

Understanding Spirituality



Self

Created by Elisabeth Sutcliffe

THE CHURCH
SCHOOLS OF
CAMBRIDGE

Contents

Theme	Page
Creation and wonder	3
Building our life on firm foundations	5
Our call: the voices around us	7
Our 'faults' can bring joy	9
Do we think only of ourselves	11
Our whole self	13
Being honest and true to yourself	15

Creation and wonder

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

As we come together, we light this candle.

If you are Christian, you may think the light is like Jesus, shining out everywhere.

If you believe in God, you may think the light symbolises the presence of God in the world.

If you are not sure about your beliefs, the flickering light may make you wonder about the existence of a God.

If you don't believe in God, the light may make you consider what meaning there is in the world.

Or the candle may have a particular meaning for you today.

Stimulus

Have you ever wondered what is special about you? Have you ever wished you could be different? Have you ever thought there was something you couldn't do?

There's a story from Judaism and Christianity about Moses; you may have heard it before. I wonder, what message might you take from this story?

One day, Moses was taking care of his flock of sheep. Suddenly Moses saw that a bush was on fire, but it was not burning up. "This is strange," he thought. "Why isn't the bush burning up? I'll go closer and see." When the LORD saw that Moses was coming closer, he called to him from the middle of the bush and said, "Moses! Moses!"

He answered, "Yes, here I am." God said, "I have seen how cruelly my people are being treated in Egypt; I have heard them cry out and have come to rescue them. Now I am sending you to the king of Egypt so that you can lead my people out of his country."

But Moses said to God, "I am nobody. How can I go to the king and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? Don't send me."

God answered, "I will be with you. Your brother Aaron may go with you, but it is YOU who can convince the king and lead my people to freedom." *Based on Exodus 3: 1-17*

Response

I wonder, what do you think Moses thought when he saw the burning bush?

I wonder, why do you think Moses asked God not to send him?

I wonder, do you think Moses went in the end? Why?

Hold one hand out in front of you. Look at the lines on your hand. Each line is unique to you.

Do you have any scars? What experiences have marked you?

Look at one fingertip. Think of something that makes you special.

Now look at another fingertip. What do you want to achieve?

As we continue to look at our hands, we will listen to this chant.

'Take, O take me as I am. Summon out what I shall be.'

Keep the music playing as the children create a written response – they could draw around their hand and write things that are unique to them or ambitions they have.

Now use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God),

Help us to be the people we are, and to know we can grow in ways we may not realise.

(Amen).



Creation and wonder

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.

Building our life on firm foundations

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

As we come together, we light this candle.

If you are Christian, you may think the light is like Jesus, shining out everywhere.

If you believe in God, you may think the light symbolises the presence of God in the world.

If you are not sure about your beliefs, the flickering light may make you wonder about the existence of a God.

If you don't believe in God, the light may make you consider what meaning there is in the world.

Or the candle may have a particular meaning for you today.

Stimulus

Have you ever wondered if you should do something easy rather than something difficult?

Have you ever thought about the things you choose to do and how they affect your life?

Read 'The Two Builders' story.

Response

I wonder, why do you think the man built his house on the sand?

I wonder, how do you think he felt when his house fell down?

I wonder, what are the storms in people's lives?

For some people, there are moments which seem like a coincidence, but they believe it is God, making a difference in their lives.

Have you ever experienced a moment that changes your life? What did you think when it happened?

Do you believe these moments are a coincidence or do you believe they might be God?

On a piece of paper, you might like to draw a response. Perhaps it is remembering an important

moment and being thankful for how it turned out? Perhaps you might be thinking about a moment you believe God helped you? Perhaps you might write a prayer.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Thank you for important moments in our lives and for our reflection on what these moments mean for our lives.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.



Building our life on firm foundations

The Two Builders

Based on Matthew 7: 24-27

Christians believe Jesus told special stories called parables to help people understand what he was teaching. One of his most famous parables is about two men who wanted to build a house.

There were two builders who each wanted to build themselves a house.

The first builder decided to build his house on sand. It was easier and the house was built very quickly but it didn't have any foundations beneath the sand.

The second man decided to build his house on the rock. It was hard work and took a long time, but the house was strong and had deep foundations.

That night a powerful storm hit. Rain lashed against the houses and thunder and lightning filled the skies. The house on the rock stood tall and strong. But the house on the sand fell down.

Our call: the voices around us

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

As we come together, we light this candle.

If you are Christian, you may think the light is like Jesus, shining out everywhere.

