

WHAT IS GOD TRYING TO TELL US? A STUDY OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

STUDY COMPANION FOR SESSION I—INTRODUCTION TO PARABLES (ANSWER KEY)

KEY SCRIPTURES

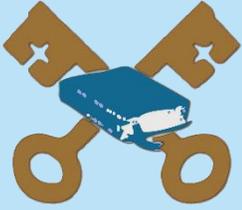
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Isaiah 6:9-10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 1:18-19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 13:20-23 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 8:9-11a | | |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Parables are not allegories. What are parables?
 - Parables are stories that Jesus made up in order to teach one central point.
- What is the only way that you will be able to understand the message of Jesus' parables?
 - By relying on God to give you understanding, insight, and wisdom. You will never understand the lessons Jesus was teaching unless God reveals it to you.
- What are the three main purposes behind God's use of parables?
 - To reveal God's truth (Matthew 13:34-35, Psalm 78:1-8)
 - To distinguish between those who can understand the parables and those who can't. Only those who are willing to humble themselves and say "I don't understand; Lord, please help me understand" will receive revelation (Matthew 13:10-17, Isaiah 6:9-10, Luke 8:9-11a, Matthew 13:36, 11:25, Hebrews 11:6, John 12:37-40)
 - To show mercy to the ones who do not understand. We will be judged according to how much truth has been revealed to us, and therefore it is mercy that God's truth is disguised to those who are not willing to humble themselves and ask for understanding (Romans 1:18-19, 16-17, 20-22)
- How does God choose who He reveals Himself to and who receives understanding?
 - God has chosen who He reveals truth to based on one very simple criterion: Who is willing to humble themselves and seek Him. There is no barrier to God's truth. It is not revealed based on merit, background, or intelligence. We all hear the Gospel, and when we do, we get to choose whether we accept or reject it, whether we scoff and turn away or diligently seek Him (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23). God responds to humility.

APPLICATION

- Parables are simple stories through which God reveals profound truth. Humble yourself when you don't understand, when you don't really like what you hear, and ask God to give you insight and understanding.
- When you have doubts and questions, don't turn away from God. Turn to Him.



WHAT IS GOD TRYING TO TELL US? A STUDY OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

STUDY COMPANION FOR SESSION 2—THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN & THE KINGDOM OF GOD (ANSWER KEY)

"The kingdom of God is the reign of God through Christ in the lives of persons as evidenced by His activity in, through, and around them. The kingdom was prophesied in the Old Testament, pictured in Israel, proclaimed by John the Baptist, inaugurated by Christ during His public ministry on earth, extended in the lives of believers through the church in the present age, and will be consummated by Christ when He returns to earth to rule with His saints." —Gene Mims

KEY SCRIPTURES

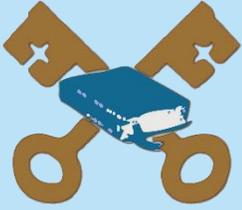
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Daniel 7:13-14 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 12:18-29 | <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 13:47-50 |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is there a difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God?
 - No. The 'Kingdom of Heaven' is another term for the Kingdom of God, used in the book of Matthew because that gospel was written to Jewish people who believed that God's name was too holy to be spoken aloud or even written (Matthew 13:31-33, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-21, Matthew 23:22)
- Is God's Kingdom still to come on the earth or is it already here?
 - Trick question—Yes! God's earthly Kingdom began while Jesus walked on the earth, and today, it is demonstrated in the lives of believers as they move through the world today. Your eternal life in the Kingdom of God began the day that you got saved! However, God's Kingdom is not fully realized yet. There are still many who reject His Kingship. When Jesus returns, He will set up a physical Kingdom on this earth and rule from Jerusalem. That is aspect of the Kingdom of God that we anxiously await.
- What is the central point of the Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast (Matthew 13:31-33)?
 - The Kingdom may seem small, but ultimately, it will grow to be greater than we can comprehend (Revelation 7:9-10). Even though you do not see it, God is building His Kingdom. His Kingdom may look small, but it is mighty.
- What is the central point of the Parable of the Weeds and the Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:24-30, 47-50)?
 - Leave it to God at the end of the age to sort His children from the false believers. It's not your job to determine who's saved and who isn't. It's the King's job.

APPLICATION

- In order to enter the Kingdom of God, we must allow Him to be King over us. Let God be God! Stop telling God how to run His world. Praise Him whether He does things the way you want or not.
- God is a powerful King and He WILL make His power known in this world. Approach Him with the reverence He deserves as King over all.
- The Kingdom has always been, the Kingdom is now, and yet the Kingdom is still yet to come! Ask God to help you understand it, and in the meantime, believe it!



