingdom is not measured by its small beginnings but by perceiving its dynamic potential for growth. The kingdom in its present form is a growing, hidden reality that will one day reach its fullness. The kingdom has come and is at work in the world. Will you perceive it?

1. Some English translations, such as "the kingdom is at hand" or "the kingdom has drawn near," should be understood as announcing the kingdom's actual presence rather than nearness.

2. Both Daniel 4:12 and Ezekiel 17:22-24 use the image of large trees to speak of expansive kingdoms.

gather

supplies

- *Shine Early Childhood Music CD*
- CD player
- Leaves
- Construction paper in various colors
- Colorful nature items (optional)

resource pack

- Bible memory poster (Psalm 145)

to do

- Collect leaves, at least one per person plus extras for visitors.

media connections

- *God's Love Is Like . . .* by Ray Buckley
- Books about trees and seeds, such as *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle, *Picture a Tree* by Barbara Reid, *Tell Me, Tree: All About Trees for Kids* by Gail Gibbons, and *How a Seed Grows* by Helene Jordan
- "A Little Bit of Yeast" by Bryan Moyer Suderman, available on the CD *Can't Keep Quiet!*
- YouTube search for "Parables of the mustard seed and yeast"

BUILD COMMUNITY

Gather the children in a circle with a collection of leaves. Sing the words below to the tune of "The Wheels on the Bus." During each verse, give the named child a leaf. Children can wave their leaves as you continue to sing.

For larger groups: Change the number of leaves each time. For example, sing "two leaves fell down . . ." and give leaves to two different children.

The leaves on the trees, they sing God's praise,
sing God's praise, sing God's praise.

One leaf fell down to _____ (name) to say,
we're glad you're here today!

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Sing "Every Tree" from the *Shine Early Childhood Music CD*, track 9. Song lyrics are at the back of this guide.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Praise God for the vibrant colors of creation with a rainbow prayer. Lay down a red paper, and say:

Thank you, God, for red things.

The group can then name their favorite red things, such as strawberries, roses, or sunsets. Continue with other colors, as long as children remain interested. *Option:* Provide nature items such as fruit or leaves for children to sort onto the various colors of paper.

Bible memory

Give leaves for children to hold. Have the children wave their leaves while saying the verse. Experiment with different ways to move the leaf as you say the verse several more times. For example, wave it high, low, rhythmically like a metronome, and so on.

You are good to everyone and you take care of all your creation.

—Psalm 145:9 (CEV)

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Open the Bible to Luke 13:18 and show children the words of the Bible story. Say:

The stories Jesus told are for you, for me, for all people.

Set out tent cards from the resource pack as you tell the story: seeds, birds, tree, tree with birds, yeast and bowl, loaf of bread, and woman eating bread.

The Bible story is found on the back of the story picture in the resource pack. Follow the instructions there for placement of the tent cards.

WONDER AND REFLECT

Be amazed by how God's kingdom grows. Set out relevant tent cards as you ask several wondering questions. Choose one to two questions from each story (seed and yeast). Ask more if children remain interested.

Seed:

- (*Seeds card*) I wonder where this seed was planted.
- (*Tree card*) I wonder how tall a tree can become.
- (*Birds card*) I wonder how many birds can come to the tree.
- (*Tree with birds card*) I wonder how a bird chooses a place to build a nest.

Yeast:

- (*Yeast and bowl card*) Imagine watching bread dough getting bigger and bigger.
- (*Loaf of bread card*) I wonder how long the woman waits before she bakes the dough into bread.
- (*Woman eating bread card*) I wonder who gets to eat the bread.

On page 2 of the Early Childhood leaflet, children can match the birds to their nests by color.

PEACE NOTES

The tree offered a place of safety for the nesting birds. Talk with children about safe places and people using the pictures on page 3 of the Early Childhood leaflet as a guide.

