

Small Group Experience

LESSON 2 - "The Great Banquet"



Whatchagaddaknow?:

"I Gotta Share God's Love With Whoever I Meet!"



Power Verse:

"...Go out...and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full."

-Luke 14:23

Retelling The Bible Story

SUPPLY LIST:

* No additional supplies needed

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

Before small group begins, review the story so you are familiar with the main points. Once small group begins, review the Bible Story by reading the provided lesson excerpt aloud, pausing when you say "banquet," so the kids can stand, leaving empty seats, and say, "No Empty Seats!" Continue on this way until the story is complete.

Say -Did you know that you play a huge role in God's plan for the local church and the family of God? Today we are going to look at what part you play and what might happen if you choose not to fulfill your God-given assignment. To start us off, I am going to read our Bible Story out loud. When you hear me say the word "banquet," you should stand and say, "No Empty Seats!"

-Read the provided lesson excerpt aloud, pausing when you say "banquet"-

Say -Jesus told a parable in Luke 14 about a man who decided he was going to throw a HUGE **banquet**. He began to make all of the preparations. He made a list of the people he wanted to invite and then sent out invitations to let them know this was going to be an epic **banquet**. The day came for the event. He was so excited. Everything had been prepared. Every plate, every glass, everything was PERFECT...except for one thing - nobody showed up. Literally nobody showed up for the **banquet**. The entire place was completely empty.

The man sent his servant out to contact the people who had been invited. One by one, they gave excuses for why they could not attend. One person said, "I bought a field and need to go inspect it." Another person said, "I just bought some oxen, and I have to go try them out." Still another person said, "I just got married, so I can't come." The servant came back and told his master about all of the excuses. As you can imagine, the man was not happy. How could these people come up with such lame excuses for why they could not come to the **banquet** - especially after all the preparations that had taken place?

The man was not going to let this stop him from having an amazing **banquet**! He told his servant, "Go out and invite whoever you can find. Go out into the highways and streets and tell everyone they are welcome!" So the servant did exactly that. He went out and invited the poor, the lame, the blind - everyone - to come to the giant **banquet**. Before long, the entire place was full of people. The man stood back and admired how full the **banquet** was. The people were eating, laughing, and having a wonderful time. He was determined to not allow a single seat to be empty.

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Say - This man truly understood the importance of “no empty seats.” Hopefully, we will also understand how important this is before we leave here today. Thank you for listening. You can stop standing and responding when you hear the word “banquet.”

Ask - How do you think the man felt when he learned that people had rejected his invitation?

-Allow time for the kids to respond; discuss their answers with the group-

Ask - Do you think he thought about giving up at that point?

-Allow time for the kids to respond; discuss their answers with the group-

Ask - Why did Jesus tell this story? What lesson was He trying to teach?

-Allow time for the kids to respond; discuss their answers with the group-

Game/Activity

SUPPLY LIST:

- * Bean bags (at least three per team)
- * Spatula (one per team)
- * Chair (one per team)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

Once activity time begins, divide the group into teams. To play the game, each team will race to use a spatula to flip or toss bean bags on to a “team chair.” Have the teams line up single-file, several feet away from the chairs. When you say “go,” a player from each team will place a bean bag on a spatula and try to flip or toss it onto the chair. They get one chance, and then they must pass the spatula to the next person in line. The first team to get three bean bags on their chair wins. Play this game as many rounds as time allows. This will be a fun lesson concept reinforcing activity.

Say - Since the man in our story was so committed to having no empty seats, I figured we should follow his example. Each team has one empty seat, some bean bags, and a spatula. When I say “go,” the first person in each team line will use the spatula to try and toss or flip the bean bag onto the seat of their chair. You get one chance, and then you must pass the spatula to the next person in line. The first team to get three bean bags on the chair wins!

-Play the game; this can be played multiple rounds as time allows-

Group Sharing

SUPPLY LIST:

- * No Empty Seats Print Piece (one per kid)
- * Pencils, crayons, or markers

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

Before small group begins, print and cut the No Empty Seats Print Piece. Group sharing is focused on encouraging the kids to open up and discuss the lesson concepts and relate those concepts to their lives. Help facilitate and guide the discussion time.

