

Parables

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Session 1: Seeing beyond the obvious

Series: Parables

Themes: **Understanding the Bible; stereotypes; love**

Bible Passage: **Luke 10:25-37**

Suggested age group: **11-14's**

Session aim: **To encourage group members to explore whether their opinions of others are based on stereotypes
To consider what it means to put the needs of others before our own, regardless of who they are**

Way in 1 - Fish bowl

Time: *5-10 mins*

Bible knowledge: *n/a*

With: *Small container or hat; three small slips of paper for each person; pen; stopwatch*

1. Give each person three small slips of paper and a pen. Tell them they have no more than one minute to secretly write the names of three people or characters they think the whole group will know or have heard of and put the slips back in the container or hat.
2. Divide the group into two teams. Each team must choose someone who is going to lead them through the game. It will help them if this person is quite extroverted!
3. The aim of the game is to use as few words or actions as possible to convey to your group who each person pulled out of the container is. For every name the group guesses in a minute they gain ten points.
4. Choose a team to go first. Their leader pulls the first name out of the container and can use words (apart from the name itself) or actions to help their team guess who it is. As soon as the team guesses correctly, they move onto the next name. The leader is only allowed one "Pass" in a round. They must stop as soon as the minute has passed. If they are only partly through the guessing of a name, they must put it back into the container. It is now the next team's turn.
5. The game continues until the container of names is exhausted. If this occurs part-way through a minute, the team can have an extra point for every five seconds still on the clock.
6. Count out the number of names each team has accrued and applaud the winners. Ask the teams what the key was to guessing quickly. Point out that with many of these people they knew basic facts or rumours about them, but not many of them are really known to them well so they had to make assumptions when describing them.

Way in 2 - Stereotypes Discussion

Time: *5 - 10 mins*

Bible knowledge: *n/a*

With: *Either enough printed faces grids for everyone to see or Power point slide (file – Stereotypes faces grid); projector and laptop if relevant*

1. With everyone looking at the 'stereotype' characters, slowly read the following questions allowing time for the group to discuss which of the faces best fits:
Which of these people – Is a millionaire? Was adopted? Was bullied at school? Is disabled? Drinks too much? Has spent time in jail? Is a Christian?
2. For each statement, the group must suggest which person on the sheet or power point that they think the statement is most likely to refer to.
3. Encourage the group to discuss these answers and give reasons to justify their choices.

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4. Explain that most of these faces have just been randomly selected and actually we know nothing about them and their lives. You can tell very little about someone by making assumptions. For example –would you really have been sure that E2 had spent 6 years in a Singaporean jail (Nick Leeson, jailed for bringing down Bearings Bank – known as ‘The Rogue Trader’) A3 was a Christian (Nicky Cruz, converted gang leader) or D5 paralysed from the neck down (Joni Eareckson, Christian speaker, artist and musician) unless you were told or met them?
5. Are they surprised by these facts? Why/why not?
6. Explain that stereotypes and shallow impressions of people can lead to assumptions being made about them. The passage for today is full of characters who had wrong impressions of one another and chose to either live up to or look past such stereotypes.

Connecting - Stories Matter

Time: 25 - 30 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: Props such as bag of coins, bandages and a small bottle of oil, Bibles or resource sheet 1 ‘Luke 10:30-37’, a big piece of paper and markers to jot discussion notes, stop watch, resource sheet 2 ‘Did you know?’

1. Give a short talk, including the following points:
 - Stories are a great way of grabbing attention and getting a point across in an interesting way. We can all think of films we watched as a child which helped to teach us about the importance of friends, standing up for what you believe in or that when life gets tough you need to keep going. (You may wish to ask them to name some examples).
 - The Bible tells us that Jesus used stories to teach the people, in fact “he did not say anything to them without using a parable” (Matt 13:34-35 NIV)
 - A parable is a story about familiar, every day things with two possible purposes. Either it makes a point about something far greater than is immediately apparent, or it explains something spiritual that would be very difficult to understand otherwise. Some of the parables told are very well known and you may have heard them told when you were younger.
 - But do we really understand the parables? Were they all used for the same purpose? Are they “nice wee stories for primary school children” or in fact do we need to take a closer look at what they really mean to understand more about Jesus?
 - This series is going to look at a number of these parables, mainly those in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and try and see what different things we can learn about Christianity today when we really look at them closely.
2. Read through Luke 10:30-37 as a group. Ask them some basic questions about it. What do they think of this parable? Is it one they have heard before? What do they think the point of this parable is?
3. Ask the group to imagine that this story is going to be filmed as a one minute teaser for a film of the ‘Life of Jesus’. Give them access to the story and the props you have brought with you to allow them to quickly work out how they would perform it. Make sure everyone is involved (if necessary divide into smaller groups) and ensure that they do not take more than 5 minutes to plan and have a run through. Be strict about the story remaining within the one minute limit, using a stopwatch if necessary. It may help to appoint one of them as director to speed up decisions and tell them to perform the story as if it must be “shot on the first take”.
4. Allow the group to perform their teaser(s). Ask them about how they decided what the key points were to include in it.