If you believe in God, you may think the light symbolises the presence of God in the world.

If you are not sure about your beliefs, the flickering light may make you wonder about the existence of a God.

If you don't believe in God, the light may make you consider what meaning there is in the world.

Or the candle may have a particular meaning for you today.

Stimulus

Are there days when you're not sure what is happening in your life or what you should do next?

Do you ever think about what is best for your future?

Do you wish there was someone who could guide you?

Sometimes when we don't know what we should do, there can be a voice that helps us. But whose is the voice? This is a story from Judaism and Christianity about hearing a guiding voice and listening carefully for where it was directing them.

Read the story: 'The Voice.'

Response

Thank you for the voices around us that help and guide us. Help us to continue to find good paths for our lives.
(Amen).

I wonder, how do you think Samuel felt when he heard this unknown voice?

I wonder, what do you think the unknown voice said to Samuel?

In this story, there are two voices: the unknown voice and the voice of Eli. Both of these voices spoke to Samuel and gave him advice to help him. One was a voice he knew and was ready to hear, another was a voice he was did not expect, that came out of nowhere.

Have a think about a time when you've been unsure what to do. Did someone's voice help to guide you? Perhaps it was a friend's voice, the voice of your family, or your teacher. Perhaps it was a voice in your own head or an unknown voice in the distance.

Is there anything you're unsure about now? What guidance are you looking for? Are you listening out for what a known or an unknown voice might say to help you?

Now use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about.

Give the children time to create a written response – they could draw a speech bubble and think what a voice might have said or will say to them.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God),

Thank you for the voices around us that help and guide us. Help us to continue to find good paths for our lives.

(Amen).

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.



Our call: the voices around us

The Voice

Taken from: 1 Samuel 3: 1-10

Many, many years ago, there was a young boy called Samuel who lived in the temple of the Lord with an old man named Eli. He had lived there for quite a long time, but did not know what he was to do in the future.

One night, Samuel lay in the darkness in his room, after the candles and lamps had been extinguished. He was just falling asleep when he heard a voice calling his name:

“Samuel! Samuel!”

Samuel rushed straight to Eli, fearing he was unwell or needed help. However, Eli replied, “I did not say a word. Lie down again.”

Samuel returned to his room, but before he could sleep he heard the voice again, calling his name once more.

“Samuel! Samuel!”

For a second time, Samuel rushed into Eli to see what he needed. Eli replied once more, “I did not call you Samuel. Lie down again.”

Samuel went back to his room and lay down in his bed once more. Before he could settle, he heard the voice for a third time.

“Samuel! Samuel!”

What was happening? This time when Samuel ran through to Eli, asking what he needed, Eli spoke to him gently.

“I am not the one who is calling you, child. Go and lie down, and if you hear the voice again, reply: ‘Speak Lord, for I am listening.’”

Samuel returned to his room, lay down and waited. Then he heard the voice speak his name again:

“Samuel! Samuel!”

This time Samuel replied, “Speak Lord, I am listening.”

Our 'faults' can bring joy

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

As we come together, we light this candle.

If you are Christian, you may think the light is like Jesus, shining out everywhere.

If you believe in God, you may think the light symbolises the presence of God in the world.

If you are not sure about your beliefs, the flickering light may make you wonder about the existence of a God.

If you don't believe in God, the light may make you consider what meaning there is in the world.

Or the candle may have a particular meaning for you today.

Stimulus

All of us are unique.

Each of us has talents and gifts.

Each of us can work hard and do amazing things.

But we also have things that we are not so good at. Sometimes we might try and hide these 'flaws' away

and not let other people see.

But what if our flaws can bring us happiness too?

What if others like us not just in spite of our flaws but because of them?

Read the story: 'The Two Pots.'

Response

I wonder, what was your favourite part of the story?

I wonder, how do you think the pot felt when it couldn't carry water as well as the other pot?

I wonder, how do you think the pot felt when it realised the water bearer was glad he was cracked?

Do you worry that you don't seem to be as good at as other people at something? I wonder if you have anything you see as a flaw. Are you trying to hide this from other people?

In this story, the pot is upset that it doesn't seem to be as good at carrying water as the other pot; however, its flaw actually helped it to bring beauty to the world. The water bearer knew that it was cracked and was glad. None of us are perfect – we are all cracked in some way like the pot. Perhaps we don't need to hide away our flaws – we might discover they can actually help us in some way.

Now use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about. Perhaps you might want to draw a cracked pot or some flowers that it is watering. What are the cracks in your life? What is it that you are watering?

