

Parables with a Purpose Nine Stories Jesus Told

A Bible Study from

heartfelt  **FRIENDS**

Dr. Joneal Kirby
Founder & Director

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a personal note:

I am always blessed when anyone expresses appreciation for this ministry or these materials. I am especially blessed when others get excited about a women's mentoring ministry program and ask to use **Heartfelt Friends, A Titus 2 Ministry**. God has control of this Kingdom work and has multiplied its uses in many more ways than I could have asked or imagined! If you or someone you know would like more information about Heartfelt Friends or would like to use the Bible Study materials of the ministry or the training manual, I only ask that you please contact me before duplicating them or using them. This allows me some measure of continuing participation in this ongoing ministry. It gives me great pleasure to see where God has chosen to send it.

As we partner in this work, as you and I bring together our friends, our skills, our passion for Kingdom building, I pray God's blessings on this endeavor. May many grow to love Jesus with all of their heart, soul, mind and spirit. And may God increase our love for others.

Joneal

Dr. Joneal S. Kirby
Author and Founder

*Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live...
to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women
to love their husbands and children,
to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home,
to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands,
so that no one will malign the word of God.*

—TITUS 2:3-5

Heartfelt Bible Study

THE PARABLES

LESSON 1: A Wise Home-Builder

Build Your House on the Rock—Matthew 7:24-27

LESSON 2: Faith of a Tiny Seed

Faith of the Mustard Seed—Mark 4:30-33

LESSON 3: A Parable of Persistence

The Persistent Friend—Luke 11:4-7

LESSON 4: A Parable of Pursuit

The Lost Sheep—Luke 15:1-7

LESSON 5: Who is My Neighbor?

The Good Samaritan—Luke 10:25-37

LESSON 6: The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants

The Talents—Matthew 25:14-30

LESSON 7: Fair Labor for Fair Pay

The Wealthy Landowner—Matthew 20:1-16

LESSON 8: The Extraordinary Value of the Kingdom of God

The Hidden Treasure—Matthew 13:44

LESSON 9: Forgive Like Your Father

Unforgiving (Unmerciful) Servant—Matthew 18:21-35

Heart Mom: Each month your lesson will contain certain elements.

The Lesson Title

The Parable

Each month there will be a parable presented for each lesson. Read it aloud, or have someone in your group or another Heart Mom read it. Parables are stories meant to be heard. Jesus was a storyteller. He was a speaker, not a writer. His ministry involved him speaking and telling stories to his thousands of listeners.

The Introduction

This will be some background information on the parable or the teaching of the parable for your use. Use as much of this information as you need or have time for. Feel free to personalize the lesson and the introduction.

The Lesson

This will explore the meaning of the parable. There are plenty of discussion questions included in this section. You probably will not be able to get to all the questions if your discussion goes well. That is okay. This series of Bible lessons is designed for there to be a lot of conversation about the parables and their meanings. In the lesson there will be questions scattered throughout for you to use to discuss the parable with your group. Along with the questions, there will be some possible answers. You may use them to stimulate discussion or you can wait and hear answers from the group members and you could add these to the conversation if necessary.

[Heart Mom: As the teacher, you will want to spend some time in prayer before your group meets. Do not be intimidated by questions from your Heart Sisters. If you don't know an answer just ask the women in the group for their response to the question and turn it into a discussion. You can also explain that you don't know the answer and you may be able to find it before you meet again.]

The Wrapping Up

The conclusion is here with a final assignment for applying the parable and the lessons learned. This assignment will be a separate handout that can be printed out and given to the group members.

Close with prayer

[Heart Mom: throughout all of the lessons, specific instructions or information for you will be in bold brackets.]

Thank you for your dedication to Heartfelt and the women you serve through it. May God bless you in this study of God's Word.

Blessings,
Joneal

LESSON 1

A WISE HOME-BUILDER

PARABLE: Wise and Foolish Builders—Luke 6:46-49

[For tonight’s lesson the reading of the parable could be done after the Introduction.]

Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete. —Luke 6:46-49 New International Version (NIV)

INTRODUCTION TO THIS SERIES

A parable is defined as a story that compares two things that may have multiple meanings. Parables have also been described as “earthly stories with a heavenly meaning.” Jesus did most of his teaching using stories. Jesus knew how people think. He knew that listening to stories is one of the best ways to learn and Jesus was a Master story-teller. His use of everyday objects, events and people made complicated issues seem simple. Jesus’ messages, although delivered over 2000 years ago, have meaning for us in the 21st century.

That is why this year in Heartfelt we are going to hear, read, and talk about some of the stories Jesus told. Each month in our Bible study time, you will hear one of the parables told by Jesus. Then, we’ll spend a few moments talking about its meaning and how you could apply the story and its lesson to your own life.

Why do you think Jesus used stories—or parables—to teach?

Stories are a favorite way of teaching and it makes it easier for us to learn new ideas and information. We all love to hear stories. Since the time we were children most of us have been fascinated when anyone begins to tell a story—so we pay attention. Stories stir emotions and this can make us remember more of the lesson.

[Below is some background information on the parables of Jesus. Use as much of this material as you would like or have time for.]

Let’s look at a few passages that offer an explanation as to why Jesus would teach in parables.

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, “they may be

ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”—MARK 4:10-12

The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.—MATTHEW 13:10-17

His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, “though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’—LUKE 8:9-10

Mark 4:33-34 and Matthew 13:34-35 repeat that Jesus would only speak to the “crowds” in parables, while secretly, in private, explaining everything to his disciples. Some commentators say Jesus used parables because they provoked thought and coaxed the listeners into participating more actively as they thought through the parables’ unclear content. Another possible reason given for the use of parables is that they are memorable stories that could be passed on orally for years before being written down.

LESSON

[Read the parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders.]

Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.—LUKE 6:46-49 NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)

Luke records these words of Jesus when he was preaching the Sermon on the Mount. This is the last story He tells during that event. Jesus says we are to do what He says. In this parable, He illustrates what someone is like who

does follow His teachings and what someone's life is like when they do not.

What is the main idea of this parable?