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5. Hand out resource sheet 2 'Did you know' for them to read. Explain that these are all facts that those hearing this parable from Jesus would already have known. Does this alter their telling of the story? What do they need to add to their performance to give the story the full meaning that was intended? What do they think the key point is now?
6. Remind them that even with well known parables, reading them carefully is important so they don't miss the main message. Here we see that we are expected as Christians to put the needs of others above our own, no matter who they are or what we have going on around us. Jesus was the ultimate example of this, looking past all the reasons he should ignore our problems and instead loving us enough to die on a cross for us.
7. If there is time they can repeat their performance with any new details they may wish to add having had more time to think about the story.

Responding 1 - Who is my neighbour?

Time: 3 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: small slips of paper and an envelope

1. The Samaritan in the parable was willing to go beyond the call of duty to help the wounded man, even though he didn't have to, didn't know the man and was technically his sworn enemy. Part of what Jesus wanted to teach his audience was that kindness shouldn't be limited to those we care about or know, but shown to anyone regardless of who they are.
2. Ask the group to reflect on who they find it hard to show kindness to. Give them the option of either sharing this name or keeping it confidential.
3. Challenge them to inconvenience themselves this week, like the Samaritan did, and do at least one kind thing for this person. This could be as simple as holding a door, fetching something for them or as ambitious as including them in something or giving them a gift. Get them to write down what they'd like to do on a slip of paper and seal them in an envelope.
4. Tell the group that this may not be easy, but that's something that many of the parables have in common – they're not simply stories for children because they often present us with a very adult situation to take action on.
5. Make sure that you bring the envelope with you next week to discuss how they got on.

Responding 2 - Seeking understanding

Time: 3 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

1. Ask your group to rate the following statements between one and five for how true they are to them, with one being completely false and five being absolutely true. They can indicate their answers with a count of fingers.
 - I am familiar with large portions of the Bible
 - I find some of the parts of the Bible difficult to understand
 - When I get stuck, I don't bother to try and find out what it means
 - When I get to a passage I know well, I skip over it
 - There is more for me to find out even in the most familiar parts of the Bible

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2. Take some time to pray with your group about the studies coming up in the next few weeks. Pray for understanding of challenging parables, fresh insight into more familiar ones and a desire to find out more about what Jesus was telling his followers by using them.

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Resource Sheet 1 - Luke 10: 30-37

The Good Samaritan

The man said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

Jesus answered, "As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, some robbers attacked him. They tore off his clothes, beat him, and left him lying there, almost dead. It happened that a priest was going down that road. When he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. Next, a Levite came there, and after he went over and looked at the man, he walked by on the other side of the road. Then a Samaritan travelling down the road came to where the hurt man was. When he saw the man, he felt very sorry for him. The Samaritan went to him, poured olive oil and wine on his wounds, and bandaged them. Then he put the hurt man on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he cared for him. The next day, the Samaritan brought out two coins, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of this man. If you spend more money on him, I will pay it back to you when I come again.' "

Then Jesus said, "Which one of these three men do you think was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by the robbers?"

The expert on the law answered, "The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Then go and do what he did."

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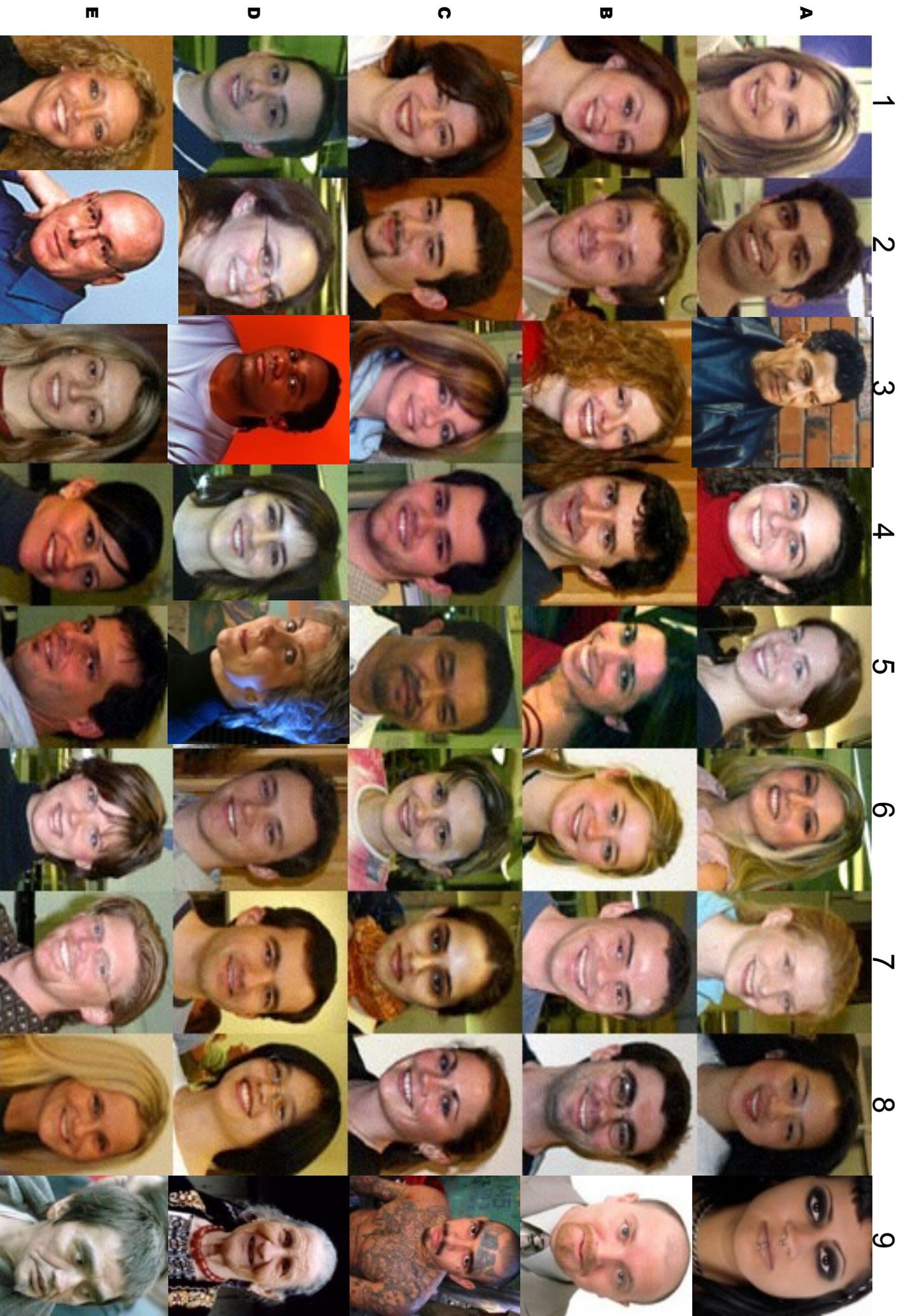
Resource Sheet 2 – Did you know?

