



# The Two Sons

Matthew 21:23-32

Welcome to 'Together Apart', free intergenerational resources to help us be church together while we are apart.

All the sections explore the same Bible passage in a range of creative ways. Choose whichever parts work best for you, and remember that 'All Age' does not mean 'only for the kiddies'!

You can find lots more free resources like this at [www.reflectionary.org](http://www.reflectionary.org)

Here is what you will find in each resource pack:



## A Word in Your Ear

A Bible passage that we can all learn from together, whatever our age.



## Food for Thought

Aimed at adults and teens, some thoughts and questions on the passage. Occasionally there might even be some Greek or Hebrew!



## Inner Space

A blank space for you to record what's in your head, whether that is worries, dreams or a shopping list.



## Looking Closer

A creative and interactive look at the Bible passage. Great for older children and anyone who likes a creative approach.



## I Wonder...

An imaginative style of Bible study, perfect for younger children and those who like to immerse themselves in the Bible world. Based on Lectio Divina and Godly Play wondering.



## Take a Break

A chill-out zone, with meditative colouring for adults and children, and links to audio recordings of the passage so that you can listen while resting your eyes.



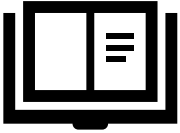
## Creation Station

A craft for children (or young-at-heart adults!) to help us think about the passage. Glue sticks at the ready!



## High 5

Some creative prayer ideas for helping us to spend time with God. Five minutes, or as long as you want.



## A Word in Your Ear

Take your time reading this extract from our Bible passage. Ask God to help you hear. You can decorate the space around the words if you like.

### The Two Sons

Jesus said to his critics, “Tell me what you think of this parable:

“There once was a man with two sons. The father came to the first and said, ‘Son, I want you to go and work in the vineyard today.’ The son replied, ‘I’d rather not.’ But afterward, he deeply regretted what he said to his father, changed his mind, and decided to go to the vineyard.

“The father approached the second son and said the same thing to him. The son replied, ‘Father, I will go and do as you said.’ But he never did—he didn’t go to the vineyard.

“Tell me now, which of these two sons did the will of his father?”

They answered him, “The first one.”

Jesus said, “You’re right. For many sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes are going into God’s kingdom realm ahead of you!

The Passion Translation



## Food for Thought

Another of Jesus' mini stories with a mega punch! They're memorable, witty and teach us important kingdom truths. Let's have a look at this one.

Jesus talks about a father with two sons. Anyone who has lived in a family will know the "You need to tidy your bedroom." / "Yeah, OK." exchange that leads to precisely zero tidying. You can almost see the heads nodding as Jesus tells his tale.

But who was Jesus talking to? That's always a useful question, because Jesus said different things to different groups of people. Some teaching was only for his disciples, other was for the general crowd. Jesus' harshest words were for the religious leaders of the time, and his softest tones for those who knew their need of forgiveness.

**Q: What things can you think of that Jesus said only to his disciples, but not to the wider crowd? Why do you think that was?**

Jesus is talking mainly to the religious leaders here. They interrupted him while he was teaching the crowds in the temple courts, and demanded to know what authority he thought he had to do this. "Who do you think you are?" in effect.

Were they trying to trap him into a blasphemous answer, claiming direct authority from his Father? Were they hoping that he'd buckle under pressure and slink back to obscurity, making tables and stools? I'm not sure what answer they were expecting, but it certainly wasn't what they got!

**Q: How would you have answered the religious leaders had you been Jesus? How would you have answered Jesus' question to them? Why do you think Jesus was so hard on the religious leaders of the time?**

To get his point across, Jesus tells the story of the two sons. It's one of the of his shortest parables, but very powerful. There is no wiggle room here. No "But who is my neighbour?" or "Lord I'll follow you, but let me just wait until ..." There's no misunderstanding the moral of this tale. But just to make doubly sure that everyone (including the crowd he was originally addressing) gets the point, Jesus hammers it home as only a carpenter can.