Jesus says first, if you are going to call for me, then it's important that you do what I tell you. You must see me as the Lord of your life if you call me "Lord, Lord." He next explains what one is like who hears Jesus' words and then acts upon them. This is obedience. This is repentance. This is following God's will for our lives. The flood is the sin, the trouble, the problems of life flowing into one's life. But because this someone Jesus tells us about in this story was deep into God's will and knew God's Word, they were not defeated or drowned or destroyed. The will of God was the way they chose to go. We have to know God's Word, know the Truth if our lives are going to be locked in step with it. That's living a deeply rooted and firm on the foundation kind of life—based on God—a faith that will not move.

What is the ROCK in this parable? Rock is an Old Testament term for God. The term "foundation" is a New Testament term for Christ used a number of times, (see 1 Corinthians 3:11). So what you have here is the message of Christ which is about God as the rock, about Christ as the foundation, and the gospel. So whoever builds his life on the gospel, on the great cornerstone of the gospel from Matthew 16, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." "Upon THIS rock, I will build my church." That's the rock bed, cornerstone foundation. When you dig down deep and build your life on God in Christ and the gospel, storms of worry, doubt, fear, or trouble can never move your house. That's somebody who is not just an admirer of Jesus, but who embraces Him as their Lord and Savior.

Here is another verse describing a wise home-builder. This homebuilder is a woman. This passage is from the Old Testament book of Proverbs.

The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down. Whoever fears the LORD walks uprightly, but those who despise him are devious in their ways.—PROVERBS 14:1-2 (NIV)

How does a wise woman build her house?

How does a foolish woman tear her house down?

This verse speaks about a wise woman who builds her house; while the foolish one, tears her house down. One of the ways this is done is by the words that a woman speaks. Words are very powerful and can be used to build up the family members or tear them down. A woman can build up the people in her household by being full of the Spirit herself and by knowing God's Word. The power of His Truth will help her to say and do the things that will please God. She can be a better woman, wife and mother when she is following God's teachings. Such as living out the teaching on how love behaves taught in 1 Corinthians 13. Or working to show the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23 in her behavior and in her words. But there is a way that a woman can tear down her home that is very harmful to her children and husband. That is by being a nag. Webster's Dictionary gives us this definition of the word "nag": 1.) to annoy by continual scolding, faultfinding, complaining, urging, etc. 2.) to keep troubling, worrying, etc. Therefore

a nagging wife or woman is one who is not living in faith, but is one who tries to get her way by continually complaining. She is seldom pleased with her husband or children and tells them so. A woman can show her faith in God even in hard situations, trusting that God is going to provide. Having a strong prayer life will help her overcome worry. Believing that God does work all things for the good of His children, she can help her family work through some tough times.

WRAPPING UP

[Pass out the handout attached and ask each member of the group to be responsible for completing the worksheet within 24 hours.]

Close the evening with prayer.

(Some of the information and commentary used in this lesson comes from Jesus' 46 Parables in Chronological Christian Bible Study, by Dave Ahl with his permission.)

HEARTFELT BIBLE STUDY HANDOUT

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders

Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."—LUKE 6:46-49 NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)

Write down 3 ways you will build your house on a solid foundation of faith in God.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Which of these 3 things can you do starting today?

What will you do to make sure you begin this habit or behavior that will build your house on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ? _____

Will you agree to pray for yourself and your friends in your Heart Group so that you will all begin building a strong foundation for your homes? _____

You can build up the people in your household by being full of the Spirit and by knowing God's Word. The power of His Truth will help you say and do the things that will please God. You can be a better woman, wife and mother when you are following God's teachings. Such as living out the teaching on how love behaves taught in 1 Corinthians 13. Or working to show the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23 in your behavior and in your words. But there is a way that you can tear down your home that is very harmful to your children and husband. That is by being a nag. Webster's Dictionary gives us this definition of the word "nag": 1.) to annoy by continual scolding, fault-finding, complaining, urging, etc. 2.) to keep troubling, worrying, etc. Therefore a nagging wife or woman is one who is not living in faith, but is one who tries to get her way by continually complaining. She is seldom pleased with her husband or children and tells them so. You can show your faith in God even in hard situations, trusting that God is going to provide. Having a strong prayer life will help you overcome worry. Believing that God does work all things for the good of His children, you can help your family work through some tough times and come out on the other side closer to God.

LESSON 2
FAITH OF A TINY SEED
PARABLE: The Mustard Seed—Mark 4:30-33

Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.” With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.—MARK 4:30-33

[Heart Mom: There are several passages in the Bible where Jesus refers to a mustard seed as He is teaching the people. Those are part of the lesson, so you may want to be familiar with these passages, Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6. They are included in the lesson.]

INTRODUCTION

[Read this passage. Encourage those who have their Bibles to turn to Matthew 13 as you read. You can also print out this passage for them to have during the Bible study.]

We are going to read a passage where Jesus explains why he used parables to teach. Listen to hear his explanation and then we'll talk about it.

Why Jesus Used Stories to Teach

The followers came to Jesus and asked, “Why do you use stories to teach the people?” Jesus answered, “You have been chosen to know the secrets about the kingdom of heaven, but others cannot know these secrets. Those who have understanding will be given more, and they will have all they need. But those who do not have understanding, even what they have will be taken away from them. This is why I use stories to teach the people: They see, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really hear or understand. So they show that the things Isaiah said about them are true: ‘You will listen and listen, but you will not understand. You will look and look, but you will not learn. For the minds of these people have become stubborn. They do not hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might really understand what they see with their eyes and hear with their ears. They might really understand in their minds and come back to me and be healed.’ Isaiah 6:9–10 But you are blessed, because you see with your eyes and hear with your ears. I tell you the truth, many prophets and good people wanted to see the things that you now see, but they did not see them. And they wanted to hear the things that you now hear, but they did not hear them.—MATTHEW 13:10-17

Jesus spoke in code through mystifying parables. Why do you think he did that? Didn't he want people to understand what he was teaching? According to Scriptures—no, He didn't. Why do you think this is so?

Here is what Jesus answered:

The followers came to Jesus and asked, "Why do you use stories to teach the people?" Jesus answered, "You have been chosen to know the secrets about the kingdom of heaven, but others cannot know these secrets.—MATT 13: 10-11

Jesus taught many things to the disciples his followers but they did not understand much of what Jesus taught. In fact the Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—all refer to the disciple's lack of understanding in many of the scriptures.