Did you know?

- The Jews and the Samaritans were bitter enemies. The man in the story had probably gone the longer way from Jerusalem to Jericho, down a road that was well known for robbers, just so he didn't have to go through Samaria.

- The priest and the Levite probably thought they were doing the right thing. By Jewish law, if you touched a dead person you were considered unclean and they wouldn't have been able to do their work in the temple for some time if they had taken the risk of seeing if the man was alive. However they still got it wrong. Jesus spent a lot of time trying to teach the religious rulers that there was no point to keeping these rules so strictly if they stopped them from obeying his one of his most important laws – to put the needs of others over themselves.

- If the robbers had really stripped the Jew of his clothes there was very little way that the Samaritan could tell who he was at all. He went out of his way to help someone who he knew could be his enemy.



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Session 2: One day at a time

Series: Parables

Themes: Heaven, materialism, guidance, heavenly treasures

Bible Passage: Luke 12:13-21

Suggested age group: 11-14

Session aim: To consider what things in life are really important

To consider God's ideas of what are wise and what are foolish plans for our lives

Way in 1 - Everything but the kitchen sink

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: space for a race, pairs of sturdy "stuff" for carrying such as shoes, containers, pans, bags etc (enough so that there is an item for each person taking part)

1. Organise the group into two teams at one end of the room, with the equipment in two distinct piles at the other end.
2. On your 'go' the first person in each team must run up to the other end of the room and select an item to bring back to their team.
3. They must then hand their item to the next person, who takes it back to the pile and selects an additional item to carry before bringing them both back to the next player. If an item is dropped then it is the responsibility of the current runner alone to stop and rearrange their burden so they can carry it back to their base successfully. The teams that do well will be those that can think logically about the order they select and stack their items, e.g. putting items into a bucket or box
4. The race continues with the pile of items to be carried getting increasingly awkward to carry until the whole pile is safely with the team at the other end of the hall. The first team to complete this task wins.
5. Ask the group how they felt about this game. Point out that sometimes having lots of stuff can actually make life more difficult!

Way in 2 - Elimination quiz

Time: 10 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: pre-prepared general knowledge questions

1. Ask the group to spread themselves around the room so that they are standing somewhere that they can't be touched by anybody else who is stretching out.
2. Explain that this is an Elimination quiz, where the last person standing at the end is the winner. There are two ways of being put out of the game, either by answering a question incorrectly, or by being touched by another contestant.
3. Players are able to move only when they answer a question correctly, at which point they can take one large step in any direction. They may choose to step closer to someone else to see if they can reach to put them out, or away from someone they feel is a threat.
4. Begin the quiz by asking the first question. Some possible types of question include:
 - What is the capital city of _____?
 - Can you name three politicians/brands of toothpaste/purple things/reptiles?
 - If there are 28 horses' hooves in a field, how many horses are there?
 - What time is _____ on the television?

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- Can you spell _____?
 - What do the letters www/PE/RBS stand for?
5. The first player with their hand up is able to answer. If they are wrong they must sit down. If they are correct they can take a step, and if they can touch any other player without moving their feet again, that player is out.
 6. Continue to ask questions and allow the game to continue until you are left with three players remaining. Ask them to come and stand at the front, one step away from one another so that the game does not continue infinitely! They then have the chance to try and answer your next questions and eliminate one another. The final player remaining is the winner.
 7. Highlight that in this game, even if you answered all of your questions correctly, it didn't necessarily mean that you won. It may have meant you were eliminated more quickly by other players who saw you as a threat. Sometimes in life, even if we think we have done really well, we still don't always know what is around the corner.

Way in 3 - When I am...