WHAT IS GOD TRYING TO TELL US? A STUDY OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

STUDY COMPANION FOR SESSION 3—THE KINGDOM IS AVAILABLE TO ALL (ANSWER KEY)

KEY SCRIPTURES

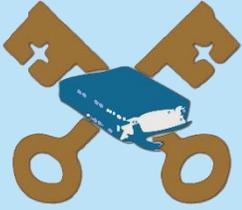
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does Jim paraphrase what Jesus says in response to the man who speaks in Luke 14:15, via the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24)? What was the central lesson that Jesus was teaching through this parable?
 - “Don’t assume you’re in the Kingdom of God.” This parable was taught to Jews who thought that they were automatically in the Kingdom of God because of their relationship to Abraham (Matthew 3:1-12). Jesus wanted them to confront the fact that the people group you are born into has nothing to do with whether you are going to heaven. It’s all about your relationship with Jesus Christ the Messiah. God extended the offer of salvation to the Jews, but the majority of them rejected Jesus, so God is drawing Gentiles in large numbers in order to make Israel jealous (Romans 1:16-17, Deuteronomy 32:21, Romans 11:11).
- What is the central point of the Parables of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)?
 - It is God’s prerogative to offer the exact same salvation to those that make a last-minute decision for Christ as those who have been faithful their whole lives. Don’t think for a moment that you will receive special treatment in heaven, or that you will get to heaven, because of how hard you worked on earth. There’s only one reason any of us are going to heaven: Because Jesus lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death for our sin, and rose again to display His victory over death and the grave. You don’t get to heaven by being a productive Church member. You get to heaven by placing your faith in Jesus alone to save you from your sin.
- Since God is able to save people at the last moment, does that mean that you can or should take your whole life to decide whether to follow Him?
 - Absolutely not! As the Parable of the Fig Tree demonstrates, you cannot presume that God will save you in the last hour (Luke 13:6-9, Romans 2:1-5). We are all guilty and deserving of death, and no one knows when their life will end. God has given you mercy. When He gives you an opportunity to surrender to Him, don’t wait. Respond when you are given the opportunity (Isaiah 55:1-3a, 6-11, 2 Corinthians 6:1-2)!

APPLICATION

- Don’t get good at tuning the Spirit of God out! The Jews knew that Jesus was talking about them in His parables, and still, they didn’t repent (Matthew 21:33-46). Don’t be like them. Instead, when you are pricked in your conscience, when the Spirit of God speaks to you, respond immediately!
- If you are in the Kingdom of God, it’s not because you earned it. It’s because of Jesus. I KNOW I’m going to heaven. That confidence has nothing to do with what I’ve done on earth, but everything to do with what Christ has done on my behalf and the fact that I have placed my faith in Him alone. Can you say the same?



WHAT IS GOD TRYING TO TELL US? A STUDY OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

STUDY COMPANION FOR SESSION 4—THE HEART OF GOD TOWARDS THE WORLD (ANSWER KEY)

KEY SCRIPTURES

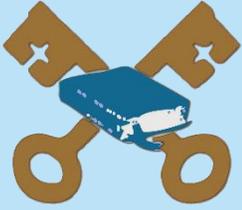
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 23:37-39 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 15:1-7 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 51:16-17 |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is God's heart towards the world?
 - God's heart is that every person would be reconciled to Him! He wants everyone to be saved, but He also wants us to acknowledge that He is in control of how the salvation process works. He is not willing for any to perish, but it is up to us whether we accept Him by placing our faith in His grace alone through Jesus Christ to save us (2 Peter 3:5-9; Ezekiel 18:23, 32, 33:11; Matthew 23:37-39, 18:10-14).
- The Bible describes serious consequences for those who cause others, especially little children, to sin (Matthew 18:10-14, 1-9). What is a sin that you might not realize you are modeling to the children around you?
 - You might be modelling the sin of legalism by acting as if we can gain righteousness by works (Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 23:13, 15). Hounding your grandkids about their church attendance does not model salvation by grace through faith alone. You cannot be the Holy Spirit to your grandkids. Love them, pray for them, be open to Gospel conversations, and let the Holy Spirit do His work in their hearts.
- What does Jesus mean in the Parable of the Lost Sheep when He says that the ninety-nine 'didn't go astray' or 'don't need repentance' (Matthew 18:10-14, Luke 15:1-7)?
 - There is no person who doesn't need repentance or doesn't go astray (Romans 3:10, Isaiah 53:6)! Jesus was teaching something deeper here: The really lost people are the ones who don't even realize their need for a Savior. Jesus came to the sick, not because some are sick and some aren't, but because those who realize and admit that they're sick are more prepared to accept Him (Luke 5:27-32).
- In the Parable of the Prodigal Son/the Loving Father (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus goes more in depth on the lesson of God's concern for the lost that He taught through the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin (Luke 15:1-10). What is the deeper point that was made in this story?
 - You can be equally far from God whether you live a sinful lifestyle OR if you think that you will be justified because of your works. The Loving Father in this parable was ready to forgive and accept both his sons. The Prodigal was willing to admit his sin and ask forgiveness because he believed that his father was merciful, while the older son thought he was owed reward because of his 'faithfulness.' He didn't know his Father's heart. Whether you live riotously or grew up in a Christian home, all you must do in order to be saved is repent of your sin and receive cleansing salvation by faith. Salvation is not by anything that you have done!