Jesus' reason? A parable is a multi-layered story. It has a deeper meaning. Jesus knew most people are very concrete, literal thinkers, tending to look for the simplest, easiest to understand meaning. Jesus wanted his followers to work harder at developing their faith and character. To grow in their thinking and reasoning and not just assume understanding. He wanted his people to seek out his meaning and to seek applications to his teachings.

Have you ever had a deeper understanding about a scripture, or about God or Jesus Christ or any Biblical issues after you've spent time praying or really studying an issue and thinking about it? Do you remember a specific time this happened that you would share?

LESSON

[Read the parable of the Mustard Seed]

Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."—MARK 4:30-32

First, a little background on a mustard plant. A pod of seeds on a mustard plant holds thousands of seeds so one plant can give rise to hundreds more plants. In many ways a mustard plant is like a weed: it sprouts quickly but can also lay dormant for many years. Like most weeds, it cannot be easily killed. It's been shown a fire can destroy a field, but it won't destroy a mustard plant. The mustard seed is not the smallest seed in the world, but it is very small compared to the other seeds, and in those days, may have been the smallest known by most people.

Now, knowing this about a mustard plant, what do you think is the main idea of this parable?

Perhaps Jesus was painting a picture of a dramatic work of God, so that his listeners would envision a huge mustard tree that was like nothing they had ever seen before. But there are other aspects of this parable that are equally, if not more important. Think of these when you compare the growth of a mustard seed to the growth of the kingdom of God. If a pod of mustard

seed holds thousands of seeds then one plant can give rise to hundreds more plants. And that may be Jesus' way of telling them the Kingdom of God is amazing. It will grow beyond anything you've ever seen before.

Jesus also referred to a mustard seed in Matthew 17:20:

He said, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

And then again in Luke 17:6:

"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

Here Jesus emphasizes again the size of the seed, what do you think this scripture is teaching about our individual faith in God?

We are not to take this statement literally about moving mountains and uprooting trees by faith. Moving a mountain? Uproot a tree? Is that what faith is all about? Faith is a gift from God and its power is not in us but in God. So a tiny bit of faith can do great things. Little of us is needed to do things God wants us to do. Remember God grew His Kingdom out of a small seed He had planted in the hearts of just a few people. This is miraculous and supernatural. It could not have happened without God's power.

What do you think God may be calling you to do that requires you to put your faith in Him to accomplish it?

WRAPPING UP

[Pass out the handout attached and ask each member of the group to be responsible for completing the worksheet within 24 hours.]

Close the evening with prayer.

(Some of the information and commentary used in this lesson comes from Jesus' 46 Parables in Chronological Christian Bible Study, by Dave Ahl with his permission.)

HEARTFELT BIBLE STUDY HANDOUT
 The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”—MARK 4:30-32

What have you experienced that showed that a small bit of faith in God can result in something big or amazing? _____

Is God calling you to do something that requires you to trust in Him, to have faith in God? _____

Will you agree to pray for yourself and your friends in your Heart Group as your faith develops so that you can trust God little and big things in your life? _____

Why Jesus Used Stories to Teach

The followers came to Jesus and asked, “Why do you use stories to teach the people?” Jesus answered, “You have been chosen to know the secrets about the kingdom of heaven, but others cannot know these secrets. Those who have understanding will be given more, and they will have all they need. But those who do not have understanding, even what they have will be taken away from them. This is why I use stories to teach the people: They see, but they don’t really see. They hear, but they don’t really hear or understand. So they show that the things Isaiah said about them are true: ‘You will listen and listen, but you will not understand. You will look and look, but you will not learn. For the minds of these people have become stubborn. They do not hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might really understand what they see with their eyes and hear with their ears. They might really understand in their minds and come back to me and be healed.’ Isaiah 6:9–10 But you are blessed, because you see with your eyes and hear with your ears. I tell you the truth, many prophets and good people wanted to see the things that you now see, but they did not see them. And they wanted to hear the things that you now hear, but they did not hear them.”—MATTHEW 13:10-17

Faith is a gift from God and its power is not in us but in God. So a tiny bit of faith can do great things. Little of us is needed to do things God wants us to do. Remember God grew His Kingdom out of a small seed He had planted in the hearts of just a few people. This is miraculous and supernatural. It could not have happened without God’s power.

LESSON 3

A PARABLE OF PERSISTENCE

PARABLE: The Persistent Friend—Luke 11:5-8

[Read this passage. Encourage those who have their Bibles to turn to Luke 11 as you read. You can also print out this passage for them to have during the Bible study.]

Then (Jesus) said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’ Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.”—LUKE 11:5-8

INTRODUCTION

Parables are descriptive stories not based on actual events. But they are based on situations that could actually happen. It was very likely this situation could have happened to someone listening to Jesus tell this story. In the Middle East, hospitality is a strict custom. So when this visitor came and the man in the story didn’t have anything to feed him, it would have been a source of shame to not have at least bread to offer his house guest. The friend’s need to feed his visitor was real and if he could not, this would have caused him to be discredited among his people. So this was an actual and urgent need this friend had when he went to his neighbor for bread.

LESSON

Why do you think the man, behind his door, asleep in his home, responded the way he did before he gave his friend the bread?

Have you ever turned down a request from a friend to do something and then changed your mind because he kept asking?

Now, let’s look for the deeper meaning in this parable. Immediately before Jesus tells this story about the friend looking for bread, the disciples had just asked Jesus to teach them to pray.

LUKE 11: 1-4 SAYS: *One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”*

Jesus gives his disciples an example of a prayer. What it would sound like and even what words to use. Some have used this as the perfect model for

prayer. It begins with a praise to God. A request to God for physical needs is then made. An admission of our own sinfulness and ends with a prayer for protection and spiritual covering. What Jesus does next is to explain the attitude we should have when we pray. Then, he tells them this story—of a persistent friend in need.

What was the attitude of the man asking his neighbor for bread?

He was insistent and obviously urgent about his need. He wasn't going away without the food! The scriptures say he had "boldness" and "persistent". (Some translations use the words: "shameless audacity")

So what does this say about the way we are to approach God in our prayer life?