Time: 7 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: Resource sheet 1 'When I am...', pens, relaxed background music

1. Put some music on and ask the group to work individually on the "When I am..." sheet which will challenge them to think about their expectations for life.
2. When they have spent about 3-4 mins on this, ask them to feed back some of their answers to you.
3. Explain that today's parable thinks about how to make the most of planning for our lives and what is really important.

Connecting - What really matters?

Time: 10 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

With: Bibles or resource sheet 2 'Luke 12:13-21', pens and paper, audio-visual equipment and Three Amigos DVD

1. You may choose to begin this session by watching a short clip from the film 'The Three Amigos'. Start at Scene 10, where they are riding through the desert, and finish when Chevy Chase offers his friends the lip balm and they glare at him. Point out that often we are really thirsty to have lots of something whether it is a possession/success/fame/power but when we have it we don't really appreciate fully what we have!
2. Ask someone to read aloud today's parable from Luke 12:13-21. Get the group's first reactions to this story. Is it fair? What do they think angers God so much about this man?
3. Point out to the group-
 - The man whose question prompted this story is putting his wealth above his relationship with his brother. Jesus wants to make it clear to him that if he destroys this relationship in pursuit of the money; he is losing out with his family and God and not gaining a great deal in return.

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- In Jesus' story, the farmer is already rich and doesn't need this huge crop for himself but has no intention of sharing it. Ask the group to count how many times he uses the words 'I', 'my', 'myself'. How about 'we', 'us' or 'you'? The farmer is completely selfish and doesn't even consider others. Selfishness is far deeper than just being selfish about things - it is effectively having self as the framework of our thinking. Comment that the major cause of sin is the big I in the centre – sIn.
 - The Bible teaches us about heavenly treasure, saved up for us when we put God and others above ourselves, something we can look forward to after this life is over. Wealth may be enjoyable in the here and now, but we can hardly head into heaven with our pockets bulging with gold, i-pods, mobiles or games consoles, can we? When someone dies, we talk about what they left, meaning how much money they passed on to their successors. Really they have left everything, because they can take nothing with them in death.
 - This man has an opportunity to make a huge difference to those living around him but instead everything is wasted.
 - Jesus is teaching that in order for us to be wise with our time and possessions we shouldn't be thinking about the here and now, but about what impact our actions will have for eternity. We have to make a decision about whether life before death or life after death is more important to us.
4. Ask the group to imagine that they are the young man who asked the original question of Jesus about his brother's inheritance. How would they be feeling having heard this answer? What questions would they have? What would they do now?
 5. Discuss with the group what Jesus meant by being 'rich towards God'. Jesus spoke about two big ideas: love God, love other people. Here is an illustration of a man who gets his wires crossed and lets something get in the way of loving God. These ideas have an impact on the way we live life now (not just what we would be remembered for or for heaven when we die).

Responding - You can't take it with you

Time: 10 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: 2 large pieces of paper, marker pens

1. Ask the group to contribute ideas about which things in life are distracting for them. They may suggest fitting in, music, fashion and so on. Write their ideas on a piece of paper, not being shy about sharing things that you find important or exciting too.
2. Go back through your list and score off the things that can't be taken with us when we die. It may seem a morbid exercise, but remind the group that at the end of the day, most of these things are just stuff we need useless empty barns for.
3. Make another list together of things that they could take with them – aspects of character, experiences, etc., that they would really like to become as people in this life and eternity.
4. If appropriate, pray with the group that they will be able to put these things first in their lives.

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Resource Sheet 1 – When I am ...

When I am....

- **20** I would like to be _____
- **25** I would like to have achieved _____
- **30** I would like to own _____
- **40** I would like to have successfully _____
- **65** I would expect to have _____
- **Gone, I would like to be remembered for**

When I am....

- **20** I would like to be a _____
- **25** I would like to have achieved _____
- **30** I would like to own _____
- **40** I would like to have successfully _____
- **65** I would expect to have _____
- **Gone, I would like to be remembered for**

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Resource Sheet 2 – Luke 12:13-21

Jesus warns against selfishness

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the property our father left us."

But Jesus said to him, "Who said I should judge or decide between you?" Then Jesus said to them, "Be careful and guard against all kinds of greed. Life is not measured by how much one owns."

Then Jesus told this story: "There was a rich man who had some land, which grew a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What will I do? I have no place to keep all my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and other goods. Then I can say to myself, "I have enough good things stored to last for many years. Rest, eat, drink, and enjoy life!"'

"But God said to him, 'Foolish man! Tonight your life will be taken from you. So who will get those things you have prepared for yourself?'

"This is how it will be for those who store up things for themselves and are not rich toward God."

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Session 3: Forgiving and Forgetting

Series: Parables

Themes: Forgiveness, God as a father, jealousy, Christian family

Bible Passage: Luke 15:11-32

Suggested age group: 11-14

Session aim: To understand God's willingness to forgive us whatever we have done
To consider our attitude towards those who have wronged us

Way in 1 - Tongue twisting fruit salad

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: space for a circle – preferably sitting on chairs

1. Arrange the group into a circle, with one less space than there are people. The remaining person should stand in the middle of the group.
2. Go round the circle and ask each person to choose the name of a different fruit. This will be the name of anyone sitting in their spot for the game.
3. The aim of the person in the centre is to have a seat in the circle, which they can claim by saying the name of one of the fruits three times before the bearer of that name can say it once. For example, if they can say "apple, apple, apple" clearly and quickly, before the person in that space can shout "APPLE", the person in the middle then swaps with that person and becomes "Apple" while the other person has a turn in the middle. On the other hand, if "Apple" can shout before the person in the middle has finished saying their name three times, the person in the middle will need to try and choose another fruit.
4. Continue the game quickly until it has become clear that some fruits are less likely to be chosen than others e.g. pineapple and pomegranate are always chosen less than grape because they are harder to say quickly.
5. Point out to the group that some words are harder to say than others, but not necessarily because they are harder to pronounce.

