



# TEACHING IDEAS AND STARTERS

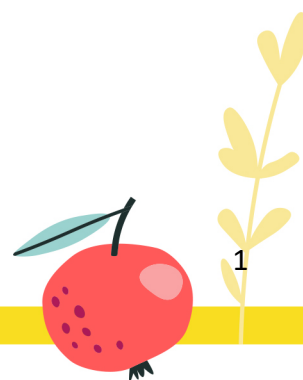
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*Welcome to the Harvest teaching ideas. This collection of ideas will give you a range of options to engage with Harvest in a creative way.*

*Remember to check out the Activity Bank, Prayer and Worship, and Toddler Church for more inspiration that could be adapted for your Harvest celebration.*

*Please browse through the document, or click the links below to jump straight to the section you need:*

- » [God's loving provision](#) . Psalm 138:2; Job 36:24; Ephesians 3:20
- » [The everyday Harvest](#) Exodus 16:31
- » [Good grapes](#) Philippians 4:8
- » [An attitude of gratitude](#) Isaiah 5:1-2
- » [From scarcity to abundance](#) Mark 6:30-44; Leviticus 19:9-10
- » [Deepen our roots](#) Ephesians 3:14-19
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» Disconnected from Creator and creation Genesis 1; 2:23; 3:12

» Giving back Psalm 24:1

» Justice and righteousness Isaiah 32:16-17

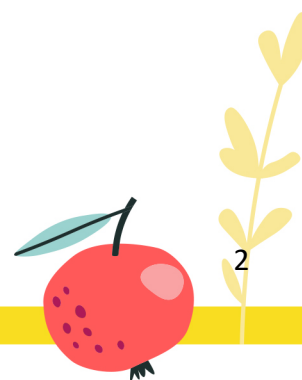
» Reaching up and out John 15:1-17

» Taking in the view Psalm 148

» The harvest is plentiful Luke 10:1-12

» Sweet or sour Galatians 5:22-23

» Hitting the jackpot Ephesians 1:3; 1 Corinthians 1:5





## God's loving provision

Let's celebrate God's creation and loving provision:

### 1. His gift of beauty

**Psalm 138:2**

Beauty is found in spectacular places and everyday kindnesses, in marvelous music and incredible people, and it greatly enriches our lives. Expressing our appreciation and gratitude to God increases our capacity to enjoy them. During the pandemic lockdown, people have become very aware of things they normally take for granted. What beauty have you missed or become aware of?

The Bible tells us to be grateful:

'I kneel in worship... and say it again: "Thank you!" Thank you for your love, thank you for your faithfulness' (Psalm 138:2 MSG).

### 2. His gift of memory

**Job 36:24**

Do you know the story of the squirrel bathing in the warm summer sun while his fellow squirrels gathered nuts? When challenged why he wasn't helping, he replied that he was collecting memories so that in the dark winter nights he could remind them of brighter days.

Sometimes just a taste or a smell can transport us in memory to events and places and experiences. During these days, what memories are coming to

mind? What are you storing up in your memory-maker?

The Bible says:

'Remember that you should praise his work' (Job 36:24 *Christian Standard Bible*).

### 3. His gift of imagination

**Ephesians 3:20**

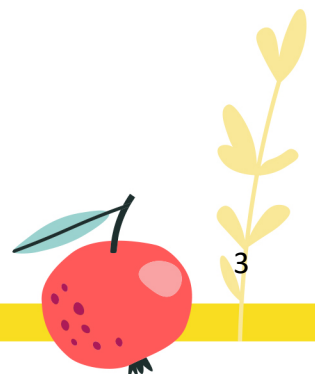
With imagination we can 'see' a field of golden wheat gently waving, and 'smell' the musty fragrance of nettles. We can 'hear' a chattering stream and feel the warm 'touch' of the sun and even 'taste' wild blackberries.

Imagination can help build a bright future. What do you imagine the post-pandemic world will look like?

