

KEY STAGE 1/UNIT 1.1

GOD

WHAT DO CHRISTIANS BELIEVE GOD IS LIKE?







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★ OUTCOMES

BY THE END OF THIS UNIT, PUPILS ARE EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO:

-  Identify what a parable is.
-  Tell the story of the Lost Son from the Bible simply, and recognise a link with the concept of God as a forgiving Father.
-  Give clear, simple accounts of what the story means to Christians.
-  Give at least two examples of a way in which Christians show their belief in God as loving and forgiving; for example, by saying sorry; by seeing God as welcoming them back; by forgiving others.
-  Give an example of how Christians put their beliefs into practice in worship; by saying sorry to God, for example.
-  Think, talk and ask questions about whether they can learn anything from the story for themselves, exploring different ideas.

KNOWLEDGE BUILDING BLOCKS

PUPILS WILL KNOW THAT:

- Christians believe in God, and that they find out about God in the Bible.
- Christians believe God is loving, kind, fair and forgiving, and also Lord and King.
- Some stories show these Christian beliefs.
- Christians worship God and try to live in ways that please him.

NOTE: Teachers should read the Essential Information pages before teaching this unit.

YOU MIGHT LIKE TO START WITH...

Give pupils part of a piece of art of the *Lost Son* (see Resources section) to work out what they think is happening. Use a photo frame to isolate parts of the picture and allow pupils to focus upon them. Encourage pupils to say what they can see in each part of the picture, colours used and mood conveyed. Ask pupils to imagine what the rest of the story might be, then complete the picture to show the rest of the story.



MAKING SENSE OF THE TEXT

- Using a child-friendly version, tell the story of the Lost Son (Luke 15:1-2, 11-32) in an interesting way. For example, use xGodly Play or story sacks with 'I wonder' questions. Pupils can answer the 'I wonder' questions or write their own. Record these questions, perhaps in a display, and refer back to them through the unit.
- Use drama (for example, hot-seating or thought-tapping theatre) to explore the differing perspectives and feelings of the father and both sons. Ask pupils to talk about their responses to the story: favourite character, most important moment, surprises, anything that made them laugh/smile or cry/sad. Draw out the forgiveness and love shown by the father. Wonder: What might this teach Christians about God? Is God like a father? How?
- Explain that the Lost Son is a *parable*, which is a special sort of story that was told by Jesus to help people learn or understand ideas. Parables might be harder to understand than some other stories because they have hidden meanings. They can seem to be saying one thing, but are really teaching something else. Help pupils to understand the concept of a story meaning something else. This can be illustrated in a way that is most suitable for the class: for example, metaphors, or contemporary stories, such as *Paper Dolls* by Julia Donaldson.
- Have a discussion using dialogic talk (see 'Glossary of Activities', *Teacher's Handbook*, page 56) to help the class work out the meanings behind the Lost Son. It is important that dialogic talk is employed so that pupils are involved in the process of working out the parable's meaning rather than merely being told it.
- Ask the pupils to make 'hidden meaning boxes'. Pupils should show the literal story of the Lost Son on the outside of a box, but put the hidden meaning inside the box ready to be found by anyone who opens it. Both artwork and text can be used to complete this activity. Pupils can work individually using nets of cubes (see Resource Sheet 1) or in groups using shoe boxes, for example.
- Refer back to the key question: What do Christians believe God is like? Do pupils have any ideas yet, about what the story says about God?



MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Share some of the hidden meanings of the parable that the pupils have found. Draw out that for Christians this parable teaches that God is loving and forgiving, like a parent. Either using their own parents/guardians as a model or parents from story books, ask the pupils to draw an outline of a parent. Inside the outline write/draw what parents do or say to show that they love their children. On the outside of the outline write/draw what pupils do or say to show that they love their parents. Draw out the meaning that love goes both ways.



