



THE SUITCASE: A STORY ABOUT GIVING

ACTIVITY GUIDE

Thomas has packed a suitcase to travel to the Kingdom of Heaven! Find out what Thomas is bringing and join him and his family on a special journey.

Zeal and excitement are a part of every child. *The Suitcase* celebrates a young child's enthusiasm to put into practice the words of Christ: to feed and clothe the poor, help the needy, and love one's neighbor.

The Suitcase can be read at home or used in a school or church setting as a tool to challenge and/or inspire children to consider God's heavenly kingdom, and how one might care for others.

ACTIVITY ONE — FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS: DIVING IN...

Age range: Any age

Materials: *The Suitcase*

Time needed: 20-30 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Read some of the parables that are mentioned in the book, The Parable of the Mustard Seed; The Pearl of Great Price; The Parable of the Hidden Treasure—all in Matthew 13.

- Before reading the book aloud to the children, speak in a hushed voice to gain their attention; have the kids close their eyes, and ask them to think of what the Kingdom of Heaven might look like. Count to ten while they think, then ask them to save that picture in their head to share with the group later.
- Read *The Suitcase*.
- Potential Questions:
 1. What were some of the things Thomas packed in his suitcase so he could travel to the Kingdom of Heaven?
 2. Why do you think he packed a mustard seed, a pearl, a hammer?
 3. Why did Thomas want to go to the Kingdom of Heaven?
 4. Thomas said, "Sometimes I just talk too much and it's important to only listen." Why is listening important?
 5. Why did Thomas's daddy tell him that he was *already* in the Kingdom of Heaven?
 6. What are some ways that we can share the Kingdom of Heaven with other people?
 7. When you pictured the Kingdom of Heaven in your head, what did it look like?
 8. How does it make you feel that Thomas's whole family joined in with him on his journey?
 9. What can you do *today* that will show the same type of love that Thomas wanted to show?

ACTIVITY TWO — THE MUSTARD SEED: WRITE AND/OR DRAW

Age range: Second through Sixth grade

Materials: *The Suitcase*, Bible, drawing paper and colored pencils (or other art materials) for each child

Time needed: 50 minutes

Teacher Prep: Read in advance The Parable of the Mustard Seed — meditate on all of Matthew 13 and ask for God’s guidance as you lead the children...

1. The Gospels are jam-packed with parables: the Good Shepherd, the Sower of Seed, the Vine and the Branches — so many beautiful and inspiring and even mysterious stories! Have an older child, or teacher **read Matthew 13: 31, 32** out loud. Allow some time for the children to ponder these words.
2. Read *The Suitcase*.
3. Choose a few questions from Activity One to get the kids thinking.
4. Send everyone off to either write their own parable, or draw a picture from a theme in the book, or from the Bible passage. Even if they draw a figure of Darth Vader or Sponge Bob, there is most likely a deep reason why. Ask them about their drawing and commend them on their hard work, their use of color, the shape of the lines, or ask them what they were thinking when they drew it.

Publish Your Students’ Work

Any artwork or quotes that are sent to me will be “published” on *The Suitcase* Facebook page. Feel free to send along jpgs, or pdfs, or simply include the attachments and/or descriptions in an email to: jane@janegmeyer.com. Make sure that you have student and parent permission before sending artwork, and please no photos of children’s faces for their own protection of privacy.

A Resource for Grown-Ups

Zeal and excitement are a part of every child. And sometimes, a child can see through all of the stuff and clutter of this life and get straight to the most important charge we have as Christians: to pack our suitcases and head out to share the Kingdom of Heaven! Be careful not to squelch a young child's enthusiasm to put into practice the words of Christ: feed and clothe the poor, help the needy, and love your neighbor. There is nothing worse than to be a little person filled with a big idea, and be told, *Sorry, honey, not today. Why don't you just go and play.*

Here are a few ideas to consider for when your child comes to the dinner table with a suitcase packed and ready to go. Remember, when help is given in person in a slow and deliberate manner—when the giver stops to really see the receiver and learn his or her name and story, like Christ did—it is life-changing for the giver and the receiver. Writing a check is lovely, but it's relationships that heal and help us grow.

- There are homeless ministries and soup kitchens in almost every community. Some are willing to have folks of all ages come and help. This is a wonderful way for an entire family to serve those in need.
- Prepare music, or cards, or treats as a family, then bring them on a visit to a home for the elderly.
- Find someone who struggles with seeing or reading, to whom your child can offer to read on a regular basis.
- Talk with your child about kids at school. Identify one who is often left out of activities and invite that child over to play.
- Contact your church community and find out if there is an appropriate person who can't travel outside their home, for whom your child could do errands or yard work, or could visit.
- Do you have a relative who could use a listening ear? Do you perhaps need to re-forge your bond first? A child's love is often the best icebreaker when family tensions have deep roots.
- Volunteer as a family at the local food bank and help stock their shelves and distribute food to the needy.
- Pack up small bags of necessities to give to those living on the street. Include a travel-sized toothbrush, wipes, and toothpaste, along with new socks, lip balm, a small icon or prayer card, and a coupon to a local food establishment. Keep them in your car for when you come across someone in need.
- Invite a friend or neighbor to join your family at a natural setting and together discover the beauty that God has put there for us to enjoy.
- Above all, pray—pray alone, and pray as a family—and seek ways to fill up your hearts with Christ's unending love.

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. (1 John 3:17–18 NRSV)