Way in 2 - How white are your whites?

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: Resource sheet 'How White are Your Whites?', pens

1. Give each group member a copy of the 'How White are Your Whites?' multiple choice magazine style quiz and allow them a couple of minutes to fill it in.
2. Once they have finished, read out the 'Washing Powder' analysis from the bottom of the page and let them decide which type they are, depending on the answers they have given you.
3. Point out that this is just a silly quiz, quite obviously about forgiveness rather than washing. However, forgiveness is a serious matter that can cause us all sorts of bother if we struggle with either seeking forgiveness from others, or offering it when it is asked of us.

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Way in 3 - Family tension

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: Extended edition of *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, audio-visual equipment

1. Show the group Scene 41 from the Extended Edition of *The Two Towers*. (Unfortunately this scene was edited from the normal version). It begins with a conversation between Boromir and Faramir, two brothers, about their relationship with their father, and ends after a confrontation between Faramir and his Dad.
2. Point out that within families it can be very difficult to forgive and forget, especially because relationships can be so intense and important to you. Unfortunately no-one in this family does any forgiving or forgetting until it is too late.
3. Tell the group that they are going to look today at another family with a father and two sons and the problems that they faced in forgiving and forgetting.

Connecting - The Long Road Home

Time: 15 mins

Bible knowledge: *limited*

With: Bibles or copies of resource sheet 2 'Luke 15:11-32', marker pens, paper

1. Remind the group that today's passage was not a recounting of an actual event but a story Jesus told to teach the crowds a lesson – what will it teach them today?
2. Read together Luke 15:11-32 and then facilitate the following discussion :
 - Make a list together of the things the son does wrong. Really emphasise how hurtful it would be for a Father to be asked for an inheritance early – the son is basically telling him that he wishes he were dead!
 - Comment on the son's degree of desperation that he ended up working with pigs. This would have been considered the lowest possible job for people of this society as these animals were thought of as "unclean" and would have horrified those listening to the story. Ask the group what they think the equivalent job would be in our society. Suggestions may include toilet cleaners, traffic wardens or prostitutes.
 - The son is so determined not to go home that he does this terrible job instead. What do they think is making it so hard for him to go home? The remarkable thing is that his father is waiting in hope that he will, no matter how he has disgraced himself.
 - Ask what they think we learn about the father in this passage? Is he noble or simply a pushover? Do they know anyone who is forgiving in this way – how does it make them feel?
 - Comment that the son has done the most hurtful things imaginable yet has been forgiven. Is Jesus saying that anything can be forgiven? What do we have to do? Make sure they mention that they have to decide to ask for forgiveness. Thankfully, the harder bit, the forgiving itself, is done for us!
 - (Optional) The other son does not react well to the homecoming. Why? Do the group relate to this feeling at all?
3. Challenge the group to thoughtfully consider which son they are more like. If the youngest son – who do they need to ask for forgiveness? If the older – who do they need to give a second chance to? They can share this if they feel comfortable to do so.
4. Ask the group to give the parable a title (note that the title 'The Prodigal Son' is not in the Bible!) Encourage them to consider the title 'The Waiting Father', as this focuses on God. What does this parable show us about the fatherhood of God? In the Lord's Prayer we refer to God as 'Our Father' – how might this parable affect the way we pray?

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Responding 1 – Everything

Time: 6 mins

Bible knowledge: *limited - some*

With: *audio-visual equipment, download of the 'Everything' sketch by Lifehouse-
<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=FVJqRLU3J0I>*

1. Let the group watch the 'Everything' sketch by Life house which powerfully depicts Jesus's role in saving us when we've made a mess.
2. Resist the temptation to make commentary on the skit and allow it to speak to them for itself. Ask the following questions, but allow pupils to think silently about the answers: What keeps us away from God? What is God's attitude to us? What is our attitude to other people who have made mistakes? (Are we like the older brother?)
3. After allowing a few seconds quiet, lead the young people in prayer, praising Jesus for not only forgiving us, but taking on our problems himself so we can have a fresh start.

