

# Junior Soldiers

Unit 9 : Lesson 1

## Matching words with hearts



**PURPOSE :** For the children to explore, understand and demonstrate that they can examine their hearts and then match their prayers with the real state of their hearts.

*'The Lord sneers at those who sneer at him, but he is kind to everyone who is humble.'*

Proverbs 3:34 (CEV)

## Consider & Prepare

**Read:**

Luke 18:9–14 (CEV)

In Lessons 2 and 3 of Unit 8, you will have covered many aspects of prayer by studying the Lord's prayer and then writing your own version. In this lesson we examine prayer again, focusing on integrity in prayer.

The parable in Luke 18 to above highlights the contrasts between the two main characters in the story. Jesus tells the parable using unlikely heroes and villains and it takes place at the most sacred space in all of Israel, the temple.

Into this place, where people prepared themselves and come to meet with God, the two men arrived. The first, a trusted man of religion and the law, and the second, an almost universally untrusted man who stole money, used intimidation and high interest rates as well as the arm of the Roman oppressors as his enforcers. Yet it is the untrustworthy man who receives what every good Jew desires when they come to the temple, to be right with God.

In this brief parable, Jesus is pointing out the difference between the two men's prayers, their hearts and God's response.

The pharisee's prayer is like a psalm of praise and thanksgiving but it is warped. Instead of thanking God for all He has done, the Pharisee points out to God the great list of things he does (and it is impressive; the Pharisee would seem to need nothing from God) and that he is better than other people.

The tax collector's prayer has become very famous. He has nothing to commend himself to God. He beats his chest, a traditional sign of grief, of mourning, and dares not even lift up his eyes to pray his prayer of confession. This is what God longs to hear: a sinner who knows the truth about themselves and is humble towards God.

Often in our lives, we are taught to judge the potential of a person or the quality of an item that we are presented with, however, this parable tells us not to expect God to judge the same way that we do.

Read Mark 7:1–23 and Matthew 23:27.

- What is God looking for in his people?
- How does Jesus' story challenge you?
- How does his story give you hope?
- Pray for the children in your group.

NOTE: Please be aware that older boys (in particular, but not only) that are in your group might not be so comfortable with heart-shaped post-it notes and talking about what is in their hearts. It is important to think creatively about the language that you use to engage them in thinking about integrity and authenticity when they pray.

### What you will need:

#### For 'Connecting In'

- The lesson plan with activity instructions.

#### For 'The Main Thing'

- Select a surprise item to make with the children and collect what you need to make it. You may need bananas and cooking skewers; scones, tomato chutney, sour cream, crackers and a block of hard butter.

#### For 'Tying In'

- You will need some heart-shaped post-it notes
- A4 paper
- Journals
- Pens, textas or pencils for writing/drawing

#### For 'Home & Beyond'

- Print off the Home & Beyond cards for each child.
- A family pack of post-it notes for each child.



## Connecting In

### The 'I'm Doing Well' Game...

Leader's Note: there are no wrong answers for this game, it is simply to help get children touch with their own ideas and choices, and how satisfied they are with how they are managing in life's challenges.

To set up this game, indicate two different ends of your activity space. In this game the players need to choose their answer to the given situation and run/move to the area that has been indicated, or the children can space themselves out along an imaginary line between the two.

The leader will call out a specific challenge that might be presented and the children can choose 'I'm doing well', or 'I'm NOT doing so well', or a spot somewhere between the two answers.

1. When I have a choice to either tell the truth or lie to avoid getting into trouble... I'm doing well [indicate which end of the room] or I'm NOT doing so well.
2. When I have the opportunity to share with others who aren't my friends... I'm doing well [indicate which end of the room] or I'm NOT doing so well.
3. When it comes to including other children in my games and my circle of friends... I'm doing well [indicate which end of the room] or I'm NOT doing so well.

4. When it comes to sharing things I love or sharing my time with my favourite people... I'm doing well [indicate which end of the room] or I'm NOT doing so well.
5. When I'm asked to help at home and do it cheerfully... I'm doing well [indicate which end of the room] I'm NOT doing so well.
6. When I need to do my homework and I want to be doing something else... I'm doing well [indicate which end of the room] or I'm NOT doing so well.
7. When I'm irritated by someone in my family and I need to respond kindly and consistently... I'm doing well [indicate which end of the room] or I'm NOT doing so well.
8. When I talk to God honestly about the wrong things I do and say, and tell him I'm sorry... I'm doing well [indicate which end of the room] I'm NOT doing so well.



### Link...

'We are often asked to look at something and judge what it is, what it can do, and if it is of good quality or not (or perhaps somewhere in between). In the game we just played we were judging ourselves and how we are doing in relation to a number of situations. We were looking at how we think we are going with doing well. This means we were judging the quality of our faith in action.

'Sometimes in life, we can think that it's more important to present a good outside image to God and others, rather than being honest about who and how we really are. In our session today we will hear about a parable that Jesus used to help us think about how important it is to match our words about ourselves with what is truly in our hearts and minds; because God can see straight to our hearts and isn't fooled by a tricky outside layer.



