

UPPER KEY STAGE 2/UNIT 2B.8

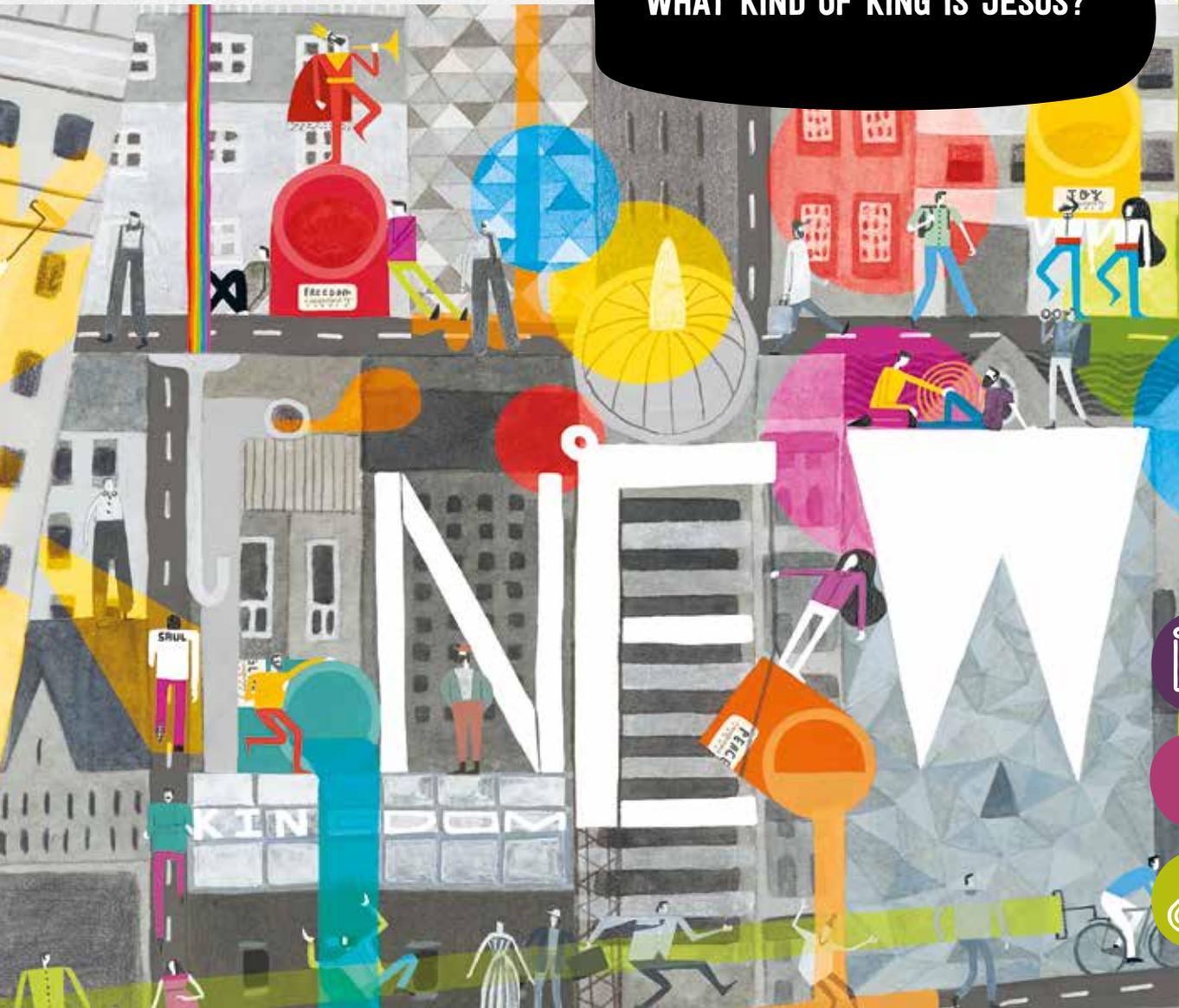
KINGDOM OF GOD

WHAT KIND OF KING IS JESUS?

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★ OUTCOMES

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

- 🔍 Explain connections between biblical texts and the concept of the Kingdom of God.
- 🔍 Consider different possible meanings for the biblical texts studied, showing awareness of different interpretations.
- 👤 Make clear connections between belief in the Kingdom of God and how Christians put their beliefs into practice in different ways, including in worship and in service to the community.
- 🔗 Relate Christian teachings or beliefs about God's Kingdom to the issues, problems and opportunities of their own lives and the life of their own community in the world today, offering insights about whether or not the world could or should learn from Christian ideas.

