



PARABLES

LEADER'S GUIDE



Parables Leaders Guide

Wow! Thank you so much for making yourself available to lead a Connect Group at theChapel! You are creating an atmosphere for people to connect, and making a huge difference in their lives. We've created this resource to help you facilitate discussions within your Group.

This study is adapted from a message series that was originally presented at theChapel. The series focused on the accounts of Jesus teaching principles of the Kingdom through stories. We like to say a parable is an earthly story with a spiritual meaning. The intent of the story was to reveal the way the Kingdom of God works to those who could hear and understand it. Through the parables we gain insight into the characteristics of the Kingdom of God, and how we can participate in it.

There will be folks in your Group in the coming weeks who have struggled to understand the way that God created them to live. These principles about God's Kingdom may seem backward or confusing because they are in conflict with some things that we learn from our families and our culture. Your discussion time together may be just the thing to unlock someone's perspective on God, and help them to experience the best that God has for them.

At the end of each week's guide, you'll see a section called "Another Chapter." If your Group is still in it, and hungry for more, these additional questions can extend the conversation a bit. We know you'll enjoy this time, and thanks again for leading!

The Parable of the Patch and the Wineskins - Week 1



Click for Full Message Video

Start by having someone in your group read Luke 5:36-29 NIV:

He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'"

Pray that through our time together, God would open our ears to hear the truth about the Kingdom of God. Thank Him for caring so much about us that He would leave the throne of Heaven to come and show us God's creation in this way. Ask Him to be present through His Spirit and His Word, and to speak to us. Amen!

In this series, we'll explore Jesus' parables, which use everyday stories to convey deeper spiritual messages. While we've already encountered our first parable, it's essential to grasp the context of Jesus' time to fully understand its meaning. Let's delve into that context with Pastor Q before we explore the parable in detail.



CLICK FOR VIDEO CLIP

So, Jesus is having dinner with the tax collectors, and the Pharisees don't like it. They assume that a good teacher should be hanging out with people who are trying to follow God's law. It's that awkward moment when you see someone you respect in a place you don't respect - like seeing your boss all up in the club.

- ▶ What would you think if you saw one of our church leaders in a place associated with sin or low moral character like a casino, a bar, or a club?
- ▶ Why do you think we tend to make a judgment about where someone should or should not be, or who they should or should not be associated with?

The next thing that happens is that some people begin to ask questions about the differences between the disciples who followed John the Baptist, and the disciples who followed Jesus. They said, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking." Your disciples are hanging at the buffet while these other disciples are making these grand gestures of sacrifice and devotion to God. Why is that?

- ▶ Why do you think the people are looking at the behavior of Jesus' disciples so closely?
- ▶ Where do the expectations that we place on others come from?

Jesus gave direct responses to both questions, but neither one satisfied the crowd. So that's when we get the parable about the patch and the wineskin. It's a story about trying to repair old things with new things. The parable says to us that God is not into patchwork. The old things are already worn in. They are formed comfortably around their old experiences. What Jesus is saying is that the Kingdom of God is not about repairing old stuff that has been comfortably formed to suit its purpose. It's about replacing those things with something entirely new.

- ▶ What areas of your life have become comfortable, worn in, and formed to fit your experience?
- ▶ How have those old ideas and values formed the expectations that you place on others? How about the expectations you place on yourself?

The parable is about spiritual elasticity and allowing God to do something entirely new in you without trying to tack it on to something that came before. We know now that we can't get new results with old behaviors.

- ▶ What old behaviors need to be replaced so you can get new results from God?

- ▶ What keeps you from casting aside some of the old behaviors?

ANOTHER CHAPTER

Read Luke 5:31-32 aloud:

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

One of the greatest consequences of a comfortable faith is that we tend to lose our love for people who don't know Jesus. An inflexible religious spirit will close us off to the very purpose of our lives.

- ▶ How would you honestly describe your current heart and attitude toward people who don't know Jesus?
- ▶ How is God using you to reach people who don't know Him?
- ▶ What needs to change for you to become more effective in your relationships with lost people?

PRAYER POINT

This week, ask God to shake up your comfort zones. Pray that God would develop our spiritual elasticity, and that we would be ready to discard the old stuff that is used up and comfortable and embrace something entirely new.