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Say - Earlier I mentioned that you play a huge role in the local church and God’s plan for His family. I want us to talk about what this and the parable mean for your life. Let’s start with these questions...

Ask - Where, and why, don’t we want empty seats?

-Allow time for the kids to answer; discuss their answers with the group-

Say - Your role in the local church and the family of God begins the day that you give your life to Christ. The moment you are saved, your assignment begins. It is your job, my job, and every follower of Christ’s job to bring others to Him. We must share the love of God with everyone we meet. The parable reminds us that this is not always an easy task. The first group of people that the man invited to the banquet rejected his invitation.

Ask - Have you ever invited someone to church, or tried to share the love of God with them, and been rejected? How does that feel?

-Allow time for the kids to answer; discuss their answers with the group-

Say - Rejection hurts, and it can make you want to quit. NO one wants to be turned down, stood up, or mocked for something they really care about. The man in the parable had all of the above happen. Jesus told this story as an example for us, a roadmap for how to navigate these situations that will inevitably happen. People have free will - that is how God made us. We have the option to say no and reject someone - even God. Let’s say you’ve done your part and invited people to church. You have tried to share the love of God with others, and, just like the people in the parable, you’ve gotten nothing but lame excuses and rejection. There are still empty seats at church, and you feel like you’re failing your assignment from God.

Ask - So what happens when we are rejected? What should we do next?

-Allow time for the kids to answer; discuss their answers with the group-

Say - Empty seats are not an option for the follower of Christ. We don’t get to tap out and say, “I tried, no one responded. That was the worst - I’m out.” We try, and try again, because the love of Christ changes lives and we are fully committed to this eternity-altering cause.

Ask - Why is the cause of sharing the love of Christ worth rejection, second tries, and even embarrassment?

-Allow time for the kids to answer; discuss their answers with the group-

Say - Sharing the love of God is always worth the cost. Once you resolve yourself to this truth, it makes the next step much easier - filling the seats. Every empty seat is an opportunity for some life to be changed for eternity. Every empty seat is a life that is desperately waiting for hope for eternity. Empty seats must be filled. Let’s look at what the Bible says - “...‘Go out...and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full.’” Luke 14:23.

Ask - What are your thoughts on this verse? What does it mean to you?

-Allow time for the kids to answer; discuss their answers with the group-

Ask - How do we fill the seats in our local churches?

-Allow time for the kids to answer; discuss their answers with the group-

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Say - Each and every one of us knows someone who isn't in church, someone who has a seat waiting, someone God desperately wants to change and love for eternity. Write his or her name on your paper.

-Allow time for the kids to complete the task-

Say - I want you to take this home with you and ask God to help you find a way to get this person connected with Him. Let this be your reminder to fill the seats!

Prayer Time

Say - I want us to take some time and pray for the names that you wrote on your pages. Let's agree together that these people will come to know Christ!

Pray

Closing

Say - The man who planned the banquet gave it everything he had. He went all out and held nothing back. He must have felt so embarrassed, sad, and probably a bit angry when he heard the excuses from the invited guests. The normal reaction in a situation like this would be to feel hurt and give up. However, this was not a normal guy, and he did not have a normal reaction. The banquet mattered too much for him to give up, so he kept asking. Finally, the banquet was full of people, and his goal of no empty seats was met. We have empty seats to fill. Our cause, the cause of Christ, matters too much for us to ever give up. Rejection, embarrassment, and difficulty can't stop us, because we aren't normal. This is a good thing! We are filled with the supernatural power that comes from knowing Christ, and we can do all things because He gives us strength. Take your page home with you, pray over the name you wrote on it, and believe that God will help you fill the seat! Thank you for coming today. I will see you again soon.

WHO WILL FILL THE SEAT?

“GO OUT...AND URGE ANYONE YOU CAN TO COME, SO THAT MY HOUSE WILL BE FULL.”
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