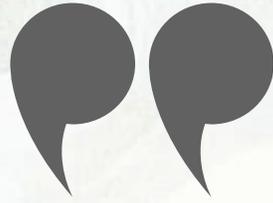




PARABLES



If there is a story, then there is a storyteller.

G.K. CHESTERTON

“Once upon a time...”

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...”

“A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...”

“In the beginning...”

Stories are all around us. From the books on our shelves to the images that fill our television screens, we all know the power of stories. They can pique our minds and prick our hearts. They can open up new horizons or close the distance between strangers. They can bring us new insights or remind us of some of the oldest truths. No matter the medium, stories have a way of shedding new light on our lives.

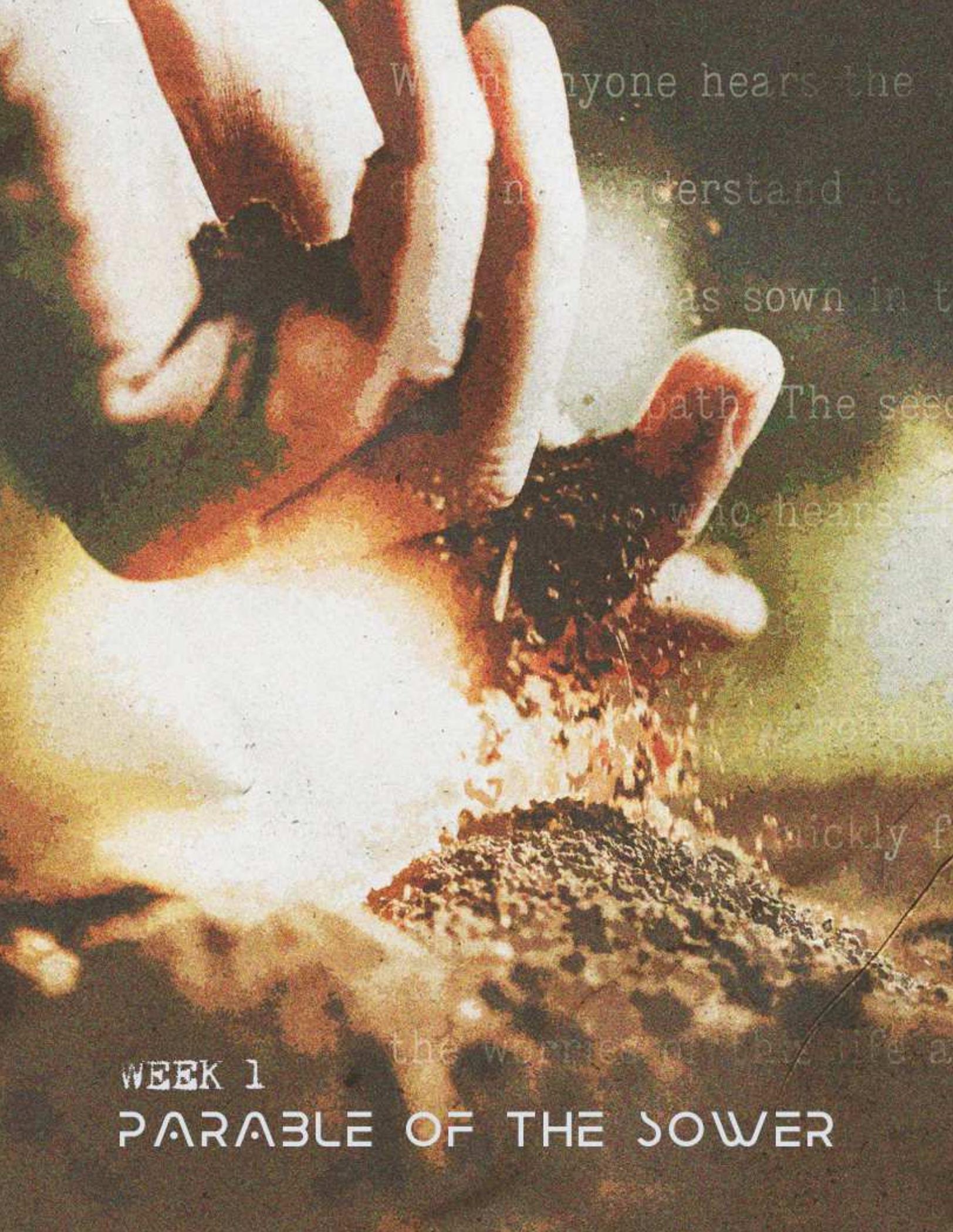
The Gospel writers tell us that Jesus was familiar with the power of stories. In fact, He used them all the time. A Lost Son. A Pearl of Great Price. A Good Samaritan. A Mustard Seed. Jesus used these images – and so many others! – to point us toward the realities of His Kingdom. Through simple images and everyday stories, Jesus’ parables have helped people throughout the centuries catch a glimpse of the eternal realities all around them. While we may be tempted to turn the Kingdom into a complex system of doctrine, Jesus shows us again and again that the Kingdom can be as simple as a story.



For all their simplicity, however, the parables deal with some of the most complex subjects imaginable. They caution us to keep watch over the status of our hearts. They remind us that appearances can be deceiving and that life is not always as simple as it seems. They ask us to reflect on our own story's end and what's really at stake here. Most importantly of all, the parables invite us into God's eternal story and call us back into the Father's house.

Like all other stories, Jesus' parables call for a response. They comfort. They confront. They call us to live differently. We shouldn't be able to read these stories and stay the same. Unlike other stories, however, the parables don't just call for a response. They call for a relationship. In the parables, we catch a glimpse of the One who speaks every story into existence. We don't just need to know these stories. We need to know the Storyteller.





WEEK 1

PARABLE OF THE SOWER



Parables are time bombs that only explode
after they have penetrated our hearts.

DOUGLAS WEBSTER

BEFORE WE BEGIN

What is your favorite story (book/movie/etc.)?

What are some life lessons/morals that come out of that story?

STORIES REVEAL. The best stories have a way of helping us see things a little bit more clearly. They shed light on the nature of life. They help us recognize our own strengths and shortcomings. The worlds they create help us understand our own.

Stories conceal. They can teach us, yes, but they don't browbeat us with their lessons. After all, the truth can be a sneaky thing. It can surprise us when we least expect it. We're more likely to accept the truth not when it's dictated, but when it's discovered on its own terms.

Jesus told parables for this exact reason. By comparing God's eternal Kingdom to everyday items, Jesus clarified things for those who wanted to learn while confusing those who thought they already had it all figured out. No parable illustrates this more clearly than the very first – The Parable of the Sower.

THE SETTING

Luke 8 opens with a note telling us about the impact of Jesus' ministry so far. As He continued traveling throughout the region, His preaching reached a wide assortment of people:

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others..." Luke 8:1-3

The Gospel message was bearing fruit everywhere! Jesus' teaching attracted people across all demographics - from those oppressed by demonic possession to those overseeing the home of a king. But why? Why did some respond so eagerly while others were so hostile? What could possibly explain such a varied reaction? The first parable provides an answer.



What are some different responses we see to the Gospel message in our day?
How have you seen these different responses through the people in your life?
What do you think is the reason for such varied responses?

THE STORY

“One day Jesus told a story in the form of a parable to a large crowd that had gathered from many towns to hear him:



‘A farmer went out to plant his seed. As he scattered it across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it. Other seed fell among rocks. It began to grow, but the plant soon wilted and died for lack of moisture. Other seed fell among thorns that grew up with it and choked out the tender plants. Still other seed fell on fertile soil. This seed grew and produced a crop that was a hundred times as much as had been planted!’ When he had said this, he called out, ‘Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.’”