**BAM!** "Many sinners ... are going into God's kingdom realm ahead of you [religious leaders]!" **BAM!** "John came to show you the path of goodness and righteousness." **BAM!** "The despised and outcasts believed in him, but you did not." **BAM!** "You neither repented of your ways nor believed his words."

**Q: How would you summarise the teaching of the parable of the two sons? How could we tell this story in today's language?**

One final thought: it might look like Jesus is teaching salvation by works here, (a good reason to not build a doctrine on only one verse!) For a fuller picture, compare his words to Zacchaeus and the thief on the cross, and note the order of forgiveness and works.

**Q: What do these verses together (and others) teach us about the place of works?**



## Inner Space

What's going round your head? Here is a space for you to put your thoughts on paper. You can write, draw ... whatever you like. What will you put here?

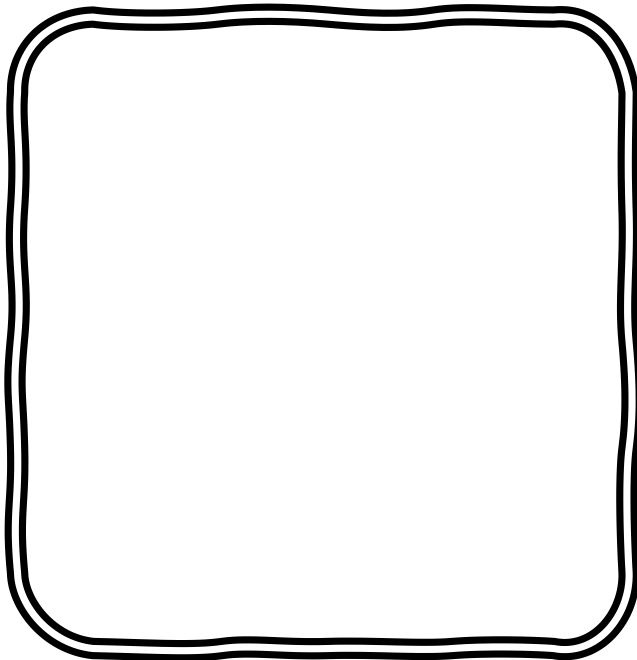
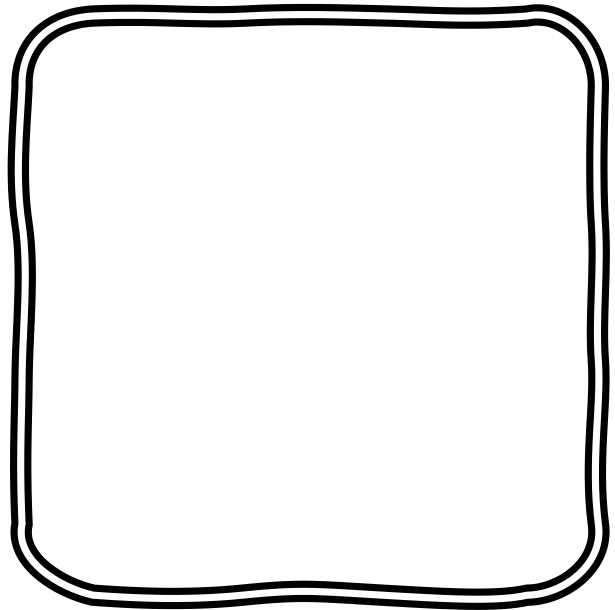


## Looking Closer

Jesus told a lot of stories, but not cutesy little tales of teddy bears and fairies. This tale of the two sons is dynamite!

Jesus thought that the religious leaders of his day were not helping people to know and love God. And he often told them so, right to their faces! Jesus called them blind guides and whitewashed tombs. (Matthew 23:13-33) Yeesh! It's not surprising they were angry!