NEXT STEPS

Try something new:

- ▶ Introduce yourself to a stranger, and try not to judge their point of view.
- ▶ Do something in worship that you have never done before (ie. lift your hands, sing aloud, ask for someone to pray with you.)
- ▶ Sign up for a Serve Day project.

The Parable of the Unjust Judge - Week 2



Click for Full Message Video

Start by having someone in your Group read Luke 18:2-8 NLT aloud:

“There was a judge in a certain city,” he said, “who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, ‘Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.’ The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, ‘I don’t fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!’” Then the Lord said, “Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?”

Pray for attentive ears to hear the message that Jesus intended in the parable. Ask God for the courage to pray with boldness and expectation, and thank Him for being just and kind in the way that He deals with His children. Amen!

We’ve been talking about the ways that Jesus described the Kingdom of God. He spoke to the crowds in parables; earthly stories with a spiritual meaning. He was talking about the way God created us to live. Today’s parable is about a persistent widow who got justice from a judge who didn’t know God, or even care about people. The key ingredient was persistence. The parable is about persistent prayer, and the nature of our just God.

- ▶ Tell us about a time when you got what you wanted because you were persistent. *(You might start with a story of your own to give folks a couple of minutes to think.)*

- ▶ What do we know about the judge?
- ▶ What do we know about the widow?

Let's go to the video for a quick clip from the message to get us started.



CLICK FOR VIDEO CLIP

The delay isn't denial. The delay is protection. That's the Kingdom principle when it comes to prayer, and it comes from knowing the nature of God.

- ▶ What are the differences between the nature of God and the nature of the unjust judge?
- ▶ What is your first impulse when a hard time comes along? Where do you go first with your problem?
- ▶ Where do you find yourself going for answers when it seems like praying isn't working?

When we keep bringing our problem back to God time and time again, we are exercising our faith. When you exercise faith, faith continues to grow. It's that kind of persistence that builds us up to ride through the hard times.

- ▶ What have you found that builds your confidence in God's ability to handle your issues?
- ▶ What issue have you stopped bringing to the Lord because you became discouraged?
- ▶ Where did you change direction because of a delay in God's response to your prayer?
- ▶ What needs to change in your perspective about God to continue to trust Him even when the answer isn't coming quickly enough for you?

ANOTHER CHAPTER

Read aloud: 1 Corinthians 15:58 NLT:

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the

work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

This Kingdom principle of persistence extends beyond our prayer. We are pressed on all sides by voices that want us to do what they want us to do, buy what they want us to buy, believe what they want us to believe.

- ▶ Where are you being pressured to shift course because of the voices around you?
- ▶ Where have you begun to waver and lose confidence in something that God said to you?
- ▶ How have you learned to return to a firm footing when your belief has begun to waver?

PRAYER POINT

This week, be persistent in prayer! Ask for God's help with the things that are on your mind. Ask for clear direction, and a greater faith in His nature as a God who cares deeply for His children. Thank Him for answering the prayer even before you get the answer.

NEXT STEPS

- ▶ Make a commitment to pray daily about something specific that matters to you.
- ▶ Submit a prayer request at theChapel.cc/pray so we can pray with you.
- ▶ Come to the front this weekend, and ask for one of the Prayer Team to agree with you in prayer.

The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard - Week 3



Click for Full Message Video

Start by having someone in your group read Matthew 20:1-16 aloud:

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. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius (a day's wage), he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, "You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you." So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. 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?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You go into the vineyard too." 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." And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, 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." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" So the last will be first, and the first last.

Pray that God would reveal something to us about what His Kingdom is like. Ask for an open heart to receive just as He intends, and for the discussion in the room to honor and please Him. Amen!

The parable is all about some workers who were upset because they worked all day, and got paid the same amount as other workers who only worked a small portion of the day. The amount was fair for a full day's work, but they still had beef with the master of the house because it didn't "feel" fair.

- ▶ What was the most recent situation you faced that felt unfair?
- ▶ What is your opinion of the master of the house from the parable? Is he a good guy or a bad guy?

We all get upset from time to time when our situation doesn't seem fair. Fairness and justice are kind of hard-wired into us, and it's hard sometimes not to position ourselves as the judge that determines what's right or wrong; fair or unfair.



