GRACE

Program Target: To help youth realize that Jesus' offer of eternal life is a completely free gift that no-one can earn.

What to do: Plan a treasure hunt ahead of time. If possible, meet in a large outdoor area, or else in an indoor space with lots of room and many good hiding places. Plant clues to help teams find their way to the "treasure." Make the clues challenging enough that the treasure hunt will take up about 45 minutes. (One good way to do this is to use Bible verses as the clues, and allow the youth to work out what the clue refers to. For example, the Bible verse Judges 4:3 refers to "nine hundred iron chariots": the next clue could be hidden near a car in your church parking lot. Treasure hunters would first have to figure out that the "iron chariots" referred to cars, and secondly figure out which car the clue was hidden near.)

At the beginning of your meeting, divide your group into two teams and tell them they are going on a treasure hunt. Let them know what the prize will be, and make it something appealing–if you have a youth activities budget, you might use it to purchase gift certificates, or passes to an activity everyone will enjoy, or some popular food items.

When the winning group has found their "treasure," bring everyone back together and give the losers the exact same prize. Debrief the group on how everyone feels about the losers getting the same prize as the winners. Read the Bible passage together and discuss the ideas of fairness, unfairness, and grace, as presented in this parable and in the activity you've just completed. Allow 15-30 minutes for debriefing, reading and discussion.

Preparation Time: Planning and setting up the treasure hunt will take a couple of hours of planning time. It's up to you how elaborate to make it, but the more challenging it is, the more competitive the groups will become, and the greater will be impact when the losers receive the same prize as the winners.

Bible Text:
Read together the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16.

Song Service:
"Amazing Grace"

Vesper or Closing Thought: Our society is very much based on the ideas that "You get what you pay for" and "There's no free ride." God's values are different. He is willing to give the same gift of eternal life to "losers" as to "winners." Sometimes that seems unfair to us. We expect to be able to earn our way into heaven by doing good. But when we've fallen and made mistakes, how comforting it is to know that there are no losers in God's kingdom. Everyone who's willing to accept Jesus' love is a winner eternally.