**How would a bad leader be like a blind guide or a whitewashed tomb?**



The religious leaders were great at doing all the right things – they even made up extra rules to keep – but they thought that keeping the rules was the only thing that mattered. They had forgotten about loving others.

Jesus reminded them in Matthew 9:13 (quoting Hosea 6:6) *"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'"*

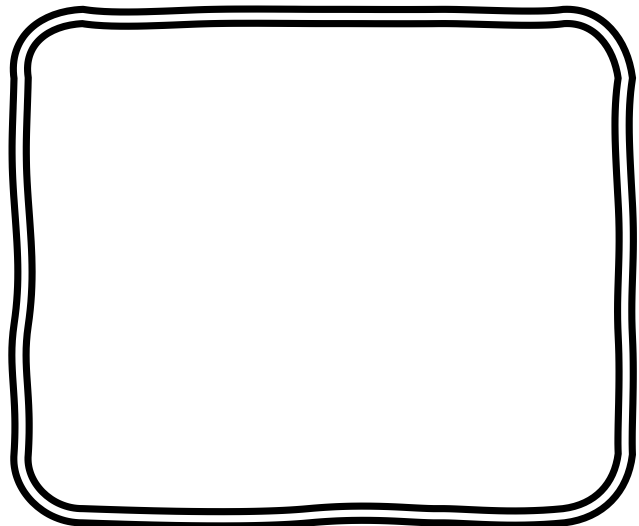
Now, the temple sacrifices were the biggest, most important rules that Jewish people had to follow, and God said that mercy was *more* important than that? Wow!

**Why do you think showing mercy was more important than making the temple sacrifices?**

In the story, the first son is like the ordinary people who get things wrong and make mistakes, but genuinely have a heart that wants to please God. The second son is like the people who have all the right answers and sound good, but their heart is not in it. Jesus said it's the first son who pleases God.

After the 'mercy, not sacrifice' quote above, Jesus continued, *"For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

**What do you think Jesus meant by this? Were the leaders really righteous?**





## I Wonder...

Read or listen to the passage a few times and let it sit in your mind.

Which words, phrases or ideas do you notice? Does anything stand out for you? Hold that in your heart and listen to what God might be saying.