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

- The parable of the Lost Son teaches that God is loving like a parent so Christians want to show that they love God. As a class, think of some of the ways that Christians might do this – either think of six ways, or give them nine ideas and ask them to select the best six to draw (see Resource Sheet 2). For example, sing praising songs, pray saying why they love God, read about God in the Bible, love people, forgive people, care for people, go to church, pray and talk to God, pray and ask God to help, be generous. Stick these drawings to the outside of large dice.
- Use the dice with the class. Take it in turns to throw the dice and then act out what that might mean for a Christian. For example: praying – give an example of a line of prayer that a Christian might say; or caring – what might a Christian do in a certain scenario? For example, someone is crying, hungry, lonely, very poor, very rich.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Explore: What happens in school if they do something wrong? Share any fresh start/new day practices you might have, and emphasise the importance of forgiving pupils in school. What happens at home? (Care may need to be taken with this question.) How do parents forgive?
- If appropriate, given the age and stage of your class, get the pupils to work in small groups, enacting drama scenarios from school and home. You will need to give them examples: for example, someone spoils a piece of work, trips someone up, steals their sister's chocolate, doesn't tidy their room. Next ask the pupils to show how the drama reaches the stage when forgiveness is given. What happens when forgiveness is not given?
- Alternatively, get pupils to practise saying 'I'm very sorry' and 'That's okay – I forgive you' to each other around the class.
- Talk together: Is it good to forgive people? Why/why not? How does it feel if you don't forgive? Why is it sometimes hard to forgive?
- Refer back to the core question: What do Christians believe God is like? The story shows the idea that God is loving and forgiving.



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

- Christian prayers have four main types. Some prayers show all four, some just one or two. These are *praise*, *saying sorry*, *saying thank you* and *asking for something*. Introduce the pupils to four jelly-baby characters: **Peter Praise**, **Suzy Sorry**, **Andrew Ask** and **Thea Thanks** – each character should be a different colour (see Resource Sheet 3), but you can provide your very own jelly babies for this. The story of the Lost Son might lead Christians to think it is very important to say 'Peter Praise' prayers and 'Suzy Sorry' prayers. Ask the pupils to look through the Lost Son story [you can use this with the Jonah story too – see Digging Deeper on next page] and ask if they can see which parts of the story suggest that Suzy Sorry, Peter Praise, Andrew Ask or Thea Thanks prayers are something that the characters might say.
- Ask the pupils to focus on two of the types of prayer: Suzy Sorry and Peter Praise. Christians believe God is loving and forgiving, so what prayers might a 6-year-old Christian say in a time of prayer at church? Write these prayers, copy some words from Resource Sheet 4 or draw on suitable shaped and coloured paper, perhaps for display.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Some of the important things that the Parable of the Lost Son teaches Christians include the ideas that forgiving and being forgiven are important and God will forgive them, but they should also practise forgiveness. Is forgiving people only important for Christians, or for other people too?
- Either listen to the free extract of the Fischy music song 'You can hold on', www.fischy.com from the album 'These are our emotions', or play the whole song. How does it feel when you don't forgive someone? How does it feel when you do forgive them? Why is it hard to forgive people?
- If your pupils are able, you might write a class poem or an extra verse to the song about what it feels like to forgive or not forgive. You might give some sentence starters to support this work, and use the repeated phrase from the song, 'You can hold on to the feeling or you can let go.'
- Or, ask them to draw or write about a time when they had been forgiven, or had forgiven someone, and how it made them feel.






DIGGING DEEPER

GOD

WHAT DO CHRISTIANS BELIEVE GOD IS LIKE?

★ OUTCOMES

BY THE END OF THIS UNIT, PUPILS ARE EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO:

-  Tell the key points of the story of Jonah from the Bible, and recognise a link with the concept of God.
-  Give clear, simple accounts of what the text means to Christians.
-  Give an example of a way in which Christians use the story of Jonah to guide their beliefs about God, for example, seeing God as Lord, i.e. in control of events and being fair: God wants to save the people of Nineveh.
-  Give at least two examples of how Christians put their beliefs into practice in worship: for example, using the story in church, in art.
-  Think, talk and ask questions about whether they can learn anything from the story for themselves, exploring different ideas.