“PARABLE”

- The Greek word for “parable” is a compound word combining the words for “throw” and “beside.” The idea is that these stories place heavenly matters beside earthly realities so we can live life in light of both of them.
- Douglas Webster: “Jesus used simple stories to set up a comparison between life as we know it and the life made possible by the gospel.”
- Think of it this way: the English words ‘parable’ and ‘parabola’ both originate from this Greek word. In modern-day life, the most common use of a parabola is in car headlights. The parabolic shape of the headlight helps focus the light into a beam powerful enough to illuminate the road ahead of us. In the same way, parables focus the truth to illuminate the things that really matter.

“SEED”

- The Parable of the Sower is the only parable Jesus directly explains to His disciples. For that reason, we don’t have to guess about the meaning of these images. Jesus told us exactly what He meant to communicate with this story.
- Luke 8:11: “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is God’s word...”
- Jesus is clear on the identity of the seed. It is the Word of God. He’s also clear on the fact that the farmer throws only one kind of seed. The difference in response isn’t due to differences in the seed or the skill of the farmer. The difference has to do with the condition of the soil.

“SCATTERED”

- In our day, farmers meticulously plow their fields to create rows and mounds for planting. In Jesus’ day, plowing didn’t usually happen until after seeding. Farmers would go out and scatter the seed all over the field, not knowing exactly which soil would be broken up for their crops.

“SOME SEED FELL ON A FOOTPATH”

- Some seed would inevitably fall to the side of the fields. Those walking paths were beaten down from all the people traveling on them. In the arid Middle Eastern climate, they were as hard as concrete. Any seed that fell there had no chance of penetrating the soil.
- Luke 8:12: “The seeds that fell on the footpath represent those who hear the message, only to have the devil come and take it away from their hearts and prevent them from believing and being saved.”
- There are hearts that have been hardened against God and His Word. Life has beaten down and trampled them. We have to be on our guard that we don't let our hearts get to a place where we can't listen (Hebrews 3:7-13).

“OTHER SEED FELL AMONG ROCKS”

- There are places in Palestine where the ground is basically a limestone shelf. The soil looks good, but there an impenetrable layer of rock about a foot underneath it. Plants didn't stand a chance. As soon as their roots hit that limestone, they would quickly wither and die.
- Luke 8:13: “The seeds on the rocky soil represent those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation.”
- Faith isn't just about receiving the Word; it's about letting the Word grow deep roots. It's not just saying “Yes” one time, but saying it over and over again.

“OTHER SEED FEEL AMONG THORNS”

- If seed landed among the weeds of this area (which could grow to be six feet tall!), it might initially grow and flourish. Yet, the other plants that surrounded it would quickly start to pull nutrients away from the young seedling.
- Luke 8:14: “The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity.”
- Jesus here confronts us with the reality that God is not the only voice in our ears. Our cares and worries can fill our hearts. We get so distracted that we lose sight of the Word. The riches of life ask us to neglect everything else to pursue them.

“STILL OTHER SEED FELL ON FERTILE SOIL”

- This type of seed is probably the easiest for us to understand. In the right conditions, seed can grow
- Luke 8:15: “And the seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God’s word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest.”
- This is the type of heart where the Word takes root. It grows and it spreads. This is the kind of heart that lets the seed do what seed naturally does. The person with a good heart watches as the Word brings a harvest into their life.
- A seed usually produces a 10-fold yield. The yield Jesus talks about (“a hundred times as much”) suggests a bumper crop that yields a truly life-changing harvest!

“LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND”

- Just because we listen to the message doesn’t mean that we’ve actually heard it. Our level of understanding is proven by our level of obedience.
- Luke 8:18: “So pay attention to how you hear. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given...”
- We naturally pay attention to what we hear and who we listen to. Jesus, on the other hand, encourages us to be careful how we hear. Both our ears and our hearts must be open to the truth He has to share.

As you think about the four different kinds of soil Jesus talked about, which do you most identify with?

Have there been times in your life when you exhibited qualities of each of these kinds of hearts?

THE SIGNIFICANCE

Jesus' story challenges us to think about far more than agriculture. It's about the human heart. His description of the four kinds of soils forces us to look at the greenhouse of our own hearts. What kind of habitat are we building there?

Are our hearts full of the good soil where truth and goodness can take root and flourish? Are we more like the hardened soil that refuses to let anyone or anything in? Perhaps the soil of our heart is filled by distractions and disruptions that choke out the things we want most. Years of neglect might have even left our hearts shallow and malnourished. Tending the soil of our souls is difficult work, but it's the only work that will reap an eternal harvest.

Like seed scattered across the ground, the truths of the Kingdom have been thrown out far and wide. And yet, not all those who have heard the Good News have received it. While the Gospel flourishes in some hearts, it flounders in others. The seed stays the same. It's the soil that makes all the difference. This initial parable – like all those that come after – puts our hearts under the microscope. Will we accept the truth and let it grow down into our souls?



How do we keep our spiritual hearts healthy?

How can we be sure that we're maintaining a posture where we are listening to and obeying Jesus' words?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What's one big application/insight you walked away with?

2. Read Luke 8:4-15. As you read this parable (and its explanation) what stands out to you? As you think about the different kinds of soil, how do they bring to mind some of the different kinds of people you've known over the years?

3. Looking at the four kinds of soil, what are some words that would describe a person with each of those kinds of heart? Can you think of seasons in your life when you were like the different kinds of soil? Which type of soil do you most identify with?

4. "So pay attention to how you hear." What are some different ways we can listen without hearing? How do we know we're really hearing the people around us? How do we know we're really hearing Jesus' words in the right way?

5. Read Proverbs 4:23. What does this verse teach us about the importance of our hearts? What happens if our hearts become corrupted? What does it look like for us to "guard our hearts"?

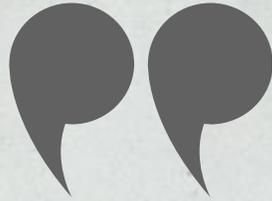
6. As you close, read Luke 8:15 together. What are the characteristics of those with "good soil"? How do we cultivate those qualities? Pray for each other, that God would grow those qualities in each of you.



WEEK 2

THE PARABLES OF THE LOST SHEEP/COIN/SON





You are sick enough to be healed. You are weak enough
to be saved. You are lost enough to be found.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

1

2

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Have you ever been lost (or maybe even lost one of your kids in a store)?

What was that like?

Why is the feeling of being lost such a distinct kind of fear?

Every memorable story is built on some kind of conflict.

There's a villain to be defeated, a kingdom to be saved, a damsel to be rescued, or an injustice to be corrected. Sometimes, the hero goes through an entire journey only to find their most challenging battle is the one within themselves. Stories require conflict. At their core, they all operate under the assumption that there is something wrong with the world.



Luke 15 contains a trifecta of Jesus' most famous parables. The stories of a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son blend together to create some of the most memorable imagery in the Gospels. More importantly, these three stories remind us of the conflict at the heart of each of our stories. We are lost. We are not who we were meant to be. We are not where we were meant to be. God created us to live in uninterrupted and unhindered fellowship with Him. We were made for a better place. We were formed for a bigger purpose. And yet, somewhere along the way, we got lost.



THE SETTING

Jesus' message of grace drew in a lot of people who were starving for forgiveness. Rather than welcoming them to the feast, the religious leaders of Jesus' day scoffed at their very presence at the table. Who were these people to think they could just claim a seat with Jesus? Furthermore, why would Jesus even invite them in the first place? Jesus met their complaints and questions head-on:

“Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people – even eating with them! So Jesus told them this story...” **Luke 15:1-3**

The three stories that followed reminded the religious leaders that we all need forgiveness. Grace isn't just for “those people”; it's for all people! We've all wandered away from God! We've all lived in disobedience. At one time or another, all of us have been lost.



How do we keep our spiritual hearts healthy?

How can we be sure that we're maintaining a posture where we are listening to and obeying Jesus' words?