**I wonder where you are in this story.**

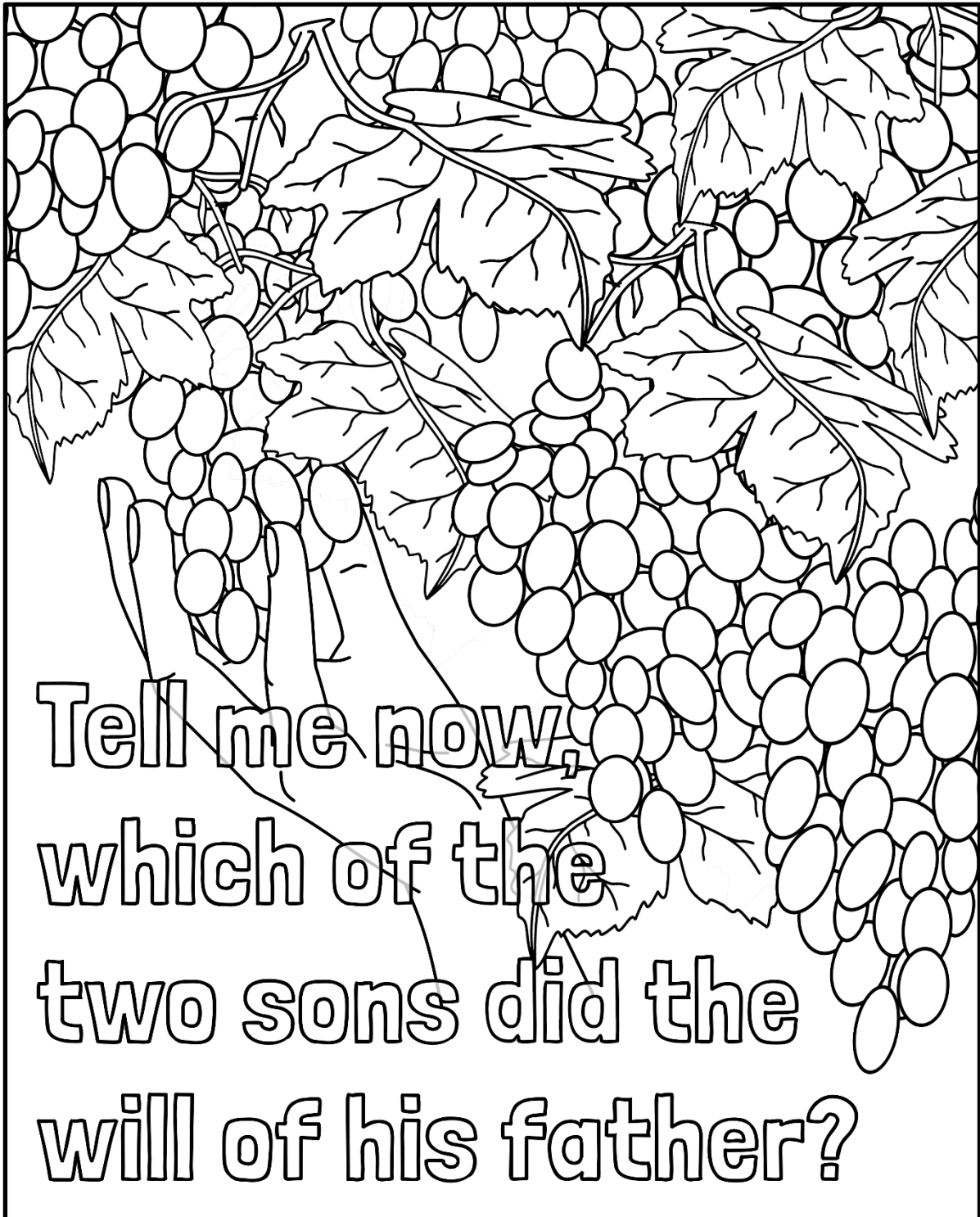
**I wonder what will change now.**



## Take a Break

Put on some music, or listen to the passage being read out while you simply sit and be. You can colour the picture below, or fill it with zentangles, or you can just spend the time breathing.

Matthew 21 on Bible Gateway audio [ESV](#) – [Message](#) – [NIV \(Dramatised\)](#) – [NIV \(Suchet\)](#)





## Creation Station – Grape Kerplunk!

I'm sure both the sons would have worked in the vineyard if they had been able to play Grape Kerplunk!

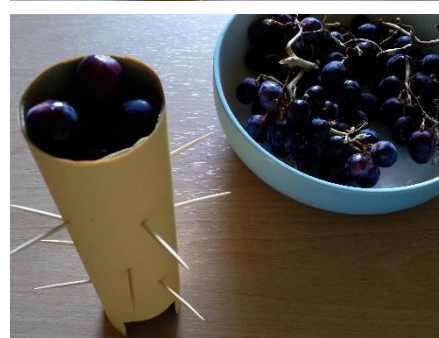
Make this simple but fun craft and have a healthy snack at the same time.