Jesus continues to teach about how we are to pray in verses 9 and 10. He says that we must ask if we are to receive:

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."—LUKE 11:9-10

A strong and urgent need drove the man to approach his neighbor's house at midnight and ASK for what he wanted. The Greek word that is translated "boldness" or "persistence" implies impudence and audacity. This is what Jesus is saying our attitude should be like when we approach the throne of God. We must pray with a confident boldness that persists in pursuing God as we seek His mercy, His grace, His favor.

Of course, we should never approach God with arrogance or disrespect. However, God wants His people to come to Him and seek His favor and His salvation. Just as a child approaches her earthly father with confidence knowing her Dad loves her and wants what's best for her, we can approach our Abba Father with that same confident attitude.

Think about this: If this man would give his neighbor what he wanted not out of friendship, but just because of his shameless boldness, how much more will God, who loves us perfectly, give us when we come into His presence?

[Pass out slips of blank paper and pens. Have them write down a brief answer to the following question.]

So, putting it all together, how would you summarize the message of this parable?

We are to be persistent in asking God to work in our lives and answer our prayers according to His perfect will and timing, having confidence He will do so.

[Have the group talk about their answers after they have had some time to think and write.]

The point of the parable, of course, is the importance of persistence, of never giving up. But Jesus' expression, "because of the man's boldness" is

remarkable. The friend has no sense of decency of waiting until morning, of not disturbing his sleeping neighbor. He goes at midnight and knocks—for some bread! And he shamelessly keeps on knocking until his neighbor gets up and shoves bread at him just to shut him up. This bold, confident, shameless appeal is what this parable illustrates. We are encouraged to ask God boldly, knowing we can trust Him.

WRAPPING UP

[Pass out the handout attached and ask each member of the group to be responsible for reading the worksheet within 24 hours.]

When we pray with confidence and persistence to God, we receive many benefits. We experience God's goodness and we maintain a relationship with our Heavenly Father. We become participants in God's purpose for our lives. As we thank Him for His blessings and we yield to His answers, our faith will grow.

Close the evening with prayer.

(Some of the information and commentary used in this lesson comes from Jesus' 46 Parables in Chronological Christian Bible Study, by Dave Ahl with his permission.)

HEARTFELT BIBLE STUDY HANDOUT
A Parable of Persistence

Then (Jesus) said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’ Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.”—LUKE 11:5-8

Through this parable, Jesus encourages you to pray continuously and ask boldly. You can know without any doubt that you can trust God. Hebrews 4:16 encourages you:

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

You can trust God with your needs, your wants and your requests. What is something you have been hesitant to ask God about?

Perhaps, you’ve not wanted to “bother” God with some problem or request. James 1:2 says this: ‘You do not have because you do not ask God.’

Commit to approach God with confidence. With boldness. Go to Him expecting Him to answer you!

Write 3 things that you are praying about.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

LESSON 4
A PARABLE OF PURSUIT
THE PARABLE: The Lost Sheep—Luke 15:1-7

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”—LUKE 15:1-7

INTRODUCTION

The parables of Jesus represent his most humble, basic teaching style. The parables were simple and memorable stories often full of imagery and usually just one single message. They were not meant for very deep interpretation because Jesus taught most of these to uneducated, common folks. Although simple, Jesus did bury some messages in them that the religious leaders of the day could not or would not understand. The simple people who Jesus was criticized for speaking with and spending time with were much more likely to understand His messages in the stories he told. Jesus’ parables were also simple and easy enough to tell again. During the Bible times, oral history was an important tradition because few people had access to any writings and much was not even written down available for the masses.

[Read the passage from Luke. Encourage those who have their Bibles to turn to Luke 15 as you read. You can also print out this passage for them to have during the Bible study.]

Most of us would be very upset if something we valued and loved was lost. Do you have a valuable collection? Maybe you have certain family photos you cherish or something you collected in your childhood you never want to lose. Have you ever lost something you loved or valued? You probably spent time looking for it. Remember what it felt like when you finally found it?

[Heart Mom: Perhaps tell a personal story of losing something you valued and you searched for it and found it to help illustrate this point.]

Jesus told this story because we can relate to searching for something we value. People can identify with what it is like when something is lost and then found. Jesus also wanted to get the attention of the arrogant religious leaders

who did not understand the nature of a compassionate, loving Father.

What kind of god do you think the arrogant leaders were thinking of when they critically said of Jesus, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”?

They probably thought God should only accept those who were like them. They believe they obeyed the law perfectly. They also thought the importance of a position of prominence in the religious circle put them in God’s favor. Being legalistic, they practiced their religion with strict laws and rules. If they really believed this they could not understand Jesus’ behavior of spending time with “sinners” and common people.

THE LESSON

Who is Jesus speaking to?

Why would a story about lost sheep be important to these people?

Tax Collectors and Sinners refers to those people who were the outcasts, the unloved, the disrespected of society. Being displaced because of their profession or lost condition makes Jesus’ story of a Shepherd who would seek out a lost sheep deeply personal, very interesting and highly valuable to this audience.

There are two groups of people who are in the audience Jesus is talking to. The “tax collectors” who worked for the Romans (or Herod). Their salaries came from over-taxing their fellow countrymen. They were hated by the people. Remember, Jesus even called one to be an Apostle. Levi, or Matthew, was a detested tax collector. And the “sinners,” who were probably those people who were living openly immoral lives, or the common people who were perhaps poor people who did not and could not follow the Jewish traditions. The religious customs of the day were costly to do and so just the elite of the Jewish religious sects were able to follow them.

These two groups characterize those people who were consistently rejected by the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. Religion had become ritualistic and performance based or because you belonged to an exclusive religious sect of Judaism, Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots or Essenes.

We see throughout the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, that Jesus’ ministry and His teachings consistently were directed to the outcasts of society, the needy, the poor, and the sick. Common people like shepherds, tax collectors and even women and children along with those living immoral lifestyles were always received with love and compassion by Jesus.

What does this mean for us in the Kingdom of God today in the 21st century church? Kingdom people care about the sinner, the needy, rejected, sick, and poor of society. Fellowship with God is evidenced by care, concern, and ministry to these kinds of people. This type of ministry characterized Jesus’ life and should characterize the life of all Kingdom people. In this parable, Jesus uses a specific number, “ninety-nine” to tell how many sheep were counted by the shepherd. Why would he do this? To show that every single sheep was important to the shepherd. That is why every sheep was counted as they were put up for the night.

