

Scripture Alive



Role-Plays for Youth

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Introduction

Teenagers in today's world face moral and ethical issues unknown to previous generations. Though perhaps more complicated than previously, working with today's youth is both challenging and rewarding. Working with young people is *challenging* in that they look for material that is fun as well as current, innovative, and thought provoking. The work is *rewarding* in that young people respond with enthusiasm to this kind of material and noticeably benefit from their experience with it.

Format *Scripture Alive* offers all the above challenges and rewards in a role-playing format. My experience, as a mother of six, a religion teacher in a parish school, and a hospital chaplain working with troubled youth, is that teenagers find role-playing enjoyable and challenging. As an alternative to all-day classroom settings, they find this learning technique refreshing and meaningful—and they are often still discussing the issues that have surfaced after the session has ended.

Purposes The role-plays are primarily aimed at conscience formation. They can elicit both feelings and understandings for conscientious decision making based on scriptural values such as forgiveness, the dignity of the individual, love of God, love of others, and love of self. The role-plays will help young people engage in and reflect on contemporary moral and ethical issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and genetic research. Through the role-plays, teens discover the opportunity to examine their values in light of the values expressed by their peers and to claim the values that they hold as their own responsibility.

Sessions Each role-play session is approximately 60 minutes in length and includes a Scripture-based, contemporary story relevant to the lives of today's young people. The young participants act out the characters in the story using role-play cards as guides. Role-playing allows the young people to present ideas and opinions by way of a character in the story. In this fashion, ideas and opinions can be addressed in a nonthreatening manner, and the young people who might be sensitive to peer acceptance can express ideas and opinions without fear of criticism.

When the role-play is finished, both the actors and the audience are asked to answer the reflection questions that are provided on a handout. These reflection questions are formulated to help the young people get in touch with their feelings and thoughts about the characters and the predicaments in which the characters find themselves.

After the young people have written their answers to the reflection questions, they are asked to share their answers with the group. This leads to discussion among the participants of the values and feelings that have surfaced during the role-playing.

The scriptural passage from the New Jerusalem translation of the Bible, on which the role-play is based, is then read aloud to the group. The participants are invited to relate the Bible passage to the characters and events of the story. A set of discussion questions designed to assist the group in correlating the scriptural passage to the characters and events of the story is provided in each session.

The closing prayer creates a meditative atmosphere for the participants to reflect on what has transpired and to bring their petitions and concerns to God.

Your task as leader is one of guidance and facilitation. You will need only to provide space, handouts, and encouragement.

Selecting Role-Players

For the first couple of sessions, I find it works best to ask for volunteers to play the roles. Usually, everyone soon wants to play a part. As the sessions continue, you may have to do some assigning so that all members of the group receive an opportunity to play a role. Please remember to include both genders in the role-plays and try to encourage even the shiest member to participate.

If you do assign roles and know your group well, you may wish to read through each session by yourself, while keeping in mind the individuals in your group. Then assign the characters to members you feel would benefit from playing them. For example, your group will probably have a number of outgoing people and a number of shy ones. In session 3, “The Parable of the Good Samaritan,” the student character is outgoing while the caring student character is shy. You would need to decide which character’s role would benefit which type of group member the most.

Usage You will find that the sessions in *Scripture Alive* can be repeated many times. Each role-play takes on a new focus each time it is played, even with the same group. As a variation, you may wish to invite parents, teachers, pastors, and other ministers to a session and ask them to participate both as role-players and as audience. This variation allows the youth to learn about the values of the adults present.

The last session in this book, “A Christmas Legend,” is designed for a role-play before an audience larger than the group itself. It will require more preparation and time, but I have found that the young people relish the opportunity to bring learning and entertainment to others.

Blessings As a leader of our youth, I know you give generously of your time and energy. I know you will find *Scripture Alive* helpful in this ministry. I pray that Jesus will bless all you do for God’s people on earth and especially all you do for the young ones he loves so much.

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The Parable of the Pounds: Responsibility, Trust, Forgiveness



Session Overview

Scripture This session is based on Luke 19:11–27. Read the Scripture passage to the young people after the role-play and the reflection questions have been completed.

Objectives

- To reflect on the gifts God has given to all people
- To reflect on the gifts that make each person special and unique
- To reflect on the values of responsibility, trust, and forgiveness

- Materials**
- handout 1–A, “The Parable of the Pounds,” one copy for the group leader
 - handout 1–B, “Role-Play Character Cards,” one copy cut into cards
 - handout 1–C, “Reflection Questions,” one copy for each group member
 - pencils or pens, one for each group member
 - handout 1–D, “Gifts,” several copies cut into cards
 - a Bible
 - a candle or other prayer symbol
 - matches

- Cast of Characters**
- the owner of the collections
 - a friend entrusted with the baseball card collection
 - a friend entrusted with the comic book collection
 - a friend entrusted with the music tape collection

Leader’s Directions

Role-Playing Choose participants to role-play the characters listed above. Give the players their respective character card from handout 1–B, “Role-Play Character Cards.”

Inform the actors that they will play their role after handout 1–A, “The Parable of the Pounds,” is read aloud to the whole group. Alert the group members to listen closely to the parable and to think about the ad-libs they will make in playing their respective roles.

