

22nd
November
2026

weekly



JOYFUL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

FULL OF BRIGHT IDEAS

WELCOME TO THIS SPECIAL 'JOYFUL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS' EDITION OF WEEKLY@. AS WE CELEBRATE THE LAUNCH OF OUR NEW DIOCESAN VISION ON 22 NOVEMBER 2026, WE'VE CREATED THIS RESOURCE TO HELP SUPPORT YOUR MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN. DRAWING ON THE THEMES OF MATTHEW 25:31-46, THESE ACTIVITIES, REFLECTIONS AND IDEAS EXPLORE HOW WE CAN BECOME JOYFUL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS BY KNOWING HIM, LOVING OUR NEIGHBOURS, AND RECOGNISING HIS PRESENCE IN THOSE AROUND US.

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Sunday 22nd November 2026

JOYFUL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

Matthew 25: 31-46

OVERVIEW

Continuing his discourse on the events of judgement that will happen on his return and the importance of serving him while we wait, Jesus provides us with a graphic description of all nations being gathered before him. Here in Britain, we might find it difficult to imagine how goats and sheep could be mixed up, because they look reasonably different, but in the Israel of Jesus' time, they looked similar. His point is that only God can tell, ultimately, if someone is a Christian or not. But he does go on to indicate the kind of behaviour that is often a reliable guide as to whether someone has taken God's commands seriously. If someone claims to be a Christian and appears to have no interest in helping those less fortunate than themselves, it is doubtful whether their faith is real. We are saved by faith alone, but we demonstrate that faith by our actions.

SONG SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion One

Praise

Elevation Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2oxGYpuLkw>

Suggestion Two

King Of My Heart

John Mark McMillan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0nrgirb9Ag>

PRAYERS

Lord Jesus, help us to see you in the people we meet every day. Give us joyful hearts, willing hands, and loving words so that we can care for others as you care for us. Amen.

Lord, as we launch our new vision, fill our churches with your joy, not just happiness that comes and goes, but the deep joy that comes from following you. Wherever we go this week, help us to recognise you in the people we meet and to serve you with glad and generous hearts. Amen



THEME SUGGESTIONS

- The sheep are welcomed into God's kingdom because their lives reflect God's love and compassion.
- Jesus wants us to love him by loving other people.
- When we are kind, helpful, welcoming, and caring, we are being Joyful Followers of Jesus because we are treating others the way Jesus would.



ALL AGE TALK

JOYFUL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

I imagine that many of you here this morning will be familiar with "Where's Wally?" (*Show the congregation a Where's Wally? book, and / or put up a Where's Wally? picture on the screen.*) You open the book and there are hundreds and hundreds of characters on the page. Everyone is doing something different. Some are waving, some are eating ice cream, some are jumping or running - and somewhere in the middle of all that chaos is Wally. At first, you can't see him. You scan the page once, twice, three times... and then suddenly you spot the striped jumper and bobble hat. And once you've found Wally, you can't believe you missed him! (*Challenge the congregation to find Wally on the screen or get a volunteer to come forward and see how quickly they can find him in the book.*)

In today's Bible reading, people expected to find God in grand places. In palaces. In temples. In important people. But Jesus said, "I was hungry... I was thirsty... I was a stranger... I was sick..." And the people asked, "When did we see you?" They hadn't realised Jesus was there - they were looking in the wrong place. And so, Jesus explained that when they cared for people in need, they were actually caring for him. Jesus could be found where they least expected him. Not because he was wearing a striped jumper and bobble hat, but because he was present in the people around them.

This is a really exciting time for us in churches across the Diocese of Blackburn because this is the launch of our new Diocesan Vision which calls us to be Joyful Followers of Jesus. When people hear that phrase, they often focus on the word "joyful". And joy is important, but before we can be joyful, we need to be followers. Followers follow someone and our vision reminds us who we are following - Jesus! Every day we are learning to notice him, listen to him and live like him. A joyful follower isn't someone who is happy all the time. A joyful follower is someone who knows Jesus and is becoming more like him.

I think there is something especially encouraging about our Bible passage today because the sheep don't seem to realise what they've done. When Jesus said, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink..." They didn't respond with, "Look at all the good things we did!" Instead, they ask, "When did we see you?" Their kindness and compassion had become natural. They had spent so much time following Jesus that loving people was simply what they did. And that's our prayer. Not that we become people who do good deeds and say, "Look how good we are." But people who naturally reflect Jesus wherever we go. Imagine what would happen if every church in our diocese became known for that. Imagine if people said:

"That's the church that welcomes everyone."

"That's the church that notices people who are struggling."

"That's the church where children are valued."