📚 KNOWLEDGE BUILDING BLOCKS

PUPILS WILL KNOW THAT:

- Christians believe in God, and that they find out about God in the Bible.
- Christians believe God is loving, kind, fair and forgiving, and also Lord and King.
- Some stories show these Christian beliefs.
- Christians worship God and try to live in ways that please him.

➔ YOU MIGHT LIKE TO START WITH...

Look together at a stained-glass window depicting the story of Jonah: for example, the roundel from the Redemption Window in Canterbury Cathedral. Ask pupils what they notice first, second and third when looking at the image – this gives you scope to help pupils understand elements of the picture. Invite pupils to share their opinions of the image. They might like some parts of it whilst disliking others. In twos or threes, pupils create a title for the window. A Google search will bring up many examples of Jonah portrayed in art to support work in this unit.



➔ MAKING SENSE OF THE TEXT

THE STORY OF JONAH

- Using a child-friendly version, tell the story of Jonah in an interactive way. For example, ask pupils to help you devise relevant sounds or actions for them to perform whenever a key word is read in the story (such as 'Jonah', 'Nineveh' (the wicked city), 'God', 'fish', 'storm' and so on). At appropriate points in the story ask pupils what they think Jonah must have been feeling. Suggest some alternatives: was he scared or sorry, angry or worried?
- Talk about pupils' responses to the story, and their ideas about it. Ask them about the best bits, or which part is most puzzling, and why. What were their feelings during the story? Ask what they think the story is about; this text is not a parable, but if there is a 'hidden meaning' in it, what might that be?
- In light of their thinking about the story so far, ask pupils: What happened when Jonah tried to run away from God? How did God find Jonah? Was it important for Jonah to go to Nineveh – why?
- Split pupils into groups and give each group one key event from the story; for example, God commanding Jonah to go to Nineveh; the storm; Jonah praying inside the fish; Jonah leaving the fish; Jonah going to Nineveh; the people of Nineveh changing their ways; God saving Nineveh; Jonah getting cross; God explaining to Jonah the importance of being concerned for the people and animals of Nineveh (see Resource Sheet 5 – you might ask pupils to do some quick sketches to show their part of the story, but make sure you move on to the next section about ideas of God!).
- Pupils work in their group members to decide a) which emotions Jonah is feeling at each stage; for example, using an 'emotions dice' or the emoticons on Resource Sheet 6, perhaps making a 'Wordle'; and b) what their part of the story might teach a Christian about God. Some groups may be able to work independently, whilst others may need support. For example, have a selection of cards with a range of ideas about God – pupils choose one that is shown by their part of the story and justify their choice. Groups feed back to the rest of the class.
- From the group feedback, work as a class to start to create a bank of ideas showing what a Christian might learn about God from stories and songs. Save this ideas bank to refer and add to in following lessons.

SELECT AND WEAVE TOGETHER ACTIVITIES TO ACHIEVE THE OUTCOMES

MAKE SENSE OF THE TEXT

UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT

MAKE CONNECTIONS

OUTCOMES



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

- Recap: what did we find out about God in the story of Jonah?
- Discuss with pupils any times when they may have heard Christian hymns and songs: for example, school assembly or singing practice, church, on the television and so on. Ask the pupils why they think Christians sing in church. Explain that they will be listening to two songs used by Christians in worship – you can choose two from the Resources page. They are often sung by pupils in church: they help Christians to think about what God is like. Why do Christians think it is important to sing songs about what God is like? Ask some Christians to suggest why they think it is important to sing about God.
- Talk together about the rhythm, rhyme and repetition within each song. Clap, dance or play along: which words stand out as being important?
- Carry out a discussion activity with pupils to ensure that they understand the meaning of the lyric. This could take the form of a teacher-led discussion, a 'snowball discussion' where pupils talk about the meaning of the lyric in pairs before moving into fours then sixes, or a 'jigsaw discussion' where the class splits into groups, with some looking at lyrics in Christian songs and hymns, and then feeding back to the whole class. After feedback, pupils use mini-whiteboards to show what they think is the most important thing a Christian might learn about God from the two songs.

