



The Worst Pet!

By Deborah Wassenberg

Introduction:

This is a pet-shop-themed lesson on bitterness. Children learn what bitterness is and why they should not choose it, pick it up, cuddle it, or feed it so it grows!

Theme Setting: The Pet Shop

- Stuffed animals and birds, plastic lizards, fish, etc.
- Dog and cat dishes
- Dog and cat toys
- Cages/plastic fish tanks
- Signage: 'Pick-a-Pet Palace'

Welcome: Animal and Bird Hand Puppets

This is the perfect moment to bring out the hand puppets. Ask your volunteers to greet each child warmly and encourage the children to gently pat, cuddle, or “say hello” to their puppet pets. Let the volunteers bring the puppets to life—nodding, waving, or leaning in for a little pat—so the children feel instantly welcome and drawn into the theme.

Story Set Up:

- Table covered with a tablecloth (to hide the puppeteer underneath)
- Large black box that holds the worst pet. (Make a way for your puppeteer to shake it)
- Sign: **DO NOT FEED!** (in front of the box)
- Soft toys all around the room or teaching area (the pets to be purchased)

Characters:

- Mr Barkley, owner of the Pick-a-Pet Palace (wearing an apron and a name tag)
- Customer (casual clothes)

Puppeteer

- Hides under the table
- Makes grunting sounds

- Moves the box to make it seem as though a wild animal is inside

Script:

Mr Barkley is straightening the pet shop when the customer enters. Every time the puppeteer grunts and shakes the box, Mr Barkley does his best to ignore it and to distract the customer from looking at the box any closer.

Mr Barkley: Hello there!
Welcome to the 'Pick-a-Pet Palace'
I'm the owner, Mr Barkley.

Customer: Hello.

Mr Barkley: How can I help you today?

Customer: I'm looking for a pet.

Puppeteer: Grunts and shakes the box

Mr Barkley: You've come to the right place.
I've got many wonderful pets to choose from.

Mr Barkley introduces the Customer to the wide range of pets that are for sale (adlibbing). Now and then, the puppeteer grunts and causes the large black box to shake. The children will notice and call Mr Barkley's attention to it. Mr Barkley pretends it's nothing and always draws everyone's attention away from the box.

Customer: These pets are nice enough in their way.
But I'm looking for something exotic.
Something a bit wild...

The customer approaches the big black box on the table.

Customer: What kind of pet is in there?

Puppeteer: Grunts and shakes the box

Mr Barkley follows the customer to the table. He stands between the customer and the box.

Mr Barkley: Oh, you don't want to take that home.

The customer tries to get closer.

Customer: How do you know?
It might be just what I'm looking for.

Mr Barkley: Can't you see the sign?

Customer: *(reads aloud)*
DO NOT FEED

Puppeteer: Grunts and shakes the box

Mr Barkley: Why, it's not even safe to feed it!

Customer: Why is it in the shop if it's not for sale?

Mr Barkley: The owner surrendered it.
She realised she couldn't keep it any longer.
It had got too big.
It wasn't safe.
It's being sent back to the dark place it came from.

Customer: Oh.
Does it have a name?

Mr Barkley: Bitterness.

Puppeteer: Grunts and shakes the box

Customer: Bitterness?

Mr Barkley: Bitterness.
It's the worst pet you could ever choose.
Do not pick it up.
Do not cuddle it.
Do not feed it.
Do not keep it.
Oh, it starts small, but it grows and grows, and it will take over your whole life!

Puppeteer: Loud grunts and a lot of shaking!

Customer: (Scared, grabs a cute pet quickly)
I think I'll go with this one...

Mr Barkley: Wise choice.

Bible Lesson: Esau and Jacob
Bible Reference: Genesis 27-33

Visuals You Will Need:

1. Child with a bitter expression
2. Jacob and Esau
3. Jacob, Esau and stew
4. Jacob receives the blessing

5. Esau angry
6. Jacob and Uncle Laban
7. Jacob and his family on the road home
8. Esau and 400 men
9. Child praying

Words:

1. Bitterness is a sharp, unpleasant taste like orange peel.
But bitterness is also an emotion you can feel.
Bitterness happens when someone holds onto hurt feelings instead of letting them go.
And the longer a person holds onto bitterness, the bigger and nastier it grows.
2. A long time ago, there were twin brothers named Esau and Jacob.
Even though they were twins, they were very different.
Esau was born first.
He grew up to be big, strong, and hairy.
He loved the outdoors.
He was the kind of boy who could hunt and come home with a fresh meal for the family.
Jacob was quieter.
He liked staying near the tents, helping with the cooking, learning and looking after the animals.
Their dad, Isaac, loved Esau's tasty cooking.
Their mum, Rebekah, was especially close to Jacob.
3. One day, Esau came home from hunting, and he was starving.
Jacob was cooking a delicious red stew.
Esau said, "Quick, give me some of that stew!"
Jacob replied, "I will... if you sell me your birthright."
A birthright was a special honour given to the oldest son — extra blessings, extra responsibility, and extra inheritance.
Esau didn't think about the future.
He only thought about how hungry he was.
"Fine! You can have it," he said.
So Esau traded something very important for a bowl of stew.
4. Later, when Isaac was old and couldn't see well, he wanted to give Esau a special blessing — a prayer asking God to give him good things in the future.
Rebekah overheard this and wanted Jacob to receive the blessing instead.
She helped Jacob dress in Esau's clothes and put goat skins on his arms so he would feel hairy like Esau.
Jacob brought Isaac a meal and pretended to be Esau.
Isaac was confused — the voice sounded like Jacob, but the clothes and arms felt like Esau.
In the end, Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob.