"That's the church where people find hope."

"That's the church where people meet Jesus."

That would be AMAZING because ultimately, our 'Joyful Followers of Jesus' vision isn't about programmes or projects. It's about becoming the kind of people who love like Jesus loves. People who see Jesus in others. People who help others see Jesus too. People who follow Jesus wherever he leads.

SET THE SCENE

WHAT PEOPLE SEE

Ask the children to take turns at showing an emotion using their facial expression and body language (you might need to help with some suggestions). Ask the rest of the group to guess what emotion is being demonstrated. Explain that we can tell a lot about someone by watching what they do and how they behave. In the same way, people will look at Christians and see something special about them by the way they behave. We want other people to look at us and recognise that we are Joyful Followers of Jesus!

THOUGHTS INTO ACTIONS

Bring some treats, such as nicely decorated cupcakes, but only enough for about half the group. Ask the children: If you received one of these, what would you do? Discuss various options - sharing, saving or eating the treat straight away. It's no good just thinking about being kind but then displaying selfish actions! In our story today, Jesus teaches us to act generously towards others. Just thinking about doing it isn't enough!



WHAT IS 'SET THE SCENE'?

'Set the Scene' offers ideas for gathering activities at the beginning of your time together. It acts as a warm-up, mentally preparing children for the main elements of your session by activating prior knowledge and curiosity.

THE INVISIBLE GORILLA

Explain to the children that you are going to test their attention by showing them a video of some people playing basketball. They must watch the video without making a sound and count the number of times the players with the white shirts pass the ball.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJG698U2Mvo>

After watching ask who got the number of passes correct. Who noticed the person in the gorilla suit?! In this experiment, approximately 50% of people who were intently counting basketball passes entirely miss the person in a gorilla suit walking through the scene. We often think that we're fully aware of our surroundings but don't actually notice the needs of others around us. Our Bible story today is about noticing and responding to the needs of others.

DISCUSSION

SUGGESTION ONE

At first it sounds like our story today is about sheep and goats, but it is really about people and the choices they make. Jesus said that the sheep were welcomed by the King because they had shown love and kindness to others. They helped people who were hungry, thirsty, lonely, sick, or in need. The goats, however, ignored those opportunities to help and care for others.

It's surprising that the sheep didn't even realise they had been helping Jesus! They asked, "When did we see you hungry or thirsty or needing help?" Jesus explained that whenever they had cared for someone in need, it was as if they had cared for him. The people Jesus described weren't doing extraordinary things. They were doing simple, everyday acts of kindness. They shared what they had, welcomed people, helped those who were struggling, and took time to care. Jesus wants us to know that even small actions can make a big difference in someone's life.

How many of you have ever worn glasses? Without glasses everything can be blurry, but when you put them on, suddenly everything becomes clearer. In today's reading, Jesus is giving us a new way of seeing - he puts on our eyes the "Jesus glasses" and suddenly we start noticing things we missed before! We notice the lonely child in the playground. We notice the neighbour who hasn't had many visitors. We notice the teacher who needs help carrying something. We notice the friend who is sad or worried. These are the kind of moments Jesus wants us to notice. Being one of Jesus' sheep means listening to his voice and choosing to love people the way he does.

This story reminds us that being Joyful Followers of Jesus is about more than knowing Bible stories or coming to church. It is about letting God's love change the way we treat other people. Every time we are kind, welcoming, generous, or caring, we are living as one of Jesus' sheep and showing the world what God's love looks like.

OUR NEW VISION

Our new vision - Joyful Followers of Jesus - has five strands, and every one of them helps us learn to see Jesus more clearly.

Knowing Jesus

The more time we spend with Jesus, the easier it becomes to recognise him. Just as you can spot a good friend in a crowded room, we begin to recognise the things that matter to Jesus.

Sharing our faith

If we've discovered something wonderful about Jesus, why would we keep it secret? We want others to know him too.

Loving our neighbour

This is right at the heart of today's Bible reading! When we help those who are hungry, lonely, hurting or excluded, we are serving Jesus himself.

Inspiring young people

Children often notice things adults miss. Their kindness, honesty and enthusiasm can help all of us see Jesus more clearly.

Forming Christlike leaders

Leadership in God's kingdom isn't about being important. It's about helping other people follow Jesus well.

GAMES AND RESPONSE

SHEEP AND GOATS

Create two 'pens', one on each side of the room and assign a colour to each pen (e.g. red and blue). Divide children into three groups; shepherds, goats and sheep. Give the sheep one colour of card and the goats another colour to match the pens. The sheep and goats begin in the centre of the room, with the shepherds at the sides. When the game starts, the shepherds should attempt to tag the sheep and goats who move around the room. If a shepherd tags a sheep or goat, they lead them to the correct coloured pen and keep the coloured card. The winner is the shepherd who collects the most coloured cards. Allow the children to switch roles so everyone has opportunity to be a shepherd.