CLICK FOR VIDEO CLIP

So, maybe the way we compare ourselves with others causes some of the discontent that we feel sometimes.

- ▶ What areas are you most tempted to compare your situation to the situation of others?
- ▶ What happens in your heart when you've compared, and determined within yourself that it's just not fair? How does it change your attitude?
- ▶ How does your behavior or language change when you have feelings of discontentment?

Remember the purpose of the parable. The idea is to show us what the Kingdom of God is like. Beyond just a look at the character of the people in the story, and what it shows us about our character, there is a bigger purpose here.

- ▶ What do you think Jesus was communicating about the Kingdom of God?
- ▶ Which characters in the story do you resonate with the most: The all day workers or the later in the day workers?

- ▶ What does the parable reveal about the character and nature of God?

ANOTHER CHAPTER

Read Ephesians 2:8-9 NLT aloud:

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Our world operates on transactions where we exchange equal value, like trading \$5 for a coffee worth \$5. However, the Kingdom of God defies this model, emphasizing generosity and grace over equal exchanges.

- ▶ How can we live in a transactional world, but be generous and full of grace?
- ▶ How does knowing that you did not earn the blessing of God change the way you bless others?

PRAYER POINT

This week, ask the Lord to make us, first of all, grateful for the kindness he has shown to us. Ask for the self control to avoid comparing ourselves to others, and for the courage to live out of a Kingdom mindset instead of following the pattern of the world.

NEXT STEPS

- ▶ Literally count your blessings. Write down or express gratitude for what you have.
- ▶ Show newcomers to their faith the same respect as long-time followers.
- ▶ Remove yourself from the temptation to compare yourself with others.
- ▶ Complete the Growth Track and volunteer generously to break free from a transactional mindset.

The Parable of the Fig Tree - Week 4



Click for Full Message Video

Start by having someone in the group read aloud Luke 13:6-8:

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Pray that God would open our ears to hear what He's saying to us through this parable. Ask for His help to become a people that bear fruit in our areas of responsibility. Thank Him for His patience and for working with us until we become more of what He created us to be. Ask for His voice to be heard, in Jesus' name. Amen!

We've been in this series of Parables; earthly stories with spiritual meaning. We have this story now about a fig tree that won't produce fruit. We have a few characters here in the story, but they aren't clearly identified.

- ▶ Who do you think owns the vineyard?
- ▶ Who do you think takes care of the vineyard?
- ▶ Who do you think is the fig tree?

The meaning of the parable isn't clearly laid out in Scripture, but let's see what we can learn from it.



CLICK FOR VIDEO CLIP

It's a good exercise to inspect areas of our lives for fruit. What areas are producing, and what areas have laid dormant for too long.

- ▶ What area of your life were you thinking of while Ps. Jason talked about his plant?
- ▶ What would acceptable fruit look like in that area of your life?
- ▶ Why do you think it's been dormant for so long?

We know that God expects us to produce, but it really matters how we see God's expectations on us. Do we see Him like a taskmaster, peering over our shoulder, daring us to fail? Or do we see Him like an enthusiastic Father looking to delight in His child? He's looking for fruit, not for failure.

- ▶ What do you think God is expecting from you?
- ▶ How does it make you feel to know that it's God's expectation?
- ▶ What would it look like to let Jesus tend the soil of that unfruitful area of your life?

ANOTHER CHAPTER

Read aloud Matthew 20:25-28:

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Sometimes we look at an area of influence in our lives, and we find it unfruitful. Often it's something that we're responsible for, but we don't have complete control over it. Whether it's a marriage with no life in it, a stalled career path, or maybe an under-performing

staff member.

- ▶ How do you react when an area of influence that you are responsible for has become unfruitful?
- ▶ Is your internal voice negative or judgmental? Is there a level of shame or guilt?
- ▶ How have you learned to bring your faith in God into those situations? What has been the result?

PRAYER POINT

This week as you pray, let's focus on fruitfulness. Ask God to search your life for areas that have grown stagnant and are not producing Kingdom outcomes. Receive the acceptance that comes from the love of God, and then thank God for it. Ask for His help to loosen the soil of your heart in that area, and the resources to bear the kind of fruit that He wants from you.

NEXT STEPS

Here are a few things you can share with your Group to help them have some action steps to work on.