Responding 2 - Doing the Laundry

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: *some*

With: *washing bowl of water, washing detergent, small scraps of white material (enough for two per person), felt tip pens, quiet reflective music (Andy Flannagan has a fantastic song called Open Arms (Prodigal Song) which would be perfect for this)*

1. Explain that the Bible tells us that when we are truly sorry like the younger son, we can ask for forgiveness and God, like the Father, will give us a completely fresh start. You may wish to read out a selection of verses that talk about this - 2 Chron 7:14, Jeremiah 33:8, Acts 10:43, Ephesians 1:7, 1 John 1:9
2. Give each young person a piece of the material and a felt pen. Put on some reflective music. Ask them to think about whether they are the prodigal, who needs to ask forgiveness of someone for something, or the brother who needs to forgive. They are then to secretly write the name of that person on their piece of material.
3. They can now make another choice. They may wish to hang onto their marked material for now until they are ready to act on it. They may on the other hand be ready to move on.
4. Those who are ready to move on can come and drop their material into the bucket of water and detergent in the corner of the room and take a new piece of material to keep to remind them of their desire to take action. It may be worth reassuring them that the material they have deposited in the bucket is completely private between them and God.
5. Once the music is finished and the young people have all had the chance to swap their material if they want to, pray for them that they will be able to move on and say the words of 1 John 1:9 again to finish.

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Resource Sheet 1 – How white are your whites?

How white are your whites?

Take our wacky washing quiz to see how soft you are on stains!

- 1) Your mum has been annoying you for weeks to tidy your room and you came back from school today to find she'd thrown out all of the magazines you'd been saving. Do you:
 - (a) Go and thank her for tidying for you and expressing regret she had to go to the trouble to do so.
 - (b) Grumble to her that you had needed those magazines but grudgingly realise it's your fault.
 - (c) Throw a tantrum, demand she buys you new magazines and only then agree to speak to her again.

- 2) Your best friend has just been asked out by the person you have had a crush on for ages and they've said yes! Do you:
 - (a) Genuinely wish them happiness and get excited about it
 - (b) Explain that you wish they had spoken to you first and you are feeling quite hurt but if it makes them happy you'll try not to let it ruin your friendship
 - (c) Fall out with them both, plot to break them up and then make friends again when its all over.

- 3) Someone who has bullied you for ages at school comes and apologises for all they have done to you, as they have now seen how horrible bullying can be for themselves. Do you:
 - (a) Accept their apology immediately and make best friends
 - (b) Talk through with them and explain just how hard they made your life and agree to let bygones be bygones even though you'll probably never be good friends
 - (c) Laugh at them that they are being bullied now and tell them its fair revenge so you think you can move on now, knowing they've had their just desserts!

- 4) You got really drunk at a party recently and spilled some secrets about your friend's family you had promised to keep secret. Do you:
 - (a) Become their family's slave for 7 years, campaign against alcohol and kill everyone who knows the secret so it can't go any further
 - (b) Apologise profusely to your friend and their family, promise to act more responsibly in the future and hope you can carry on being a friend to them even if they aren't speaking to you
 - (c) Assume it doesn't count because you were drunk, blame the person who held the party and get annoyed when your friend won't speak to you anymore.

Mostly As?

You are luxury detergent...! You want everything to be nice and cuddly and soft and ok... but are you genuine about it?

Mostly Bs?

You are quick action Vanish stain remover! You are quite likely to make a mess but are ready to fix it if you remember how!

Mostly Cs?

You are Tesco Value washing powder, content to leave things a bit grubbier because it comes at less of a cost to you.

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Resource Sheet 2 – Luke 15:11-32

The son who ran away

Then Jesus said, "A man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Give me my share of the property.' So the father divided the property between his two sons. Then the younger son gathered up all that was his and travelled far away to another country. There he wasted his money in foolish living. After he had spent everything, a time came when there was no food anywhere in the country, and the son was poor and hungry. So he got a job with one of the citizens there who sent the son into the fields to feed pigs. The son was so hungry that he wanted to eat the pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he realized what he was doing, he thought, 'All of my father's servants have plenty of food. But I am here, almost dying with hunger. I will leave and return to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son, but let me be like one of your servants." ' So the son left and went to his father.

"While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for his son. So the father ran to him and hugged and kissed him. The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Hurry! Bring the best clothes and put them on him. Also, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get our fat calf and kill it so we can have a feast and celebrate. My son was dead, but now he is alive again! He was lost, but now he is found!' So they began to celebrate.

"The older son was in the field, and as he came closer to the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. So he called to one of the servants and asked what all this meant. The servant said, 'Your brother has come back, and your father killed the fat calf, because your brother came home safely.' The older son was angry and would not go in to the feast. So his father went out and begged him to come in. But the older son said to his father, 'I have served you like a slave for many years and have always obeyed your commands. But you never gave me even a young goat to have at a feast with my friends. But your other son, who wasted all your money on prostitutes, comes home, and you kill the fat calf for him!' The father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. We had to celebrate and be happy because your brother was dead, but now he is alive. He was lost, but now he is found.' "

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Session 4: Everything You Have

Series: Parables

Themes: Themes Here

Bible Passage: Matthew 13:44-46

Suggested age group: 11-14

Session aim: To evaluate priorities and things that are important in life
To consider what it means to place the kingdom of God as the most important

Way in 1 - All or nothing

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: large dice, optional pencil and paper for each player

1. Tell the group that the aim of 'All or nothing' is to accumulate as many points as possible by the end of the game by adding together the numbers rolled on the die.
2. At the start of each round everyone must stand. A leader then rolls the die and reads out the number. The players then add that number to their score.
3. The die continues to be rolled and the numbers added together until the players feel that they are happy with the score they have accrued and make an individual choice to sit down, thereby "banking" their score so far. They may wish to take note of this score.
4. A round is finished when the number six is rolled. At this point any players still standing lose all their points from that round and are forced to sit down with zero points. Previously "banked" scores are not affected.
5. The game is continued with as many rounds as you wish with either setting a time limit or a score to aim for a good way to call it to a close.
6. Make the point that each player needed to choose when they were going to stop. Were they going to take a risk with the hope of a big reward, or continue carefully so as not to lose their score but never have a chance of winning?