SEPERATE

Choose one person to be the shepherd and secretly allocate everyone else the role of a sheep or a stubborn goat. As the sheep and goats act out their roles, the shepherd has to identify which are which and separate them by moving the sheep and goats to opposite sides of the room.

DOMINOES

Explain to the group that you are going to collectively make a domino run. You will each take it in turns to add a number of dominoes to the sequence and the number will be determined by rolling a dice. Before you start, select a few children and say that If they're right-handed, they must use their left hand, and if they're left-handed, they must use their right hand. Start creating the run, giving everyone chance to participate. Ask the children who were disadvantaged how they felt about using the wrong hand. Jesus wants us to notice people who face challenges and show them love and support.



WHAT IS THE AIM OF A RESPONSE?

The response activity allows children to respond to the message in a meaningful way. It creates space for children to express their thoughts, ask questions and explore their faith, considering how what they've heard might guide their choices and behaviour.

RAISING AWARENESS

There are lots of things that negatively impact on local communities that we might feel powerless to do something about. Suggest that even though the children can't necessarily do something to help directly, they can promote and raise awareness of things which can help a good cause. Research and make posters to highlight the good work of local charities and initiatives such as Refugee Centres and Food Banks.

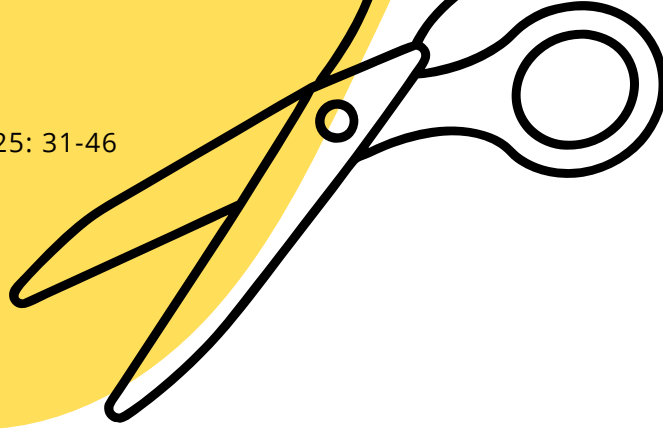
RESPOND TO NEED

You will need an empty glass jar and some lolly sticks. Decorate the jar together with coloured paper, ribbon, stickers, etc. Write on the lolly sticks ideas for ways you could help someone who is hungry, ill, lonely or imprisoned. Put the lolly sticks inside the decorated jar, then each pull one out and pledge to try and do that thing to help. It is important that you communicate what you have been doing with parents so they feel able and prepared to support what the children have pledged to do at home.

FOOD COLLECTION

Write the names of different non-perishable food items on post-it notes and stick them up on a wall. Make sure they are all things that can be purchased quite cheaply. Invite the children to come and take a post-it note and commit to getting that item to bring to church next week. Collect all the donated food and arrange to take it to a foodbank or homeless shelter.

ACTIVITIES



MAGNETS

Bring a selection of metal objects – coins, cans, old keys, utensils, etc. and some magnets. Pretend that the local council has declared that it can only recycle items made of steel. How will we separate the correct items out from the rest? Use magnets to find out what is made of steel (aluminium items and copper coins won't stick to them). Metal objects might look similar, but they behave differently. In the same way that the magnet invisibly draws the steel close, so the Holy Spirit in us can't be seen, yet prompts us to act in certain ways which are visible to others.

EXTRA LOVE

Provide the children with a list of people connected to your church family or wider community that need some extra love or encouragement (e.g. those that are unwell, have suffered bereavement, have a family member who is working away or is in the military, someone who is out of work or starting a new job, etc.) Invite the children to draw pictures, make cards, or write letters of encouragement to send them.

FLUFFY SHEEP

See the video here for instructions on how to make cute sheep using fluffy chenille yarn and pieces of pool noodle:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVxDX6_fe0E&t=146s

Make sure adults supervise the use of hot glue guns to prevent accidents. Talk about how if we want to be friends of Jesus, we must show love for others just as Jesus shows love for us. That is how Jesus can tell his sheep from the goats.

SHEEP SNACK

Create tasty themed snacks by spreading crackers with cream cheese and then decorating them to look like sheep. You could use twiglets or pretzel sticks to legs and seeds or pieces of cut up vegetables for the faces. Be mindful of any allergies or intolerances. As you eat your snacks together, remember that Jesus calls us to be like the sheep who listen to the Good Shepherd and show love and kindness to others through our actions.