APPLICATION

- As you learn more about God's heart towards the world, remember that you need Jesus just as much as the lost! Pray that He would give you His same heart, that you would desire strongly for all to come to know Him. Then live in a way that points people to Him!
- God is a God of mercy and compassion, but He is also holy, and therefore He cannot excuse sin. That's why He provided Jesus as a sacrifice sufficient for all our sins. Don't soften the Gospel to make it palatable. Be honest with people about their need for salvation, then leave it to the Holy Spirit to lead people to repentance.



WHAT IS GOD TRYING TO TELL US? A STUDY OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

STUDY COMPANION FOR SESSION 5—CLOSE TO THE KINGDOM IS NOT ENOUGH (ANSWER KEY)

KEY SCRIPTURES

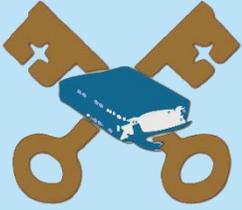
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 22:34-40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Colossians 1:23 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 3:1-19 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mark 12:18-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 3:9-10, 19-26 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 6:1-9 |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The lawyer who asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life understood the basics of the Gospel, but his next question revealed his true heart. What did he mean when he asked “Who is my neighbor?” and why did Jesus answer his question with the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)?
 - Jesus used his story to point out that the lawyer was trying to justify himself not loving others. After telling the parable, Jesus asked “Who was a neighbor *to this man?*” This revealed that loving your neighbor is not about favoring those close to you, but rather treating people with care and mercy whether you think they ‘deserve it’ or not. That’s what we are called to do, because that’s who our Father is.
- Jesus told the scribe who spoke to Him about the Greatest Commandment that he was not far from the kingdom of God (Mark 12:18-34). What was he missing that kept him out of the Kingdom of God?
 - He had not placed his faith in God’s sacrifice and provision for his sin. The only thing that God requires of us is that we believe in the One that He has sent (John 6:25-29). Works or fanatical belief in anything other than Jesus Christ will not save you. Believing that there is a God isn’t enough. You must place your faith in Jesus to cleanse you from your sin, and you must surrender your life into His hands and His control. Salvation is through no one else (John 14:6, Acts 4:12).
- The way that salvation is accomplished has been the same throughout all of history, the method has not changed! How has God decreed that salvation must be received? What has remained the same, no matter the time in history?
 - Salvation is and always has been by faith alone in God’s provision for your sin (Habakkuk 2:4; Isaiah 1:18-20; Genesis 3:6-7, 21; Job 33:14-30; Acts 2:36-41).
- It’s important that we both listen to good teaching and know the Scriptures and check them for ourselves. The Bible says that when Jesus gives you His Spirit, you are sealed and eternally secure. What are some Scriptures that back this up?
 - Ephesians 1:13-14
 - John 6:39
 - Hebrews 13:5-6
 - 1 Peter 1:3-5
 - Philippians 1:6

APPLICATION

- Do not miss out on an eternity with God because you are trusting in anything other than Jesus, like your church membership or your baptism, to save you. There is a difference between wondering if you’re saved and knowing that you’re lost. Is the Holy Spirit revealing to you today that you are lost and prompting you to give your life to Jesus? Don’t delay. Close to salvation is not enough. Surrender your life to God today by placing your faith in Jesus alone, in His life, death, and resurrection, to save you and cleanse you of your sin. Enter the Kingdom today!



