



SECRETS OF THE KINGDOM

Unlocking the parables of Jesus

Connect Group

Participants Guide

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Session 1: The Hidden Treasure, Pearl, and Net

Opening Question:

What does “paradise” look like to you? What would you do to get there?



Matthew 13:44-50 (ESV)

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

The Parable of the Net

⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1. What did the man feel when he discovered the treasure?

In Palestine, people often secured their treasure by burying it in the ground, especially when



unstable political situations threatened foreign conquest. The man in the parable discovers buried treasure and values it so highly that he sells all to buy the field and claim the treasure.

This parable teaches the joy of discovering the kingdom of heaven as God's greatest gift to us through Jesus the Messiah. Its value exceeds that of any other possession. Therefore, we are willing to give up everything else for the priceless joy of receiving the Kingdom. Paul says it well in Philippians 3:8, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ."

2. What possession in this world do you value most? Is it holding you back from inheriting the Kingdom of God?

The man who finds the rare and beautiful pearl is willing to sell everything to buy it. The parable's point is the same as the treasure; the Kingdom is so beautiful and precious that nothing else compares. By God's grace we give away everything to participate in God's rule in our lives.



1. How valuable was the pearl?

In the parable of the nets, we see that the fisherman have collected a great catch of a multitude of different kinds of fish. It was typical that they would drag the net ashore and sort the fish according to its kind. This illustrates God's nets of grace reaching out to the whole world, then His final judgement will do the separating.

2. What happened to the good fish and the bad fish?

3. What is our role as Christians in the fishing story?

4. What do you think it would have been like to hear Jesus teach about heaven?

5. Other than buried treasure or a precious pearl, what illustrations could you use to explain to a friend the value of knowing and following Christ?

6. What might you say to this friend about the separation of the fish?

7. What reminders can you use today to help you pray for non-Christian friends and relatives?



Session 2: The Unforgiving Servant

Opening Question:

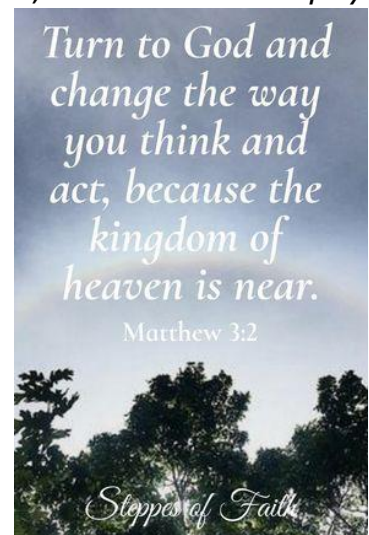
How would you react if the bank that held your home mortgage or car loan paid it off for you because you could not?



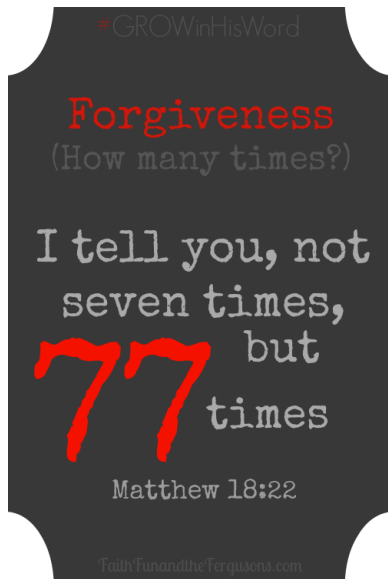
Matthew 18:23-35 (ESV)

²³"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.²⁵And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'²⁷And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.'²⁹So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'³⁰He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³²Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'³⁴And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

- 1. To what did Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven?**
- 2. How was the king prepared to get the large amount of money owed to him by a particular servant?**



3. What did the servant do after his debt was cancelled?



4. What makes forgiveness difficult? What are some situations others have faced that you would find difficult to forgive?

5. How likely are you to forgive someone once, twice or even three times?

Jesus portrays the magnitude of God's grace in terms that would have stretched his hearers' imagination. In this parable, the servant owed the King more than he would ever have been able to repay: more money than existed in circulation in the whole country at the time! The man was a fool to get so far in debt, and the king had been a fool to let him get away with it. So here he compares God with a king who let a subordinate get too far into debt to ever pay him back. The grace of God is so deep and unimaginable that it repeatedly bursts the bounds of Jesus' metaphor.

6. In what ways has God shown mercy in forgiving our sins?

When poor crops or other circumstances forced a ruler to forgive taxes, he did so with the understanding that his people would respect his benevolence. If he released his subordinate ministers' debts, they in turn must release the debts of those indebted to them. This principle was widely known, and the first servant should have understood it; but as we have seen, this servant is a fool.

Although creditors could come up with money quickly by demanding immediate payment on loans, the sum the other man owes the first servant is impossibly small compared to what that higher official owes the king. Perhaps the sum is so small that the first man previously overlooked it. Yet this first servant, perhaps still determined to repay his debt to the king, has now decided to become ruthlessly efficient in exacting what is owed him—a sum less than one-fifth of the minimum he himself would have fetched on the slave market. In other words, the forgiven servant has failed to embrace the principle of grace.