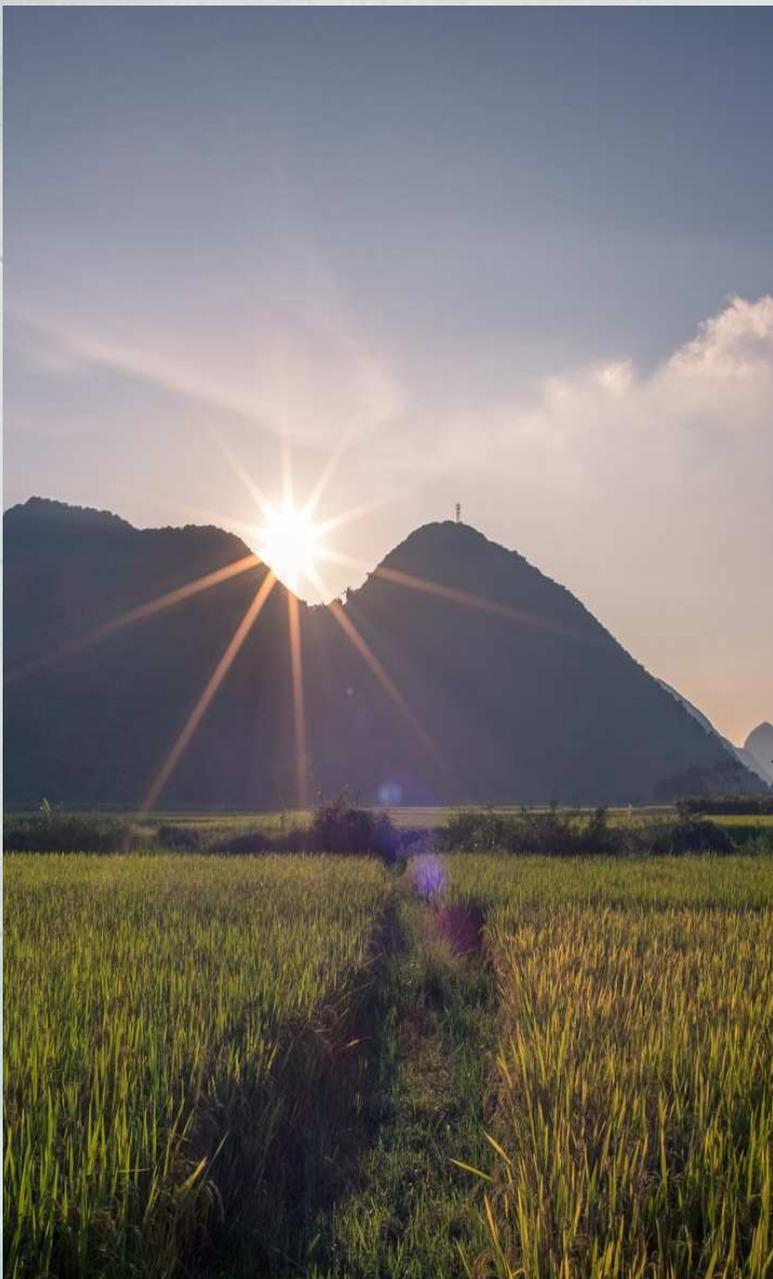
THE STORY

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.'

To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.'" So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.' But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began. Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working.



When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.' The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!' His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'" (Luke 15:4-32)



“IF A MAN HAS A HUNDRED SHEEP...”

- Jesus tells three stories here in quick succession, each dealing with lost objects. In the first story, a sheep becomes lost in the countryside. In the second, a coin is misplaced in a house. The third builds on both ideas, telling us the story of one son who is lost in the distant country and another son who is lost even though he stayed in the house.
- Though the flock size seems large to our minds, Jesus’ audience would have been able to visualize such a picture. It wasn’t uncommon for shepherds to keep watch over flocks numbering 200-300 at a time.
- This opening story may be a subtle dig at the religious leaders. Ezekiel 34 refers to these leaders as “shepherds” over Israel. Jesus may be implying that they had not done their jobs in taking care of God’s wayward sheep.

“REJOICE WITH ME”

- The language of celebration permeates each of these stories (vs. 5-6, 9, 10, 23). We celebrate when lost things are found. How much more should we celebrate when lost people are found?
- Darrel Bock: “Evangelism is grounded in the joy of recovery.”

“A WOMAN HAS TEN SILVER COINS...”

- The “silver coins” mentioned here might be significant for a couple of reasons. For starters, the “coins” mentioned (‘drachmas’) are each worth a day’s wage. This is not an insignificant amount of money. For our purposes, we might imagine that the woman has ten \$100 bills and loses one of them.
- The coins might also be a reference to a headdress worn by married Jewish women. They would string together ten silver coins and wear them as a symbol of their dignity and honor.
- Whether their value was sentimental or fiscal, the coins were important. Jesus makes it clear that they were worth turning the room upside down to find.

“A MAN HAD TWO SONS...”

- In the longest – and perhaps most famous – of the three parables in Luke 15, Jesus tells the story of a father with two sons. The youngest son asks for his share of the estate (literally, “the life” of the father) and leaves the house to go to a distant country.
- The son ultimately loses all of his wealth. This is due to a convergence of his bad choices (squandering his money) and some extremely bad luck (a famine hits the land). He ends up feeding the pigs of a local farmer – a job that failed to meet his needs and left him ceremonially impure.

“HE FINALLY CAME TO HIS SENSES...”

- The younger son’s repentance is portrayed here as a return to himself. He finally wakes up from the life he has been leading to realize who he is supposed to be.
- The younger son’s repentance puts him on the path back home. As he walks the long road, he rehearses what he’ll say to his father when he arrives. What he doesn’t anticipate is that the father’s response will keep him from saying everything he had in mind.

“HE RAN TO HIS SON...”

- The father sees his son walking down the pathway and runs out to greet him. This is significant for two reasons. One, this means that the father was looking for the son. He had his eye on the road because he knew his son might one day be on it. Secondly, in a culture that so values honor and dignity, it would have been considered impolite for a wealthy man to tuck in his robe in order to run towards his son. Yet, this father’s delight is so great that he defies social conventions in order to get to his son as soon as possible!

“BRING THE FINEST ROBE...”

- The father cuts his son’s speech short. The first word the father speaks (‘quickly’ in the Greek) speaks to the urgency with which he welcomes his son home. He commands his servants to bring out the finest robe, the family ring, and a pair of sandals. All these things are marks of sonship. They serve as signs that the father is welcoming his son home and restoring his honor and authority as a member of the family. The wayward son is not welcomed as a slave, but as a son!
- Better still, the father announces a huge feast. He kills the fattened calf and invites his neighbors to celebrate his son’s return. The final phrase in verse 24 continues the theme of celebration that has permeated this chapter: “So the party began.”

“THE OLDER BROTHER WAS ANGRY...”

- Not everyone is glad to see the prodigal come home. The older son hears the sound of music coming from the house and asks what’s going on. When he hears the father has thrown a party for his brother’s return, the older brother is livid. His reaction shows that he doesn’t truly love his brother or his father.
- The father comes out to beg his son to come to the feast. Once again, the father breaks social expectation and etiquette. A guest refusing to enter a feast would have dishonored the host. The father takes the insult upon himself by trying to include his son in the festivities. His final plea to his son - “We had to celebrate” - reminds us once again of the necessity of celebration. When the lost are found, it is something to celebrate.
- Jesus leaves this parable open-ended. Does the older son go to the feast? Does he celebrate the return of his brother? Or, does his heart remain hardened against the grace of His father? By ending the parable this way, Jesus confronts the Pharisees – both in His day and in ours – with a question: How we will react when we see lost people coming home?

When you read this story, is it easier for you to put yourself in the place of the younger brother or the older brother? Why?

In what ways does your story overlap with the story of each of these lost brothers?

THE SIGNIFICANCE

From the moment Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, we have been lost. And yet, the good news of the Gospel is that someone has come after us. There is a Shepherd who searches for His lost sheep. There is One who scours the entire house, desperately upending every couch cushion to find what's missing. There is a Father who longs to welcome His wayward children home. We wander; He waits. We sin; He searches. We spend our lives searching for the solution to the disconnect we feel in our souls. Meanwhile, He desperately searches for us. These three stories remind us we are never so lost that we cannot be found.

