Use Week of:

The Wicked Tenants

BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 21:33-45

MAIN POINT: God will judge those who reject Jesus.

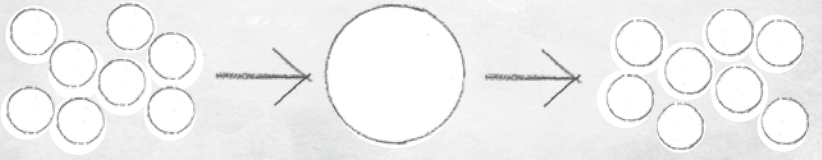
KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

SMALL GROUP OPENING
(10–15 MINUTES)
PAGE 90

LARGE GROUP BIBLE STUDY
(25–30 MINUTES)
PAGE 92

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES
(25–30 MINUTES)
PAGE 98



Leader BIBLE STUDY

A couple of days after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the day after He cleansed the temple, Jesus returned to the temple complex and began teaching. The chief priests and elders questioned Jesus. "Who gave You this authority?" they asked. These religious leaders did not want to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. So Jesus told them parables to get them thinking and to teach them about Himself.

The parable of the wicked tenants illustrates the story of Israel's history. As you teach kids, help them connect the story to what happened in Israel's history. First, the landowner is God the Father. He chose to bless the world

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through Abraham's family, the people of Israel. The vineyard is Israel.

The tenants are the leaders of Israel. Throughout history, God sent the Old Testament prophets to speak to God's people. But they did not listen to the prophets. Like the tenants of the vineyard, Israel's leaders persecuted the prophets. So God the Father sent His Son, Jesus. Jesus knew that the people were going to kill Him like the tenants killed the landowner's son.

Jesus led the leaders to conclude themselves what would be fair: that the landowner would punish the tenants and find workers who respect Him. God too is just. God will judge those who reject Jesus. He planned to choose a people who respect and trust Him—those who have faith—and form a community of believers from every nation to live under His righteous leadership.

Those who encounter Jesus can either accept and trust Him or walk away and reject Him. No one who meets Jesus will walk away unchanged. Pray that God would change the hearts of the kids you teach so that they would come to trust in Jesus, the Son of the loving and just Master, who wants everyone to come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

Additional resources for each session are available at *gospelproject.com.* For free training and session-by-session help, visit *www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.*

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Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Doodle it:** As you tell the story, draw doodles to help illustrate the different parts of it. Draw a large rectangle for the wall around the vineyard, stick figures for the tenants and servants, small circles for clusters of grapes, and a crowned stick figure for the landowner's son. Each time the tenants injure or kill a servant sent by the landowner, draw a large *X* over that figure.

The Wicked Tenants

Matthew 21:33-45

Jesus was teaching in the temple. He told the religious leaders to listen to this story: "A landowner planted a vineyard. He built a wall around the vineyard and dug a pit for crushing grapes. He also built a tower. The landowner **rented the vineyard to some tenants and left the country.**

"When it was time for the harvest, the owner sent some servants to get his grapes. But the tenants grabbed the servants. They **beat up one servant, killed another, and threw stones at a third.**

"So the owner sent more servants to his vineyard, but the tenants attacked them, too.

"Finally, the owner sent his son. He expected the tenants to respect him. But the tenants threw the son out of the vineyard and killed him."

Jesus asked, "When the owner comes back to the vineyard, what do you think he should do to those tenants?"

The religious leaders answered, "They deserve to die! The owner should rent the vineyard to people who respect him.**"**

Jesus replied, "Don't you know what the Scriptures say?

> 'The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the cornerstone—the most important stone of all. God did this, and it is amazing to us.'"

Then Jesus said, "So I tell you, God's kingdom will be taken away from you and given to people who do what He commands. Anyone who trips over this stone will be broken to pieces, and this stone will crush anyone it falls on.**"**

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When the religious leaders heard Jesus' story, they knew that Jesus was talking about them.