Be prepared with words of assurance if children share stories of feeling afraid. It is normal to feel afraid when scary things happen. We can remember that God is always with us. We can also seek comfort and reassurance from others. If a child identifies an ongoing scary situation, use your best judgment about whether to talk with the child's family member.



Seeds and yeast

Luke 13:18–21

supplies

- Bible
- Early Childhood leaflets
- Pencils or crayons

resource pack

- Story picture
- Tent cards (seeds, birds, tree, tree with birds, bowl, loaf of bread, woman eating bread)

to do

- Prepare the specified tent cards from the resource pack, folding them so they stand up.

explore

CREATE

Imagine you are birds in the branches of the mustard tree. Have children weave bits of yarn, string, and ribbon around a tree branch, tying or wrapping them around the twigs. Use play dough to make small nests and eggs to put in the decorated “tree.” A play dough recipe is available at www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras. Add craft feathers if desired.

supplies

- Branches with several twigs branching out
- Lengths of yarn, string, and ribbon
- Play dough
- Craft feathers (optional)

MOVE

Build a story tower using the “Build a tower” game cards and tent cards from the resource pack. Instructions for stacking the cards and playing the game are on the back of the resource pack cover. As you play, highlight cards that are relevant to the stories children have already heard, such as coins, yeast, bread, woman eating, trees, and so on.

supplies

- Tent cards (from resource pack)
- “Build a tower” game cards (from resource pack)

RETELL

Retell the Bible stories using a bin of sand. Place a plastic tablecloth under the bin for ease of cleanup.

Mustard seed: Provide several small seeds, twigs, and leaves. Children can dig small holes in the sand and “plant” the seeds. Stand the twigs and leaves in the sand to show the seed “growing.” Add craft feathers to represent birds.

Yeast: Put a mixing bowl, wooden spoon, and a small scoop in a bin of sand. The child can sprinkle some sand (yeast) into the bowl, then add three scoops of sand (flour) and mix it together, just as the woman in the story did. Pour a small amount of water on the sand and continue mixing.

supplies

- Bin of sand
- Plastic tablecloth
- **Mustard seed:** seeds, twigs, leaves, craft feathers
- **Yeast:** mixing bowl, wooden spoon, small scoop, water

DISCOVER

Pour a small scoop of assorted seeds, such as birdseed, or dried beans on a piece of felt. Have children sort the seeds into egg cartons. Read books about trees and birds. See Media connections for book suggestions.

supplies

- A variety of seeds or dried beans
- Piece(s) of felt
- Empty egg cartons
- Books about trees and birds



other ideas

- Mix 1 T / 15 ml yeast, 1 t / 5 ml sugar, and ½ C / 125 ml warm water in a glass bowl. Observe the changes.
- Plant seeds. Then act out the growth of a tiny seed into a large tree.
- Make a handprint tree. See page 4 of the Early Childhood leaflet.

bless

PRAY

Gather the group in a circle. Invite children to copy your movements. Crouch down. Slowly rise up as you pray, until standing with arms stretched overhead.

Pray:

Thank you, God, for taking small things like seeds and yeast and making them grow, grow, grow. Amen.

SEND

Hold hands in a circle. Sing “Bwana Awabariki” (May God Grant You a Blessing) from the *Shine Early Childhood Music CD*, track 5. Song lyrics are at the back of this guide. Send children with these words of blessing:

May God bless you and give you peace, _____ (name).

Make sure to send leaflets home with the children.

supplies

- Early Childhood leaflets
- *Shine Early Childhood Music CD*
- CD player

leader's closing prayer

Pause and wonder at God's mysterious ways. Small seeds can grow into strong, sheltering trees. A small amount of yeast can grow dough into nourishing loaves of bread. Great things may have small beginnings.

Wondrous God, I trust that you will grow faith through small beginnings and through the experiences the children and I are sharing. Amen.

If we listen and pay attention closely enough, children often have more to teach us than we them.

—Gina Arnett
Dayton, Ohio