Way in 2 - Happy memories

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: none

1. Tell the group that they have all made a friend called Mr. Moneybags. This friend really wants to please them and has offered to go shopping for whatever they all most want. However, he has a really bad memory and needs help to remember what to buy.
2. Get the young people to sit in a circle and choose someone to start. They must begin by saying, "When Mr Moneybags goes shopping I would like him to buy..." and then their item. The next person would then repeat the sentence with both the previous item and their own one. The next would then do the same with the previous two and their own and so on around the circle. For example – "When Mr Moneybags goes shopping I would like him to buy... a Ferrari" "When Mr Moneybags goes shopping I would like him to buy... a Ferrari...and a pet elephant."
3. When everyone has had a chance to play, recount the list together. Ask the group if they think that having these things really would make them happy.

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Way in 3 - Price is Right

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: About 6 personal items which matter to you (for example a photo, piece of jewellery, favourite film or book, something electrical, a keepsake, cuddly toy, holiday souvenir), tea towels to hide each item, cards with your estimated guesses of their prices (purely financial worth, so a photo may be worth only its processing cost of about 8p) and also a secret list rating in order their emotional worth to you.

1. Make sure that the items are hidden from view under tea towels with their price cards face down before the group arrive so you are ready for this activity.
2. Show the group the first item with its price value card. Tell them that you are going to show them some items from around your home and they have to estimate whether their cost is higher or lower than the previous item.
3. Show them the next item. Let them guess whether it is worth more or less than the previous item. Once they have guessed 'higher' or 'lower', turn over the price card to show them if they are correct. Move along the line of items this way until you get to the end. This should be fairly simple for the group.
4. Allow them to re-arrange the items into price order. Ask if they think that this is how you really value the items. If they think that you value these things differently, allow them to re-arrange the items accordingly.
5. Show them how you would rate them personally, telling them why in each case. Explain that sometimes in life you are forced to decide what really matters to you and for what reasons.

Way in 4 - Would you rather?

Time: 5-7 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

With: Two signs, one saying 'A' and the other 'B'

1. Set up the signs at opposite sides of the room
2. Tell the group you are going to give them a number of sets of two choices. If they would rather the first option, they must go and stand beside 'A'; if the second, go to 'B'.
3. Read out the following list of options, (or a list of your own) giving time between each for the young people to make their selections. You might want to pause occasionally and ask a young person why they have chosen one option over another.
Would you rather:
 - (A) Have a record breaking No1 single OR (B) Have a lot of singles that don't reach Top 40
 - (A) Go on a month long holiday but work for the rest of the year OR (B) Have four 1-week holidays
 - (A) Have only one extremely close friend OR (B) Have unlimited acquaintances
 - (A) Have the "Best house in Britain" OR (B) Have three small flats here and there
 - (A) Only be fancied by one amazing person in your whole life (and everyone else be repulsed) OR (B) Be seen as incredibly attractive by a huge number of 'ok' people
 - (A) Have a winning lottery ticket OR (B) Have a steady income

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- (A) Have one ticket to a once in a lifetime event OR (B) Own the extremely limited edition Hi-Def Blu-Ray disc of it
 - (A) Have the one thing in the world you've been looking for, at the cost of everything else you have OR (B) Keep everything you have already and know that one thing is out of reach
4. Explain to the group that there are times when we have to make some really difficult choices about what we would rather do, have or be. What we need to do in these situations is decide what is most important to us.

Connecting 1 – Priorities

Time: 10 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

With: Bibles or resource sheet 1 'Bible Passages', news story about discovered treasure e.g. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/west_midlands/7414504.stm

1. Explain that one thing that Jesus often used parables for was to explain the idea of God's kingdom. This kingdom could mean heaven (God's people in God's place) or God's people living in his way on earth. Jesus, as king, came to demonstrate what living as part of this kingdom looked like. That's all a bit difficult to understand, so Jesus again turned to stories to describe what this meant.
2. Read Matthew 13:44. Ask the group how they would feel to discover buried treasure like this man did. Look at a news story about a similar instance. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/west_midlands/7414504.stm is a good example because, like the man in the story, they hid their treasure again when they discovered it.) What would the group do if they were in this situation?
3. Give a short talk covering the following points:
 - The man in this story wasn't expecting to have an extraordinary day when he woke up that morning. He just happens to discover something remarkable in the middle of everyday life.
 - The amazing thing about God's kingdom is that sometimes we can come upon it quite by accident at places and times that we may have been many times before. The significant thing about this man is not that he *finds* the treasure but what he chooses to *do* once he has.
 - The treasure is this man's for the taking, but he is going to claim it as his own first. He realises that if he is going to keep the treasure that has made him so happy he has to buy it. Without losing a moment he happily goes away, sells everything and buys the field with the treasure. And it is his. Finder's keepers!
 - He quickly decides what is most important to him and acts on it. Do we have our priorities sorted? When we come across a once in a lifetime opportunity will we recognise it? Will we see immediately that it has got to be the most important thing to us so we can make the most of it?
 - In the shopping with Mr Money bags/ Price is Right game you were able to tell me quickly what you wanted in life (Mr Money bags)/that some things have an unseen value (Price is Right). Where does God come into this for you?
 - Read Matthew 6:19-21. Emphasise verse 21. When they discover that thing they most want, where will their heart be?