- ▶ See a need. Meet a need. Just look for someone who needs something you do, and do it for them. Be sure to bring Jesus with you by praying with them, or mentioning your relationship with Him.
- ▶ Intentionally choose positive, life-giving and affirming words to address issues that are falling short of expectations. The key is the anticipation of fruit instead of failure.
- ▶ Go through Growth Track, and pick an area in the church to serve.

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders - Week 5



Click for Full Message Video

Start by reading Matthew 7:24-27 aloud:

These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards.

Pray for the courage to apply God's Word to our lives, so that we can endure difficult times without wavering. Ask God to show us the foundation of our lives, and to help us see the cracks and vulnerabilities before they become structural damage. Thank Him for providing all that we need to live the way He created us to live.

So this parable is all about being a smart carpenter in the way that we go about building our lives. It could be the way we are structuring our personal lives, our homes, our businesses or even our country.

- ▶ What are some of the things that you are "building" right now in your life?
- ▶ Assuming it's built to last - what are you expecting it to look like in the future?
- ▶ How have you been able to apply the Scripture to the foundation of what you are currently working on?

Quality construction outlasts the storm - and quality

construction has as much to do with WHERE we build as it does WHAT we build. That's why we're talking about the foundation. Let's take a look at a clip from the message to help us continue the conversation.



CLICK FOR VIDEO CLIP

Our choice to place Jesus as our source, and not as a supplement – that's what secures for us a firm foundation that is able to outlast the storm. But how often do we just carry on with life tacking Jesus on to whatever areas we see fit.

- ▶ How would you describe Jesus as a supplement instead of our source?
- ▶ What would have to change for Jesus to become the foundation that everything else in your life is built on?
- ▶ Have you ever faced a storm that revealed that your foundation was not as secure as you thought? Tell us about it.

A solid foundation doesn't come about overnight. It's a step-by-step process. It takes consistent, faithful work and the patience to allow time for things to firm up.

- ▶ What areas cause you to become impatient and assume control, instead of trusting God to work?
- ▶ What have you learned about the value of trusting God's Word and God's timing?
- ▶ What is one step you are willing to take to strengthen your trust and dependance on God?

ANOTHER CHAPTER

Read Mark 4:35-41 aloud:

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping

on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

That question the disciples asked rings out, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" If we're honest, sometimes it's hard to trust God because it's not obvious to us that He cares. Surely He sees our struggle. He must be aware of the waves crashing all around us.

- ▶ Is there anything going on in your life, and it just doesn't seem to you like God cares about it?
- ▶ Why do you think Jesus didn't calm the storm until the disciples woke Him up?
- ▶ Why did Jesus question their faith? After all, they did go wake Him up.

This story sets us up to see something that can be really beautiful in our lives; to build up the faith that can stand in the middle of the storm, and be fearless knowing that our God is able to quiet that storm in a moment.

- ▶ Have you ever had the experience of standing confidently in the middle of a storm because of your trust in God?
- ▶ In what situation in your life are you begging Jesus to wake up from His nap, and do something to help?
- ▶ What could it look like to change your perspective, and trust God's power instead of fearing the storm?

PRAYER POINT

This week, as you pray, let's ask God to grow our faith. Ask for help to trust Him so much more than we have before. Ask God to calm the storm, but if He doesn't, ask Him to calm us instead. Pray for the courage to

stand in the midst of any kind of chaos or storm with confidence that our God is bigger than anything we face.

NEXT STEPS

Let's also put that faith to work! Here are some helpful suggestions we can implement this week to strengthen our foundation:

- ▶ Before you just make a decision and do what you think is best, pause and pray. Invite God into the situation.
- ▶ If you face a problem this week, find a passage of Scripture that applies. Commit it to memory, and then instead of saying what you think about the problem, say the Scripture.
- ▶ Instead of trying to get out of an uncomfortable situation. Just stay there, and let God calm your thoughts and emotions.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan - Week 6



Click for Full Message Video

Start out by having someone in your group read Luke 10:30-37 aloud:

Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. "By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.' "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

Pray for the heart of the Good Samaritan; to be a merciful neighbor to those around us. Ask God to remind us of the power of community, and that our eyes would be opened to opportunities to meet needs.

