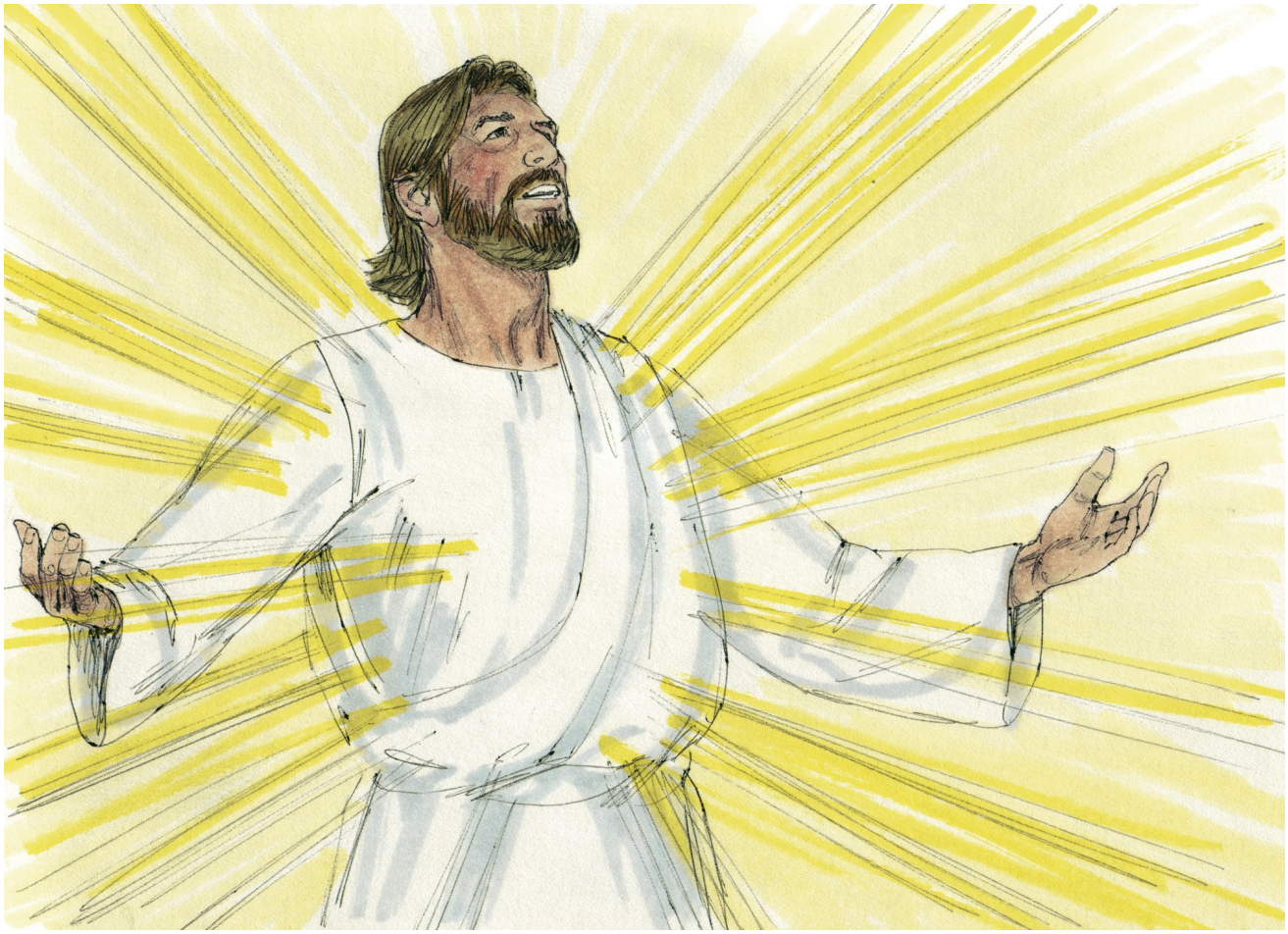
A PUPPET PLAY IN ONE ACT

Fish Out of Water, or The Richest Fish

Based on Matthew 17:24–27 · Written by Carrie Elderberry



SUITABLE FOR
Ages 5 and up

PERFORMANCE TIME
10–12 minutes

CAST SIZE
6 puppets

PROPS REQUIRED
Blue cloth for water (optional)

MAIN THEME

Giving back to God isn't about His need for our money — it's about becoming generous like He is, with resources He provided in the first place.

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To print just the play on its own, print pages 5–11.

