

Children and the Kingdom of God: A Listening Exercise

Facilitator Guide



A collaboration between
World Vision International and Viva Network 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Project

World Vision International and Viva Network view children as active agents of change in their communities. They affirm “the children’s right to decide on matters that affect their lives, which include faith beliefs and values” (Ibid., 7). The organizations advocate for children to have a role in the Kingdom of God based on Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 18:1-6, 19:13-15, and Luke 18:15-17. Ministers and caregivers who desire to serve children effectively must be aware of the children’s views of the Christian God and His Kingdom, life in the faith community, and the roles children can take on as active participants. Therefore, both organizations collaborate on a listening exercise with children to glean an understanding and include and support them in God’s mission. The outcomes of this research will lead up to, during, and after the 2024 Lausanne Congress in Seoul, South Korea.¹

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The listening exercise aims to “bring the much-needed voices of children into the Lausanne 4 space and open up more discussion around actively involving children in faith spaces or communities around the world” (Ibid.).

The objectives (Ibid.) are:

- 1) Position children as active agents in the Kingdom of God, capable of supporting and leading action in faith spaces.
- 2) Understand how children view their role in the Kingdom of God and how they can contribute to integral mission efforts in their communities.

¹ Abstract from World Vision International and Viva Network document, 2024.

1.3 Timeline

A tentative timeline is as follows:

Date	Task
March, Week 2	The consultant meets with the regional representative.
March, Week 3-4	The regional representatives select facilitators.
April, Week 1	Online training of facilitators.
April, Week 2 - 3	The facilitators act on the preliminary, prepare the materials, conduct the Listening Exercise, and collect the data.
April, Week 4	Facilitators submit their data to the consultant.
May - June	The consultant analyses the data and writes the report.
June, Week 3	The consultant submits the deliverables.
June, Week 4	Upon approval, the consultant summarizes the Listening Exercise and reports the findings to the facilitators.

1.4 Methodology

The facilitators will conduct three activities and complete the questionnaires to gather data on the children's understanding, feelings, and behavioural responses related to God and his leadership among the people (Kingdom of God). The three activities are:

- Activity 1: Art-based research
- Activity 2: Storytelling and discussion
- Activity 3: Photovoice

1.5 Facilitator's Role

In this exercise, a facilitator has a unique role to lead and empower the selected participants to discover and express their understanding of the "Kingdom of God". The Listening Exercise posits that children can engage in higher thinking when given ample space for reflection, supported by a more competent peer, and engaged in dialogue. Hence, the facilitator is:

1) A MORE COMPETENT PEER

- The facilitator organizes a child-friendly physical and educational space for the Listening Exercise.
- The facilitator encourages the participants to express their understanding of the topic through art, photography, and discussion.

2) AN ENABLER

- The facilitator probes the participants to think deeply about the topic.
- The facilitator guides the participants to use the correct words to identify and express their lived experiences.

3) A LISTENER

- The facilitator patiently listens to the participants "talk out" their ideas.
- The facilitator (with help from the assistants) documents the participants' responses.



2. PRELIMINARY

2.1 Selection and Training of Facilitators

- Each participating centre will nominate a facilitator and two assistants (facilitating team) for the Listening Exercise.
- The team will receive a Facilitator Guide.
- The consultant will orientate the team online.

2.2 Guidelines for Parents of Participants

- The facilitating team will select the participants for the Listening Exercise.
- The facilitating team will meet the participants and their parents to explain the aim and objectives of the Listening Exercise.
- The facilitating team will set the meeting date, time, and place.
- The facilitating team will prepare the art resources.

2.3 Participants' Profile

The participants comprise at least 150 boys and girls globally and will be chosen by selective sampling with the following criteria:

- Between the ages of 8-18
- Self-identify as a Christian
- They or their family attend or are involved in a faith community (church/home church, religious club, or small group)
- They are in an active relationship with the organisation hosting the discussion through a programme, project, etc.

Description of the Participants

(In the data analysis, the participants' identity code will include the initial letter of the country.

E.g., M101 – Mongolia Participant #1)

Identity Code	Nationality	Gender Male (M) Female (F)	Age	Consent Form Yes /No	Preferred Expression ABR (A), Photovoice (P), others (O)
101					
102					
103					
104					
105					
106					
107					
108					
109					
110					
Name of field Project:					
Name/s of Facilitators:					
Date of Listening Exercise:					

2.4 Participation Consent Form

(For children 18 years and below)

To Whom It May Concern,

You are invited to participate in a listening exercise on how children think, feel, and respond to the “Kingdom of God” topic. The meeting will be held at a child development centre at your location. You will be assigned an art-based activity such as painting, drawing, collage, or photography. There will also be a storytelling and discussion session. Your views are important, and your identity will be kept confidential. The organizers will supply all the art materials. Your participation is voluntary, and there is no payment for involvement.