Yet, the story of the older brother warns us about another kind of lostness. We can lose the heart of the Father. Our own self-righteousness can start to make us think we found ourselves. We can start to look down on our lost brothers and sisters, forgetting that we once were just as lost as they were. Just because we're in the Father's house doesn't mean that we share His heart. How do we react when we see the lost come home? What's our response when we see God's grace let loose in the world? Do we celebrate? Or, do we stand outside the feast and pout? The test of if we've received grace is how we respond when that grace is extended to someone else.

Why is it so tempting for us to become like the older brother?

How does self-righteousness creep into our hearts?

How do we prevent that kind of attitude from filling our hearts?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What's one big application/insight you walked away with?

2. Read Luke 15:1-32. As you read these three parables, what stands out to you? Which of the characters in the story do you most identify with? Imagine yourself in their situation. What does this parable look like through their eyes?

3. What do these three parables teach us about the different ways we can get lost? How do the younger son and the older son show us different kinds of rebellion against the Father? How do we guard ourselves against both those dangers?

4. "We had to celebrate..." The language of celebration and rejoicing is all over Luke 15. What does this teach us about the ways we should respond when lost people return to the Father? What are some practical ways we can celebrate God's grace with one another?

5. Read 2 Peter 3:9. What does this verse tell us about God's desire for the lost to return home? How should God's heart for the lost guide our lives? How can we better prioritize our lives around His mission?

6. Each of us knows a "prodigal son." Who is the prodigal you would like to see come home to the Father? As you close, spend some time praying over the prodigals in your life. Commit to praying over these names for the next week.



WEEK 3

THE GOOD SAMARITAN





What makes the parables mysterious, or difficult, is that they challenge us to look into the hidden aspects of our own values, our own lives. They bring to the surface unasked questions, and they reveal the answers we have always known, but refuse to acknowledge.”

AMY-JILL LEVINE

BEFORE WE BEGIN

How would you define the word ‘compassion’?

Is it an emotion or an action (or maybe both)?

When was a time when someone showed compassion to you?

“Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”

if you had an opportunity to talk to Jesus, that wouldn't be a bad question to ask. Who better to tell you how to gain eternal life than the One who has lived for all eternity? The religious leader who brought this question to Jesus in Luke 10 probably thought he'd get an itemized checklist of things he could do to ensure his place in heaven. Maybe he thought that Jesus would tell him the things that might disqualify him from eternal life. At the very least, Jesus might get him on the right path.

Unfortunately, the religious leader didn't realize that his question was flawed from the start. He assumed he could be the hero of his own story. His whole question was built on the idea that he could power through and punch his own ticket into heaven. As his own question admits, the religious leader wanted to earn something that could only be inherited. An inheritance is not something you work for. An inheritance is always a gift.



THE SETTING

“One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: ‘Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus replied, ‘What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?’ The man answered, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘Right!’ Jesus told him. ‘Do this and you will live!’ The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”

Luke 10:25-29

It wasn't uncommon for one of the Pharisees or other religious leaders to question Jesus. They made a habit of trying to trap Him or trip Him up. What makes this religious leader's question so interesting is how overtly he tried to justify himself. He wanted Jesus to give him some credit. Surely, he had done enough to earn his place in heaven. As one of the religious elites, he certainly had to be in a better position than the irreligious rabble. The story Jesus told in response to this interaction would confront the religious leaders' self-piety and expose the prejudices of his own heart.



What makes us want to justify ourselves? How do the two greatest commandments identified in this passage show us that self-justification is impossible?

THE STORY

“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.’”

(Luke 10:30-37)



“...FROM JERUSALEM DOWN TO JERICHO...”

- The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was steep and treacherous. Over the 18-mile trip, you would descend over 4000 feet in elevation. Walking between the cities was more like climbing a hill than walking a road. The lack of a shoulder on some sections of the road left travelers overlooking a 300-foot crevice.
- Beyond its elevation change, the road also contained multiple caves and hiding places. This made it a perfect ambush spot for thieves and bandits. The road came to be known as the “Akeldama” (“Way of Blood”) for that very reason. The situation Jesus describes here was not only plausible; it was common.

“...A PRIEST CAME ALONG.”

- The beaten man seems to have some immediate luck, as a priest makes his way down the road. Jesus’ audience would think that such a righteous man would certainly help. The word choice Jesus uses here shows how emphatically the priest refused help. The Greek phrase to describe the priest’s action literally translates as “he passed by against him.”
- Though we may speculate as to why neither the priest or Levite stopped to help, Jesus offers us no motivation. Rather, He simply notes their unwillingness to stop and help a man in need. In the end, it’s not their intentions that condemn them, but their inaction.
- Martin Luther King Jr: "I'm going to tell you what my imagination tells me. It's possible these men were afraid... And so the first question that the priest [and] the Levite asked was, If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' ... But then the Good Samaritan came by, and he reversed the question: If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

“...A DESPISED SAMARITAN...”

- Much like our jokes that begin with “a priest, a rabbi, and a minister,” Jesus’ mention of a “priest” and a “Levite” would have made the audience anticipate a Jew as the third traveler in this story. His choice of a Samaritan not only subverted their expectations, it defied their prejudices.

- Jews and Samaritans hated one another. The Jews viewed the Samaritans with suspicion, as the Samaritans were the generational descendants of those who intermarried with pagan nations during the time of the exile. The Samaritans resented the Jews for looking down on them and treating them as outsiders.

“...HE FELT COMPASSION FOR HIM.”

- A Samaritan and a Jew would have naturally been at each other’s throats. The compassion exhibited here stands in stark contrast to the way Jews typically thought about Samaritans. Indeed, one of the unstated ironies in Jesus’ story is that travelers often used the Jericho road to avoid traveling through Samaria at all.

- Notice that Jesus first speaks of compassion in terms of a feeling. Compassion must well up from within a person’s heart. Yet, it cannot merely stay internal. As the Samaritan shows us, compassion is also an action.

“...TOOK HIM TO AN INN...”

- The Samaritan helps the man in almost every way. He stops and bandages the man’s wounds. He takes some oil and wine from his own supplies and treats his injuries. He puts the injured man on his donkey and takes him to the nearest town, giving up his mode of transportation.

- The Samaritan even takes the man into town and puts him up in a hotel for the night. This final act comes at incredible risk to the Samaritan. Those in the town might have assumed the Samaritan attacked the Jewish man and responded in kind. He puts himself in great danger to help a man in need.

“WHICH OF THESE THREE...?”

◦ In a final stroke of genius, Jesus turns the religious leader’s question on its head. The religious leader had asked “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus doesn’t answer that question. Instead, He asks the religious leader to identify the neighbor in the story. Being a neighbor isn’t about identifying who lives in your neighborhood; it’s about seeing yourself as a neighbor to everyone.

“GO AND DO THE SAME.”

◦ Jesus doesn’t say “Go and think the same.” He doesn’t even give the command to “Go and feel the same.” No, Jesus says “Go and DO the same.” There’s action implied here in this story. Those who want to be a neighbor must live out of their compassion. Loving your neighbor isn’t about whether you feel anything for them. It’s about whether or not you practically, tangibly do things to help. That’s the kind of compassion – the kind of love – that can break down barriers.



What would be a modern-day equivalent of the feud between Jews and Samaritans?
What would that level of compassion look like in today’s culture?

