



Key Bible passage: Luke 18:15-17

Aim: to think about how we behave towards people who think differently from us

1 You could either play the part of this intolerant person yourself, or put the words in the mouth of a puppet.

Pretend to be really grumpy as you stand in front of the children. Keep it all so exaggerated that they will know you are only pretending. Say: 'I'm in a really bad mood today. I'm feeling really **intolerant**. Do you know what that means? It means there are certain sorts of people I really can't stand. Some people I can't stand because of what they choose to wear, or because of what they look like. Some people I can't stand because of what they like. Some people I can't stand because of who they are. So please will you all stand up. And I'm going to say what sort of people I can't tolerate. If I can't tolerate your sort of person, please will you sit down, and I'll be left with the ones I can tolerate. And perhaps then I'll be happy with just the friends who are like me.

I can't tolerate people who have a guinea pig / who are wearing a watch / who like Basil Brush / who have blue eyes / who have long hair / who support a football team / who had toast for breakfast / who are wearing a white shirt '

(Continue until there are only one or two children left standing and then say:) And I can't tolerate CHILDREN!

Look round the hall, and observe that there aren't actually many / any people left. Oh dear, I'm so intolerant that I can't have any friends at all. Do you think that's good for me? Do you think that's good for everyone else? No, nor do I.

(There is a verse version of the story below in [The Gospels Unplugged](#), which is an alternative telling of the story from the child's point of view)

2 You know, Jesus' disciples should have known better. They were used to having to make friends with different sorts of people. Jesus welcomed all sorts of people into his group of friends: people who broke the law, people who nobody else liked, people who were the real scumbags of society. All these people were not just tolerated by Jesus - he didn't just put up with them - he loved them to bits and made them feel really special.

And one day, Jesus' disciples were with him as he told the grownups stories about what God is like. Everyone was listening very quietly and politely as grown ups usually do, when suddenly, a group of toddlers burst through the crowd of grown ups! Their mums shoved them towards Jesus and put babies in his arms and called out, 'Please bless my baby, Jesus!' The disciples were horrified. Here they were, all being good and grownup together and these horrible noisy little children were about to spoil everything. Why should children spoil their grown up time? Children didn't matter at all - they were worth nothing until they grew up and became proper people! And here they were, interrupting Jesus and the important grown ups!



'I can't stand children!' the disciples muttered to each other. They quickly jumped up like bouncers or bodyguards and shooed the children and their mums away. 'Don't bother Jesus!' they hissed. 'Can't you see he's very busy with people who matter? Go away!' But Jesus held up his hand and walked over to the children. He looked quite cross with the disciples. 'Let the children come to me,' he said. 'Don't stop them.'

The disciples looked puzzled. Children? Children didn't count for anything - they wouldn't give Jesus any support or money. They weren't worth bothering with! Children were just a nuisance. But Jesus went on:

'Don't stop them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people who are like these children. Listen up, all you grownups - you need to accept the kingdom of God as if you were a child, or you'll never enter it.'

And Jesus stopped teaching the grownups and blessed all those children who came to him, as if they were the most important people around. As if they were just as important as any of the grownups. And the disciples thought deeply about what Jesus had said.

3 Let's take a moment of quiet now. I'm going to ask four questions that I'd like you to think about silently.

- I wonder how the children felt when the disciples tried to shoo them away?
- I wonder what the disciples did next time a child wanted to come to Jesus?
- I wonder if there are people you can't stand?
- I wonder how Jesus would like you to behave towards them?

4 Say: well, perhaps I need to be a bit more tolerant. Let's see, could you stand up if you ' (work through the list above again) Ah! Now everyone is included! And instead of no friends at all, I've got hundreds - that has to be good news.

5 While we're standing, let's pray.

Lord Jesus, you welcomed all sorts of people to be your friends. You saw what they were like on the inside. Please help us to see other people through your eyes. Amen.