The Mustard Seed

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: God's kingdom starts small and grows great. Faith as a grain of mustard seed, real trust in a great God, matters more than how big we are.
Bible passage: Matthew 13:31–32 and Matthew 17:14–21. Students read them out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." *Matthew 17:20 (KJV)* and "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." *Hebrews 11:6 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, a few real mustard seeds taped to an index card, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Matthew 13:31–35, Matthew 17:14–21 and Acts 2:41–47. Write both memory verses on the board.

1. Opening game: Small Start, Big Finish (5–10 minutes)

Split into two teams. Read a small beginning; the first team to name what it becomes wins a point: one snowflake after another *(a snowman)*, one brick *(a wall)*, one acorn *(an oak)*, one step *(a long walk)*, one letter *(a book)*, one spark *(a fire)*. Then pass the mustard seed card. Ask: *What do you think one mustard seed becomes?* Say: "Jesus used this seed twice: once for God's kingdom, and once for faith."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: Matthew 13:31–32. Old words in this passage:

- **put he forth** (13:31): He told; **the kingdom of heaven**: God's kingdom, God ruling as King among His people
- **a grain of mustard seed** (13:31): one mustard seed; **sowed**: planted
- **the least of all seeds** (13:32): the smallest of the seeds
- **the greatest among herbs** (13:32): bigger than all the garden plants
- **becometh** (13:32): becomes; **lodge in the branches thereof**: come and stay in its branches

Ask: *Who was Jesus telling this to?* (The multitude, the great crowd by the sea, 13:2. "Without a parable spake he not unto them," 13:34.) Mark 4:30–32 tells the same parable: the plant "shooteth out great branches," and the birds "lodge under the shadow of it."

Talk it through: Jesus did not explain this parable in the Bible, so we don't add to it. But we can see the kingdom grow in Acts: about 120 believers (Acts 1:15), then "about three thousand souls" (2:41), then about five thousand men (4:4), and "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (2:47). It started with Jesus and a small group of disciples, and today it reaches the whole world.

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Read out loud: Matthew 17:14–21. Old words in this passage:

- **lunatick, and sore vexed** (17:15): very sick and badly troubled; **ofttimes**: often
- **cure** (17:16): heal; **faithless and perverse generation** (17:17): people who don't trust God and have turned the wrong way
- **suffer you** (17:17): put up with you; **hither**: here
- **rebuked** (17:18): sharply commanded; **apart** (17:19): by themselves
- **unbelief** (17:20): not trusting God; **verily**: truly; **remove hence to yonder place**: move from here to over there
- **howbeit** (17:21): but; **goeth not out but by prayer and fasting**: only goes out through prayer and fasting

Talk it through: the disciples had been sent before to heal the sick and cast out devils (Matthew 10:1, 10:8), but this time they could not. Jesus gave the reason plainly: "Because of your unbelief" (17:20). He did not say they needed a huge faith. He said faith "as a grain of mustard seed": small, but real, and in the right Person. Luke tells of a time the apostles said, "Increase our faith," and Jesus answered with the mustard seed again (Luke 17:5–6).

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Why do you think Jesus chose the least of all seeds to picture the kingdom of heaven (13:31–32)?
2. The church grew from about 120 believers, and about three thousand souls were added on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15; 2:41). What does that tell you about what God can do with a small start?
3. The birds come and lodge in the branches (13:32). Who finds rest and help in God's church today?
4. Jesus had given the disciples power to cast out devils (Matthew 10:1). Why do you think they could not this time (17:20–21)?
5. "Nothing shall be impossible unto you" (17:20). Read 1 John 5:14. How do these two verses fit together? Is faith a way to get what we want, or trust in what God wants?
6. Hebrews 11:6 says "without faith it is impossible to please him." What is one area of your life where you need to trust God more?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: **unbelief** means not trusting God; **verily** means truly; **remove hence to yonder place** means move from here to over there. In Hebrews 11:6, **cometh** means comes, **a rewarder** is one who rewards, and **diligently** means with all your heart and effort.
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Matthew 17:20 this week; keep working on Hebrews 11:6 next week too.

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5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "Hebrews 11:6 says 'he that cometh to God must believe that he is.' So how do we come to God? God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). That is how the church grew in Acts 2:41: 'they that gladly received his word were baptized.'"
Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. What is one "mountain" in my life right now, something that feels too big for me?
2. What would it look like to trust God with it this week, even with a small faith? (Remember 1 John 5:14.)
3. Write a short prayer asking God to help you trust Him, and to use you to help His kingdom grow.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: pray every day about the "mountain" you wrote down, and invite one friend to church or youth group.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that Your kingdom grows from small beginnings, and that nothing is impossible with You. Forgive our unbelief, and help us trust You with real faith, even when it feels small. Use us to help Your kingdom grow. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student asks, "Why didn't God answer my prayer when I had faith?": answer gently and honestly. Faith is trusting God, not controlling Him: "if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John 5:14). God always hears, and He answers in His way and His time. Encourage them to keep praying and to talk with their parents and pastor.

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