Christ Connection: Jesus told this story to teach the religious leaders about Himself. God sent His own Son, Jesus, to earth but the religious leaders rejected Him. Jesus is the cornerstone—the most important One of all. Only He can save us from our sin.

WANT TO DISCOVER GOD'S WORD? GET *ADVENTURE!*

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover the Pharisees said the vineyard owner should find faithful servants. Jesus' parable hints that God would raise up followers from all nations, united by the gospel. (Acts 1:8) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out *www.lifeway.com/devotionals.*

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Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: The Wicked Tenants
BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 21:33-45
MAIN POINT: God will judge those who reject Jesus.
KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34
BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, ask them to describe a time they disobeyed their parents. Did they face any consequences? What were they?

SAY • In our story today we will learn about a parable Jesus told to explain how God feels about people who reject His ways. We all disobey sometimes. How does God feel about disobedience?

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Vine Words" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete the "Vine Words" activity page. Instruct them to find and circle the words from the word bank.

SAY • The words you circled in the word search are all important parts of the Bible story we will hear later today. Make sure you pay close attention to find out what these words have to do with the parable we are learning about.

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Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Follow the vine

Use yarn to mark a path around the room. Wind it around chairs, under tables, and over any other obstacles in your space. Use tape to secure the path. Challenge kids to follow the "vine" from one end to the other.

- yarn
- tape

SAY • Our story today is about men who worked at a vineyard. A vineyard is like a farm for growing grapes. We call it a vineyard because grapes grow on vines. What do you think men who work at a vineyard would do if the man who owns the vineyard asked them for the grapes they had grown?

OPTION 2: Grape gathering

Scatter a large number of small rubber balls or paper wads around the room. Form two teams of kids, and designate one basket for each team. Instruct teams to gather as many grapes as they can in 30 seconds, starting when you say "go." Any grapes not returned to the basket when time is up do not count toward the team total.

- small rubber balls or paper wads
- baskets, 2
- stopwatch (optional)

SAY • In our Bible story today, we will learn about a parable Jesus told. In the parable, a man planted grapes in a vineyard and hired other men to take care of the grapes. What do you think happened when the man who planted the vineyard sent someone to gather the grapes? We'll learn soon!

Transition to large group

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Large Group LEADER

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Countdown

- countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire
- trash bag filled with shredded or crumpled paper

[Large Group Leader enters wearing hiking boots and a large backpack. He or she is carrying a trash bag that is nearly full.]

LEADER • Well if it isn't my favorite campers! How are all of you doing this fine day? Very well, I hope. You aren't leaving trash all over the campsite, are you? Someone in the site next to mine left a lot of food wrappers and other garbage all over the place. That can be dangerous, as it attracts bears or other animals to the site. Plus it's just plain inconsiderate. Yep, those people were friendly but turned out not to be very good tenants of the campground.

A *tenant* is someone who is allowed to use something by the person who owns it. In fact, there's a parable that Jesus told about some tenants who weren't good tenants either. How would you all like me to tell you about it? [*Allow responses.*] Awesome.

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Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • If you remember our big picture question, say it with me. ***Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom***. That's exactly right. As we get ready to hear this parable, think about what Jesus was teaching about God and about God's kingdom.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

• Giant Timeline

LEADER • We've talked about a lot of different parables so far. Let's review them using our timeline. I'll say the name of the parable, and you all tell me what we learned from it.

- "Parable of the Sower" (**Not everyone who hears the gospel believes it**.)
- "The Unmerciful Servant" (**God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others**.)
- "The Good Samaritan" (**Jesus calls us to love others as He has loved us**.)
- "Three Parables" (**Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost**.)
- "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector" (**God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble**.)

Great job, everyone! Those are all the parables we've talked about so far. We have one more that we will learn about this week before I have to end my camping trip and head home. This weeks story is called "The Wicked Tenants." Remember that a *tenant* is a person who is allowed to use something that belongs to someone else, usually land. The tenants in our Bible story used a vineyard.