🏗️ KNOWLEDGE BUILDING BLOCKS

PUPILS WILL KNOW THAT:

- Jesus told many parables about the Kingdom of God. These suggest that God's rule has begun, through the life, teaching and example of Jesus, and subsequently through the lives of Christians who live in obedience to God.
- The Kingdom is compared to a feast where all are invited to join in. Not everyone chooses to do so.
- Many Christians try to extend the Kingdom of God by challenging unjust social structures in their locality and in the world.

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

➔ YOU MIGHT LIKE TO START WITH...

Lots of people say the point of our lives is to make the world a better place, to leave it better than we found it. Get the class to think about how this can be done: list and rank some of the worst problems we face in the world today (for example, hunger, hatred, war and violence, cruelty to children, lack of love, lack of healthcare, poverty ...). Find out in pairs about some people who have done something to make one of these problems less awful. Write a poem, a verse of a song or a Nobel Peace Prize citation to celebrate the person's achievement. List five ways in which people in the next 50 years – pupils' lifetimes – could make the world a better place. Consider: Who will do this? Will they help?

🔍 MAKING SENSE OF THE TEXT

- Ask pupils to speculate: do Christians think Jesus came to Earth to get people *into* Heaven, or to make the world more *like* Heaven? Christians believe both. Jesus' 'Kingdom of God' parables and their meanings explore more about these ideas.
- Ask the pupils in threes to put the 'Lord's Prayer' into simple language that children in Year 1 could understand, and then make an illustrated book of the prayer (one page per line? 8–10 pages?). What did they put for the sentence: 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven'? This part of the prayer asks that earth will become more like Heaven. For Christians, Heaven is a place full of love, with no tears: people do what God wants. Earth is not presently like this, of course. Ask pupils to list ten things found on Earth which would not be found in Heaven. Make links to ideas about the Fall and sin from the Bible's 'big story' (using the Frieze, and building on prior learning).
- Jesus told lots of stories that start: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...' Use two of these with the class and explore their meanings carefully. What is the Kingdom of God?
- **The Feast: Luke 14:12–24.** Read or tell this story to the class. Ask pupils to respond with any comments, feelings, ideas, questions. What do they think: who was Jesus talking to, why did he tell this story, and what do they think Jesus meant? Give some prompts for pupils to make decisions about the meaning of the parable: Is the feast Heaven, or is it a banquet on Earth? Is the man giving the feast similar to God, or to Jesus? Why do the rich and successful people make excuses? When Jesus came to Earth, it was not the priests or the holy, religious people who welcomed him, but the common people and the outsiders: how does this connect to the parable? Was Jesus teaching that everyone is welcome if they want to be part of his Kingdom? Is Heaven more like a feast or a party than anything else? How would the different people in his audience feel about the story? Compare their ideas with some commentaries (see Resources).
- **The Tenants in the Vineyard: Matthew 21: 33–46.** Read or tell the story to the class, pointing out that Jesus had enemies: he is sometimes presented as a figure so innocuous that no one would bother to crucify him. Tell them it's a bit of a mystery story, but they will get five clues to help them work out what it means. Ask threes to write a short paragraph to explain the meaning. Clues (print these on to cards):
 - In the Old Testament, the people of God in the nation of Israel are compared to God's vineyard.
 - In John's Gospel, Jesus is called the Son of God.
 - The chief priests were Jesus' enemies – they were jealous because he was so popular, and disagreed with him about religion.
 - The Old Testament called the Prophets 'Servants of the Lord'.
 - The chief priests arrested Jesus and he was killed a few days later.
 - Get each group of three pupils to share their idea of what the parable really means with two other groups.
 - If these are 'parables of the Kingdom', what kind of king is Jesus? Ask pupils for their suggestions. See Resource Sheet 1 for ideas.