PRODUCTION OVERVIEW

Synopsis

BOY and GIRL are frustrated that their dad wants them to give part of their hard-earned money back to God, right when they're saving up for a pet goldfish. GRAMPY helps them see that everything they "earn" — with their strength, their brains, even the opportunity to work — comes from God to begin with, and that giving is about becoming generous, not meeting a need God doesn't have. Three fish — ANGEL, GREEN, and CORAL — act out the story of Peter finding a coin in a fish's mouth to pay the temple tax, with an audience-participation refrain ("Up above!" — "Oh, no!").

Spiritual Concept

God doesn't need our money — He owns everything already. What He wants is for us to become generous, the way He is generous, using resources that were always His gift to us in the first place. The fish scene from Matthew 17 shows God providing in a wildly unexpected way, which is a reminder that He's more than able to provide for whatever He asks us to give.

Age Suitability

Best for ages 5 and up; the audience-participation refrain and silly fish banter make it a great fit for a younger, more interactive crowd, while the money conversation speaks just as well to older kids who are starting to earn their own.

Performance Time

10–12 minutes

CAST & TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Characters (in order of appearance)

GRAMPY — A modern grandfather. Patiently helps BOY and GIRL understand giving back to God through questions, not lectures.

BOY — A modern child, GIRL's brother, saving up for a pet goldfish. Starts out resistant to giving — “What's mine is mine” — and comes to understand generosity by the end.

GIRL — A modern child, also saving for a goldfish. Quicker than BOY to start catching Grampy's point.

ANGEL — A fish, eager (and repeatedly shooed offstage) to tell the Matthew 17 story.

GREEN — Another fish, co-narrator of the coin story with Angel.

CORAL — The fish who held the temple-tax coin in her mouth — tells her own “up above” fishing story to ANGEL and GREEN.

Prop Options

- A blue cloth to represent water may be draped over the stage bar for the fish scene.
- The fish can be as simple as pictures taped to sticks. CORAL should have a hinge so she can open her mouth.

PERFORMANCE NOTES FOR PUPPETEERS

New to puppets? General prep, technique, and voice tips live at gospelpuppets.org/getting-started.

Character Notes

CORAL's “up above” story is the comic heart of the play — let the audience refrain build energy each time it repeats.

GRAMPY never lectures — he leads BOY and GIRL to the answer with questions (“Who gave you your muscles?”). Keep his tone warm and a little teasing, not preachy.

Staging

The fish (ANGEL, GREEN, and CORAL) pop in and get shooed offstage several times before their scene — keep these entrances quick and comic.

Practice the “Up above!” / “Oh, no!” call-and-response with the audience before the fish scene begins, as the script suggests.

A fun way to include more people, especially pre-readers eager to help, is to have a hand-held “curtain” ready for the change into the fish scene. Helpers can run up and screen the center stage for a moment while chimes are rung and the puppets switch places.

Reading the Script

CAPS = volume/intensity.

Em dashes (the long dash, —) = the author's pacing notation, especially in Grampy's interrupted lines.

FISH OUT OF WATER, OR THE RICHEST FISH

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(Enter GRAMPY.)

GRAMPY: What a beautiful day! (Look up) God is so good.

(Enter BOY and GIRL.)

BOY: Oh, THERE you are, Grampy. We've been looking all over for you!

GRAMPY: Hey, buddy. Hey little girl. (Look up) Just look at those clouds! Aren't they just beautiful?

GIRL: Yeah… I guess. But Grampy, we need you to talk to Daddy.

GRAMPY: Your dad? You mean my SON, don't you? Heh, heh.

BOY: Oh, that's right. Well, can you still boss him around, the way Daddy tells US what to do?

GRAMPY: Now that is a funny question.

BOY: Well, can you?

GRAMPY: A father IS a kind of boss, I suppose…

BOY: So, CAN you? CAN you?

GRAMPY: No, kids… your father is all grown up. I'm not his boss any more.

GIRL: Rats! Then you can't help us.

GRAMPY: What seems to be the trouble?

BOY: Dad is telling us, that we ought to give part of our money, which WE EARNED, back to God!

GRAMPY: Oh! Well, now, he is quite right.

GIRL: Oh no! OK, first of all, why does GOD need our money?

GRAMPY: Good question. He doesn't.

BOY: I knew it! Ok. Second of all, what is mine is MINE. We earned that money. I want to keep ALL of it. What's wrong with that?

GRAMPY: Another good question. You two are really THINKING today!

GIRL: Grampy, stop teasing! Help us!

BOY: Yes, this is serious! We wanted to buy our goldfish today! We thought we had enough, but now…

(Enter ANGEL and CORAL.)

ANGEL: We heard someone say “fish”!

CORAL: Was that our cue to come on stage?