WHAT IS GOD TRYING TO TELL US? A STUDY OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

STUDY COMPANION FOR SESSION 6—DOES YOUR LIFE REFLECT SALVATION? (ANSWER KEY)

KEY SCRIPTURES

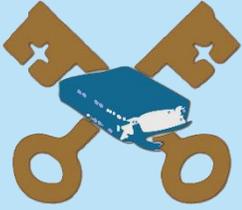
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| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 John 4:7-21 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 12:35-46 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 16:1-13 |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The parables we will study in these last two sessions have an overarching point in common. What is that main point?
 - The way we live our lives should display evidence of our salvation. How we treat each other and how we act toward God should reveal that we are members of God's Kingdom, and that Jesus is living His life through us. Members of the Kingdom of God should look markedly different from the rest of the world.
- What are some ways that we as believers should look different from the rest of the world, according to the parables we studied today?
 - We should be ready and willing to forgive others, as demonstrated in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35, Luke 7:36-47)
 - We should live faithfully, doing the work that the Father has called us to, as revealed in the Parable of the Ten Virgins and the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 24:45-25:30, Luke 12:35-46)
 - We should be generous with what we have, knowing that it all comes from God, as demonstrated by the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)
- The Bible says that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. If you really want to have a heart for God, what can you do to grow that in yourself?
 - Take the things you treasure and give them to God! Make things of God your treasure, and dedicate the things that you treasure to God, and you will develop a heart for God.
- The Parable of the Dishonest Manager is a confusing one (Luke 16:1-13). We know Jesus wasn't commending a man for cheating his master, so what was Jesus actually saying when He commended the man in this story?
 - Jesus was pointing out that at least this man thought about his future and what would happen to him after he lost his job. Jesus used this observation to highlight the folly of not giving any thought or preparation to what might happen to you after death. As children of God, we should use what He has given us with a thought towards the life to come!

APPLICATION

- Consider how much you have been forgiven by God, and be willing to give your fellow man the same grace and forgiveness! Those who realize that they have been forgiven much, love much! If you can't forgive the people around you, you don't have Christ's love in you.
- There will be reward for those who have been faithful to do as God commands, both in this life and in the life to come (Luke 12:35-46). Live in such a way that no matter when your Master returns, you will be ready, excited, and assured of your reward!



WHAT IS GOD TRYING TO TELL US? A STUDY OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

STUDY COMPANION FOR SESSION 7—OUR HEARTS TOWARDS GOD
(ANSWER KEY)

KEY SCRIPTURES

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 14:25-33 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 18:1-8 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- This entire series has been intended to encourage you to continue in a life of full surrender to Christ. What specifically in your life is God calling you to surrender to Him today? What does it mean to you to live a life of surrender and following Jesus (Luke 14:25-33)?
 - Personal reflection:

- Just before Jesus taught the parable of the bold neighbor, his disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1-13). What did the way they asked reveal about the disciples' attitude towards God, and what does the parable teach us about God?
 - The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray in a way that revealed that they thought they had to convince Him to help them. Therefore, Jesus used this parable to teach the disciples the heart of God. The man in the parable asked shamelessly because he saw his friend as someone who would not only be able, but glad to help. That's how God wants us to come to Him. Believe that He is for you (Romans 8:31-39)! Ask and it will be given! Seek, and you will find! Knock, and the door will be opened!

- The Parable of the Persistent Widow might seem somewhat similar to the parable of the bold neighbor (Luke 18:1-8). But God is not an unjust judge! What does this contrast parable teach us about God and how we should approach Him?
 - Unlike the unjust judge, God won't give in and answer our prayers just because we've badgered Him enough. Is your faith in your persistence or are you persistent because of your faith in a good God? Pray and don't lose heart, not because you think God will have to answer you if you bother Him about it enough, but because you believe that He is a good Father who delights to give good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:7-11)!

- The last two parables that we will cover seem to contradict one another. Why does one parable describe servants being served by the Master (Luke 12:35-37), while the other says that servants should not expect to be served (Luke 17:7-10)?
 - The answer is simple. On this earth, we are to serve God without expectation. But when Jesus returns, He will take us to our reward, and we will be honored!

APPLICATION

- In order to endure the trials of this life, and to learn to fully surrender to God, we must understand the depth of His love for us, and how emphatically He is for us!
- Pray boldly, but don't take shameless prayer to the unbiblical realm where you think that if you believe it enough, God has to do it. Instead, follow Jesus' example, and make your request, but say "Yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).
- Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but let yourself be transformed by God so that you trust Him no matter how He decides to direct your life!