The Bible tells us that:

'[God's] power within us is able to do far more than we ever dare to ask or imagine' (Ephesians 3:20 PHILLIPS).

How are you responding to God's loving provision for this Harvest time?





## The everyday harvest

Exodus 16:31

God's goodness is seen in his provision.

Fearful of starvation in the wilderness the people complained to Moses. Despite their ingratitude, the Lord provided for them.

'The community of Israel decided to name this mysterious substance "manna" (which means, "What is it?"). It was white like a coriander seed, and it tasted sweet like honey wafers. (Exodus 16:31 VOICE)

### 1. Divine: it was undeserved.

They complained about their situation, forgetting they had been released from slavery by God's intervention. God told Moses it was bread rained down from Heaven. It was undeserved and unexpected.

During the pandemic lockdowns, did you receive unexpected help?

### 2. Deliberate: It was a test.

It was a daily test of the people's trust and obedience. It required gathering every day according to each person's need, and a double portion prior to the Sabbath. But some were greedy and disobeyed, and what they had harvested went mouldy.

Greed brings bad consequences to the perpetrator and others.

At the beginning of the lockdown some people hoarded such large quantities that others had difficulty getting basic necessities. Later there were reports that some wheelie-bins were full of rotting food.

In what area of our lives might we be failing to trust or obey?

### 3. Daily: It was ongoing.

For 40 years, regardless of the changing seasons, manna fed the covenanted community. The miracle was not the existence of manna, but the sheer amount of manna that was made available.

Our manna today:  
[Jesus said] 'I am the bread that gives life. If you come to my table and eat, you will never go hungry. Believe in me, and you will never go thirsty.' (John 6:35 VOICE)

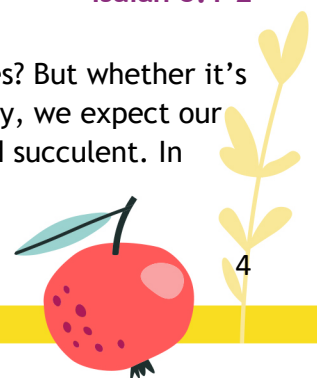
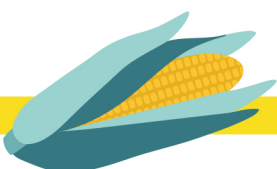
We don't deserve it, but spiritual nourishment is available for us to harvest every day.

Are you gathering the provision offered?

## Good grapes

Isaiah 5:1-2

Who doesn't like grapes? But whether it's the green or red variety, we expect our grapes to be sweet and succulent. In





ancient Israel the vine was symbolic of the nation. Isaiah 5:1-2 tells of a vineyard planted by God's provision. But sadly his generosity was abused, his guidance confused and his gift misused. It did not produce the good grapes he expected (v3).

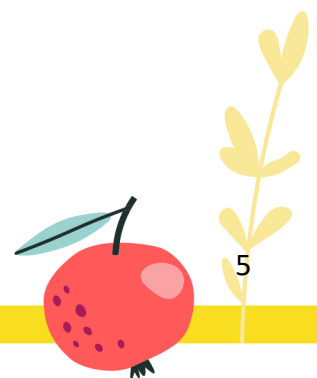
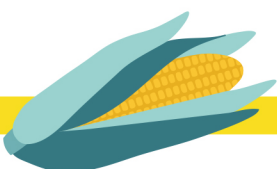
Isaiah's song was intended to rebuke Israel. God had planted them, looked after them, cared for and tended them. God expected a crop of justice and a harvest of righteousness. He wanted them to do good, but instead Israel murdered and acted unjustly. Israel didn't respond to God's direction. The grapes were not good.

It is an ongoing story, for whenever we try to live our lives without reference to God it is not long before there is a sense of dissatisfaction with life. If all our attempts at improvements are really only geared to benefit ourselves or to create a good impression, then the little fruit we have is in danger of quickly withering. Unaided by God, we will harvest unnecessary problems and a lack of spiritual power, or our duty becomes a drudge. The grapes are not good.