THE SIGNIFICANCE

In our day, it's not hard to find someone to be a neighbor to. All around us, there are people who are bruised and bloodied by sin. They've been left for dead on the side of the road. Our job's not to pass them by or kick them while they're down. Our response should be defined by compassion. We open our hearts to their suffering. More importantly, we open up our lives, our wallets, our possessions. Failing to do either misrepresents the Gospel. Being a good neighbor requires that we have mercy and show mercy.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan confronts each of us on multiple levels. It confronts our feelings of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. It confronts our apathy. It confronts our prejudices. Most of all, it confronts our illusions that we can be the hero of our story. We may have opportunities for everyday heroism, but those acts can never save us. That's because we've already been saved. When we were left for dead and without a hope in the world, Jesus saw us, took pity on us, and brought us back to life.

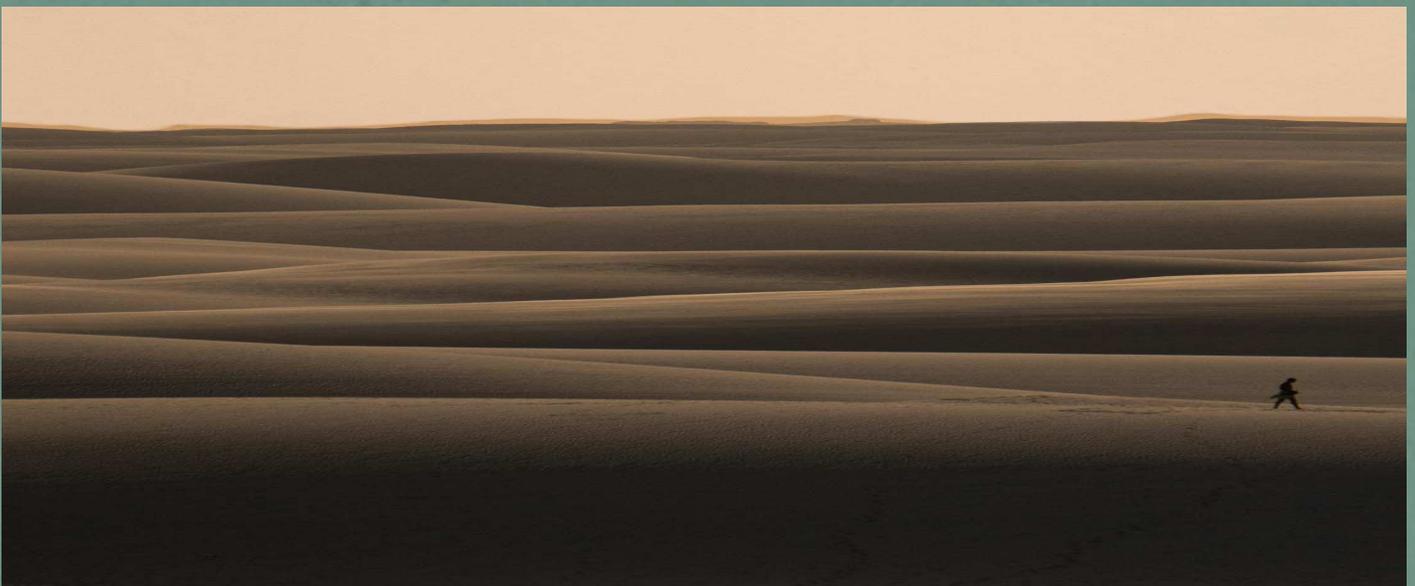
Is it more difficult for you to feel compassion or to act compassionately?

Why?

What are some habits you can develop to help you grow in compassion?

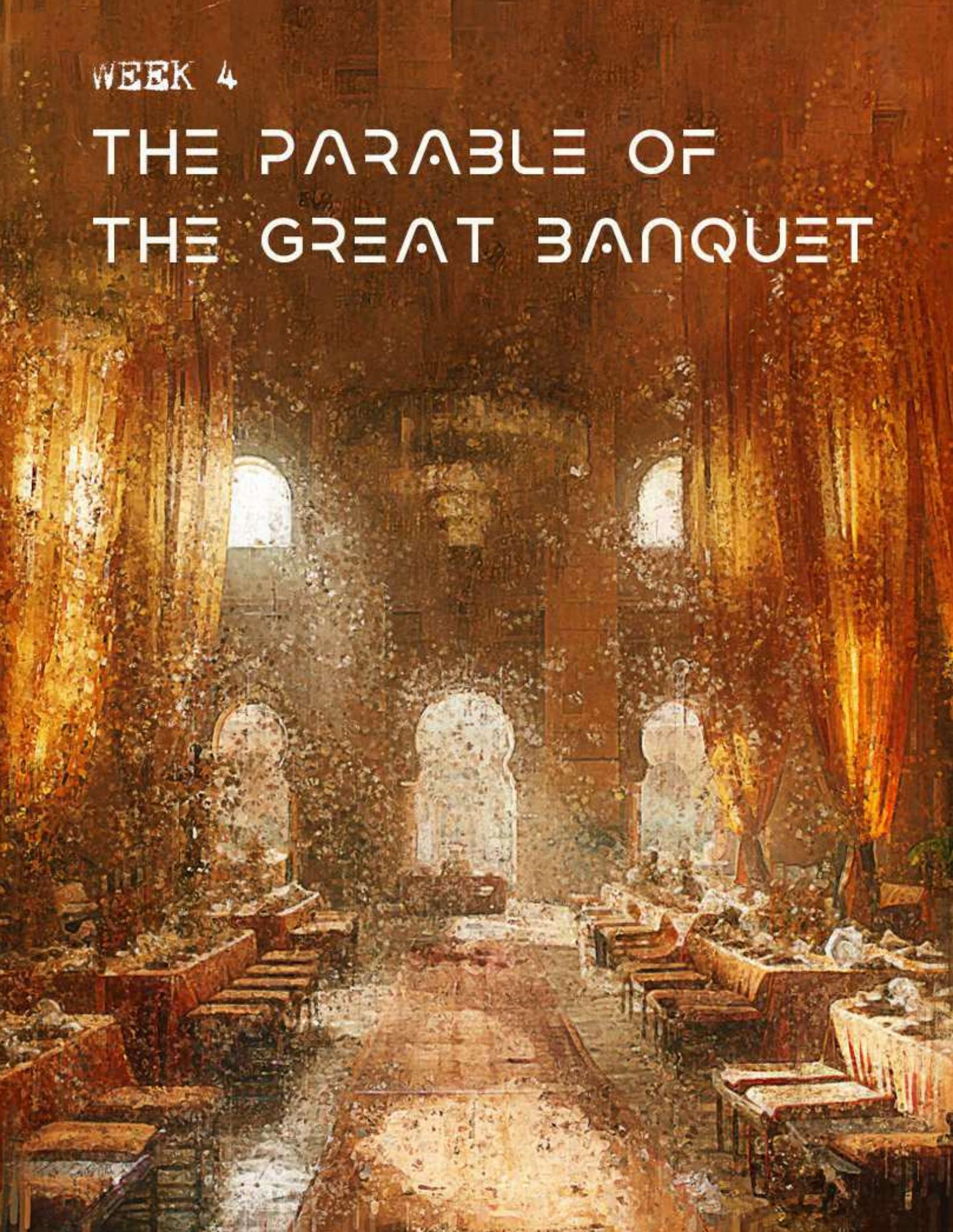
GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What's the most practical insight you gained from this week's episode?
2. Read Luke 10:25-37. When you read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which character do you most naturally identify with? Why? How does it change your perception of the story if you put yourself in place of the wounded man?
3. Why do you think the Priest and the Levite passed by the man on the side of the road? What kept them from helping? What are some obstacles that keep you from helping others in need? How can we move past those barriers to live compassionately?
4. How did the Good Samaritan provide for the wounded man's needs? What practical help did he supply? What are some of the modern-day equivalents of these items? How can they guide us as we seek to practice compassion today?
5. Read James 2:14-19. How does James talk about compassion as a practical expression of our faith? In what ways do our acts of service reveal our faith? How does the compassion we show to others grow out of the compassion Jesus has shown us?
6. Who are some people in your life who are hurting and in need of help? How is their situation similar to/different from the situation of the wounded man in this parable? What's one practical step you can take to show them compassion this week?