Give the children time to create a written response – they could draw a speech bubble and think what a voice might have said or will say to them.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God),

Thank you that we don't need to hide away things we are not so good at but to celebrate that we all have something different to offer.

(Amen).

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.



Our 'faults' can bring joy

The Two Pots

Original author unknown.

A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which he carried across his neck. Each day he would walk for several miles in the blazing heat of the sun, to fetch water from the stream.

One of the pots he carried was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. However, the other pot was cracked. By the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the water bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his house.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you. I have been able to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice a difference between the side of the path on which you are carried, but not on the other pot's side? I have always known about your flaw, and I planted flower seeds on your side of the path. Every day while we walk back, you've watered the seeds and now these flowers are able to grow. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the path and our house."

Do we think only of ourselves?

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

As we come together, we light this candle.

If you are Christian, you may think the light is like Jesus, shining out everywhere.

If you believe in God, you may think the light symbolises the presence of God in the world.

If you are not sure about your beliefs, the flickering light may make you wonder about the existence of a God.

If you don't believe in God, the light may make you consider what meaning there is in the world.

Or the candle may have a particular meaning for you today.

Stimulus

How often do you think about your life?

How often do you think about other people and how they are? How often do you think about the whole world?

This is a story that might just make us think about who and what it is important for us to think about in our lives.

Read the story: 'The Rich Man's Wish.'

Response

I wonder, why do you think no one else was thinking of the rich man?

I wonder, what do you think would have been a better wish for the rich man?

I wonder, who today needs you to think about them and care for them?

Have a think... Do you often find yourself thinking only about yourself? In a game, or in group work, do you always want to have things your way?

Have a think... Could you do anything differently? Who in your life needs you to think about them and care for them at the moment?

Look at your hands – what could you do to help others? As we reflect, we will listen to this music: 'Brother, sister, let me serve you.'

Play the music, and keep the music playing as the children create a written response – they could draw

the wish they have for someone else or write who they are going to think of more.

Now use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God),

Thank you for those who think about us and that we can think about and care for others. Help us to remember we are never alone (as you are always with us).

(Amen).

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.

Note:

It might be good to reinforce that it is important to think about yourself as well as others, but that the rich man thought only about himself and not others.



Do we think only of ourselves?

The Rich Man's Wish

Copyright: <http://www.davidsemporium.co.uk>

A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which he carried across his neck. Each day he would walk for several miles in the blazing heat of the sun, to fetch water from the stream.

One of the pots he carried was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. However, the other pot was cracked. By the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the water bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his house.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you. I have been able to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice a difference between the side of the path on which you are carried, but not on the other pot's side? I have always known about your flaw, and I planted flower seeds on your side of the path. Every day while we walk back, you've watered the seeds and now these flowers are able to grow. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the path and our house."

Our whole self

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

As we come together, we light this candle.

If you are Christian, you may think the light is like Jesus, shining out everywhere.

If you believe in God, you may think the light symbolises the presence of God in the world.

If you are not sure about your beliefs, the flickering light may make you wonder about the existence of a God.

If you don't believe in God, the light may make you consider what meaning there is in the world.

Or the candle may have a particular meaning for you today.

Stimulus

Are there days where you think your life is great and days where you feel terrible? What about other people?

Is it easy to judge them based on a bad day that they're having?

We often say that life is full of ups and downs.

How can we remain steady throughout?

Sometimes we have to remember and hold our whole lives and all that we know of ourselves and others, together.

Read the story: 'The Measure of Life.'

Response

I wonder, which is your favourite season of the tree in the story?

I wonder, which do you think is the most important season of the tree in the story?

I wonder, why do you think our lives are made up of ups and downs?

It is very easy to judge our own, and other people's lives, on just one moment, or one day. I wonder how we would live differently if we kept the whole picture of our own, or someone else's life in mind?

Have a think about a moment recently where you've found yourself annoyed with yourself or another person. Is that what they are always like or was there a reason that moment happened? If you think about everything you know about yourself or that person, could that change how you feel?

Now use the materials on your tables to respond to what we have thought about.

Give the children time to create a written response – they could draw a tree in different seasons, or themselves in different moods.

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God),

Thank you for everything that we are. Help us to remember that when we are or someone else is having a bad day, that does not change who we are.

(Amen).

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.

The Measure of Life

Copyright: <https://www.beliefnet.com>

There was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn not to judge things too quickly. So he sent them each on a quest, in turn, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away. The first son went in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in summer, and the youngest son in the autumn.