However, there is hope for us all. Jesus is the living vine, and he can give us renewed spiritual life. Jesus explains:

'When you're joined with me, and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant... This is how my Father shows who he is - when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.' (John 15:5-8 MSG)

We have been put into the world to bear '...fruit that won't spoil' (John 15:16 MSG). A living, healthy relationship with Jesus claimed by faith is what we all need - a life from which grows fulfilment, soul satisfaction, and a harvest of good grapes. What a provision! Let's make sure we are joined to the Living Vine today.





## An attitude of gratitude

Philippians 4:8

Paul reminds us that we should aim for an attitude of gratitude, and suggests that our thinking can dictate our outlook. Using Philippians 4:8, how might these words of advice shape your prayers? What might you want to thank God for today?

- What is true?
- What is noble?
- What is right?
- What is pure?
- What is lovely?
- What is admirable?
- Anything excellent?
- Or praiseworthy?

Think, reflect and focus on the provision God has made for you - and thank him for his divine, daily, deliberate provision.

## From scarcity to abundance

Mark 6:30-44; Leviticus 19:9-10

The predominant theory in our society is that you can never have enough - that our needs can only be met by purchasing more goods. The concern that there might not be enough to go round creates a culture of scarcity. If we believe there is never enough for everyone, we will be driven to compete for what there is. We are bombarded by advertising which exploits a deep-seated fear that however much we have, it's not enough.

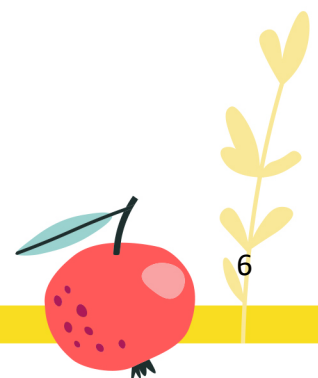
Contrast this with the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus refocuses the disciples,

not on what they're lacking (as in a culture of scarcity) but on the resources they do have (a culture of abundance). Somehow, in God's economy, abundance breeds further abundance. How can we develop a neighbourly culture? How can we use our skills and gifts to meet the needs of the communities around us and to build connections?

In Leviticus God wanted his people to develop a deep-seated trust in his provision for them, and to understand that he provided enough for them to give away generously.

As in the festival of first fruits, how are we putting God first? Part of the harvest was to be reserved for helping poor and marginalised people; how do these ideas shape our Harvest giving today?

It's easy to be overwhelmed by the scale of the problems we face - global poverty, fractured communities and unemployment. We don't tend to react well to uncertainties in our own lives, fearing that what we have will not be enough. But Jesus encourages us to look at what we do have and to place that in God's hands.





## Deepen our roots

**Ephesians 3:14-19**

- Reflect on the beauty of local gardens, no matter the size, and draw parallels to other gardens in the Bible:
  - Eden - God's plan of perfection and his desire to bless us.
  - Gethsemane - Jesus preparing to go to the cross for our sins
  - Paradise (a Persian term which can be translated as 'Royal Garden') - where we see a picture of Heaven.
- Consider deepening our spiritual roots:
  - The more we nourish our spirits in prayer, the deeper our roots in Christ will go.
  - The more we feed our hearts on God's word, the more its influence will change us.
  - The deeper our roots go, the more the fruit of the Holy Spirit's presence within will be noticeable.
- If we ask God to bless us with more of the life of his Spirit within, then it follows that we would seek to be a blessing to others.
- How can we live this in a practical way?
- How can we care for this world that has been gifted to us?

- How can we have a rich harvest of the Spirit's work in our thoughts, words and deeds?

## Creation in harmony

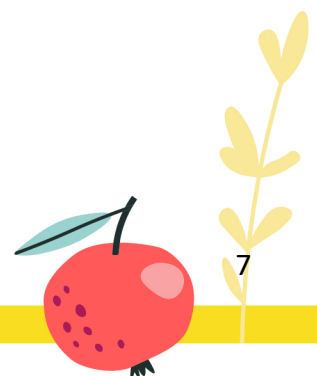
**Isaiah 11:1-3,6-9**

What kind of world does the Bible imagine?