WEEK 4

THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT BANQUET





In ancient times, when the oldest son always got all the wealth and the second or younger sons had no social status, how does God work? Through Abel, not Cain. Through Isaac, not Ishmael. Through Jacob, not Esau... At a time when women were valued for their beauty and fertility, God chooses old Sarah, not young Hagar. He chooses Leah, not Rachel ...Why? Is it just that God likes underdogs? No. He is telling us something about salvation itself.

TIM KELLER

BEFORE WE BEGIN

What's your favorite movie twist of all time?

What makes that twist in the story so memorable?

How does it make you feel when a story surprises you like that?

Has a story ever caught you off-guard?

You expect a story to go one way and it swerves in a completely different direction. A last-minute plot twist pulls the rug out from under you. A character's sudden betrayal leaves you breathless. Stories can use the elements of surprise and subversion to change everything in a moment. It's only when you reach the end that you realize things were never really as they seemed.

The stories Jesus told often contained elements meant to invert the things you thought you knew. His original audience would have had trouble believing that a Samaritan could be good or that a son at home could be just as lost as one in the distant country. Jesus had a way of turning our assumptions on their heads, forcing us to reconsider the nature of our world. In so doing, He let us know that God's Kingdom doesn't work the way human kingdoms do. The first may be last and those who are poorest in the eyes of the world may just be the richest in God's economy.



THE SETTING

Interestingly, the Parable of the Great Banquet actually takes place at a banquet! Jesus had been invited to eat Sabbath dinner at the home of the one of the Pharisees. As Jesus watched the visitors come into the feast, He noticed how they all jockeyed for the seats of honor. His teaching on the matter almost certainly added tension to an already tense situation:

“When He noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ‘When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Luke 14:7-11

The room must have fallen silent with these words. Jesus had confronted their arrogance and pride, putting everyone in the room on the defensive. Perhaps hoping to diffuse the tension, a person at the table chimed in with blessing for the table: “What a blessing it will be to attend a banquet in the Kingdom of God!” The man’s attempt at bringing levity to the situation would actually end up making things much more awkward.

What does Jesus teach us about humility and pride in this passage?

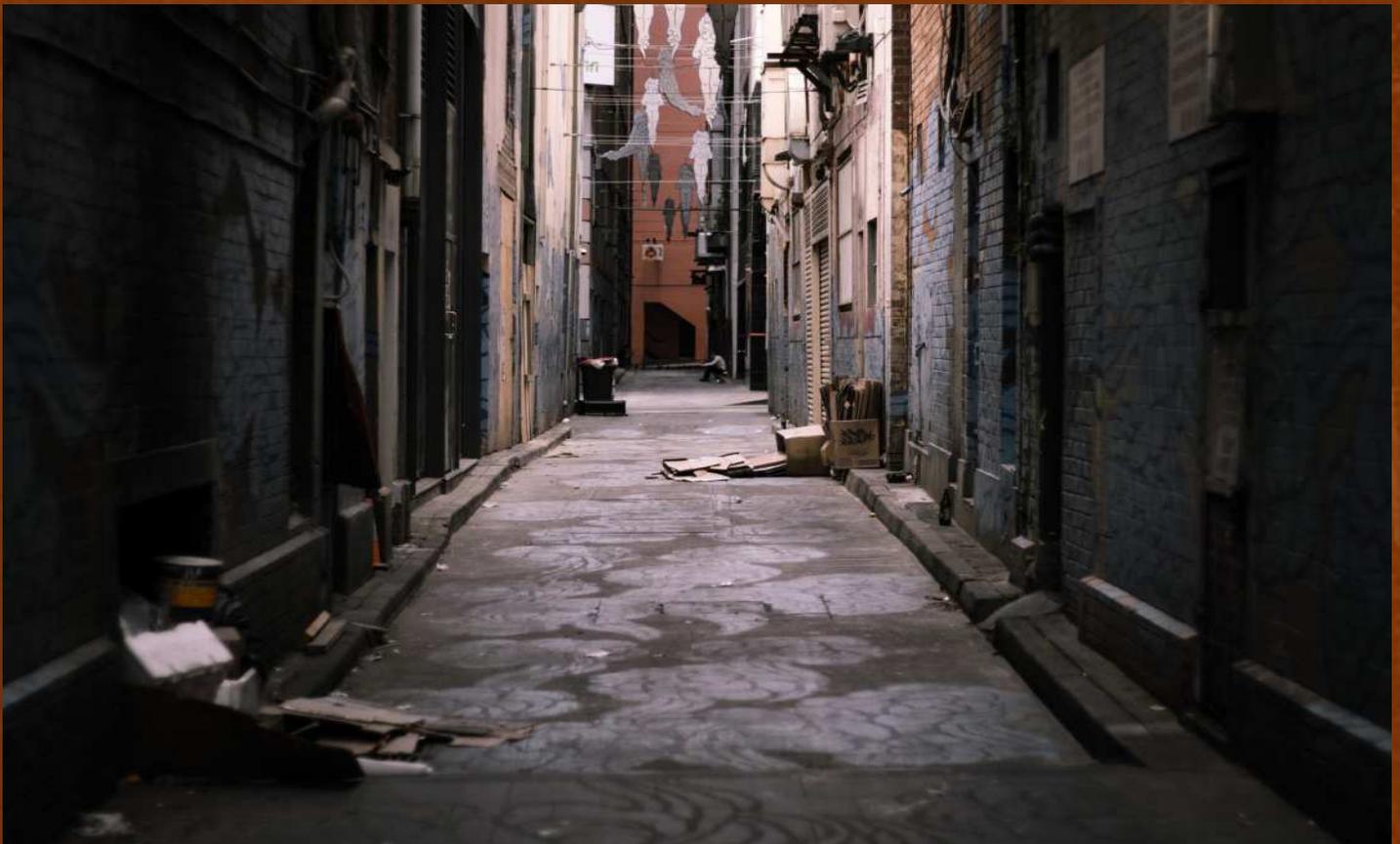
Why do we have a tendency to promote ourselves?

What does genuine humility look like?

THE STORY

“Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘What you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

Luke 14:16-24



“A GREAT BANQUET...”

- The imagery of God’s Kingdom has a great tradition through the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah notably pictured the End of Time as a great banquet that all people would be invited to join.
- Isaiah 25:6-7: “In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies will spread a wonderful feast for all the people of the world. It will be a delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat. Then He will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth.”
- The religious leaders of Jesus’ day struggled with this passage. How could the prophets say that all people would be at the great banquet of the Lord? Surely the unclean Gentiles wouldn’t be there, would they? They couldn’t picture anyone at the feast other than the Jews – God’s chosen people.
- William Barclay: "A Christian is like a man who is forever at a wedding feast." The imagery of the Kingdom as a banquet once again reminds us of the joy Jesus came to bring.

“COME, FOR EVERYTHING IS NOW READY...”

- In that day, when you sent out invitations to a banquet, you would set the date for the feast, but not the time. Guests would RSVP for the day of the banquet and clear their calendars for that day. When the food was ready, the host would send out his servants to let them know that all had been prepared.
- If you accepted the initial invitation, your attendance at the banquet was socially mandatory. It would have been incredibly impolite to refuse to appear at the feast. And yet, Jesus imagines a situation where three guests all refuse to attend. In so doing, they insult the honor and the generosity of their host.
- The excuses offered by these would-be guests become increasingly unbelievable. No one would buy a field or a yoke of oxen without inspecting them. Neither would a groom casually forget the day of his wedding. The febleness of their excuses hides their obvious disrespect for the invitation.

“BECAME ANGRY...”

◦ The host understands the insults implied in these excuses. The original invitees have dishonored their host and created an awkward situation for him. He's now stuck with a tableful of food surrounded by empty chairs. With no guests to enjoy the banquet, the festivities seem to have ended before they had a chance to begin.