### You will need:

- A kitchen roll tube
- Coloured paper
- Glue stick
- Scissors
- (optional) something pointy for making holes – I used a drawing pin
- Cocktail sticks
- Grapes

### What to Do

1. Cover the tube with coloured paper and stick the edges down well. You can draw patterns on it if you like. Perhaps you could decorate it like a tower, a vending machine or giant grapevine.
2. Cut an opening at the bottom, about 3cm square.
3. Make holes all over the tube. Leave about 5cm free of holes at the top, so that you have room for plenty of grapes. You can use a drawing pin, a large needle or sharp pencil to make the holes if it is too hard with the cocktail sticks.
4. Now push the cocktail sticks through the holes. They do not need to come out the other side, and you don't need to use all the holes.
5. Stand your tower on the table and load it up with grapes. Take turns pulling out a stick and see how many grapes you can get to fall down.
6. There are lots of games you can play with this (besides just scoffing the grapes, of course). You could use two different colours of grapes, or have a prize for whoever wins the most. You could have one special grape or a different fruit such as a cherry and the winner is whoever gets that. What other games can you think of?







## High 5

Spend five minutes talking and listening with God. Here is one way:

### Grape Prayers

Get a small bunch of grapes, or draw a bunch on some paper and have purple and green colouring pens handy.

Every time you pray one of these tiny prayers, you can pick a grape and eat it, or colour in a grape on the bunch. Keep going until all of the grapes are used up.

You'll need to keep your prayers small and sweet, just like grapes. Here are some suggestions, but make up your own as well. Everyone can join in with 'Amen' after each prayer.

### Suggested Grape Prayers

- 🍇 Dear God, thank you for grapes.
- 🍇 Lord Jesus, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong today. Please forgive me and help me to ... *(fill in your own thing you need help with)*
- 🍇 Dear God, please look after people who are worried or ill.
- 🍇 Gentle Spirit, please guide me today, and help me to live like a child of God.
- 🍇 Father God, you are kind and loving, you are patient and good.
- 🍇 Dear Jesus, thank you for using stories to help us understand.
- 🍇 Holy Spirit, thank you for living with us every day.
- 🍇 Dear Lord Jesus, please help me with ... *(fill in your own difficult situation)*
- 🍇 Holy God, you are perfect and wise. Please help me to listen to you.
- 🍇 Dear God, thank you for the world we live in. Please help us to take care of it and the people and animals that live here with us.
- 🍇 Dear Father, please may our leaders make wise decisions to help people in trouble.
- 🍇 Dear Lord, please bless ... *(fill in your own choice of names)*
- 🍇 Lord Father, thank you for making me part of your family.



## The Full Text

### Matthew 21:23–32

<sup>23</sup> After this Jesus went into the temple courts and taught the people. The leading priests and Jewish elders approached him and interrupted him and asked, “By what power do you do these things, and who granted you the authority to teach here?”

<sup>24</sup> Jesus answered them, “I too have a question to ask you. If you can answer this question, then I will tell you by what power I do these things. <sup>25</sup> From where did John’s authority to baptize come from? From heaven or from people?”

<sup>26</sup> They stepped away and debated among themselves, saying, “How should we answer this? If we say from heaven, he will say to us, ‘Then why didn’t you respond to John and believe what he said?’ But if we deny that God gave him his authority, we’ll be mobbed by the people, for they’re convinced that John was God’s prophet.”

<sup>27</sup> So they finally answered, “We don’t know.”

“Then neither will I tell you from where my power comes to do these things!” he replied.

<sup>28</sup> Jesus said to his critics, “Tell me what you think of this parable:

“There once was a man with two sons. The father came to the first and said, ‘Son, I want you to go and work in the vineyard today.’ <sup>29</sup> The son replied, ‘I’d rather not.’ But afterward, he deeply regretted what he said to his father, changed his mind, and decided to go to the vineyard. <sup>30</sup> The father approached the second son and said the same thing to him. The son replied, ‘Father, I will go and do as you said.’ But he never did—he didn’t go to the vineyard. <sup>31</sup> Tell me now, which of these two sons did the will of his father?”

They answered him, “The first one.”

Jesus said, “You’re right. For many sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes are going into God’s kingdom realm ahead of you! <sup>32</sup> John came to show you the path of goodness and righteousness, yet the despised and outcasts believed in him, but you did not. When you saw them turn, you neither repented of your ways nor believed his words.”

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