Thank you,

The Steering Committee
World Vision International and Viva Network

Participant Signature

I understand the procedures of this listening exercise and volunteered to participate.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Date

Parent/Caregiver Signature

I understand the procedures of this listening exercise and allow my child to participate.

Parent/Caregiver Name

Parent/Caregiver Signature

Date

Witness

Date



3. DATA COLLECTION

3.1 Concept of “Kingdom”

(Before beginning the art-based activities, the facilitator will explain the term “Kingdom of God.”)

Facilitator: Have you heard of the word “kingdom”? What does it mean?

(Give the participants time to respond.)

A kingdom is a country led by a king (a man) or a queen (a lady). This king or queen is the leader and, together with a group of special helpers, builds the country to be a good place for their people to live.

Facilitator: Can you think of a country with a king or queen?

(Give the participants time to ponder.)

Examples of kingdoms are Great Britain, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Japan, Bhutan, Sweden, and Spain.

(The facilitator can show a world map, point to the place, show country flags, pictures of the respective king and queen, or multiple.)

Facilitator: What would you want your king or queen to do if you lived in a kingdom

(Participants give their answers, and the facilitator writes them on a board /flip chart. Summarize the answers.)

Thank you for the answers. Good kings or queens are wise. They love their people and work very hard for them to live well. (Read some of the answers given.) Good kings or queens know their people’s needs, take time to listen, and keep them safe from danger. In olden times, kings and queens would go to war and fight against enemies to protect their country. The kings and queens also celebrate with the people on festivals and special occasions.

(Linking to the aim of the project...)

The Bible tells us that Christians also have a kingdom. It is called the “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of Heaven.” This kingdom is not a country on the map. The kingdom of God is anywhere God is welcomed as the king or leader. It could be in the home, school, or community. The kingdom of God can be in you and me if we let God be our king or leader. What would our homes, schools, villages, towns, or neighbours look like when God is welcomed as king and leader? You can draw, paint, or make a collage to show your answer. You can work alone or in pairs.

3.2 Art-based Activity and Questionnaire

Art-based research (ABR) comprises drawing, painting, collage, or any art form that generates data to analyse and interpret the participants’ views of a topic. In this listening exercise, the participants can choose one of the activities in which they can express themselves.

- Drawing and Painting

This tool is also known as “picturing research.” Since the Kingdom of God is abstract, drawing and painting allow the participants to express their feelings, sometimes limited by verbal language.

- Collage

A collage is an ensemble of materials (e.g., textured paper, cloth, plastic, and objects) glued together as art. The collage design narrates the participants’ views and experiences of the topic. Every picture tells a story. Younger participants can work in pairs.

Considerations:

- Allow 40 -60 minutes for drawing, painting, and collage.
- Encourage the participants to write their narratives.
- Those who cannot yet write can tell their stories to the facilitator.
- Inform the participants that the notes will be sent to someone to develop a PowerPoint presentation.

Possible resources:

Painting	Drawing	Collage and Mix Media
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paint brushes• Drawing Paper• Paint palettes• Water containers• Watercolours• Old newspapers to line the tables. Paper for writing narratives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drawing paper• Permanent markers Erasers• Rulers• Colour markers• Crayons• Chalk• Charcoal• Pencils• Colour pencils• Pens	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paper puncher• Buttons• Colour paper• Cotton wool, yarn• Construction paper• Old newspaper• Recycled materials• Cardboard• Glue• Scissors• Old Magazines• Pieces of cloth

Art-based Questionnaire

Identity Code:

Location:

**Complete one questionnaire for each participant.
Ask the questions to the participants. If it is not relevant, skip it.**

1) Tell me more about your picture.

2) Who are the people in this picture?

3) What are the people doing in this picture?

4) What is God doing in this picture?

5) What do you like about this picture?

6) What else can you add to this picture that shows God is king?

7) What is the happiest moment in this picture?

8) why are people in this picture making God their king?

9) Where are you in this picture?

10) If this picture can talk, what will it tell us about God and his kingdom?