5. When Esau came in later with his meal, he discovered what had happened.
He was furious.
He felt tricked, hurt, and angry.
Esau vowed to himself that once their father had passed away, he would kill Jacob.
When Rebekah heard his threat, she quickly sent Jacob away to keep him safe.
She sent him to stay with her family.
6. Jacob lived with his Uncle Laban for many years.
Uncle Laban tricked Jacob, just like Jacob had once tricked Esau.
Jacob learned what it felt like to be treated unfairly, and God used those years to shape Jacob's heart.
7. Eventually, God told Jacob to go back to his homeland.
Jacob was afraid.
He remembered how angry Esau had been.
What if Esau still wanted to hurt him?
Jacob prayed and asked God to protect him.
He sent gifts ahead – herds of animals – hoping to show Esau that he wanted peace.
8. When Jacob finally saw Esau coming with 400 men, he was terrified.
But something surprising happened.
Esau ran to Jacob, hugged him, and forgave him.
There were no angry words, no fighting, and no revenge.
Just two brothers crying and holding each other after many years apart.
God had softened Esau's heart, and Jacob was amazed at the kindness and the forgiveness he received.
9. When someone hurts you, don't cuddle bitterness like a pet.
Don't feed it.
Feeding bitterness looks like:
- replaying the hurt
 - talking about it again and again
 - refusing to forgive
 - imagining revenge
- Don't keep it.**
Let it go by:
- talking to God
 - forgiving
 - talking to a trusted adult
 - choosing peace
- Let God heal your heart.**
- God heals bitterness by taking away the hurt, forgiving the sin, softening your heart, and helping you forgive.

Ministry to the Children:

If you feel bitterness, hurt, or anger inside... If you want Jesus to make your heart clean... If you want His love to fill you instead of bitterness... You can ask Him right now.

Prayer (repeat after me)

“Jesus, I need You. Sometimes my heart feels hurt or angry. Please take away all bitterness. Forgive my sin and make my heart clean. I turn away from my sin. Come into my life and be my Saviour. Fill me with Your love and peace. Help me forgive as You do. Thank You, Jesus. Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer today, Jesus has forgiven you. He has taken bitterness out of your heart. His Spirit (the Holy Spirit) now lives in you, and He will help you grow sweet, kind, and forgiving with your words and actions.

Memory Verse: Ephesians 4:31-32

‘Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger...Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.’

Fetch the Frisbee!

You Will Need:

- Frisbees
- Words of the Memory Verse on sticky labels or cards

What to do:

- Write each word or phrase of the Memory Verse on separate sticky labels or small cards.
- Attach one word to each Frisbee (or tape the card underneath).
- Spread the Frisbees around the play area — on the ground, on cones, or lightly tossed.
- Divide children into two teams (or play as one big group for younger ages).
- Mark a throwing line where children stand to catch the Frisbees.
- Have a leader or volunteer ready to throw the Frisbees one at a time.

How to play:

- Children take turns standing behind the line to catch a Frisbee thrown by the leader.
- If they catch it, they bring the Frisbee back and collect the word attached to it.
- If they miss, the Frisbee stays in play and another child tries next turn.
- Teams keep collecting words until they have all the words of the Memory Verse.

- Once all words are collected, children work together to arrange the verse in the correct order.
- Finish by saying the Memory Verse out loud together — loud, soft, fast, slow, or with actions.

'Treats':

- Bird food (nut-free trail mix)
- Dog food or Kitty kibble (chocolate and cereal mix)
- Bunny snacks (carrot sticks and dip)
- Guinea Pig treats (apple slices)

Game: Dog-Trial Obstacle Course

Stations & How They Work

1. Weave Poles

Set up cones, pool noodles, or chairs in a zig-zag line.
Children “weave” through like a trained agility dog.

2. Tunnel Run

Use a play tunnel or two tables with sheets draped over.
Kids crawl through quickly but safely.

3. Hoop Jump

Hold a hula hoop low (or tape it to a chair).
Children jump through like a show dog.

4. Balance Beam

Use a plank on the ground, a rope line, or a chalk line.
Kids walk across without “falling off the beam”.

5. Fetch & Return

Throw a soft toy or beanbag a short distance.
Child runs to fetch it and brings it back to the “trainer”.

6. Sit–Stay–Go

Leader calls: “Sit!” (Kids crouch), “Stay!” (Freeze), “Go!” (Run).
Mimics obedience commands in dog trials.

7. Hurdle Hop

Use pool noodles on buckets or low cardboard boxes.

Kids hop over one or two small hurdles.

8. Treat Bowl Toss

Place three bowls labelled “Treats”.
Kids toss a beanbag into any bowl before moving on.

9. Finish Line Trick

Kids choose a “trick”:
Roll over
Shake hands
Spin
Sit pretty

How to Run the Course:

- Set up stations in a loop so kids move in one direction.
- Demonstrate each obstacle before starting.
- Send children through one at a time or in small, spaced-out groups.
- Have volunteers at tricky stations (tunnel, hurdles, and hoop).
- Celebrate every child with “Good dog!” cheers and high-fives.
- Optional: give each child a “treat” at the end!

Craft Suggestions:

You'll find images for these crafts on the internet.

- Toy Pet Carrier (use a template to create a carrier from cardboard that the children can decorate)
- Fish Food Sprinkles (use sprinkles to decorate iced cupcakes or biscuits)
- Toy Collar (thread beads onto a string to create a collar for a dog or cat)
- Paper Plate Pets (use paper plates to create a pet)
- Paper Plate Fish Bowl
- Wool-Wrapped Bird (wrap wool around and around a cardboard bird)
- Egg Carton Goldfish (wrap an egg carton cup in orange tissue paper)

Colouring Sheet: Pick-A-Pet Palace

A colouring sheet to photocopy is on page 9.