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

- From their learning, ask pupils to address the question: if Christians believe that Jesus is a king, then what would his kingdom be like? Pupils might list features of the world/society as it is (creative, energetic, fast, diverse, unequal, polluted, violent and so on), and compare and contrast with the kind of world that Jesus was seeking, using evidence from the stories and texts they have studied about Jesus. What kinds of things would Jesus want to change?
- Build on this by comparing two songs some Christians use to express the kind of Kingdom Jesus wanted to set up: 'Lord of the Dance' and 'Down to Earth' (see Resources and Resource Sheets 2 and 3). Teach pupils the two songs in music lessons, if you like, but in RE it is important to analyse the lyrics. Add to their ideas from the previous activity and consider what the songs say about the type of king Jesus intended to be, and what his kingdom would be like.
- Get pupils to express their understanding by choosing a simple tune they like and writing a couple of verses of their own that Christians might sing about the kind of king that Jesus might be, the kind of kingdom he wants. They should use quotes, examples and ideas from the stories of the life of Jesus they have studied.
- Explore ways in which Christians try to bring the Kingdom of God on Earth. Get pupils to make clear links with Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom by asking them to:
 - Investigate and report back on how a local church serves the needs of people who are left out. (Have a look at Oasis churches and gather examples of ways they serve the marginalised: www.oasisuk.org/churches or the Salvation Army www.salvationarmy.org.uk/easterhouse).
 - Create a news report on the work of Church Action on Poverty (blog.church-poverty.org.uk/category/sheffield/).
 - Write an advert to encourage Christians to support the Prison Fellowship: www.prisonfellowship.org.uk/what-we-do/. The advert should say what they do and why it is the kind of thing Jesus would want.
 - Explain how Traidcraft's Christmas video shows the Kingdom of God in action: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YV2mCyafvQ. Ask pupils to devise their own simple advert that shows how one Christian church or group helps to make the world a better place (for example, the work of Barnardo's children's charity: see Resources).
 - These specific examples prepare pupils for the 'Making Connections' activity, where they draw on their learning to develop project proposals for churches that want to make a difference, and bring the Kingdom of God closer.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

IF I WERE QUEEN OF THE WORLD, KING OF THE WORLD...

- There is something Utopian about Jesus' teaching and his idea of the kingdom of God. This work invites pupils to connect their own vision of the world's best future with the idea of God's Kingdom.
- Ask pupils to imagine that the local Christian communities – the churches in your area – are going to try to do more to make the world a better place, to 'follow King Jesus'. Consider and list some of the needs in your local area and community, then ask pupils to role-play the local 'Churches Together' partnership (you might look for your local example, and invite a visitor). Six or eight of the pupils can be on the council, and the others in small teams; each pitch a project to the council, who must judge how far the projects might contribute to a better world and to the 'Kingdom of God' growing stronger. These projects are NOT just for Christians! They should make a difference to the world for everyone.
- Project ideas could reflect the learning from this unit of work, or wider ideas about God's Kingdom. Try these:
 1. Helping people in prison.
 2. An arts and music project for the local community.
 3. A way of helping children who are in trouble.
 4. A series of worship events in the local woods.
 5. Some special events for families to enjoy together.
 6. A project to give refugees a better chance in life.
 7. Raising funds to send aid for people in a part of the world stricken by a disaster.
 8. A project to reduce racism.
 9. A party for people in the local area from all religions.
 10. Providing for children who haven't got enough money to go on holiday.
- The key question for each group is this: Why might 'King Jesus' think this one is a good idea? When the 'project pitches' have been made, they might be revised in the light of the comments from the 'the Inter-church Council' with 'Churches Together'.
- If following Jesus inspires Christians to bring in the 'Kingdom of God', talk about what inspires the very many individuals and organisations that are not Christian, but which are also trying to bring justice to the world. Compare with pupils' ideas and talk about how far they are making the world better.
- To finish, in the light of their learning about Christian ideas, ask pupils to write their own poem, manifesto or speech: If I were queen of the world, king of the world, then I would...

★ OUTCOMES

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

-  Explain connections between biblical texts and the concept of the Kingdom of God – where God rules in human lives.
-  Consider possible meanings for biblical texts studied, and compare their ideas with ways in which Christians interpret biblical texts, showing awareness of different interpretations.
-  Make clear connections between belief in the Kingdom of God and how Christians put their beliefs into practice, for example through receiving and practising forgiveness.
-  Identify ideas arising from their study of the Kingdom of God and comment on how far these are helpful or inspiring for the world today, justifying their responses.