GIRL: Ooh, what adorable fish!

GRAMPY: No, no. It’s not time yet. Go on back, fishies.

ANGEL: But we’ve been waiting and waiting!

GRAMPY: Your turn is coming up. Now off you go.

CORAL AND ANGEL: Aww…

(Exit FISH.)

BOY: We’ve been saving up to buy some fish! GOLDfish.

GIRL: That’s why we need ALL our money.

GRAMPY: Ah, yes. That reminds me. You had TWO questions.

GIRL: Yes. First: Why does God need OUR money?

BOY: And Second: Why can’t I keep what is MINE?

GRAMPY: I think I understand. I used to feel the same way.

BOY: Really? You did!

GRAMPY: Yes. And your Dad felt the same way, when HE was your age, too.

GIRL: Then he should understand!

GRAMPY: Oh, I think he does. Did you talk to him about it?

BOY: Not yet. We were hoping YOU would talk to him. And talk him OUT of it!

GRAMPY: Oh! Heh, heh. Well, first, about your questions—

BOY: About God?

GRAMPY: Yes. God does not NEED your money.

GIRL: Why do we have to give it then?

GRAMPY: Because God wants you to learn to be generous, just like He is.

BOY: I’m not rich enough to be generous, yet.

GRAMPY: And you never WILL be, if you believe that.

GIRL: No, wait, I get it. I think you mean like “sharing.”

GRAMPY: Right! That is one way we can follow Jesus.

BOY: Arg…Will God help me be generous? It’s so HARD…

GRAMPY: Yes. But it also helps YOU, to become part of HIS work here on the earth.

BOY: Well, that is KIND of cool…I guess…

GRAMPY: And to answer your second question—

GIRL: That's right. Can't we just give some money to God, some OTHER time? We need all of THIS money, for our goldfish!

(Enter ANGEL and GREEN.)

GREEN: You keep talking about fish! Here we are!

ANGEL: Now? Can we come out now?

GRAMPY: Patience! Very soon. Now shoo!

ANGEL AND GREEN: Aww…

(Exit FISH.)

GRAMPY: God wants you to understand that HE gave you that money.

BOY: He did not! We EARNED it!

GRAMPY: OK, but who gave you your muscles?

BOY: Oh. God did, I guess. But—

GRAMPY: And your brain?

GIRL: God did. Oh, I see where you are going with this!

GRAMPY: And who made the world, so there is work for you to do? And who made someone with money to pay you?

BOY: OK, OK, now I get you. But—

GIRL: I guess we should go find a little more work to do, so we have enough for both. Our goldfish and our offering.

(Enter CORAL.)

CORAL: Now? She keeps saying "fish"!

GRAMPY: Nope.

CORAL: Aww…

(Exit CORAL.)

BOY: We actually do have almost enough money, for both.

GIRL: Right. After all, Daddy said we only ought to give a "part."

BOY: I might even give more, now that I understand.

GRAMPY: Good! And go talk to your Dad about it. Maybe he can give you another job to do. I have some work for you too!

(Enter ANGEL.)

ANGEL: *(loud whisper)* How about now?

GIRL: Alright. We are done with our part. Have fun!

ANGEL: HURRAY!

BOY: Yes, let's go find some more work!

(Exit GRAMPY, BOY, and GIRL. Enter GREEN and ANGEL. Fish sway gently as if in a current.)

GREEN: Ahem. Now we need some help from you, the audience. Will you help us? (Let audience respond.) Good!

ANGEL: Whenever you hear us say, "Up above," you say, "Oh no!" Can you say that? UP ABOVE! (listening)

GREEN: Let's practice: UP ABOVE!

(Audience: "Oh, no!" (repeat until it's good)

GREEN: In this important fish scene, me, Coral, and Angel—

ANGEL: were in the water near Capernaum—

GREEN: on the day that Jesus and Peter had to pay the Temple tax.

ANGEL: But then Coral just disappeared!

GREEN: Where did she go?

(CORAL plops in.)

CORAL: Whew! That was a close one!

GREEN: What happened? Where did you go?

CORAL: I went… UP ABOVE.

ALL: *(make sure audience helps)* OH, NO!

GREEN: Good work, audience!

ANGEL: You were HERE one second, and then you disappeared!

CORAL: I know! I thought I was a goner! I went "up above"!

ALL: *(make sure audience helps)* Oh, no!

GREEN: But now you are back!

CORAL: It was the strangest thing. I saw this bright shiny worm—

ANGEL: What? Worms are not shiny—

CORAL: This one was. It looked DELICIOUS!

GREEN: You are not very careful about what you eat.