Of all the parables that Jesus shared, this is one of the more familiar ones. We hear news stories from time to time about people who helped a person in the midst of an emergency. They might call that person a "good Samaritan." But the meaning in this parable runs deeper than just a convenient phrase to describe someone. Let's join Pastor Kyle for an overview of what's happening in the culture in which this story is originally told.



CLICK FOR VIDEO CLIP

So, the parable of the Good Samaritan is actually the way that Jesus chose to answer a question from one of the Jewish leaders. The question: "Who is my neighbor?"

- ▶ Why do you think the Jewish leader asked that question?
- ▶ Why do you think Jesus answered the question the way that he did?

Jesus used a racial division to illustrate his point. In the time of Jesus, a Jewish person and someone from Samaria would have seen each other as enemies. It was a hate / hate relationship. These two communities initially came from the same blood line - the nation of Israel - the people of God. But they experienced the separation of their relationship. Ideological and religious differences created a disdain for one another, and they opposed one another deeply.

- ▶ Where do you experience the sharpest division in your life? (ie. partisan politics, broken family relationships, racism)
- ▶ Why would the Samaritan in the story cross over this division to provide support and help to the Jewish man?
- ▶ What is Jesus saying to us about the divisions we experience between different groups of people?

The heart of the Samaritan in the parable was filled with compassion for the man that had been attacked. He stepped over division, convenience and his own personal agenda to make arrangements for the Jewish man to be restored to life.

- ▶ What most moves your heart with compassion?
- ▶ If you could rid the world of one injustice, what would it be?

ANOTHER CHAPTER

Read aloud 1 John 3:16-17:

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?

We all feel the tension from time to time about when to extend a hand to help, and when it seems more wise not to. We wrestle with justifications around what the person might do with what we give, or we defer to someone else more qualified to provide the best care. We fear being taken advantage of, and it may even cross our mind that the person is getting what they deserve.

- ▶ What reasoning most frequently prevents you from reaching out to help someone in need?
- ▶ How have you learned to discern which needs you will meet, and which ones you’ll let go by?
- ▶ What is one adjustment you’d like to make in the way that you see people with needs?

PRAYER POINT

When you spend time with the Lord this week, pray for open eyes to see those He would have you love and serve. Ask for the courage to step out in faith, and resist the urge to justify why we should not help. Ask for the level of intimacy and attention you need to hear His direction clearly. Amen!

NEXT STEPS

Here are a few practical things your Group can do to apply this parable:

- ▶ See a need, and meet it. Use whatever resources God has given you to help improve the situation for someone else.
- ▶ Make it a point to engage with someone you would normally avoid.
- ▶ Sign up for a Serve Day project, and then do it well.

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector - Week 7



Click for Full Message Video

Start out by having someone in your group read Luke 18:10-14 aloud:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Pray that God would help us today to take a step away from pride and self-sufficiency, and instead walk toward greater humility. Ask for a heart of dependance on the Lord. Thank Him for being patient with us in the moments when we feel like we have it all together, and in the moments when we feel completely helpless and hopeless.

This parable explores two extremes: the Pharisee, a religious teacher who flaunts his knowledge of God's Law, and the tax collector, an outcast known for greed but deeply aware of his sin.

- ▶ Which character in the parable do you identify with the most? Why?
- ▶ Why do you think Jesus shared this parable?

Let's go to the video to set up the discussion.



CLICK FOR VIDEO CLIP

It's the difference between pride and humility; religion and relationship. We're going to start our conversation comparing these two ideas to our life experiences.

- ▶ Tell us about a time when you found yourself in a situation depending more on religion than relationship.
- ▶ In what areas of your life are you the most tempted to act out of self-reliance rather than God-dependance?
- ▶ How could you restore an attitude of humility in these areas of life?

You may have heard the saying before, "Nothing affects an outcome more than an attitude." We know that the attitude we carry into goals we're trying to achieve or problems we're trying to solve can have a huge impact on how that situation turns out. The two men in the story were actually the same: Both in the house of God, and both desperately needing to be there. The only difference between them was their attitude; the orientation of their minds about why they were there in the first place.

- ▶ When you attend church on the weekend, what are you expecting to give?
- ▶ When you attend church on the weekend, what are you expecting to receive?