📦 KNOWLEDGE BUILDING BLOCKS

PUPILS WILL KNOW THAT:

- Jesus told many parables about the Kingdom of God. These suggest that God's rule has begun, through the life, teaching and example of Jesus, and subsequently through the lives of Christians who live in obedience to God.
- The parables suggest that there will be a future kingdom, where God's reign will be complete.
- Many Christians try to extend the Kingdom of God by challenging unjust social structures in their locality and in the world (for example, by practising forgiveness).

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

➔ YOU MIGHT LIKE TO START WITH...

If Jesus were the opposite of himself ... Ask pupils to say what Jesus would have been like if he were the complete opposite of everything they know about him. Use these prompts to gather ideas.

- He would have been born in ...
- People would have called him ...
- He would have made friends with ...
- He might have lived at ...
- He might have had servants to ...
- He could have had ...
- Maybe he would have been ...
- His message would be ...

These prompts connect to the song 'Down to Earth' and to the idea that Jesus was a very different kind of king.



➔ MAKING SENSE OF THE TEXT

- **Remind the pupils of the Lord's Prayer**, and the two parables about the Kingdom of God they have already studied, and introduce a third:
- **The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35)**. Read the opening verses (21-22) and then ask pupils in pairs to draft a very quick story that illustrates Jesus' point. What kind of story do they expect Jesus to tell? Then tell or read the story. Discuss how effective Jesus' story is. What message would his followers have taken from this story?
- **This parable is well suited to drama:** the emotions and action of the parable could be listed as questioning, fear, begging, relief, ungratefulness, hatred, outrage. Begin by getting pupils to think about how to portray these in body language and drama. Put the class in groups of about six, and give them either a script to work from or guidance on how to improvise this parable. After suitable practice time, see the performances of each group. How has acting this out affected their reading and responses to the story?
- **Different interpretations.** The plain meaning of the story is that if you have been forgiven, then you should forgive others, but does this parable mean Christians should always forgive? Not all Christians see this parable in exactly the same way. Ask the pupils to present ideas and arguments to say: how likely is it that Jesus' story means:
 - that God is loving and forgives all wrongs, if people turn from evil and trust him?
 - that because people have been forgiven so generously by God, they should be generous in forgiving others?
 - that Christian parents should forgive their children if they are mean, cheating, lying or unkind?
 - that Christians should never fight back if they are attacked, but forgive instead?
 - that a criminal who says sorry can become a church minister?
 - that everyone will end up in heaven, because God will forgive all wrongs?
 - that there is a price to pay for being unforgiving?
- One specific way to explore this is to ask pupils to rate different items as 'easy or hard to forgive' on a scale of 1 to 10, and consider if Jesus would forgive all these things (see Resource Sheet 4).
- Return to the key question: if Jesus is a king, what kind of king is he? (Use Resource Sheet 1 again and see how pupils' ideas have developed.)



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

- **Can murder be forgiven?** Can a murderer be part of God's Kingdom? Following on from the discussion of different ideas about forgiveness in the previous session, tell pupils the story of Clayton Fountain, a multiple murderer in the USA who became a Christian monk (from the book: *Different Kind of Cell* by W. Paul Jones (Eerdmans, 2011)). Ask them to consider if forgiveness is better than punishment, why forgiveness is sometimes so hard, and whether forgiveness is important in the 'Kingdom of God'. Their answers could be incorporated into a storyboard of Clayton Fountain's life. A P4C enquiry based on Clayton Fountain's story is a good method for learning here (see Resource Sheet 5 for this story): Can a murderer be a good monk?
- **Talk about what this teaches Christians** about following Jesus. What difference might it make to the way a Christian goes about life at school, at home, at work?
- **One Solitary Life: Has God's Rule Begun?** Read with the class the famous text – a kind of poem – by Dr James Allen Francis about the impact of the life of Jesus (see Resource Sheet 6). Check, line by line, that they understand what the text is saying about Jesus. Ask them to consider the idea that this text shows very well that Jesus is a 'different kind of king'. Has the impact of his life been impressive – more than that of queens, kings and emperors? (See Resource Sheet 7 for suggestions.) Remind them of the two songs studied in the first part of the unit. Draw an outline of Jesus. Inside, draw/write examples of what Jesus was/did; outside, what he wasn't/didn't do.
- **Concluding:** suggest to pupils six conclusions they might draw from this work, and ask them to choose two they agree with more than the others, and explain why. See some examples on Resource Sheet 7.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Reflect on the learning about the Kingdom of God by asking: If Jesus looked at the work of the church and the state of the world, what would please him and what would disappoint him today? Ask pairs of pupils to develop lists of three to five points in answer to these questions.
- Insight A: Is the Kingdom of God growing in the world? How do the pupils see it?
- Insight B: Is it perhaps true that the Earth will never get to be like Heaven, so the only way to a perfect future is to go to Heaven? (Teach pupils that Christians believe in a perfect future for those who turn from sin and trust God.) Is Heaven the only place where God's Kingdom could be really 100 % complete?
- Develop, through discussion (for example, in a P4C enquiry), pupils' own views, ideas and insights into these questions:
 - Does the human race need a rescuer?
 - Is the world getting better, or is the world getting worse?
 - In the 'kingdom of forgiveness', will some people be more likely to do bad things because they don't think they will be punished?
 - Heaven or justice – what matters more? Does heaven matter more to Christians than justice here on Earth? Should it?
 - Is it true that Jesus' 'One Solitary Life' changed the world forever? How, and why?
 - What kind of 'king' was/is Jesus?
- Lessons to learn? Ask pupils to conclude their study by saying whether there are any lessons they can learn from Christian ideas about God's Kingdom of justice and love. In a society where there are people of different faiths and many people with non-religious views of life, are there any lessons that are helpful or inspiring for all?