CORAL: What do you mean?

ANGEL: Just this morning, you ate that OTHER shiny thing, the flat, round thing.

CORAL: Oh, yeah. The flat, round, HARD thing.

GREEN: That was not a worm, either.

CORAL: No, you are right. It was so big I could not even SWALLOW it!

ANGEL: You could not TALK, either.

GREEN: Which was kind of a nice change.

CORAL: Hey! Be nice!

GREEN: You can talk now, though!

CORAL: Yes! Did you notice that it is GONE? Look!

(she opens her mouth)

ANGEL: Yes, it's gone. Did you finally spit it out?

CORAL: No. A MAN took it. The man who caught me… UP ABOVE.

ALL: *(encourage audience to join in)* Oh, no!

GREEN: WHAT man?

CORAL: Let me tell you! When I bit the shiny worm, it bit me back!

ANGEL: Ouch!

CORAL: It was a HOOK, not a worm.

GREEN: Oooh…

CORAL: And then suddenly it pulled me UP out of the water!

ANGEL: Oh! THAT is why you suddenly disappeared.

CORAL: Yes. I went… UP ABOVE.

ALL: Oh, no!

GREEN: Golly. Where the big birds are, and the nets come from?

ANGEL: Where no one ever returns…

CORAL: Yes. I thought I was a goner.

ANGEL: Ohhh. But nobody ever comes back from… UP ABOVE.

ALL: Oh, no!

CORAL: I know! But here I am!

GREEN: What happened?

CORAL: Well. The shiny hook was tied to a string, and the string was tied to the man.

ANGEL: Yes? Yes?

CORAL: He lifted me out of the water—

GREEN: Ooh… UP ABOVE?

ALL: Oh, no!

CORAL: Yes. And he opened my mouth and took out the hook—

ANGEL: Ooh!

GREEN: And then?

CORAL: And then— he just— just— looked in my mouth.

ANGEL: Why?

CORAL: I don't know. But he saw that round, flat, shiny, hard THING!

GREEN: That thing you ate…?

ANGEL: That you could not swallow?

CORAL: Yes. His eyes got all big.

ANGEL AND GREEN: Yes?

CORAL: And he opened HIS mouth—

ANGEL AND GREEN: Yes?

CORAL: He said it was a "coin"!

GREEN: OK, whatever. Whatever THAT is.

CORAL: He reached in, and he took the coin out of my mouth!

ANGEL AND GREEN: Yes?

CORAL: And then he just— dropped me. Back into the water.

ANGEL: So that is how you got away!

CORAL: Yes! He held up the coin, and he forgot all about me.

GREEN: Well I hope you have learned your lesson!

CORAL: Yes. Some shiny things are not good for fish to eat.

ANGEL: Right! OK, let's have the other puppets come back now!

(Enter ALL puppets.)

GRAMPY: So you can see from that story, that God provides everything we need. Even enough to be generous.

GIRL: And sometimes in very surprising ways!

BOY: Now for the ending! One, two, three—

ALL: You can read all about the fish and the coin in the Bible, in Matthew Chapter 17. Goodbye!

THE END

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Discussion Questions

1. Why did BOY think he should keep all his own money at the start of the play?
2. GRAMPY asked, "Who gave you your muscles? Your brain?" What was he trying to help BOY and GIRL see?
3. What's the difference between giving because we think God needs it, and giving because we want to be generous like Him?
4. CORAL learned a lesson about being careful what she eats. What lesson did BOY and GIRL learn about money?
5. Can you think of a surprising way God has provided for something in your own life?

Related Bible Passages

Primary Text: Matthew 17:24–27 — Jesus tells Peter to catch a fish, and the coin for the temple tax is found in its mouth. (Full account — reference only.)

Additional Scripture:

- 2 Corinthians 9:7 — “You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. ‘For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.’” (NLT)
- Psalm 24:1 — “The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him.” (NLT)

Song Suggestions

- “Yet Not I but Through Christ in Me” — CityAlight — https://open.spotify.com/track/7sxPwx9sBZVD6LR4oEwnc6
- “Take My Life and Let It Be” — Maranatha! Music — https://open.spotify.com/track/1JWIEd5GAYuHl0CboYOdUZ
- “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” — Westminster Central Hall Choir & The Epworth Singers — https://open.spotify.com/track/3uvrrwatGrldEOXM2j4Yhp

Ministry Context

Great for a stewardship or giving-themed series, or any time kids are earning their own money for the first time. The audience-participation “Up above! / Oh, no!” refrain also makes this a fun standalone choice when you want high energy and a laugh alongside the lesson.