[Discuss this.]

WRAPPING UP

The deeper message of this parable could be summarized like this. Jesus is painting a picture of the value God puts on each one of us who are His. He wants us to know God as a loving, compassionate and protective Father God. As a shepherd protects his flock, God acts as our Shepherd who watches over each one of his sheep in his care. Like sheep, God, our Shepherd, keeps us under his protection and care as long as we stay close to him. But if we stray away from God, lose sight of him and are away from where his grace and love can care for us, God cannot protect us. This parable tells us God will come looking for us. He never, ever will give up on one of his own. Like the shepherd, God will keep searching for us and calling for us to come back to him.

There's a deeper message here also. That is why Jesus had to be sent to earth, to live among us, to give up the perfection and protection of Heaven and suffered as a sacrifice for us. When we were still sinners, God sent Jesus to restore us to him so that we could become his children again.

Romans 5:6 and 8 describes it like this:

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”—ROMANS 5:6, 8

[Heart Mom: Here is an extra section to the lesson if you have time or would like to incorporate this message into your lesson.]

You may have people in your life who have strayed from God. Who are away from His protection and care? What can be done for them? Is there anything you can do? Of course, praying for them is vital. He wants to draw His own back into his arms quickly and safely. In conversations with them, remind them that God sent Jesus, his Son, to save them and God loves them very much. He always has and always will. Remind them that you and God will never give up on them. God reminds us through this parable that he doesn't give up on his lost sheep.

Close the evening with prayer.

(Some of the information and commentary used in this lesson comes from Jesus' 46 Parables in Chronological Christian Bible Study, by Dave Ahl with his permission.)

HEARTFELT BIBLE STUDY HANDOUT

The Parable of the Lost Sheep—Luke 15:1-7

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Commit to approach God with confidence. With boldness. Go to Him expecting Him to answer you! Pray for those who have gone astray and those who are lost.

Write 3 things that you are praying about.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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Like sheep, God, our Shepherd, keeps us under his protection and care as long as we stay close to him. But if we stray away from God, lose sight of him and are away from where his grace and love can care for us, God cannot protect us. This parable tell us God will come looking for us. He never, ever will give up on one of his own. Like the shepherd, God will keep searching for us and calling for us to come back to him.

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LESSON 5
WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?
PARABLE: The Good Samaritan—Luke 10:25-37

[Read the passage. Encourage those who have their Bibles to turn to Luke 10:25-37 as you read.]

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live?” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”
—LUKE 10:25-37

INTRODUCTION

As we have studied and talked about Jesus’ parables these past few months, we have discussed how Jesus told stories to explain spiritual concepts. Jesus through these stories, made larger points than the parable seemed to have on the surface. Jesus wanted those listening, especially his followers, to seek out deeper meanings and to apply those personally.

In addition to hidden meanings, Jesus used the characters in his stories to represent a variety of people, beliefs, or ideas. Almost always in his audiences were commoners, but also there were devout Jews, even priests and teachers of the Law of Moses. Often Jesus would represent these different groups by characters in his parables.

Let’s look at the different characters in this parable about the man who was beaten and left on the side of the road. Here’s a list of them:

- The man who was beaten
- The priest

The Levite.

The Samaritan

Let's get to know each of these a little better:

The man who was beaten was innocently walking from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was viciously attacked by thieves, beaten and robbed and left hurt and helpless on the side of the road. The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho was a popular route and about 17 mile long. The road descends about 3,000 feet as it approaches Jericho and except for a small inn or lodge about halfway on the route the terrain was desolate and the area fairly isolated. Being hurt on this journey would mean a very bad outcome. It was known as a hazardous trip due to thieves and robbers. This is the character the story revolves around: an Innocent Man beaten and left to fend for himself.

Jesus intentionally leaves the man undescribed. The audience, being Jewish, would naturally assume that he was a Jew. Being in this half dead state, he would be unconscious. Since he is stripped, he then is unidentifiable. Historically, a person can be identified in one of two ways: his dress and his speech, i.e., dialect. The man is any person: void of ethnic background, void of stature, void of position.

Why do you think Jesus chose this particular character and this situation for this story?

This would have been a circumstance that most people of that time would have been familiar with, and possibly could identify with. If we heard a story similar today about a breakdown in your car on the interstate out in west Texas, most of us would understand that situation.

The priest was on this road possibly because a large settlement of priests lived and worked near Jericho. It would have been natural for him to take the same route. A priest was a keeper of the Law of Moses. There were certain rituals and responsibilities to remain pure and clean to perform the temple rituals. The priest could have believed he would not be able to perform his duties if he was contaminated by a man's blood. Although the Law of Moses commanded him to show mercy and to help your neighbor, this priest did not have pity on the man instead passing on the other side of the road to avoid the fallen, hurting man.

The Levite was a temple minister. Those from the tribe of Levi had been chosen by God to care for all things at the temple. Again, he was a member of the religious company carefully selected to participate in temple services and the teaching of the Law. What excuses could these religious clergymen have used to justify not helping the beaten man? Perhaps they had an important meeting or appointment. Because of their high office in the Temple service, they may have considered themselves to be above the task of aiding someone who was in this situation. Too busy. Too rushed. Too important.

The Samaritan was part of a mixed race between the Jews of captivity and the Samaritan people of the land they were captive in. The relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was one of hostility because of some bad things that happened in the past. The Samaritans were thought of as a common, lesser group. The Jewish people generally looked down on them or even

despised them. However, the Samaritan is not a gentile. He would be bound by the same law as the Jews. Since he would not be naturally from that area, the half dead man would certainly not qualify as his neighbor.

John 4:9 has this reference to the Samaritan people. It's from a story of a woman at the well where Jesus rested one day:

“A Samaritan woman said to him (Jesus), ‘You are a Jew. I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’ She said this because Jews don’t have anything to do with Samaritans.”

What did the Samaritan do for the beaten man that was out of the ordinary?

He gave care and attention to a total stranger, possibly someone from another race. The beaten man could have been a robber also. Or had diseases. It's likely he didn't see the robbery take place, but just came upon the beaten man beside the road. The Samaritan could also have worried that he would have been accused of beating and robbing the man if found with him. But instead he acted on the Law of love. He put love into action with someone who he didn't know personally.