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Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

- Bibles
- "The Wicked Tenants" video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Open your Bible to Matthew 21:33-45. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "The Wicked Tenants."

LEADER • Oh my goodness! Those men were not nice at all! The vineyard did not belong to them. The man who owned the vineyard paid them to work the ground and grow grapes, but the grapes belonged to the vineyard owner, not the tenants. When he tried to get his grapes, they responded with violence and cruelty. They even killed the vineyard owner's son.

Wait a minute—does that sound like a familiar outcome? Who else sent His Son only to have the men kill Him? [*Allow responses*.] That's right. This parable is about God and Jesus.

God is like the landowner. He created the nation of Israel and gave special responsibility to the religious leaders to help care for the people of Israel and guide them to obey Him and wait for the Messiah, Jesus. However, the religious leaders did not want to listen to Jesus when He finally arrived and began teaching. Instead of listening to Jesus, they hated Him and plotted to kill Him! Jesus was explaining to the people that He is the One God sent to bring people to God. Just as the people said that the landowner in the parable should punish the wicked tenants, we know that **God will judge those who reject Jesus**.

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Christ connection

LEADER • The next part of Jesus' teaching can be a little tricky to understand. Jesus compared Himself to a cornerstone. A *cornerstone* is a stone in a building

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placed at the corner, where two walls come together. It is important because if the cornerstone is set wrong, it affects both walls, making the whole building wrong. Jesus was explaining to the religious leaders that He is the most important part of God's kingdom. He is the One through whom God's kingdom would be brought to earth. Just as **God will judge those who reject Jesus**, God will accept those who believe in Him. Jesus' importance is shown all throughout God's plan to send Him to die for sin and rescue people like you and me, who could not do anything to rescue ourselves.

Key passage (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- "He Saw a Huge Crowd" song

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Mark 6:34.

LEADER • While Jesus was on earth, He taught people many things. Jesus is more than just a good teacher though; Jesus is God's Son. Jesus came because of His love and compassion for us and because of His desire to obey God's plan.

Lead boys and girls in singing "He Saw a Huge Crowd."

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

- "Unit 22, Session 6" discussion starter video

LEADER • Have you ever needed help but been unwilling to let someone help you? Think about that as you check out this video.

Show the "Unit 22, Session 6" discussion starter video. Discuss reasons why a person may reject help even if he or she needs it. Why do you think people reject Jesus? What do you expect to happen to people who reject the help they need?

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LEADER • We all have the choice to trust Jesus or reject Him. The Bible teaches that we all are sinners and deserve death. We cannot save ourselves and need Jesus to rescue us. When we believe in Jesus, He forgives our sin and gives us new life. Then we can show other people who Jesus is through our words and actions so they might trust Him and believe in Him too.

Sing (4 minutes)

• "The Kingdom of Heaven" song

LEADER • I'm so glad to have Jesus. Let's spend some time singing a worship song to Him.

Sing together "The Kingdom of Heaven."

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Thank You, Lord, for giving us Your Son. Thank You for making the way for us to be rescued from sin. Give us courage to tell the world about You. Use us as part of Your plan to bring more people into Your kingdom. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

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The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means "good news." It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.

God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.

We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)

God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.

Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.

We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

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Small Group LEADER

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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster

Ask for volunteers to say the key passage from memory. Praise the efforts of each kid who attempts reciting the verse. Then assign each kid a word from the verse and see how fast the group can say it, with each kid saying only his own word in the proper order.

SAY • When Jesus taught about God and His kingdom, many people were excited to see Him and listen to Him. Jesus had compassion on them. But some people rejected Jesus. Today we learned that **God will judge those who reject Jesus**.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- Bible times costumes or props.

