



On your marks

Here is a simple idea for sharing something of the heart of the Christian gospel using everyday objects and imagery familiar to children. This could be used as the basis for a children's talk in church, a short presentation during a mid-week club or as a part of an assembly in a school.

Get set

You will need a selection of different length rulers; a copy of the Guinness Book of Records (or the like); some willing volunteers; a stepladder and a brief case

Go!

1

Begin with a riddle:

*I say, I say, I say
When is King, not a King?*

When he is a ruler

2

(Produce various rulers.)

A 15cm ruler, a 30cm Ruler or a ruler a metre long...or rather a **metre rule**, as it should be called, which give us another meaning to our word. Not just a King, not just a measurer but an instruction to obey a **rule, short rules**, like the short rules that you have on the walls of a classroom or a club, about how we should behave to each other; or **longer rules** like those laid down by the local authority, about for example how we should behave in the local park or on the streets; to **really lengthy rules** like those set out in the laws of the country, which have been passed by the government.

And this link between measurements and rules is carried on in other ways too. We say, for example, that if you break the rules, **measures** will be taken, even severe measures!

3

(Now use the ruler to take some measurements of various items around the room and then of the children themselves. Make it funny!)

The whole idea of measuring things is vital to lots of aspects of our life. For example it is at the heart of what you do in a lot of lessons at school, particularly science and numeracy lessons, where you are encouraged to observe, draw conclusions and make measurements.



4

In fact you might say human beings can become obsessed with the idea of measuring things. Many of you I expect either own or have seen a copy of the Guinness Book of Records – full of endless measurements.

Show a copy and then pick out some interesting and some crazy examples of: *the greatest, the newest, the smallest, the busiest, the heaviest, the oldest, the smelliest, the highest, the strongest, the largest, the rarest, the tallest, the deepest, the lightest, the richest, the weakest, the longest, the widest, the farthest, the loudest, the shortest, the youngest, the lowest, the slowest* and so on.

Perhaps you could ask different children to read out these examples, showing pictures or some other appropriate visual aid, if possible.

5

But, beware! The great danger is that all this measuring tricks us into thinking that all of life can be measured and calculated. You can't reduce everything to statistics, dimension, measurements and figures.

The truth is that there are many things in life that can't be measured, or are much harder to measure. For example:

How do you measure how much someone cares for you?

(in cubic centimetres or kilograms?)

How do you measure how loyal your friend is?

(in litres or kilometres?)

How do you measure how happy you are?

(in inches or litres?)

How do you measure how lonely you feel?

(in pounds or pence?)

How do you measure if he or she **really** loves you?

6

There are many things that defy measurement. We may live in a scientific age, but we mustn't be fooled that we have all the answers because we can make all sorts of clever measurements.

We are all of us much more than we can measure.

(*ask someone to come and stand next to an upright metre rule*)

You can measure this person in lots of ways – height, weight, shoe size etc., but you can't measure his hopes, his feelings, his ambitions, his personality, his fears, his worries, his secrets – all the things that really make him him, her her, and you you!

We can't measure these things because **we can't see them** but that doesn't mean they are not real. Just because something can't be seen or measured doesn't mean it's not there.



7

If we started thinking like that then there are lots of things we wouldn't believe in. Take air for instance. It would be crazy not to believe in air just because we can't see it. And maybe it is just as crazy to say we don't believe in God just because we can't see him or measure him. As we have shown, some of the most important things in life are invisible and immeasurable.

8

Listen to a version of a story from the Bible, the story of a **ruler**, a **rich young ruler**, that's what the Bible calls him. *Mark 10 : 17-22*

As a visual to help you tell this story, use a stepladder to represent the different steps 'up' to heaven that the young ruler might take. Also have a brief case, which the ruler clutches on to and which represents his riches, which Jesus asks him to let go of before he can be sure of heaven. You might dress up a child to be the rich young ruler - as a wealthy businessman for example or in some fine clothing. Take care of course when he or she climbs up some of the steps in response to Jesus talking about the commandments.

A rich young ruler had everything in life. He was well off and in a good position socially. Nevertheless he felt he was missing out on something - like many people feel. So he decided to find out what the carpenter preacher from Nazareth would say. He had a reputation for wisdom and miracles.

When he found him, he said to him 'Good master, how can I get a piece of heaven. I want to be sure of heaven - what must I do?'

Jesus' answer seemed simple, at first. 'You know the Ten Commandments - no idols, no stealing, honour Mum and Dad, and keep the Sabbath etc'

'Yes, yes' said the Young Ruler, 'I know all that. I've kept the rules since I was a child. So is that it then? Do I measure up for heaven?'

There was silence for a while. Then Jesus just looked at the young man - or rather into the young man. He really cared about him. When he spoke, he said:

'You've missed out on something; something you can't so easily measure ... what about your heart? What is more important to you deep down ... heaven or your wealth?'

He paused and then Jesus said, 'The real test of that is this. Go and sell what you have and give it to those in need and then you will have the real wealth of heaven.'

The rich young ruler was left speechless. Anything but that. He'd rather get to heaven keeping the rules, 1,2,3,4,5 ... 10... all neat and measurable - but not this way - not the way of sorting himself out on the inside; that was much more difficult to measure.

The Bible records that his face fell and he walked away very sad.



- *I wonder what he did next?*
- *I wonder if he did do what Jesus suggested?*
- *I wonder what we would have said and done, if this had been you or me?*
- *I wonder how Jesus felt when the young man walked away?*

9

So a ruler - something we all come across every day at school or at home - reminds me of the fact that not everything in life can be measured. In fact the most important things in life are invisible and immeasurable but are nevertheless **real**...like God and His love for us

10

Here is a prayer you could use, if appropriate:

Heavenly Father, thank you that the most important things are beyond measurement - like your love and the fact that you are with us every day. Help us to use this day wisely, so that it isn't just hours and minutes but a day of doing what will really matter and be important. We commit the day to you. Amen