TAKE AWAY

REMINDER CARDS

Show the children how to each make a set of four cards that say 'Smile', 'Give', 'Say' and 'Help'. These are to take home and remind them to think of ways in which they can do these things each day. (NB giving doesn't have to be money – it can be a hug, or some time, or a listening ear.) Encourage the children to share the cards with their families so everyone can join in with using them as we seek to be Joyful Followers of Jesus!

POPCORN SHEEP

Invite the children to each fill a clear bag with popcorn, seal it and then stick a sheep's face on it made from black card. See the example here: <https://www.catchmyparty.com/photos/2550317>
The children can take their popcorn to eat at home and remember that Jesus calls us to be like the sheep who listen to the Good Shepherd and show his love through kindness, care and compassion for others.



WHAT IS A 'TAKE AWAY' ACTIVITY?

A take away activity helps children to remember what they've heard and carry it with them afterwards. These activities often feature a challenge to do or think about something as part of their daily lives.

SECRET SHEEP CHALLENGE

Make sheep badges for the children to take home. See the link here for inspiration: <https://www.thriftyfun.com/Making-a-Cardstock-Sheep-Badge.html>

Suggest that the children secretly wear their badge this week, attaching it somewhere that only they can see it, e.g. inside their jacket. The badge can remind them of their secret sheep challenge. Can they:

- Help someone without being asked?
- Encourage someone who is sad?
- Welcome someone new?
- Share something they have?

You could check in with the children next week and invite them to share what happened.

AT HOME



SUGGESTION ONE

Research the work of your local food bank (one organisation is Trussell, however there are others: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/>) and find out what sort of things they are currently short of. Put together a donation including some of these things and take a family trip to the food bank to deliver it to them. If you can't afford to do this, you could make a card to encourage the food bank volunteers in their work, and take that instead. Pray together:

Father God, we are sorry for the times when we think of ourselves first instead of other people. Show us how to better love and care for others, like you first loved and cared for us. Amen

SUGGESTION TWO

Buy two different kinds of treats that look similar, e.g. Smarties and M&M's. Mix them up in a bowl and then work as a team to separate them as fast as you can. Remember that the shepherd in Jesus' story separated the sheep from the goats, helping us think about how Jesus recognised the difference between those who showed love and kindness and those who did not. Pray together:

Loving Jesus, help us to notice people who need a friend, a helping hand, or a kind word. Teach us to listen to your voice, follow your example, and show your love to everyone we meet. May our lives be full of kindness, compassion, and generosity, so that others can see something of you in us. Amen

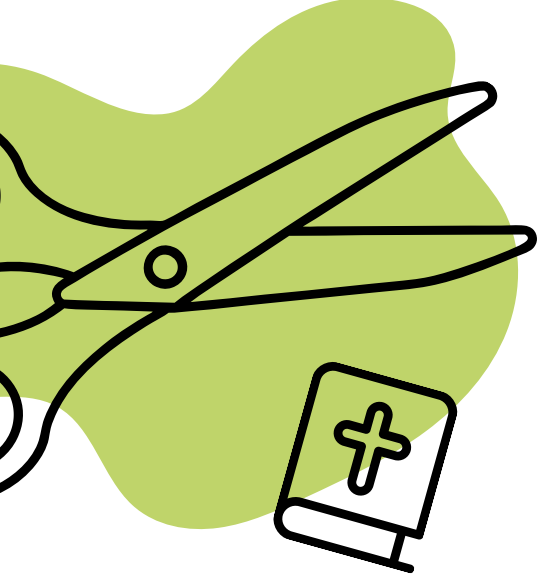


WHAT IS 'AT HOME'?

At home is a collection of questions and suggestions designed to help families grow in faith together outside of church. You can weave these activities and conversations into your rhythms of life to help you build on what you have learnt during groups and services.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Share what you each learned in church today!
- Why do you think Jesus cares so much about how we treat other people?
- How does it make you feel to think that when you help someone, you are actually helping Jesus?
- Can you think of a time when someone showed kindness to you? How did it make you feel?
- If Jesus visited our family this week, what ways would he see us being joyful followers of him?



THANK YOU!

A huge Weekly@ THANK YOU to all the incredible writers who have contributed to this resource over the years. Your creativity, dedication, and faith have shaped something truly special—we couldn't have done it without you.

We're also deeply grateful to everyone who has used our materials to share God's love with children across the Diocese of Blackburn and beyond. Your commitment to making Jesus known is inspiring, and we're honoured that this resource has been part of your ministry.