## The Main Thing

### Not always what it seems...

'Have you ever seen a magic trick, optical illusion or a joke that seems like one thing but is actually something else that gives you a big surprise? Maybe something that looked like one thing on the outside or how it was presented, but was something else on the inside?' *(Give children time to share examples).*

'Today we're going to look at the Bible and build a surprise together. The story from the Bible is one that Jesus told; he used it to talk to people about what was really in their hearts and their attitudes when they pray.'

Read together: Luke 18:9–14 (CEV)

### Make it...

For this activity you will need to choose one of the tricks below and the appropriate items needed to create your choice.

Make one of the following and explore the questions below while you are working.

- **A banana that looks fine on the outside but is completely brown inside:** (done by using either a metal or wooden cooking skewer pushed from either end of the banana to meet in the middle and then taken out). You will need a couple of beautiful, yellow, almost under-ripe bananas; and two either metal or wooden cooking skewers. With the banana unpeeled, choose an entry point at both

the top and the bottom of the banana that will create a small tunnel all the way through the banana – letting air enter the inside of the banana and making it go brown rapidly from the inside out whilst still looking yellow on the outside.

- **A cracker with fake cheese on it: (slices of butter).** You will need nice looking crackers, and a block of hard butter. Cut slices of butter and arrange them on crackers on a serving plate to look like cheese and crackers.
- **Scones with jam and cream:** You will need some scones, tomato chutney (that looks like jam) and some sour cream. You will need to cut the scones and add some of the tomato chutney and some sour cream to make them look like delicious scones with jam and cream. Arrange them on a plate.



Ask the questions while the children are making their fake food trick (the idea of asking these questions is to reveal some specific characteristics of people who are fake about who they are, and what God really sees and knows):

- What do you think about this trick? Who are you going to give it to? Do you think they will work out what it is before they bite into it?
- I wonder if you think that life can sometimes be like this, i.e. you think you know what you will get and it turns out to be something very different or even no good at all.
- To make this illusion work really well, what do you think you might have to do? (*Create a great illusion; something that looks like something it is not*)
- How long do you think the illusion will fool people? (*Until it's opened or bitten into or someone investigates closely.*)

Re-read the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector...

- How are both of the men similar to the illusion we have just created? (*They are not what they appear to be. People have judged them based only on their appearance, this is not how God judges them.*)
- How much of what was in their hearts and minds did God already know? (*Everything.*)
- I wonder if what was truly in their hearts was seen in their prayers. (*Both men revealed lots of their hearts; dig deeper with the children, what did their prayers reveal?*)
- How much of what is in our hearts and minds does God know? (*Everything.*) Are you sure? (*Yes, God really does know all about what is in our hearts.*)
- I wonder what God really wants to hear from us in our prayers? (*To honestly talk about who we are and what we need from him, and he wants us to remember who he really is too—the pharisee had forgotten who God is and was rambling on about how great he was!*)

I am sure there are times when you are really not sure what to say to God; grown-ups have the same trouble at times. God really just wants us to be truthful. There is a really cool verse in the Bible that tells us that when we don't know the words to say, the Holy Spirit will communicate on our behalf.

'In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words' (Romans 8:26).

The Holy Spirit will also help us to focus on what needs to be prayed about if we ask him for help.



# Tying In

## Prayer...

For this prayer time you will need some paper, the children's journals, some heart-shaped post-it notes and some pens/textas or pencils for writing and drawing. You might like to divide into some small groups to help facilitate this prayer time and give opportunity for the children to share with each other before or after they have thought about their prayers.

The way that we pray and connect with God is not just about the words that we use, it might be communicated silently or through pictures or images.

Today, God wants to hear prayers that come from what is truly in your hearts.

Take some time to pray and connect with God. (*You may like to play some music to help create a nice space for the children to reflect individually.*)

You might like to write or draw a prayer (on some paper or in your journals), you might like to write some words that will help you pray about specific things, you might like to write or draw something that is in your heart on a post-it note and add it to your journal. It might be a prayer about a concern that you have for yourself or someone else, it might be about your attitude to someone or something that you are struggling with, it might be asking for forgiveness about an un-wise choice that you have made or it might be saying thanks to God for something that He has provided for you or your family, maybe even for God's unconditional love.

Then all pray together:

Dear God,

Thank you that you know ALL about what is in our hearts.

Thank you for wanting to hear about the real me and not just a fake picture.

Please help us to show who we really are in all that we do.

Help us this week to pray and talk to you about what is truly in our hearts.

Amen.



# Home & Beyond

Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.

This 'Home & Beyond' is to encourage the children to take a bunch of heart-shaped post-it notes (or others that might be appropriate or better suited to the makeup of your group) that can be used for prayers throughout the week.

## Prayers of the heart...

- Use the post-it notes you have been given this week to write prayers about what is truly on your heart.
- Invite other members of your family, your Big Bud or some other special people to also share the prayers of what is truly on their heart.
- These prayers can be added to a sheet of paper that you might like to stick on your fridge or up in your room or you might like to collect them and keep them in your journal.

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