3.3 Parables of the Kingdom and Questionnaire

This second exercise focuses on children’s biblical hermeneutics on the Kingdom of God. Hermeneutics is the process of interpreting the Scriptures. The assumption is that children, as active agents and models of faith, can provide a perspective to the Bible. We will use three parables for this exercise. A parable is a story in everyday life with which the hearers are familiar.

#	Parable	Verses	Aim
a.	The Mustard Seed	Matt 13:31-32	To capture the children’s imagination of what it takes for God’s presence and leadership to grow in a community.
b.	The Pearl of Great Price	Matt 13:45-46	To understand the children’s level of value and commitment to God.
c.	The Net Full of Fish	Matt 13:47-49	To measure the children’s perception of God’s grace to people.

Facilitation: 40 minutes

- 1) The facilitator and participants will sit in a circle so they can see each other. Two assistants will listen and record the responses.
- 2) The group listening process has three ground rules:
 - a) Participants will take turns to speak.
 - b) Participants will patiently listen to the speaker.
 - c) Participants will respect each other’s opinions.
- 3) The facilitator restates the definition of the “kingdom of God” – “The kingdom of God is any place where God is the leader or king. It can be in the home, school, or village. The kingdom of God can also be in you and me if we allow God to be our leader and king.”
- 4) The facilitator tells a parable, prompts thinking, and receives participant feedback.
- 5) In conclusion, the facilitator places all three objects in the middle of the circle and asks whether the participants have more thoughts to share. After that, the session concludes with prayer.



a) The Mustard Seed

Introduction

Mustard seeds are tiny round seeds from a mustard plant. They are the size of a dot. Mustard seeds are used in cooking, making salads, medicine, and oil.



In the Gospel of Matthew 13: 31-32, Jesus told a parable about the mustard seed.

He says, “The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.” (RSV)

Let us consider what this parable teaches about the Kingdom of God.

(Put a mustard seed on each participant’s palm. Encourage them to feel how tiny the seed is.



The Mustard Seed Questionnaire

Leading the participants in reflection Group
Listening: One Questionnaire per parable

1) What did the man do to the mustard seed?

2) How did the tiny mustard seed grow into a big tree?

3) How do you think the mustard seed feels when it is so tiny?

4) Why did Jesus say the Kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed?

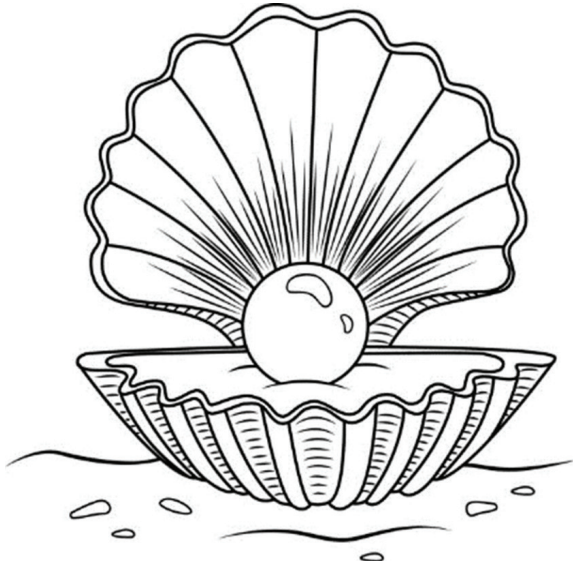
5) If you were the mustard seed, how can the adults help you grow into a big tree?

6) If the mustard seed could talk, what would it tell you about the kingdom of God?

b) The Pearl of Great Price

Introduction

A pearl is a round, shiny object inside a clam or oyster. Pearls are usually made into jewellery, and good pearls are very expensive.



In the Gospel of Matthew 13: 45-46, Jesus told a parable about a Pearl of Great Price. He says that “the kingdom of God is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” (RSV)

Let us consider what this story teaches about the Kingdom of God.

(Give each participant a plastic pearl, which you can buy cheaply from an accessory shop. Alternatively, you can use a table tennis ball as a visual aid to symbolize the pearl of great price.)



The Pearl of Great Price Questionnaire

Leading the participants in reflection Group
Listening: One Questionnaire per parable

1) What is the merchant doing in the parable?

2) Why was he willing to sell everything he had to buy this pearl?

3) Why do you think this pearl is so valuable?

4) How will the merchant benefit from the pearl?

5) If you were in this story, would you like to be the merchant or the pearl? Why?