SELECT AND WEAVE TOGETHER ACTIVITIES TO ACHIEVE THE OUTCOMES



BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

The Kingdom of God is, in essence, where God rules – not a geographical territory, but in human hearts and minds, lives and communities. Jesus’ key teaching in the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) is that he is beginning a kingdom where God’s rule of love, forgiveness and inclusion will grow. The Gospels look forward to a time when this kingdom will spread across the Earth like yeast through a lump of dough, and they picture people finding the kingdom for themselves like a trader who comes across one amazing pearl and gives up everything to get it. Jesus compares God’s Kingdom to a festival, a party, a treasure, a secret, a seed that grows, a harvest, and a wedding.

For Christians today, across the world, being a member of the community of the Kingdom of God is a precious gift, and a challenge: living out the values of the Kingdom of God is the key challenge of being a disciple of Jesus, loving God and loving our neighbour. There is no space here for hypocrisy, selfishness or personal pride. Instead, generosity, compassion, love even for enemies, and a joyful willingness to put others ahead of one’s own

interests is the rule. Unsurprisingly, the Christian community often fails to live up to this vision, and can be as divisive, exclusive and lacking in love as any human community. The offer of forgiveness through Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, give Christians hope that God can help them to be more loving and faithful.

Christians use these texts to remind themselves of the way the world is supposed to be, and to reflect on how careful they must be not to forget that they are living in God’s Kingdom. Many might say they find it easier not to let God rule in their lives, as Jesus’ example shows that they may well end up in conflict with others. Christians might study the parables in private Bible reading and prayer, or in prayer groups, or listen to a sermon in church. They would probably agree that the point is not just to listen, but to act.

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT AND ITS MEANING(S)

JESUS’ PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The four Gospels record over 50 parables – stories Jesus uses to make a key point or to subvert a conversation. They are often sharply targeted at hypocrisy, they carry big ideas about God, faith and grace, and they stick in the mind. Many of the parables begin ‘The Kingdom of God is like...’ and use figurative, metaphorical or imaginative ideas to open up Jesus’ teaching about how to live a life following God.

THE FEAST: LUKE 14:12-24

This parable is certainly about inclusivity. The rich and well-fed exclude themselves from the feast, so the downtrodden and outcast are brought in. Luke’s Gospel is a long series of ‘short stories of inclusion’. Here, Jesus implies a welcome to anyone not too proud to join the feast of the Kingdom of God. But there are always shades of meaning in the parables, and they are open to

different responses and interpretations. One way of looking at it might include the idea that, for the audience at the time, the first guests to be invited are the religious leaders of Israel; the poor and the lame represent the outcasts of Israel; and the people from the highways represent the Gentiles – people who were not Jewish – so that the Kingdom is open to them too. This is a challenge for his audience, although the ‘big story’ of the Bible always said that Israel was to attract other nations to God. Here, the master’s generosity is matched by his severity too – the parable suggests that there will come a time when the invitations will stop. In the light of this, people’s reasons for refusing to join the feast and accept God’s generous invitation look rather feeble.