LESSON

Now, knowing what you do about each of these characters in Jesus' parables, who was responding in the way that God expected? The Samaritan was the only one who showed mercy and care for the beaten man. He is the one, however, of all the characters in the story that the listeners would be the most surprised to have helped and been kind to a stranger.

What do you think Jesus' purpose was in telling this story to answer the legal expert's question of “who is my neighbor?”

Jesus addresses the laws of love—the greatest commandments ever given according to Jesus and God's own teachings. Love your neighbor is an action, not a feeling or concept. Jesus saw into the legal expert's heart and saw he was judging the keeping of the law on very rigid guides. He may have thought Jesus would say a neighbor is a friend or family member. Certainly he didn't expect Jesus to describe a commoner or an unrecognizable man. And certainly he, or the crowd of listeners, would not have thought a Samaritan would have been the right acting person in Jesus' story. This is Jesus' point: someone in need is your neighbor and that can be anyone and everyone.

WRAPPING UP

Jesus explained who our neighbor is in an indirect answer to the lawyer's question. We are to love everybody. We are to extend love, mercy, grace, kindness—all the attributes of the Holy Spirit's gifts—to everyone regardless of race, economic situation, education, intellect, or social standing. The man who was beaten could have represented any person since we do not know his race or social class or even his religious background.

By answering the lawyer's question with this parable Jesus refuses to define

who a neighbor is specifically. Instead He asks a question himself in order to have the answer be proved and seen clearly by the lawyer and others who were listening.

Jesus, in this dialogue with a Jewish expert, knew he was talking to someone who was used to settling legal questions concerning the Law of Moses. We are told the lawyer wished to “test Jesus”. He wanted to “trip him up.” Perhaps knowing this man’s heart, a lesson on love was what he needed and Jesus knew this.

[Have an open discussion with your group with this question.]

How can we avoid acting as the priest and Levite did in the parable?
How can you and I be more like the Samaritan?

Close the evening with prayer.

(Some of the information and commentary used in this lesson comes from Jesus’ 46 Parables in Chronological Christian Bible Study, by Dave Ahl with his permission.)

HEARTFELT BIBLE STUDY HANDOUT

PARABLE: The Good Samaritan—Luke 10:25-37

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How can we avoid acting as the priest and Levite did in the parable? _____

How can you and I be more like the Samaritan? _____

LESSON 6

THE FAITHFUL AND UNFAITHFUL SERVANTS

THE PARABLE: The Talents—Matthew 25:14-30

[Read the passage. Encourage those who have their Bibles to turn to Matthew 25:14-30]

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.—MATTHEW 25:14-30

INTRODUCTION

We have discussed several times why Jesus used parables, or stories, to teach the people. The Disciples were as curious as we are about this method. We read in Matthew 13:

"The disciples came to (Jesus) and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 13This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand." The people

who came to hear Jesus were not ready to receive his message about the Kingdom of God. So he taught his lessons hidden in stories. The truth of the Kingdom were heard but not understood. Only those who had hearts to hear the Truth would understand these stories.

How is this similar to teaching about God's Kingdom today in our times?

Biblical scholars have had varying opinions as to the value of the talents in this story. There is no doubt the word "talent" here that Jesus is speaking of means money. Some theologians have related its value to the mina. A mina seems to be worth about 3 months wages for a laborer. There are 60 minas per talent. Based on that the talent is worth about 15 years pay for a common laborer. That is a pretty substantial amount of money.

Let's now look at the elements in this parable:

- Time
- Money
- Work
- Profit

Doesn't this seem a pretty worldly subject for a spiritual story? Why would Jesus use talk about money and investments to illustrate an important message?

Jesus used common or basic elements in his parables so that the common people could relate to the story. Money and income was important to everyone, so the stories fundamentals are understandable.

Let's talk about these four elements. All of them represent a message about the Coming of Christ's Kingdom

TIME—Jesus' way of talking about His return and the coming of His Kingdom. Jesus taught there would be signs to discern the general "season" of His return, but neither the day nor the hour would be known. Beyond this, His return would come at a time when it was not expected.

MONEY—Jesus is showing that both believers and unbelievers are entrusted with certain things, and that they must give account for their stewardship. What Jesus wants the people to know is that ALL men/women are accountable to God for how they use (or do not use) those resources which God has entrusted to them.

WORK—Both the first and second servants immediately set to work with the master's money. It is not the money that goes to work, as such, but the worker. When the third servant's excuses are set aside, it becomes evident that this man is lazy – he didn't do any work.

PROFIT—Those who can be trusted to do the work in order to profit their master are rewarded for their work and faithfulness. Those who are unfaithful will lose their talent/money and their reward.

How are the faithful servants in the story rewarded by their master?

First, they receive their master's appreciation and praise. He says, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Second, because they have proven themselves to be faithful with the few things the master trusted them with, so now they are each given greater responsibilities by their master.

Third, they are invited to “Come and share your master’s happiness! which is the salvation of lost sinners.

What is the response of the master to the unfaithful servant?

He was harshly reprimanded. The talent was taken from him. Then he was thrown out: ‘throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ This is meant to describe the horrible suffering experience of hell.

THE LESSON

What would Jesus want us to understand from this parable? What do you think the meaning or the message of this parable is for us today in the modern church?

The Lord gives us all certain talents, or gifts or skills. We each have abilities and sometimes opportunities that God wants us to use to make our lives better and to serve others. He also wants us to know He is the giver of all these things and we are to show our gratitude by developing the talents he’s given us.

WRAPPING UP

Jesus teaches in this parable that when the Lord blesses you with a gift or a talent it is your responsibility to develop it and use it all for His glory and to increase the work of the Kingdom of God.

What are some specific gifts or talents you see in others around you? How have you seen someone develop their talent to use for the Lord.

What about you? Are you active in developing the talent the Lord has given you as a member of the Kingdom of God?

How are you using your talent to Glorify God and to grow the Kingdom?

Close the evening with prayer. Pray specifically for the growth of each other’s talents to serve the Lord in the way God designed them to.

[Handout the attached sheet. Ask everyone to complete it within 24 hours.]

Close the evening with prayer.