NOTES

The kinds of lessons Christians might learn from Jonah are that God is fair and just, but also forgiving; that God is everywhere and knows everything; that God listens to prayers; that God is Lord of all, not just the 'People of God' – Jonah only wanted the tree to live, but God wanted the people to live; and that if God loves everyone, Christians should too.

As a result they will understand that this God is worth thinking about, and worth worshipping! Christians do this sometimes through singing – and many songs teach them a bit more about what God is like.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Ask: If God is invisible, how do Christians describe God? What questions do pupils have about these ideas of God? You might get pupils to record some of these questions in thought bubbles.
- Reflect on what pupils have learned about Christian ideas of God from the story and songs explored. Create small pieces of art to represent one of the ways of understanding God discussed in earlier sessions, or another idea that pupils have; for example, images of forgiveness, love, power, care, friendship, creating or creation. They might start with ideas that surprised them, or the ideas that they think might be most important to people who believe in God. These pictures can be put together to form a large class collage using the key question as the title: What do Christians believe God is like?
- Using the collage as a stimulus, help pupils to focus upon this complicated view of God: is there only one idea about God, or are there lots? Are there some ideas you like best? Are some hard to understand? Are some a bit scary? Are some comforting? Might some be good to think about when you need help? Might thinking about any of these make you act a little bit differently, or a lot differently? Are these ideas only important for Christians? What ideas do you have about God? Do you have someone or something that is comforting when you need help...? How is this a bit like, or not like, God for Christians?
- Use some of these questions, and some that the pupils asked, and see if they can record some answers on the other side of the thought bubbles from the start of this section.

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

Christians read the Bible as telling a story of the relationship between God the Creator, and creation. Specifically, it is about God's relationship with human beings. The Bible starts with everything going well, with humans as good friends with God, but humans mess up their friendship by preferring to go their own way. The rest of the Bible explores ways in which God draws humans back into a close friendship with him. This includes choosing a special people (the Hebrews or people of Israel, also called the People of God) to demonstrate what it is like to be friends with God, so that everyone would want to be friends with God. It is important to know this because it helps to explain why some people are not obeying

God, or why some want to run away, and why God is so pleased to welcome people back.

This shows how the Bible can be used in human attempts to understand the nature of God. Christians believe that the Bible reveals what God is like, and that he is worth being friends with – more than that, he is worth worshipping!

Christians use the stories of Jesus in various ways. Jesus' parables have been a source of comfort, inspiration and challenge for centuries. Christians might explore the story and its meanings in a Bible study group, act it out in drama, listen to a vicar or minister preach about it in church, and try to find out what Jesus is teaching them about how to behave.

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT AND ITS MEANING(S)

LUKE: THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

Jesus' parables help people to understand big, difficult concepts by using metaphor. Therefore, they may be harder for pupils to understand fully than some other stories in the Bible.

The parable of the Lost Son can be found in the gospel of Luke (15:11-32). Luke wrote the Gospel, telling the words and actions of Jesus, after speaking to eyewitnesses. Chapter 15 relates three 'lost' parables in succession – the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. The sheep, the coin and the son are used as metaphors for sinners (the 'lost') turning to God, who rejoices when they are 'found'.

In the parable, Jesus explains to his listeners what God is like, using a metaphor they would understand: a father who cares for his pupils. The father's younger son demands his inheritance early, before leaving home and squandering it all. **[NOTE: the story talks about prostitutes – so be careful which version you use to tell the story!]** The younger son ends up feeding pigs and is so hungry that he longs for their food – this would have been seen as sinking very low indeed at the time when the Gospel was

written, due to the laws of Judaism, in which contact with pigs was not allowed.

The son decides he needs to return to his father and say sorry, which is symbolic of a sinner turning back to God. He returns and repents without expecting to regain his old place in the household. God is shown as not only a forgiving father, but also a loving one who was watching out and waiting for his son to come home, receiving him with open arms and celebrating his return.