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Connecting 2 - Ultimate Cost

Time: 10 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

With: Resource sheet 2 'World Record Breaking Collections', paper, pens

1. People who have a specific interest in something may often start a collection of related memorabilia. Hand out copies of resource sheet 2 'World Record Breaking collections' for the young people to look at. These people are real fanatics! Imagine being so obsessed!
2. Ask the group what they think someone would need to amass such a collection, list these characteristics on a large piece of paper. Make sure that the following attributes are brought in for discussion:
They need to have ...
 - a passion strong enough to convince them that this is worthwhile doing;
 - expert knowledge of their collection to allow them to decide what items are worthwhile pursuing as prized additions to the collection
 - a decision that they would rather spend time searching for the ultimate collector's pieces and money to buy them for their collection than on anything else.
3. Ask someone to read the short parable contained in Matthew 13:45-46. What is their reaction to this merchant's decision? What does it tell them about the merchant? What about the pearl?
4. Explain the following points to the group –
 - This parable, like that of the treasure in the field, was told by Jesus to explain what the 'kingdom of God' was like. (You may want explain that this phrase can be used to describe Jesus himself, heaven or God's people living for him on earth. The phrase 'the kingdom of God is like...' has been paraphrased as 'This is what it is like when God is at work'. RT France *Matthew*, IVP)
 - This pearl was more than this expert dealer had ever hoped for, despite having spent his whole life looking for it. Having spent so much time dealing with lesser examples, he immediately knew that this didn't even compare to anything he had seen before. He had a chance to possess it, it was there for the taking, as long as he was willing to prioritise it above everything else he had already.
 - The chance to enter God's kingdom is the same –it's so much better than anything we could have hoped for in our search for ultimate fulfilment, and if we are willing to value it above everything else, we are welcome to it. But it comes at a cost.
 - To possess the very best, the dealer has to be willing to give up the second best and he does so immediately, knowing it is worth it. This is a difficult thing to do. Sometimes, in order to put God first we need to set aside other things too. It's always worth it, but it is still a hard choice for many of us.
5. Discuss with the group what they think makes "the kingdom of God" worth giving up everything for. Do they think it is worth it at all? You may wish to relate a story you know of someone who sacrificed a great deal for their faith.
6. Look at the characteristics they listed earlier for a dedicated collector, how do any of these things link to someone wanting to be part of God's kingdom?

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Responding 1 - Grabbing the opportunity - prayer

Time: 2 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

With: Bible or copy of resource sheet 1

1. Read through Matthew 13:44-46 again. Explain that while one man stumbled on his treasure by chance and the other sought his out, both had the opportunity to possess it immediately.
2. Ask the young people to reflect on their own experiences of God – did they just happen to find that Christianity popped into their everyday lives, or have they been searching for that “something special”?
3. Pray out loud for the young people that however they discover God for themselves that they would be able to be sure of their choice of what to do.

Responding 2 - Giving it all

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

With: Bible or resource sheet 1, music player, reflective song, paper, pens

1. Read through Matthew 13:44-46 again. Point out that both men considered their treasures worth more than everything else they had.
2. Read the following statements to the young people,
“If something is worth any cost, it may well cost you everything”
“To get the best you have to give up anything that is second best”
3. Ask the group to reflect on if that is true of these parables, what is their ‘second best’ that they might have to put aside to get the best from their relationships with God?
4. While they are thinking play some suitable music. A good choice would be *What I wouldn't Give* by Andy Flannagan. (Track 12 on his *Son* album). They may wish to write out their thoughts on a piece of paper and bin or destroy them as a symbol of a decision to put these things aside.

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Resource Sheet 1 – Bible Passages

Matthew 13:44-46

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. One day a man found the treasure, and then he hid it in the field again. He was so happy that he went and sold everything he owned to buy that field.

⁴⁵ "Also, the kingdom of heaven is like a man looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found a very valuable pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it."

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹ "Don't store treasures for yourselves here on earth where moths and rust will destroy them and thieves can break in and steal them. ²⁰ But store your treasures in heaven where they cannot be destroyed by moths or rust and where thieves cannot break in and steal them. ²¹ Your heart will be where your treasure is.

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Resource Sheet 2 – World Record Breaking Collections

World Record Breaking Collections

- Michael Zarnock from Deerfield, New York has collected 8128 (as at Feb 2007) different Hot Wheels cars since 1968.
- David Morgan from Burford has collected 137 different traffic cones – that's more than 2/3 of all of the types ever made.
- Brent Dixon from Georgia in the USA has managed to accumulate 41,418 different key rings since 2001 without getting any duplicates!
- A German lady called Birgit Berends has been collecting penguins since 1990 and has managed to gather 2,520 so far.
- Having flown with over 1003 different airlines since the 1970s, Niek K Vermeulen of the Netherlands has brought home 5180 different kinds of airline sick bags!

(Taken from the Guinness Book of World Records online on 1/11/2008)