(Some of the information and commentary used in this lesson comes from Jesus’ 46 Parables in Chronological Christian Bible Study, by Dave Ahl with his permission.)

HEARTFELT BIBLE STUDY HANDOUT

The Parable of the Talent

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.—MATTHEW 25:14-30

The Lord gives us all certain talents, or gifts or skills. We each have abilities and sometimes opportunities that God wants us to use to make our lives better and to serve others. He also wants us to know He is the giver of all these things and we are to show our gratitude by developing the talents he's given us.

Write down a specific way you can develop a talent/gift you know God has given you. _____

Who can help you in this process of getting stronger or better or to learn more about the talent you are going to use for the Kingdom of God? _____

Will you begin today to shine for the Lord in this one area? Pray for God to give you wisdom and guidance to develop your talent He has given you. _____

LESSON 7
 FAIR LABOR FOR FAIR PAY
 PARABLE: The Wealthy Landowner—Matthew 20:1-16

[Read the Bible verse. Encourage those who have their Bibles to turn to Matthew 20:1-16]

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ “Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”—MATTHEW 20:1-16

INTRODUCTION

Through reading, studying and discussing God’s Word over these months together, perhaps you have begun to see how the Bible does have a rich, deep, important meaning for your life today. While an ancient book, the Word of God is, as Hebrews 4 tells us, as alive as it was several thousand years ago when the inspired writers wrote the words down. Hebrews 4:12 says: “The word of God is alive and active.”

The questions we have been discussing in this study of the Parables are slightly different from a traditional Bible study. We have been focusing on how the Scriptures apply to your life today. The questions have given us a lot to talk about.

Have these lessons from the Parables of Jesus seemed different than other Bible studies you have done? If so, how have they affected you?

LESSON

In this parable Jesus told it appears at the end of the day everyone ended up in pretty good shape, wage-wise. What exactly did happen in this parable? Anyone want to sum up the story in the parable of the wealthy landowner?

A wealthy farm owner needed workers for his fields. He hired some workers early in the day, but throughout the day he added other workers to the ones he had hired earlier. He actually went to town five different times, so the groups of workers all arrived to work later and later throughout the day. At the end of the work day, the owner decided to pay everyone the same amount for the work they had done. The later workers got the same amount of pay as the workers who were there first thing.

Did the owner do anything wrong in deciding to pay his workers this way?

No, it was the farm owner's right to do whatever he wanted with his fields and money.

No, the farmer must have had a good heart.

No, he needed work done and found a way to get it done most efficiently.

The landowner asked this question. "Are you envious because I am generous?" vs. 16

Thinking about his question, which of these are true? The workers who had been on the job the longest complained because they:

Felt cheated out of a fair wage?

Were jealous of those who were paid the same but had worked less?

Did not understand it was the owner's right to pay whatever he wished to his workers?

[Answer: They are all true.]

The landowner asked the question because he knew their hearts. No one was cheated out of their wage. No one was underpaid. The earlier workers were jealous. Those complaining early workers thought they deserved more because they had worked longer hours in the unfavorable conditions, but they were paid what had been agreed to. The payment he gave to the late workers was his choice. It is confusing that in this parable conscientious workers were paid the same as those who did less. Sure, we are puzzled the less responsible employees were treated the same as reliable employees. This parable is not about fair labor and wage practices.

What deeper lesson did Jesus teach in this parable? Jesus is teaching us about Grace. If we focus on the content of the story—if we only read and hear the narrative of what happened to the employees during and at the end of a work day. We miss the message.

Here is Jesus' answer to the legalists. Those who believed in fairness based on the law. "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the

right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

God distributes Grace to us. It’s His gift to Christians. None of us get paid what we deserve or earn. We will never measure up to this grace. We cannot EARN our salvation. We can never do enough, work hard enough, pray enough, serve enough to be worthy of God’s gift of salvation. We can never be worthy enough. If we all got “paid by God” based on our own merit, none of us would earn Heaven.

WRAPPING UP

What should our attitude be towards God’s gift of grace to us?

What affects our attitude toward others—perhaps those who we think are less deserving—or those who have hurt us or those we love?

Conclude with prayer asking God to bless us with a spirit of Gratitude for His Grace.

Close the evening with prayer.

(Some of the information and commentary used in this lesson comes from Jesus’ 46 Parables in

Chronological Christian Bible Study, by Dave Ahl with his permission.)

HEARTFELT BIBLE STUDY HANDOUT
PARABLE: The Wealthy Landowner—Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ““Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”—MATTHEW 20:1-16

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What affects our attitude toward others—perhaps those who we think are less deserving—or those who have hurt us or those we love?

LESSON 8

THE EXTRAORDINARY VALUE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

PARABLE: The Hidden Treasure—Matthew 13:44

[Heart Mom: Read Matthew 13:44 to begin.]

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.—MATTHEW 13:44

INTRODUCTION

Before this passage, we read in verses 34-35:

“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.” (cf Psalm 78:2)

This verse is a reference to another Biblical text from Psalm 78:2. This passage from Matthew 13 refers to the psalmist is also speaking about hidden things of the Kingdom. And notice this passage confirms other things we have learned about Jesus. According to Holy Scripture, he never spoke without using parable.

Based on our previous lessons about the parables of Jesus, who are these parables, these stories with hidden meanings meant for?

They were meant for believers in Jesus—For His followers. They were not for the legalistic teachers and high Jewish leaders who did not understand Jesus and his teachings. They were for those who had a heart of understanding for the Kingdom of God and for the teachings of Jesus.

The Gospel of Matthew, where this parable is recorded, is one of the books of the Bible that give us direct access to the teachings of Jesus. The other three books that record Jesus’ teachings are Mark, Luke and John. In these stories known as parables, Jesus speaks often about the Kingdom of God and how it is different than the kingdom of this world. However, although using spiritual lessons, Jesus used physical, earthly descriptions to talk about spiritual things in order to teach his followers.

LESSON

According to ancient history studies, people in Bible times often buried their valuables in fields. We learn through these that Jewish law was “if a man finds scattered fruit, scattered money... these belong to the finder.” So finding and keeping buried treasure was considered the norm. The man was not doing anything wrong. When the man found the treasure, he could have just taken it. But that is not what our story says he did.

Why did the man who found the treasure do what he did?

