



On your marks

For Christians, following Jesus is sometimes compared to setting out on a journey or embarking on a race through life. It is a journey or race that starts in this life but the finishing line is in heaven. But what is the end of the journey like? The following idea explores the parable of the Great Feast.

Get set

Here's a storytelling way of sharing Jesus' parable of the Great Feast with a large number of children and adults.

Jesus often describes heaven like a great party in his stories. On this occasion, he emphasises that everyone is invited - even those who come last in the world's eyes - whereas those who were invited first missed out! The parable can be found in Luke 14:15 - 24.

Jesus often uses the saying 'the first will be last and the last will be first'. This would be a strange turnabout indeed on the sports field. But the race of faith is different from a race on a running track. In the Christian race, everyone can come first, including those who seem to be at the bottom of life's pile ('the last'). Like in the London Marathon, everyone gets a medal, wherever they come.

Go!

1. When people take part in sport events, they usually have their eyes on the finishing tape or on qualifying for the final. They are competing to win - to get a medal. The race of faith also has a finishing line or final but here there isn't just one winner or only one successful team. Anyone can be a winner. Even the last can come first! Jesus once told a story that shows the last coming first and the first last.
2. Divide your group into four and then get them to sit in four concentric circles - each circle should be more spaced out and bigger than the one before.
3. As you tell the story below, invite each circle to act out the story as you tell it.

Once Jesus told a story to show how much God loves everyone and wants everyone to be winners.

For the inner circle to act out: Once there was a great king who wanted to hold a big party. His servants laid the tables with the finest silver cutlery, the very best dinner plates, the most sparkly glassware and lots of really beautiful decorations. And then they set about cooking the best food ever. *(As they pretend to lay the tables and cook, ask this first group what they think would be the best food to have.)*

For the second and third circles to act out: While the first servants were busy preparing the feast, there were other servants who wrote out the invitations in their very best handwriting. *(As they pretend to write out invitations, ask those in the second circle for suggestions for some grand wording for the invitations.)* They then rolled these up, sealed them as scrolls and delivered them to



the guests. *(The group in the third circle act as the guests. Make sure everyone gets an imaginary invite - perhaps accompanied with a verbal description of the feast to encourage them to come.)*

For the first, second and third circles to act out: The cooking went on, preparations continued (by those in the first circle) and soon everything was ready. The great feast was prepared and it was time to party. The servants (those from the second circle) went back to those who had been invited (those in the third circle) to tell them it was party time... but the guests turned their backs (the whole third circle should do this), making excuses why they couldn't come after all. *(Suggest some modernised versions of the excuses from the parable - for example, 'I have work to do in the office', 'I have family business to attend to', 'I have a new car to try out'. Encourage those in the third circle to make up their own excuses.)*

For the second and fourth (outer) circles to act out: When the great king heard what had happened, he was furious: 'If the ones who I invited first won't come, then I'll invite others... the ones who are last... those on the very edge'. And he sent out his servants to invite the poorest, the last and the least important people. *(Those in the second circle should go to those in the outer circle and invite them to come.)* 'Come to my party', said the king. 'I want my house full. I want everyone to enjoy the feast!' And they came. *(The servants from the second circle should come and sit down in the middle of the first circle, along with those from the outer circle. They should all squash together, enjoying (noisily) the best food ever!)*

Pause and then say:

And this is just like the finishing line... the final scene in heaven... at the end of the journey of faith. It is like a great party! A party where the last (point out those in the fourth circle) end up coming first and... (point sadly to those in the third circle still sitting with their backs to the party) the first come last! I wonder if they regret turning down the invitation now?

God, the great king, wants everyone to come... and to win.

If young children are involved, it might be a good idea to then invite 'the new last' of the third circle to come in and enjoy the party too!

4. Talk about this parable together.
 - Which parts did they like?
 - Which parts surprised them?
 - How did each group (and the king) feel as they acted out the story?
 - What do they think Jesus was trying to tell us through this story?

Try acting the story out again, now that everyone knows what happens and invite them to add more of their own ideas to what is said and done.

5. Finally, you could illustrate Jesus' saying - 'the first shall be last and the last first' - by means of a rope. Get one person to stand at either end of the rope. When the two people are both



facing the same direction, one is definitely first and one is last. But God can turn our ideas upside down when we turn to him. If the two people with the rope change direction, now the last becomes first and the first becomes last. But even that isn't quite how God has it. Add in some more people and then link up the first and the last to make a circle. Now each person could be first or last. In fact, because the beginning might be anywhere (if you tie the ends of the rope together), everybody is first and must also be last!

Jesus said: *If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all* (Mark 9:35, RSV).

God does not work in straight lines but uses his circle of love to change everything.

Ask the group what they think that this might mean for all sorts of situations in their lives and in the life of the world (rich and poor; weak and strong; hungry and full; and so on).