Throughout Scripture there are many glimpses of the kind of world God imagines for his creation.

In these verses of Scripture we see an incredible image - animals coexisting in ways that ordinarily they shouldn't! And right in the centre of this is human life in its most vulnerable form, ie a young child, playing with and around deadly species of all kinds. Clearly this is poetic imagery, but in what way? Put simply, this is the world as it is to be. This is the world recreated where big and small can live together without fear of death and destruction.

How can this be applied to the issue of climate change and the inequality we see in our world today? How can we help to bring about this vision of restoration in our lives and communities? How can we seek to 'neither harm nor destroy' (v9)?

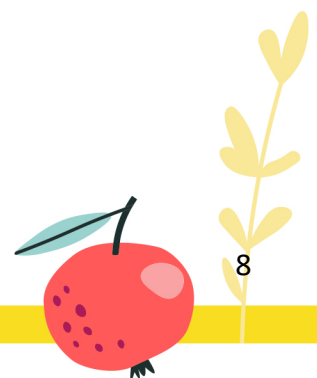




## Every praise!

### Romans 11:33-36

- Ask the congregation to remember a moment when they couldn't help but praise God. Praising God actually does us good - in our minds, in our bodies and in our spirits. Could this explain why the Bible records so many moments when people burst out with their praises to God (1 Chronicles 29:10-11; Ephesians 3:20-21; 1 Timothy 1:17)?
- This type of passage is called a 'doxology' - from *doxa* meaning 'praise' and *logos* meaning 'a word or saying'.
- Paul has been explaining God's saving plan to the believers in Rome. His lengthy writings (chapters 9-11), spanning millennia, continents and nations, describe God's purposes worked out through his people. Suddenly, Paul is overcome and must worship.
- **Romans 11:33** - Paul affirms that God's wisdom, knowledge, judgments and paths are beyond human comprehension, especially through his son Jesus and his people the Church.
- **Romans 11:34-35** - Paul uses two Old Testament quotations to assert that any human criticism of God is completely out of place (Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11).
- **Romans 11:36** - Paul states that God is the source, sustainer and goal of everything. Therefore, all glory is his alone for all time.
- At Harvest time we are reminded that anything we choose to give to God is actually already his.
- As we put him first in our lives, other people will be attracted to him and give their lives to him too.







## Fruit that shall last

John 15:1-17

How can we cultivate fruit that will last? Some buildings are now built, not to last, but with built-in obsolescence. Which is the best approach? Or does it depend on the situation?

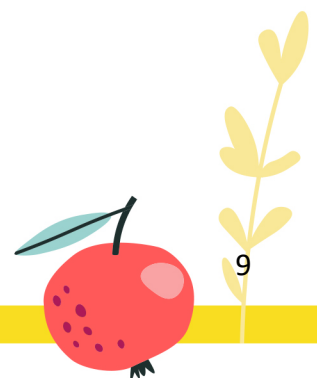
Draw comparisons with the parable of the sower (Luke 8). Note the reference to the man who accepts the word with enthusiasm but there is no depth, there is no root - he is not fruitful, he does not last.

John extends the theme of depth, of being rooted - bearing fruit, fruit that shall last. The Greek word *meno* is translated to fruit that shall *LAST* or fruit that shall *ABIDE*. The word - as can be seen by looking at the many examples of its use in the New Testament - does not automatically or even necessarily mean permanent, forever or everlasting.

- ‘Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay (*meno*) at their house until you leave’ (Matthew 10:11).
- ‘Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death; stay (*meno*) here and keep watch with me”’ (Matthew 26:38).
- ‘Mary stayed (*meno*) with Elizabeth for about three months and returned home’ (Luke 1:56).
- ‘When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay (*meno*) at your house today”’ (Luke 19:5).