When the older son is angered by the events, the father explains why they should celebrate – because the younger brother was dead/lost and is now alive/found. This part of the parable has been interpreted in many ways, including seeing the older brother as representing people who think they are on the right path, but look down on people who are 'sinners' and 'outcasts'. Many Christians see the story as telling them that God is particularly concerned with the people who are furthest from him, and rejoices when they turn back. They believe that God generously forgives people when they turn back to him – even though they don't deserve forgiveness.

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT AND ITS MEANING(S)

THE STORY OF JONAH

Jonah is a short book in the Old Testament, written perhaps 2,500 years ago. Jonah is a prophet (someone who is chosen to speak for God), and this is a book of 'the prophets'. Christians use it to learn some things about what God is like and what matters to him.

Jonah is commanded by God to go to the wicked city of Nineveh and say that they are going to get into big trouble if they don't start worshipping God. Jonah doesn't fancy this challenge and so he tries to run from God. God sends a storm and Jonah is swallowed by a great fish, demonstrating the omniscience (all-knowingness) and power of the Lord, but particularly his concern for the people of Nineveh who are lost and far away from God.

Obedience to God is a key theme in this book and when he is given a second chance, Jonah eventually shows his obedience by going to Nineveh. He also learns that God is not tied to just one place – he is everywhere.

God's role as Lord and a judge is apparent within the story, and he is able to both punish and preserve. God shows compassion and mercy toward humans and animals, in judgement. This is clear in the final chapter when he justifies to Jonah his decision to save Nineveh; if Jonah cares about a plant that grows and dies in just a day, how much more will God care about the people of Nineveh? Jonah learns a lesson and describes God as slow to anger and full of love. He learns that God is the God of all people, not just of the Jewish people.

Some Christian interpretations see Jonah as representing the People of God, who are supposed to attract other nations to God – they won't manage that by staying away from other people! Some Christians make a link between the story of Jonah and Jesus stilling the storm (Matthew 8:23–27), and they also connect Jonah's three days in the fish's belly and Jesus' three days in the tomb before his resurrection.



GOING FURTHER

An additional text might be the story of Moses and the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:1–12). Apply the same learning model to exploring what this story tells Christians about God, and how they live as a result.

You might take some key words and names for God in the Bible and see how many of them are found in the two stories studied, and in the Moses story above.

WHY NOT LINK WITH...?

Note that the story of Jonah is a Jewish story, and also valued by Muslims. You might talk about stories that the three religions share and think about why.

RESOURCES

It would be good to use the parable of the Lost Son (New Testament, book of Luke 15:11–32 and the Book of Jonah in the Old Testament), to compare what they both say about what God is like. However, if there is not time for this, we have suggested that the story of the Lost Son enables pupils to learn the core ideas, with the Book of Jonah allowing them to dig deeper and embed their learning.

Teachers should read the full text in an up-to-date translation (for example, *New Century Version*, *New International Version UK* or *New International Children's Bible*). Search online on the Bible Gateway, which will give lots of translations: www.biblegateway.com

With pupils you might use a good pupils' Bible (for example the *Lion Children's Bible*), but note where parts are missing in these simplified versions.

The Jonah Roundel from the Redemption Window in Canterbury Cathedral can be found here: www.iconart.org.uk/index.php?s=med&p=2

Dinah Roe Kendall's Triptych of 'The Prodigal Son's Return' (2005) can be found here: www.magnoliabox.com/artist/13760/dinah-roe-kendall

A great Jonah song, 'When Jonah Sank into the Sea' can be found in 'Jonah Man Jazz' by Michael Hurd.

Songs suitable for looking at what Christians believe God is like: for example, 'My God is So Big', 'Who's the King of the Jungle?', 'Our God is an awesome God'. A recent song is 'My Lighthouse' (from Rend Collective), www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFBZJGSgyVQ

'You Can Hold on' is from the album *These Are Our Emotions*, on sale from www.fischy.com. A free sample is available to play and would be sufficient for the activity. www.fischy.com/songs/you-can-hold-on.