Begin the role-play by reading aloud handout 1–A, “The Parable of the Pounds.” When the reading is finished, direct the collection owner character to ask each collection holder character, one at a time, to come to the stage to explain how they cared for the collection and in what condition they are returning it. Ask the collection holders to ad-lib their respective parts, based on their role-play character cards, beginning when the owner calls them to the stage. Direct the owner of the collections to respond to each collection holder’s story by sharing with the audience some of the characteristics he finds admirable in each person. Direct the audience to applaud if they hear anything trustworthy or praiseworthy.

The owner then rewards the collection holders accordingly by offering them positions in his or her company.

Reflection and Discussion When the role-playing is completed, ask the participants to take 10 minutes to write answers to the questions on handout 1–C, “Reflection Questions.” Explain that each participant is to answer the questions whether or not she or he played a role. After the participants have answered the questions, allow 15 minutes for them to share their answers with one another.

Following the reflection sharing, read aloud Luke 19:11–27 and ask the participants to point out any similarities they see between “The Parable of the Pounds” as it was role-played and the Scripture passage.

Continue by leading a discussion using the following questions:

- What does it mean to be entrusted with a gift?
- What are some gifts God has entrusted to us?
- How do you use the gifts God has entrusted to you?
- How would you feel if God returned to collect your gifts?
- What does it mean to suffer the consequences of one’s behavior?

Closing Prayer Before the session, from handout 1–D, “Gifts,” prepare a slip of paper for each student.

Direct the participants to sit in a circle around a candle or other prayer symbol. Scatter the folded slips of paper around the prayer symbol. When all the participants are seated, read the following prayer aloud:

Dear gracious God, we gather to give you thanks and praise for the gifts you give us. We thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus, who gave up his life for our salvation. We thank you for the gift of your Spirit, the comforter. We thank you for the gift of life itself.

Great Giver, it is sometimes hard for us to realize the great love you have for us—a love so great that your world would not have been complete if each of us had not been a part of it.

You want us to be here at this time in history. You have bestowed each of us with special gifts. You have given us gifts that are needed by our world today. Help us, gracious God, to accept our own giftedness and to use our gifts and talents to bring your love and forgiveness to others.

God of all creation, Jesus tells us that to receive the gifts you have for us, we need only to ask you in his name. We ask you now, in the name of your Son, to give us the gifts you have for us.

Ask each student to take a slip of paper and then conclude with the following prayers:

Gracious God, we accept the gifts you have so generously given. We will try to make them a part of our life and faith as we pray together the prayer given to us by your Son, Jesus.

Finish the prayer by inviting everyone to join hands and say the Lord’s Prayer.

The Parable of the Pounds

After graduation from high school, four longtime friends gather for a going-away party for the one who is leaving to attend college in Japan. The departing friend is especially sad because not all his [or her] belongings can be taken along. This means leaving behind three valuable collections accumulated over the years through hard work. Each collection—a baseball card collection, a comic book collection, and a music tape collection—means a lifetime of searching and bargaining, not to mention many weeks of allowances.

The departing friend decides to entrust each collection to one of the other friends for safekeeping until the time of return.

As the years go by, the friend holding the baseball card collection puts them into a special album, frequently admires them, and even adds new cards to the collection, thereby increasing its value for the owner.

The friend holding the comic book collection goes to medical school and works part-time on a children's ward of a hospital. This friend often takes the comic books to the hospital and reads them to the sick children, frequently mentioning the owner who now lives in faraway Japan.

The friend holding the music tapes collection listens to the tapes every day for a while but is a fun-loving person who likes to party and has a hard time keeping a job. Every once in a while, when hard up for cash, this friend sells some of the owner's music tapes, thinking that the owner will not notice a few missing tapes. But over the years, the collection dwindles until it is gone.

Six years later the friend who owns the collections returns from Japan, now a famous computer software developer, owner of a software company, and very wealthy. In appreciation for the friends to whom the collections are entrusted, the owner arranges a party. The collection holders are invited, along with their families, to join the fun. The collections owner tells them that they will be picked up in a limousine and that they should each bring the collection they are holding with them. The owner assures them that they will be rewarded generously for their care of the collections. Each collection holder decides to attend.

Role-Play Character Cards



The Owner of the Collections

The owner of the collections is happy to return as a successful business owner. The owner wants to reward the old friends for their care of the special collections by offering them prestigious positions in the new software company. The owner will listen to each collection holder as he or she comes up on stage at the reception party to return the collection with an explanation of how he or she has cared for it. The owner will reward each of them accordingly after sharing with the audience the characteristics the owner finds admirable in each person.



A Friend Entrusted with the Baseball Card Collection

The friend entrusted with the baseball cards is proud of how the collection was cared for while the owner was away. This friend is eager to share how much time was taken to find valuable cards to add to the collection.



A Friend Entrusted with the Comic Book Collection

The friend entrusted with the comic books is looking forward to telling the owner about her or his experiences with the sick children with whom she or he shared stories from these special comic books. This friend is proud of the owner's success and has told the children about it.



A Friend Entrusted with the Music Tapes Collection

The friend entrusted with the music tapes is very anxious about going up on the stage and telling the owner that the valuable collection of music tapes is gone. This friend will try to explain why the tapes were sold and how he or she feels about what has happened.

