

Supplies: 1 or 2 packages of mini-marshmallows (if you have over 20 students, go with 2 packages); 60 toothpicks per team (3 to 4 people per team); small paperback book

TELL

- For the opening question, I'm going to ask you a question and then we'll go around the circle and say our names and then give our answer to the question.
- I'll ask the question and then I'll answer first, ok?
- Here's the opening question: If you could build anything you wanted to, what would it be?

GO AROUND THE CIRCLE

TELL

- During this summer, we're going to be talking about parables. Parables are stories that can help us better understand an idea. For instance, I could tell you that you have to just try harder. Or, I could tell you the story of the "little engine that could" that shows us what trying harder might look like.
- Almost all of the parables we'll be talking about this summer are told by Jesus. However, there were parables that were told before Jesus lived and can be found in the Old Testament.
- Today we're going to read two parables. One from the Old Testament and one that is told by Jesus in the New Testament.
- Let's listen to the parable from the Old Testament first.

Ecclesiastes 9:14-18 (edited for reading/listening comprehension):

14 There was a little city with few people in it. A great king decided to attack it and so he surrounded it with his armies, not allowing anyone to get *out* or any food to get *in* the little city. 15 Now there was found in the little city a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembers that poor man. 16 This is too bad because, "Wisdom is better than might; yet the poor man's wisdom is forgotten, and his words are not heeded." 17 The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler among fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one foolish person destroys much good.

ASK

- What was happening to the little city? (It was being attacked)
- And who saved it? (a poor wise man)
- Can you tell me what it means to be "wise?" (able to make knowledgeable decisions – often based on previous experience)
- Can you tell me what it means to be "foolish?" (unable to make good decisions)

TELL

- This story tells us how wisdom is stronger than the strength of weapons of war.
- We're going to do a demonstration now that shows one way that wisdom can overcome strength.

EXPLAIN

- I need one volunteer. (pick volunteer – the smaller the better!)
- I'm going to put one fist on top of another and what I want you, the volunteer to do, is to try and separate my fists from each other in 30 seconds.
- Before we start, who here thinks s/he can do it?
- Alright...GO!

NOTE: Do not let the volunteer separate your fists from each other.

DO Demonstration

ASK

- How did our volunteer try to separate my fists? (with strength).
- But does that make much sense...I mean, I'm a lot bigger right?
- So here's a different approach for our same volunteer. Instead of trying to separate my fists by moving them up or down, move them sideways.
- Have one of your hands hit my fist going left, and have your other hand hit my other fist going right.
- Any questions?

NOTE: Surprise is needed to make this work the best, but since you just told them about the approach, you can't be surprised yourself. So, to the best of your ability, lock your muscles the same way as you did the first time and don't anticipate the sideways approach. You want the demonstration to work.

DO Demonstration

ASK

- What happened?
- What did our volunteer do differently?
- Do you think one approach was more wise than the other? If so, which one? Why?

TELL

- In the next parable, Jesus tells a story that also talks about wisdom and foolishness.
- So let's listen to that story now:

READ Matthew 7:24-27: 24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!"

ASK

- What did the wise man do? (built his house on rock)
- Why is this wise? (Because when the rains come, the house did not fall)
- What did the foolish man do? (built his house on sand)
- Why is this foolish? (when the rains come down, his house falls down)
- Before Jesus tells the parable of the wise man, *who* does he say will be like a wise man?
- (those who hear the words of Jesus and then acts on them)
- Who does Jesus say will be like the foolish man? (those who hear Jesus' words but do NOT act on them)

TELL

- In the parable, the rock that the wise man builds on is like Jesus' words.
- And the sand that the foolish man builds on is like not paying attention to Jesus words.
- And the thing that we would be building with (or without) Jesus' words, would be our lives.
- And the main thing that Jesus' words mostly show us is how to better receive and then share God's love and gifts of God's Holy Spirit.
- In the first parable we read today, we learn that wisdom is more powerful than military might.
- In the second parable we read today, we learn that wisdom comes from listening to Jesus' words and then acting on them.
- Together these two parables are telling us that wisdom comes to us when we pay attention to God, like Jesus did, and that this wisdom God offers us is a very powerful gift, even more powerful than storms, floods and the armies of a great king.
- So throughout this summer, we'll be talking about some of Jesus' words, which means, by the end of the summer -- because we'll be more familiar with more of Jesus' words -- we'll all be much wiser and more powerful than we were at the beginning of this summer!

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- For the rest of the class, today, we're going to see who can build the tallest and most stable tower built out of toothpicks and mini-marshmallows.
- You'll get 50 marshmallows and 75 toothpicks.
- Whoever builds the tallest building that can also hold up this book (use a small paperback) without falling down or over, gets to take the rest of the marshmallows home.
- Think about your foundation – how stable can you make it?

Note: Depending on how many marshmallows you have and how many kids you have, you might have to have the kids join forces and make teams in order to lessen the demand upon your marshmallow supply.