◦ The host comes up with a brilliant plan. If his original guests won't attend the banquet, he will come up with an alternate guest list. His command to the servants underscores the urgency of the matter: “Go out quickly into the streets... and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” The host refuses to let this banquet go to waste and invites any and everyone to his table.

“THERE IS STILL ROOM.”

◦ The story repeatedly comes back to the idea that there is plenty of room for everyone. Jesus wants to make it clear that the banquet will never be filled and there will always be a seat at the table. Those who are absent from the feast aren't there because of a lack of space; they are absent because they refused to come to the feast.

“COMPEL THEM...”

◦ This phrase seems a little bit odd, almost as if the master is expecting his servants to force people to come into the banquet. However, the word ‘compel’ here carries more the idea of ‘convince.’ The poor and needy in the area might have trouble believing that they could be the guests at such a marvelous feast. The servants might have to work to convince them that this was actually a genuine invitation.

“NOT ONE OF THOSE WHO WERE INVITED...”

◦ Jesus' final words in this parable confirm the great reversal of the story. Those who initially accepted the invitation refuse to come. Those who thought themselves unworthy ultimately find a place at the table. If you think you are full, you'll never accept an invitation to God's feast. To come to the banquet, all you need is need.

◦ “Let us redefine the term hard to reach. We often talk about ‘tough neighborhoods’ and ‘poor neighborhoods’ being ‘hard to reach.’ But in Luke's Gospel the poor and the broken flock to Jesus. Those who trust in their riches, who seek power among men, who make religion a show are ‘hard to reach.’ Those are the ones who...get cast out.” - Thabiti Anyabwile



Look back at the excuses the original invitees made. How do these mirror excuses we can make today when it comes to accepting God's invitations?

THE SIGNIFICANCE

The Parable of the Great Banquet contains a series of escalating absurdities. From the invited guests who cancel their RSVPs during the party to the disappointed host who suddenly has to fill every spot at his table, the parable piles on the outlandishness. Yet, its twists and turns remind us that God is a gracious host. He invites everyone to His table. There's a spot for each and every one of us – all we have to decide is whether or not we're going to accept His invitation.

On a deeper level, this parable also reminds us that pride can be a dangerous drug. It can make us feel like we're more important than we are. It can cause us to put on a mask and act like someone we're not. Worst of all, it can lure us into a false sense of security. It can trick us into thinking we're okay and we've somehow earned a place at God's table. Jesus' story of the banquet reminds us that everyone who gathers around the table is only there through the gracious invitation of our God. When He holds the first banquet in His Kingdom, the guest list is bound to surprise us all!



How does pride blind us to the reality of our need for grace?

How does the Gospel help us keep a right view of ourselves and maintain a sense of humility?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What's one new insight you gained about this week's parable?
2. Read Luke 14:7-24. As you read this parable, what stands out to you? Is there a character or characters you identify with? If you had been one of the people attending the actual banquet with Jesus, how would this story have challenged/impacted you?
3. What excuses were made by the partygoers in Jesus' story? How are these excuses similar to/different from some of the excuses that keep us from God today? How can we be sure we are giving God's Kingdom priority over these things?
4. In what ways does grace challenge our pride? In what ways does it challenge our sense of unworthiness? What does Gospel-centered humility really look like? What would a humble person look like? How would they treat others?
5. Do you think it's significant that Jesus describes His Kingdom as a banquet? What does this teach us about the joy and celebration that we, as believers, should feel? Do you think Christians today do a good job representing this aspect of the Kingdom? Why or why not? How can we better exude this sense of joy to those around us?
6. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6. What does this teach us about God's desire to have all people at His banquet? What role do we have to play in helping bring people to the table? As you close in prayer, ask God to open your eyes to the opportunities you have to invite people to the banquet.



WEEK 5

THE PARABLE OF
THE TALENTS



The parables are postcards from heaven. ‘Wish you were here,’ they say. Supernaturally, however, they can transport us exactly to the place they depict, the place where God’s kingdom is coming and his will is being done on earth as it is in heaven... Once upon a time, a king came to earth to tell stories, and the stories contained the mystery of eternal life.

JARED WILSON

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Is there a decision in your life you wish you could do over again?
How would knowing the future have helped you make a better/different decision?

If you could go back in time 20 years, what would you invest in?

Some people think of the business opportunity they let get by. Maybe it was a stock investment or a career change they wish they had the foresight to make. Others might think of a purchase they would (or wouldn't!) make if they had it all to do over again. For others, this question is more relational. Their investment would be in time spent with the love that got away or a family member who left too soon. The point is, we'd all change something if we knew then what we know now.

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus encourages us to invest our lives towards eternal life. Since we know His arrival will upend the values of this world, we shouldn't spend our lives chasing after the things this world desires. Instead, we ought to invest our lives in the things that will matter in the Kingdom. Where are we spending our time? Where are we spending our treasures? It's easier to plan for the future when you know where the story is headed.



THE SETTING

As the Jewish Feast of Passover approached, Jesus and His disciples made their way towards the city of Jerusalem. After three years of ministry across the region, Jesus had accumulated a vast number of followers. With each step bringing them closer to King David's city, expectations for the kingdom of Israel's restoration reached a fever pitch. With these Messianic hopes growing, Jesus stopped to tell a story about the Kingdom's arrival:

“While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.”

Luke 19:11

The parable Jesus told – the Parable of the Talents (or Minas) – should have helped the crowd recognize that the Kingdom wasn't going to come as quickly as they thought. Unfortunately, they completely missed the point. As Jesus approached Jerusalem for the final time, the crowd welcomed Him as a King. Their focus on the here and now kept them from seeing the eternal Kingdom Jesus came to establish:

“When He came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’”

Luke 19:37-38

Why do you think the crowd misunderstood Jesus' Kingdom?

Why do eternal concerns often take a backseat to our more temporal needs?

THE STORY

“He said: ‘A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’ But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’ He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ ‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’ The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’ Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’ His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’ Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’ ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’ He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.’”

Luke 19:12-27



“A MAN OF NOBLE BIRTH”

- In that day, kingship wasn't necessarily passed down by birthright. If you wanted to authenticate your kingship over a land, you had to go to Rome. Caesar determined your claim over the area. In places like Judea, on the edge of the Empire, that meant a long trip in the hopes of being given the authority of a king.
- One of the most famous instances of this occurred in 4 B.C. with the death of Herod the Great. Each of his three sons – Philip, Herod Antipas, and Herod Archelaus – journeyed to Rome to have their reign confirmed. The picture Jesus paints in this parable makes it clear He has this exact situation in mind.

“TEN OF HIS SERVANTS”

- Unlike Matthew's version of this parable (Matthew 25:14-30), Luke's story mentions ten servants instead of just three. Yet, Luke will only focus on the results achieved by three of the servants. Perhaps his version of the story is designed to help us imagine ourselves as one of the remaining servants. If we were one of the seven servants not mentioned here, would our master find us faithful?

“TEN MINAS”

- Before this nobleman goes, he gives each of his servants a “mina” – a “pound of silver” according to the NLT. This was worth about three months' wages. To put it in modern-day terms, the master gave each of these servants somewhere between \$20,000-\$25,000 to invest and use while he was away.
- He told his servants to take that money and invest it. This was incredibly risky. The nobleman hasn't been crowned king yet. This money bears his image and authority. If he isn't affirmed as king, this money is functionally worthless. By taking this money and using it, the servants are placing their trust in his kingship. They trust that when he returns, he's returning with authority.

“HIS SUBJECT HATED HIM AND SENT A DELEGATION”

◦ In 4 B.C., when Philip, Herod Antipas, and Herod Archelaus went to Rome to have their kingship approved, a contingent of Jews traveled after them. Herod Archelaus was so disliked that this group went to try and convince Caesar not to give him power. Their plan worked. Though Archelaus was made a regent over the area, he did not get the full status of kingship he sought.