When we gather together, we come to Know God more, but sometimes we get too comfortable, and it becomes more about being known by others. We find our familiar relationships. We love to be celebrated for talents and contributions, and gradually we lose sight of why we're there in the first place.

- ▶ In what parts of your life have you become more interested in being known than knowing God's plan and purpose?
- ▶ What do you do when people affirm your talent or accomplishments?
- ▶ What do you do when you affirm your own talent or accomplishments?

ANOTHER CHAPTER

Read aloud 2 Corinthians 10:12:

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

Both men in our parable compared themselves. The Pharisee compared himself to the tax collector, and he was judged superior ... by himself. The tax collector compared himself to the awesome majesty of his Creator, and he judged worthy ... by God.

- ▶ Why do you think we are so inclined to compare ourselves to others?
- ▶ Have to become satisfied with an area of your life simply because it looks better than someone else's?
- ▶ What would it look like to allow God to raise the standards to a level that requires your dependance on Him to be successful?

PRAYER POINT

Let's go to the Lord this week asking for 2 things: 1) For the insight to understand, and ears to hear the Kingdom principles we were created to enjoy, and 2) For the courage to apply what we hear to our lives. Ask for the heart of humility to keep seeking God's best, and reminders of our need for God's power and love. Amen!

NEXT STEPS

Here are a few practical things your group can do to apply this parable:

- ▶ Attend church with a focus on knowing God more, and less on being known by others.
- ▶ Look for an area in your life that has become complacent, and raise the standard.
- ▶ Make it a point not to judge the position or behavior of others, but rather be with them in an honest pursuit of God's Word.

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl - Week 8



Click for Full Message Video

Start out by having someone in your group read Matthew 13:44-46 aloud:

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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Pray that God would help us to realize more today than ever before the value of His Kingdom. Ask God for the courage to shift our sense of worth from the world's systems to the principles of heaven. Thank Him for His kindness and mercy in sharing with us the highest and best of all creation.

Let's talk about treasure. We have a lot of different ways to talk about what something is worth: We talk about the price of an item or a service. We talk about prioritizing our time according to values. We talk about the return we get on an investment. These are all ways of communicating and exchanging worth. This parable says that the Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure. It's of great worth.

- ▶ What are the things that are worth the most to you today?
- ▶ For you today, what would be worth selling everything you have to obtain it?

Let's lean into a clip from PQ to get an idea of what this parable is all about.



CLICK FOR VIDEO CLIP

Joy is the result of the treasure of God's Kingdom. In the parable, the man's joy came AFTER he had assessed the value of the treasure. In his joy, the man determined that no matter what it may cost him, he had to have it. Because it was that valuable. Everything pales in comparison.

- ▶ What is something in your life that is so valuable that it brings you great joy?
- ▶ What is something that used to hold a lot of value to you, but then something else came along, and diminished its worth?
- ▶ What are some things in your life that you used to hold dear, but when you found Jesus, they seemed less important - less valuable?

The test that will reveal the value of God's Kingdom in our lives is in three areas: My time. My talent. My treasure. Somewhere in those areas we usually find the thing that is competing for the value that belongs to God alone.

- ▶ Which area holds the most value in your life - time, talent or treasure?
- ▶ What have you come to value so much about the Kingdom, that it has caused other things to pale in comparison?

ANOTHER CHAPTER

Read aloud Philippians 3:7-8

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ

The idea of this principle is not to devalue the things that we love and hold high, but rather to see the Kingdom of God with a level of value that surpasses them all. The value of the treasure outweighs the sacrifice.

- ▶ Where do you feel pressure in the culture around you to over-value something?

- ▶ What have you been willing to sacrifice for the value of the Kingdom?
- ▶ Is there any value in God's Kingdom that you have not yet been willing to pay the price to obtain?

PRAYER POINT

This week let's ask God to increase the level of value that we attach to our intimacy with Him, our relationships with His people. Ask for an increased hunger to know his Word, and to see others come to know Him as well. Thank Him for opening our eyes to the misplaced worship in our lives - areas that we have allowed to overshadow the surpassing value of God's Kingdom. Amen!

NEXT STEPS

Here are a few practical things your group can do to apply this parable:

- ▶ Prioritize the time for corporate and personal worship this week.
- ▶ Ask God what He would have you give in a sacrificial way to the greater purpose of His Kingdom.