He sold everything he had in order to buy the field and lay claim to the treasure.

There are two people in this story. Who do they represent?

The man who finds the treasure and the owner of the land where the treasure was buried.

What did the owner of the field do that was surprising?

He sold the field to the treasure-finder. Obviously he didn't own the treasure either, or he would not have sold the field with the buried valuables. He would have dug it up and claimed it before selling his land.

The man who found the treasure could have taken it and claimed it as his own without buying the field. Instead, he sold all his possessions in order to have enough money to buy the field and claim the treasure.

Why do you think the man didn't just take the treasure when he found it?

Why did he think he should sell his possessions and buy the whole field?

He knew he had found something so valuable it was worthy everything he had to get it. He was so ecstatic about finding the treasure he was willing to do whatever he needed to do in order to legally, ethically, honestly, totally make it his own.

What is the hidden meaning of this parable? Is it about an earthly Kingdom? This parable is about the value of the Kingdom of God not earthly wealth or an earthly kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven is more valuable than anything else we can have or own. A person must be willing to give up everything to have it.

Let's talk about how the man found the treasure. Let's consider a few questions:

Did he know the value of the treasure?

Was the treasure someone else's or could anyone have found it?

Did the treasure cost him or did the field cost him everything?

The man discovered the treasure. It was an accident that he stumbled upon it. But the man knew its value immediately. Although buying the field cost the man everything, the treasure was a free find. It came with the purchase of the land. But the treasure was just given as part of the purchase. It cost the man nothing. God gives us access to His Kingdom, a treasure of immeasurable value. But we do have to claim it. We must recognize what God is giving us. The landowner had access to the treasure also. He owned the field, but he didn't know about the treasure, so he couldn't claim it. In the same way, many people do not recognize the Kingdom. Many do not even know what to search for. They do not know or understand the value of an eternal kingdom.

WRAPPING UP

In verse 44, we find that the man's response to finding the treasure was one of joy. Most of us want this kind of real joy! This man knew that what he had was more valuable than anything he owned and this realization of what he had discovered brought him a valuable feeling—joy! This kind of joy, this

true happiness, is possible when you discover you have the Kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ in your life.

Do you know how valuable a relationship with Jesus Christ is?

The world looks at Christians and does not understand why we worship God and want to serve Him. The world does not understand our servant-hearts or unselfish living. Most people want to acquire things they feel have great value—money, houses, jobs, fame, possessions—yet they are worthless in the long run. God has offered something of true value to all and the source of real joy. The treasure—the greatest treasure of all—a life lived in Christ and a part in His Kingdom.

Let's do everything we possibly can to enjoy this valued treasure! Live joyfully!

Close the evening with prayer.

(Some of the information and commentary used in this lesson comes from Jesus' 46 Parables in Chronological Christian Bible Study, by Dave Ahl with his permission.)

HEARTFELT BIBLE STUDY HANDOUT
PARABLE: The Hidden Treasure—Matthew 13:44

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In verse 44, we find that the man's response to finding the treasure was one of joy. Most of us want this kind of real joy! This man knew that what he had was more valuable than anything he owned and this realization of what he had discovered brought him a valuable feeling—joy! This kind of joy, this true happiness, is possible when you discover you have the Kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ in your life.

When we look at our lives, what do we trade for the all surpassing greatness of knowing God?

Do you know how valuable a relationship with Jesus Christ is?

The world looks at Christians and does not understand why we worship God and want to serve Him. The world does not understand our servant-hearts or unselfish living. Most people want to acquire things they feel have great value—money, houses, jobs, fame, possessions—yet they are worthless in the long run. God has offered something of true value to all and the source of real joy. The treasure—the greatest treasure of all—a life lived in Christ and a part in His Kingdom.

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LESSON 9

FORGIVE LIKE YOUR FATHER

PARABLE: The Unmerciful Servant—Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”—MATTHEW 18:21-35

INTRODUCTION

In response to a question from Peter concerning how much should we forgive, Jesus answers seventy times or some say seventy times seven. Jesus then uses a parable to teach His disciples about the “kingdom of heaven.” We can take some very important principles from this parable and apply them to our lives today.

LESSON

The servant in this parable was shown mercy by the King who was his ruler and his employer. The debt that was forgiven was ten thousand talents. Today that would be equal to several millions of dollars. When the servant was confronted with the debt of another servant who worked for him, he was unwilling to forgive another who owed him a hundred denarii. A denarius was a day’s wage and was worth approximately sixteen cents.

In relation to the debt the first servant was forgiven how did the second servant’s debt compare?

This was a very small amount.

What happened to the servant who did not forgive?

He was sent to jail, tortured and required to repay the debt—he was given the same treatment as he gave the second servant.

What does God forgiving us depend on? Let's look at a few verses:

But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.—MATTHEW 6:15

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.—MARK 11:25 ESV

What principle is Jesus teaching his disciples?

Forgiveness is not an option. It either comes with a reward—God's forgiveness; or a punishment—God's unforgiveness. Grace or forgiveness to one another is to be without limit. Neither we nor the disciples are to count the number of times we forgive. Rather, as the parable teaches, we are to forgive because God forgave.

What principle can we today learn from this?

We are like the servant with the great debt towards the King. Our sin is what separates us from God's love and acceptance of us. We do not deserve for our debt of sin to be forgiven. It is because of God's loving mercy our debt of sin is CANCELLED. Jesus wants us to realize how deep, how wide, how complete his grace and Mercy is towards us in our sinfulness. We must extend that same grace and forgiveness towards others when they wrong us—without limit—so that we ourselves receive forgiveness.

WRAPPING UP

Any other deeper lessons Jesus may be teaching in this parable?

Jesus is teaching us about Grace.

To forgive much is expected. We can never forgive as much as God has forgiven us. Christians deal with debt in a different way than the world because we understand how much forgiveness matters to us.

What is so hard about forgiving others, even though we understand God's forgiveness towards us?

[Heart Mom: This is your last meeting of this season of Heartfelt, so you may want to spend a few minutes getting some feedback about what being in our ministry, in your group has meant to your Heart Sisters. Encourage everyone to sign up for the next season this summer when registration begins.]

Close the evening with prayer.

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Please remember to sign up for Heartfelt next year—WE LOVE YOU!