- ‘Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed (*meno*) where he was two more days...’ (John 11:5f).
- ‘I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay (*meno*) in darkness’ (John 12:46).

The last text implies permanence but the other examples clearly do not. However, they all suggest importance, substance, depth. This is not a quick-fix, a sticking-plaster, a flash-in-the-pan approach to life, but rather a long-term, an in-depth, a commitment-to-integrity approach to life.





## Disconnected from Creator and creation

Genesis 1; 2:23; 3:12

Explore the creation story and the three relationships Adam broke between himself and:

- God - he became afraid of God
- Eve - he blamed her and had a go at God for her existence
- the Earth - the created order was broken and would need sweat and toil in order for Adam to survive on it

Adam became the centre of his world. In Adam's eyes, the world became something that was his own, something to be exploited for his own ends, and because he was now without God, it also became something to be abused.

Explore how independence is closely linked to greed, and greed has no respect for creation: exploitation, environmental refugees, climate change, pollution...

Galatians 5:22-23

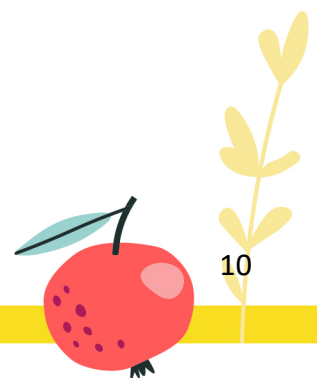
Ask people which they prefer - orange or lemon? Or does it depend on the situation - half-time in a football match or baking a lemon cake? Oranges and lemons are different. We can say that orange is sweet and that lemon is sour.

Sweet and sour - what are you? Some people that are sweet enter a room and it seems to be a better place because of the sweetness they bring into it. Sometimes people are described as sour and bring into a room a negative feeling

because of a bad attitude and spirit - a sourness.

The word of God says in Galatians 5:22-23 that we as Christians should display fruit. Now that doesn't mean we go around with an orange or lemon tied around our neck, but we should display spiritual fruit by the way we live, by the way we act, by the way we speak, and by the very way we live our lives.

We need to ask God to help us display his fruit in all that we do. We don't want to be sour in any way. How can we be a people who allow God's sweetness to make a difference through us?





## Giving back

Psalm 24:1

1. God created the world beautifully. In Genesis 1 we read that he was pleased with all he had created. He put mankind in charge to take responsibility for it.
2. God created the world out of his love for us, so that we could enjoy it.
3. We need to give back to God out of thanksgiving for all he has given to us.  
How has God shown his love for us? How do we show our gratitude to him? Bringing fruits and vegetables, tins and monetary gifts on Harvest Sunday for others to share is one way to show our appreciation.
4. We also need to enjoy the Earth in a way that takes good care of it and ourselves - we are called to be good stewards of creation.  
How are we doing this? How does this relate to our spiritual lives?
5. We can make a difference wherever we are - everything on the Earth is the Lord's. Explore practical ways in which we can care for it. Doing this pleases God and is another way to give back to him.

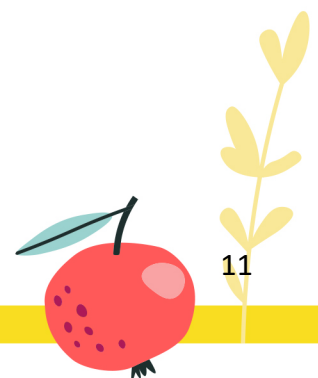
## All things for him

Colossians 1:16-17

If all things were made by Christ and for Christ, then that means the universe was made by him and for him. Not for us. If in him all things hold together, then that means that the universe functions in the way that it does because of him. The laws of nature have been put in place through Christ. The universe is not in chaos because of Christ. There is an inherent order to our world, and even though our abuse of the world's resources has caused it to be scarred and broken, we can still see a central law at work which helps the world to right itself again. We are responsible for working together with God to reconcile all things in Christ.