The challenge for Christians today is to work out what this might mean to them in the twenty-first century: with whom do they identify? Have they received an invitation? Have they accepted the invitation, or are they putting up excuses...?

THE TENANTS IN THE VINEYARD: MATTHEW 21:33–46.

Christians, who call Jesus the 'Son of God', see Jesus as the son, the one the tenants kill. The parable suggests that God is patient in waiting for people to turn to him, even when they are hostile, but that the opportunity to take advantage of that patience will not last forever. Some say the tenants are Jesus' enemies, for example from the Sanhedrin. Others say listeners are nudged to see the tenants as typical of any humans who find God's message, and its claim upon their lives, hard to take. The parable was remembered by the early Christians perhaps because it feels like a prophecy or prediction of what was to happen to Jesus himself.

The key points of Christian belief that relate to these two parables are that God extends a gracious welcome to all humanity, but this is not always well received: selfishness or greed can get in the way of spiritual life, and of the coming of God's Kingdom.

THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT: MATTHEW 18:21–35

This Bible text suggests that being part of God's Kingdom brings both blessings and obligations. As Scottish theologian Thomas Erskine put it: 'religion is grace and ethics is gratitude'. Those who have themselves been forgiven much by God should then become like God, willing to forgive others generously.

Reciprocity or mutuality are continuous themes in Jesus' ethical guidance to his followers: 'do to others as you want them to do to you', 'forgive and you will be forgiven', 'the measure you give will be the measure you get'. This principle is balanced with God's generosity, or grace. Humans put in a little of their goodness; divine grace multiplies and expands it. The Kingdom of God is in the small seed that grows to a mighty bush, or in the little bit of yeast that raises a whole loaf of bread. Christians today may still, of course, find the practice of forgiveness very challenging, but Jesus' inspirational teaching lies behind all Christian efforts at reconciliation and peace-making, and Christians acknowledge their reliance upon the Holy Spirit to grow in goodness.

RESOURCES

The words of the **Lord's Prayer** based on Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4:

www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/daily2/lordsprayercreed.aspx

www.stedmundsbury.anglican.org in their 'schools' section, under 'resources', the 'Lord's Prayer Project' is a CD of 13 different settings of the Lord's Prayer and also contains materials for an RE focus day in school on the Lord's Prayer. There is a lesson plan and background notes for each year group. Year 5 focuses on 'Your kingdom come, your will be done' and Year 6 on 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'.

'The Lord's Prayer' video www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIUXh4mx4gl&feature=youtu.be (banned from cinemas in 2015).

A bishop responds to the ban, with an explanation of the words of the Lord's Prayer:

www.sheffield.anglican.org/blog/bishop-of-sheffield/seven-reasons-to-ban-the-lord-s-prayer

The Bible Gateway site has some resources that explain Bible texts: search for a text and then click the blue 'STUDY THIS' button. There are some free commentaries – mostly Protestant (for example, Matthew Henry Commentary,

IVP New Testament Commentary). These give some short explanations, for example, for the parable of the feast: www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+14%3A12-24&version=MSG

A useful illustrated version of the song 'Lord of the Dance' can be found at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCIMWHONc 'Lord of the Dance' suggests that the Kingdom is a place of energy, vitality and joy, not a place where rules are imposed.

Stephen Fischbacher's song 'Down to Earth' can be sampled or purchased on CD at www.fischy.com/downloads/music-clips/ 'Down to Earth' suggests Jesus is a friend to outsiders. Where people are sick, he wants healing, where they are left out, he wants acceptance, where people are disapproved of, he wants dancing, where there is death, he wants new life – Jesus is that kind of king.

Pupils will find it interesting to explore the work of the Prison Fellowship – over 1,500 Christian volunteers who try to help people in prison: www.prisonfellowship.org.uk/ Or to find out about Thomas Barnardo, who set up the famous children's charity: www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_history/thomas_barnardo.htm



GOING FURTHER

You might like to explore Christian ideas of Heaven, where God's rule is fully established.

WHY NOT LINK WITH...?

Christians are not the only ones who seek to make the world a better place. For example, make connections with Jewish ideas of '*tikkun olam*,' healing the world; Muslim ideas of *zakat*, charity; and Sikh ideas of *sewa*, service.