6) How is the Kingdom of God like a pearl of great price?

c) The Net Full of Fish

Introduction

Fishing nets are often made by tying ropes or materials to form a woven cage. Fishermen use these nets from their boats to catch fish in the lake or sea.



In the Gospel of Matthew 13: 47 -49, Jesus told a parable about the net full of fish. He says, "The kingdom of God is like a net that was let into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then, they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets but threw the bad away. (RSV)

Let us consider what this parable teaches about the Kingdom of God.

(As a visual, put some plastic toy fish in a fruit net. Hold it for the participants to see when reflecting on the questions.)



The Net Full of Fish Questionnaire

Leading the participants in reflection Group
Listening: One Questionnaire per parable

1) What did the fishermen do when they went out in their boats?

2) What was the result of their fishing trip?

3) Why did the fishermen separate the good and the bad fish?

4) Why is the Kingdom of God like a net?'

5) If people are like the fish in the net, how do we know who are the good and the bad?

6) The fishermen threw the bad fish away. What do you think God will do with bad people?

3.4 Photovoice and Questionnaire

(This optional activity is suited for youth aged 16-18.)

Material: Camera, Handphone with camera

Photovoice (Wang and Burris, 1997) is a qualitative research method to understand the lived experiences of marginalized people. Using photovoice, the participants decide on the image to capture with their handphones or cameras. However, they can submit only one photo each and write a narrative to explain how the image speaks of God's leadership/kingship (Kingdom of God).

This option is suitable for older participants who can work independently. The task can be carried out individually at the participants' own time. Noting that they may not have a smartphone or camera, there are several ways to navigate this matter:

- a) Limit the option to participants who may have access to a smartphone.
- b) Provide the participants with disposable cameras (sharing basis).
- c) Provide the participants with old handphones on a sharing basis.

Process:

- 1) Explain the concept of a kingdom (see 3.1 page 8)
- 2) Instruct the participants to take a photo of any object, scenario, or structure symbolical of the reign of God (kingship, leadership).
- 3) Write an explanation and submit it to the facilitator.
- 4) The facilitator will meet the participants to complete the questionnaire.

Photovoice Questionnaire

Participant's Code:

Location:

Focus Group Discussion Complete one questionnaire for each participant	
1) What is the title of your photo?	
2) What does this picture tell us about the Kingdom of God?	
3) Tell us more about the picture.	



4. SUMMARY

4.1 Facilitator's Comments

Administrative Details

1.	Affiliated organization:
2.	Country/ State:
3.	Name of field project:
4.	Location code:
5.	Name/s of facilitators:

Administrative Details

Items	Y	N	NA
1) The participants understood the purpose of the meeting.			
2) The questionnaires were clear enough to follow.			
3) The participants were cooperative in the listening sessions.			
4) The activities were age-appropriate.			
5) There was ample time for reflection and answers.			
6) The "Kingdom of God" concept was difficult for the participants to understand.			
7) The Facilitator Guide was easy to translate.			
8) The facilitators could easily follow the instructions in the Facilitator Guide.			

Please complete the sentences.

1) The most enjoyable part of the listening exercise was

2) The most challenging part of the listening exercise was

3) A suggestion I would like to make is

4) What other theme/s would be of interest to help the faith communities better understand the children and faith development?

5) Other comments:

4.2 Submission of Documents

Facilitators should submit the following information to the Consultant by **15 May 2024**.

- a) Participants' Profile
- b) Participation Consent Forms
- c) Photograph of artwork (one item per participant/pair)
- d) Art-based research questionnaire (one copy per participant)
- e) Parables of the Kingdom Questionnaire (3 copies per centre)
- f) Photovoice Questionnaire (one copy per participant)
- g) Facilitator's comments (one copy per centre)

(Please submit photo/s of the participants working on their art or listening to the parables. These photos will be forwarded to World Vision and Viva for documentation only and not for public viewing.)

4.3 Report of Findings

Facilitators should submit the following information to the Consultant by **15 May 2024**.

- a) The project consultant will analyse the data from the Listening Exercise.
- b) The report will be sent to the World Vision and Viva team by June 2024.
- c) Upon approval, the facilitators will receive a copy of the report.
- d) The facilitator can hold an appreciation tea party and share the report with the participants. This is optional.





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O'Malley, L. J., and S.E Munsell. 2020. "PhotoVoice: An innovative qualitative method in research and classroom teaching." In *Educational Research: Theory and Practice*, 31(1),26-32. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lori J. O'Malley, E-mail: lomalley@rsu.edu.