Distribute a Bible to each kid and help kids look up Matthew 21:33-45. Assign roles to different kids and allow them to act out the story. You may want to use costumes or props to help engage the kids. Then, ask the following questions:

1. Who built the vineyard? (*the man who owned the land, Matt. 21:33*)
2. Who farmed the land and was supposed to take care of the grapes? (*the tenants, Matt. 21:33*)

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3. What did the tenants do to the servants sent by the landowner? (*They beat them, threw rocks at them, and even killed one; Matt. 21:34-36*)
4. Who did the landowner eventually send to get the grapes? (*He sent his own son, Matt. 21:37*)
5. What did the tenants do to the landowner's son? (*They killed him to try to steal his inheritance, Matt. 21:38-39*)
6. What will happen to people who reject Jesus? (**God will judge those who reject Jesus**, *Matt. 21:42-43*)

SAY • In the parable, the landowner sent his son to correct the tenants, but they killed him. Similarly, God sent Jesus to show people how to have a relationship with Him again, but the religious leaders rejected Him and killed Him on a cross. This was all part of God's plan, though. Jesus died to pay the penalty for sin. Anyone who believes in Jesus will receive forgiveness and new life, but those who reject Jesus will be judged by God for their sin.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

• foam ball

OPTION 1: Lose-lose situation

Select one kid to be the *baller*. He will stand at one end of the room and throw the foam ball toward the middle of the room. The other kids will stand scattered around the room and try to catch the ball. When a kid has caught five throws, she becomes the next *baller*, and everyone's catch count resets to zero. After playing a few rounds, select two or three kids to be *tenants*. They will no longer be allowed to catch throws, but instead they will be tasked with blocking throws and knocking the ball to the ground before other kids can catch it.

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SAY • At first the goal of the game was clear: you wanted to catch throws so that you could become the *baller*. But when the *tenants* were introduced to the game, things shifted. The *tenants* weren't trying to win the game and become the *baller*, they were just trying to keep other people from winning. In a way, that's what it's like when people reject Jesus. We know that **God will judge those who reject Jesus**, but in addition to that, people who reject Jesus can't help other people believe in Jesus because they aren't spreading the gospel. It's a lose-lose situation for them.

God wants us to believe in Jesus so we will have eternal life with Him. God also calls us to share the gospel with everyone we meet so that more people have the chance to believe in Jesus and be forgiven by Him.

OPTION 2: Prayer grapes

- green chenille stems, 1 per kid
- purple construction paper
- white paper
- pens
- paper
- glue or tape

Provide each kid with a green chenille stem and purple construction paper. Instruct the kids to tear off bits of construction paper, each about an inch or two in diameter. Ask the kids to write down the names of friends, family members, or other people they know who may be rejecting Jesus on the different bits, crumple them into small balls, and glue them in clusters to a sheet of white paper. Then they can use their green chenille stems to make a bit of grapevine and glue it to the paper near the top of the grape cluster. Help kids write the Scripture reference for the parable at the top of their papers.

SAY • In the parable, the landowner wanted to collect the grapes that were his. The wicked tenants killed

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the son in hopes of keeping the vineyard and its grapes for themselves. In a way, people are like the grapes in the parable. God wants to gather people to Himself. We know that **God will judge those who reject Jesus**, so we can pray for people who do not yet believe in Jesus to put their faith in Him and be saved. Take your grape clusters home and pray for the people you wrote down. Ask God to gather those people into His kingdom.

Tip: Some kids may have trouble identifying unbelievers they know. Consider providing a list of unreached people groups that the kids could use in this craft.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

- markers or crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible story coloring page, 1 per kid

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture of a way they disobey Jesus and a way they obey Him.

SAY • When we disobey Jesus, we are rejecting parts of Jesus' teaching. Thankfully, once we are saved, God forgives us and makes us new. God still calls us to obey Him out of love. The more we know God, the less desire we will feel to sin or reject Jesus' commands.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray, asking God to help your group believe in Jesus and share the gospel with those around them. Ask Him to help them grow in obedience.

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