We are called to love God with all our heart... If we love God, then we must love what he loves. He loves this created broken world, and together with him he wants us to work to redeem it and renew it.

How can we make sure that Christ is at the centre, and not us? How can we love all our neighbours, including our economic and global neighbours?





## Justice and righteousness

Isaiah 32:16-17

In order to understand these verses more clearly we should recognise that the same Hebrew word is translated into English both as 'justice' and 'righteousness'.

Repeating this word closely not only emphasises the importance of justice within the passage, but also allows for different nuances of justice to be recognised. It signifies both the importance of making 'right judgments' in the legal sense, and at the same time expressing love towards the victim in a compassionate sense. This passage also suggests that the physical presence of shalom occurs as a fruit of just relationships within the world. Not only that, but when this has been established, its effects will last for ever.

Thus, if we are to see the world become as God intended it, we have to tackle the injustice of the world.

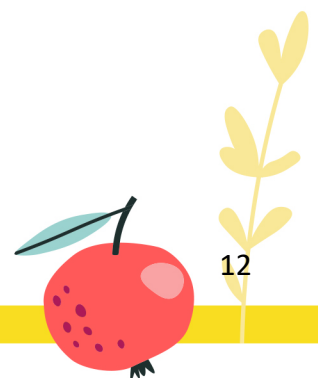
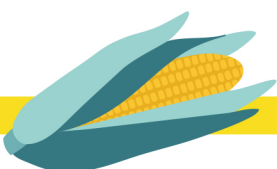
## Reaching up and out

John 15:1-17

This passage makes it almost impossible to separate the 'reaching up' (holiness, discipleship) aspects from the 'reaching out' (in mission and evangelism) aspects. Explore what it says to us about life with Jesus:

- We are rooted in Christ, drawn into the mystery of connection with the divine that only Jesus graciously makes possible for us.
- Two aspects of healthy plant growth are nourishment and pruning - the fruit bringing glory to God.
- If we're rooted in Christ and open and willing to growing in relationship with him, then fruitfulness will follow.

What does it mean for us to be rooted, growing and fruitful? Do we commit ourselves to being deeply rooted in Christ - utterly dependent on him and solely sustained by him? What will the fruit of our life be?





## Taking in the view

### Psalm 148

Psalm 148 gives us an opportunity to take a fresh look at our planet and God's amazing creation from above, from below and from within.

#### From above - adoration

Psalm 148:1-6 begins with a call for everything in the 'heights', with a bird's-eye view perspective, to 'praise the Lord'. Throughout the Bible God is pictured as being 'highest above the earth' - supreme above all beings. We are lifted up to see things from a God perspective.

Looking at Earth from above has left a powerful and lasting impression on the astronauts who have seen this view for real. Jim Lovell who flew with Apollo Missions 8 and 13 said: 'It's hard to appreciate the Earth when you're down right upon it because it's so huge... From a position 240,000 miles away we gain an idea of how insignificant we are, how fragile we are.'

When we start from above we cannot help but be filled with praise and adoration.

#### From below - awe

Small children often give an amazing child's-eye view of the world seeing God's creation from 'below'.

In verses 7-12 the psalmist calls on earth (on all that is below) to 'praise the Lord'.

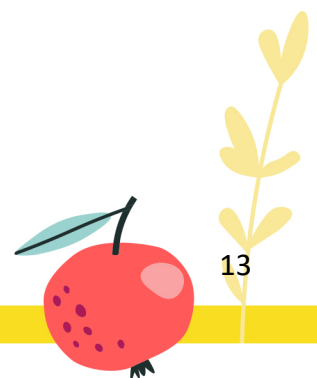
From sea creatures, to mountains, to people of all ages and backgrounds, the Lord created us all, and all owe him praise.

When was the last time we looked at creation through the eyes of a child and rediscovered the awe and wonder of it all? May we be inspired to be more childlike, to discover again awe and wonder at God's world around us, and be inspired to care more for this beautiful planet he has placed us on.