7. Why is an unforgiving spirit so deadly?

8. What individual(s) do you need to “release from their debts” today?



Session 3 The Laborers in the Vineyard

Opening Question:

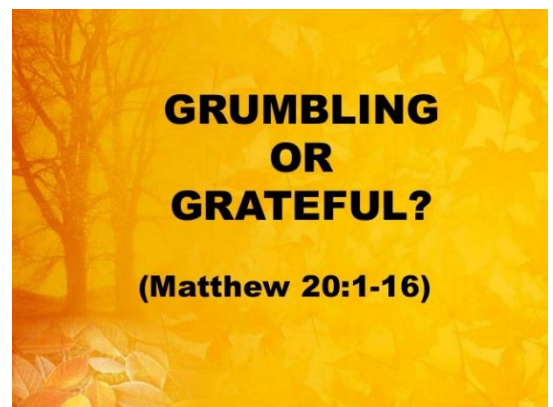
Who is the best employer or boss you've ever had and why?

Matthew 20:1-16 (ESV)

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.'⁵ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' ⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.'⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'¹³ But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last."

1. Why are identical wages given to both early and late workers?

2. Is the landowner's practice unjust, generous, or both?



In this parable, Jesus reveals the mystery that the gospel message is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The Jews were the first to receive God's promise and the Gentiles, the last. As Christians, we know that we, too, inherit the Kingdom of God and have been grafted into His family by grace through faith. New believers inherit the same Kingdom as those who commit a lifetime following Christ Jesus. They are as dear to the Father as those who never went astray.

We have a tendency, as the parable illustrates, to covet and to be resentful of what others receive from God. The owner of the vineyard asks those who have worked longest and (presumably) hardest for him, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" The point is that God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness are God's to give away as God sees fit.

3. In what ways does God's grace seem unfair?



4. Why is it dangerous to compare your own situation with someone else's?



5. How does it make you feel to know that heaven will include ex-murderers, former child molesters, embezzlers who put their trust in Christ only minutes before death?

6. How can focusing on God's grace in our lives keep us from becoming jealous of others?

This parable, recorded only by Matthew, is closely connected with the end of the nineteenth chapter, where Peter asks how it should fare with those who, like himself, had left all for Christ. It is designed to show that while they would be richly rewarded, a certain equity would still be observed towards later converts and workmen in His service.



7. Do you think Peter would have expected this answer to his question?

8. Given this answer, what motivation did Peter have to continue to preach the gospel, and even die in order to spread this new of Christ Jesus?

9. How does this affect your motivation to share your faith with non-believers?

Session 4 The Two Sons

Opening Question:

Have you ever told your spouse or co-worker that you'd do something and then didn't follow through?

Matthew 21:28-32 (ESV)

²⁸“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ ²⁹And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. ³⁰And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.



1. What is the Father's request?

2. Which son is like the prostitutes and tax collectors?



3. How do you suppose the religious leaders of the day responded to this story?

The parable uses the same imagery as that of the Laborers in session 3, with some special variations. This time, those who are called to work are “sons,” and not hired servants. This signifies two sorts of persons: some that prove better than they promise, represented by the former of these sons; others that promise better than they prove, represented by the latter. The first son are the sinners of the culture and the second son, the religious leaders. The outwardly religious and the conspicuously irreligious were being compared as being alike, i.e., both children of God.

Jesus presents this story in response to the Pharisees question about Jesus’ authority to teach and heal in Jerusalem during Passover week in Matthew 21:23. When the Pharisees answered the question of which son did the will of his father, they unknowingly condemned themselves. They did not believe that John the Baptist came to them from God. Others did and so, did the will of the Father.

4. If the Jewish religious leaders were trained in the Law and familiar with the Old Testament, why did they oppose Jesus?

5. What is the warning here for Christians? Why doesn’t religious knowledge or information guarantee that we’ll be godly?

6. Which son's story is most like your own?

7. When is it too late to do the right thing?

8. How can you know the will of the Father so that you can follow Him?



Session 5 The Great Banquet

Opening Question:

Have you ever planned a wedding? How did you decide who to add to the invitation list?

Matthew 22:1-14 (ESV)

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ²"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.'"⁵But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'¹⁰And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.



¹¹"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen."

1. Why is this banquet held?

**2. Who did the King invite first?
Subsequently?**



3. What did the king order his servants to do with the man who was improperly dressed?

4. Why did the king throw out the unwelcome guest?

The first part of the parable continues the theme from the previous session that the heirs of the kingdom have rejected it, and the kingdom has been offered to others. God's servants have the task of offering the gospel to all people. Although, we've all been invited to the Banquet, we see that receiving an invitation to God's kingdom does not guarantee inclusion. We must be properly clothed. Many will claim to be in the kingdom, but only those clothed with Christ's righteousness are actually presentable to God. Only those who are chosen will be present at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

5. What keeps people from accepting Jesus' offer of eternal life?

6. The wedding clothes in the story that were needed for entry to the banquet symbolize what quality that is necessary for entry into the kingdom of heaven?

7. What will happen to those who either reject Christ or try to enter His kingdom on their own terms?

8. You are invited to the banquet. How do you know you'll get in?