When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe what they had seen.

The first son said that the tree was ugly, bent, and twisted.

The second son said no - it was covered with green buds and full of promise.

The third son disagreed again, he said it was laden with blossoms that smelled so sweet and looked so beautiful, it was the most graceful thing he had ever seen.

The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfilment.

The man then explained to his sons that they were all right, because they had each seen only one season in the tree's life. He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person, by only one season. Instead, the essence of who they are--and the pleasure, joy, and love that come from that life--can only be measured from looking at all the seasons together, and without any one season, no other season would happen; the tree would not be truly itself.

Being honest and true to yourself

Opening

Light the candle with these words:

As we come together, we light this candle.

If you are Christian, you may think the light is like Jesus, shining out everywhere.

If you believe in God, you may think the light symbolises the presence of God in the world.

If you are not sure about your beliefs, the flickering light may make you wonder about the existence of a God.

If you don't believe in God, the light may make you consider what meaning there is in the world.

Or the candle may have a particular meaning for you today.

Stimulus

Have you ever thought you're not doing as well as everyone else? Have you ever wanted to twist the truth to make a good impression?

Here's a story about someone who was worried they weren't good enough.

Read 'The Emperor's Seeds' story.

Response

I wonder, what was your favourite part of the story?

I wonder, how do you think Ling felt when he took his empty plant pot to the emperor?

I wonder, why the emperor thought Ling would be the best successor?

There are often times when we feel like we haven't done as well as we wanted to, or think others are doing better than we are. However, if we stay true to ourselves and are honest about who we are and what we can do, we might just find ourselves more capable than we realised.

On a piece of paper, you might like to draw a response. Perhaps you want to remember a time

when you have felt you can't achieve something? Perhaps you want to think of a time you were honest and how this helped you?

After a few minutes, invite the children to come and place their responses near the candle – either on display or in the basket.

Closing thought/prayer:

(Dear God)

Help us to be honest and true to ourselves so that we can find out who we truly are and discover all that we are capable of.

(Amen)

Closing

Ask one child to blow out the candle.

As we blow out the candle, we imagine our thoughts, our ideas, our conversations, perhaps our prayers spreading out, ready to go with us.

Let us go with hearts filled with love.



Being honest and true to yourself

The Emperor's Seeds

Original author unknown – possibly from Islamic tradition

An emperor was growing old and knew it was time to choose his successor. He called the young people in the kingdom together and said, "It is time for me to step down and to choose the next emperor. I am giving each one of you a seed today. I want you to plant the seed, water it and come back one year from today with what you have grown from this one seed. I will then judge what you bring and choose who will be the next emperor!"

Ling received a seed like the others. He went home and excitedly told his mother the story. She helped him get a pot and planting soil, and he planted the seed and carefully watered it. Every day he watered it and watched to see if it had grown. After about three weeks, some of the other youths began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Ling kept checking his seed, but nothing grew. Three, four, five weeks went by, but nothing sprouted. By now, others were talking about their plants. Ling didn't have a plant, and he felt like a failure. Six months went by; still nothing grew in Ling's pot. He believed he had killed his seed. Everyone else had trees and tall plants, but he had nothing. He just kept hoping for his seed to grow.

After a year all the youths of the kingdom brought their plants to the emperor for his inspection. Ling told his mother that he wasn't going to take an empty pot, but his Mother said he must be honest about what happened. Ling felt sick to his stomach, but he knew his Mother was right. When Ling arrived, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by the other youths. They were all shapes and sizes. Ling put his empty pot on the floor and many of the others laughed at him. A few felt sorry for him and said, "Hey, nice try."

When the emperor arrived, he greeted the young people and then surveyed the room. Ling tried to hide in the back. "My, what great plants, trees and flowers you have grown," said the emperor. "Today, one of you will be appointed the next emperor!" All of a sudden, the emperor spotted Ling at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered his guards to bring him to the front. Ling was terrified. "The emperor knows I'm a failure! Maybe he will have me killed!"

When Ling got to the front, the Emperor asked his name. "My name is Ling," he replied. The emperor looked at Ling, and then announced to the crowd, "Behold your new emperor! His name is Ling!" Ling couldn't believe it. Ling couldn't even grow his seed. How could he be the new emperor?

Then the emperor said, "One year ago today, I gave everyone here a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. I gave you all boiled seeds, which would not grow. All of you, except Ling, have brought me trees, plants and flowers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Ling was the only one with the courage and honesty to bring me a pot with my seed in it. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new emperor!"