#### From within - action!

The Bible teaches us that Jesus unites Heaven and earth - he is from above, yet with us below. Through Jesus we gain a third perspective, 'from within'.

The climax of the psalm is verse 14 where God shows he loves and cares for all his creation, but he has a special place for 'his people' - you and me - our fellow humanity. As part of God's creation we are loved by him, and if our adoration is in place (from looking above), if our awe is engaged and connected (from looking from below), then from within creation we should be called to action to care for creation, and for all humanity as part of God's amazing creation.





## The harvest is plentiful

Luke 10:1-12

Jesus' teaching applies equally to disciples engaged in mission today. You may be the only Christian in your workplace, school, college, club, doctor's waiting room and supermarket. These are Christ's fields, and he will do the saving. You are tasked with accomplishing his harvest.

Mark 5:18-19 tells of a man possessed by evil spirits. Jesus healed him and the man then begged Jesus to let him travel with him. But Jesus' response was that he should go home and tell others.

Not all people are called to travel, to go away. Most, like this man, are required to be a blessing and be a disciple and tell what God has done for them, just where they are, in the neighbourhood where they live/work, in the places they normally go to, with the people they see.

We may feel lonely, flawed and inadequate for the task, but we are not alone. We belong to the wider Church, a community of faith, and are part of the family of Jesus.

- How do we encourage, support and nurture one another for this missionary task?
- What do we need to leave behind?
- How do we deal with opposition, in all its forms?
- How can we bring the deep sense of peace we associate with God's coming salvation?

'Go make disciples.' In the New Testament the word 'Christian' appears only three times, but the word 'disciple' appears 269 times.

## Sweet or sour

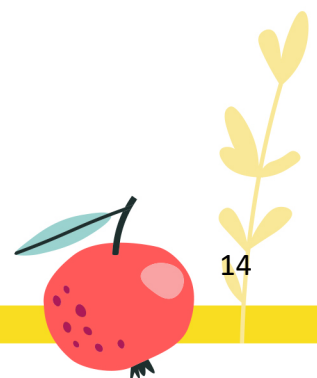
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## Hitting the jackpot

**Ephesians 1:3; 1 Corinthians 1:5**

Large lottery jackpot winners often make the headlines.

- What would you do with all that money?
- How would you spend all that money?
- How will you ever be able to manage all that money?

As we give thanks to God today for all he has given us, how should we respond?

### With humility...

Think about all you have just for a moment, and then reflect where it comes from. What we have and enjoy is what God has given to us (Psalm 23:1). How do we thank him for all he has given us (Ephesians 5:19-20)?

Matthew Henry - famous for his commentary on the Scriptures - sought to develop a life of thanksgiving. His diary entries reveal something of this in a record of an occasion when he was robbed. He wrote:

‘I was robbed today but I am thankful because I have never been robbed before.’

‘I was robbed today but I am thankful that I did not have much money on me.’

‘I was robbed today but I am thankful that they took my money and not my life.’

‘I was robbed today but I am thankful that I was not the robber.’

Thankfulness is a good measure of humility - we have nothing that God has not given to us and we all need to maintain a spirit of humble thanks to God for his goodness.

### With integrity...

Think about who you are and who it is who has made you. What we are is what God has made us. He has made us in his image; how then do we reflect the image of God? Harvest must never be only about worship and praise and thanksgiving. The challenge is to live a life that reflects the glory of God, that reflects the love and nature of God. How do we live a life of integrity and transparency? How can we make sure that the fruit we bear comes from a deep and intimate relationship with God and reflects a life of integrity?

### With responsibility...

Consider how we manage what God has given us with responsibility. All that we have is what God has given to us, and all that we are is what God has made us. All that we do is what God has created us to do and gifted us to do. We are created and gifted for works of service (Ephesians 2:10). Each of us has a purpose to fulfil - a work to do - a Kingdom to grow - a harvest to reap.

How then do we do this?

- By humbly thanking God for all his good gifts.
- By reflecting the glory of God in our lives.
- By fulfilling our God-given responsibilities.