◦ This wrinkle adds an element of danger to Jesus’ story. The nobleman has enemies who don’t want to see him become king. There are people actively fighting against his Kingdom. If they succeed in stopping him, those who served the nobleman might find themselves in trouble as well. Do the servants trust him enough to do what he said?

“WELL DONE, MY GOOD SERVANT!”

◦ Notice why the nobleman congratulates his servant. It’s not because of his success; it’s because of his faithfulness. “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter...” The first two servants showed loyalty and allegiance to the master by using the minas and aligning themselves with his kingdom.

◦ These first two servants are given great rewards. The first one is made the governor of ten cities. The second becomes the ruler over five cities. Their King gives them an alarming amount of prestige. Their loyalty and faithfulness to their master is rewarded in an extravagant way!

◦ Jesus sums up their reward thusly: “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given.” Some have struggled with the meaning of these words. Why would the master give more to those who already have? But, the point of these rewards is that faithful servants are given something they never could have earned on their own.

“I JUDGE YOU BY YOUR OWN WORDS”

- The third servant, however, blames his cowardice on the fact that he believes the King is harsh man. The King sees through this ridiculous excuse. If he really were a harsh man, then the servant should have known that the Master would expect some results. He should have at least put the money in the bank to draw some interest!
- The fact of the matter is that the third servant was too scared to put the money in the bank. Didn't want to take the master's money to the tellers because he didn't want anyone to know that he was aligned with the master. He was too worried about what others thought to do what his King said.

“BUT THOSE ENEMIES OF MINE...”

- The parable ends with a reminder of those who sought to thwart the master's plans. Now that the nobleman's kingdom has been confirmed, these usurpers will not escape judgment. Eventually, everyone will stand before the King.
- Darrell Bock: “Everyone is accountable to Jesus in one way or another.”

Why do you think the third servant was afraid to use the master's money?

What are some fears that keep us from aligning with the Kingdom in our own lives?

THE SIGNIFICANCE

While many of the parables focus on the world as it is today, others look at the world to come. Jesus' stories don't just look around; they look forward. The world isn't always going to be this way. We aren't always going to be this way. The day of Jesus' return will be a day of incredible transformation. On that day, our plans will cease to matter. Our priorities will fall by the wayside. When the true King comes back, the world we know will cease to exist. We will finally and forever see the world – and ourselves – as God intended.

The reality of that day ought to affect our priorities on this day. How would you live today if you knew the King was coming back? What would you change if you knew you were one day going to stand before His throne? The King has given us a lot. He's given us our possessions, our families, our finances, our very lives. Everything we have is something Jesus has entrusted us with until the day of His return. When He comes back, He'll want to know what we've done with all we've been given. On that day you stand before Him, what will you say?

How does our world view the idea of accountability?

How does it make you feel to know that our lives are accountable to Jesus?

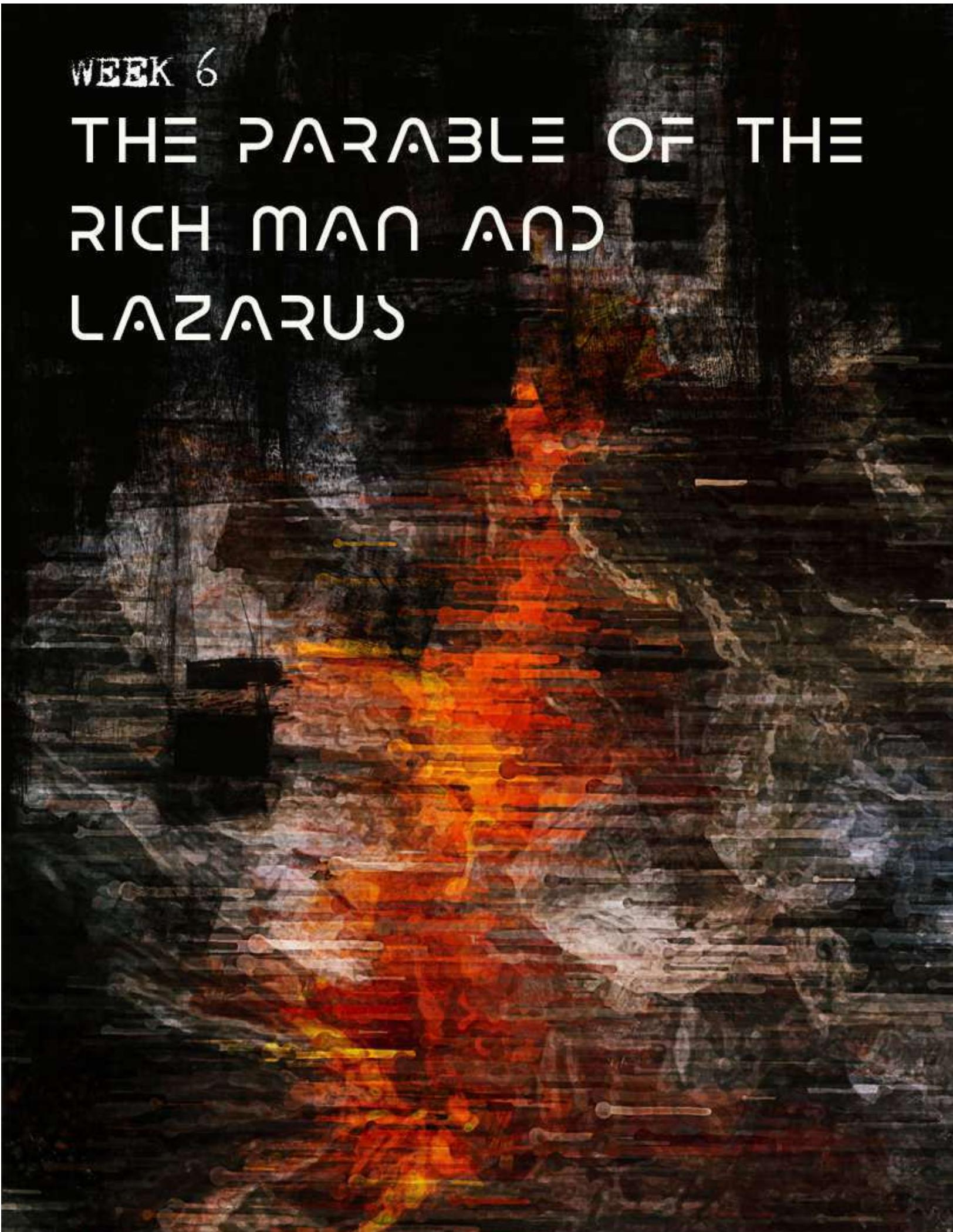
How should that fact change our lives?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What did you learn about this parable and its meaning in our lives?
2. Read Luke 19:11-27. What is your reaction when you read through this story? Which of the servants do you most identify with? How do you think they felt as they stood before the King to give an account of what they had done?
3. How does our world view the idea of accountability? Why do we rebel against the concept of accountability? Why do we need it? How does it make you feel to know that our lives are accountable to Jesus? How should that fact change our lives?
4. Why do you think the third servant was afraid to be associated with the master? Why did he doubt the kingdom's coming? What are some ways we show our allegiance to Jesus in the way we live? What fears make us doubt the kingdom's arrival? How do we face those fears to trust in Him?
5. Read 2 Peter 3:11-14. What does Peter say is ultimately going to happen to the things of this earth? Since we know that day is coming, how should it change the way we live today? What sort of lives does he encourage us to live? What does this look like practically?
6. We don't just want the Gospel to change our opinions; we want it to change our outlook. How does the reality of the Kingdom change the way you live today? How does it change the way you see the world and prioritize life? Close your time together in prayer asking God to help you live this week with Kingdom priorities.

WEEK 6

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS





And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after... All their life in this world and all their adventures...had only been the cover and the title page: now at least they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

C.S. LEWIS

BEFORE WE BEGIN

What is your favorite ending to a story?

What makes this ending so significant to you?

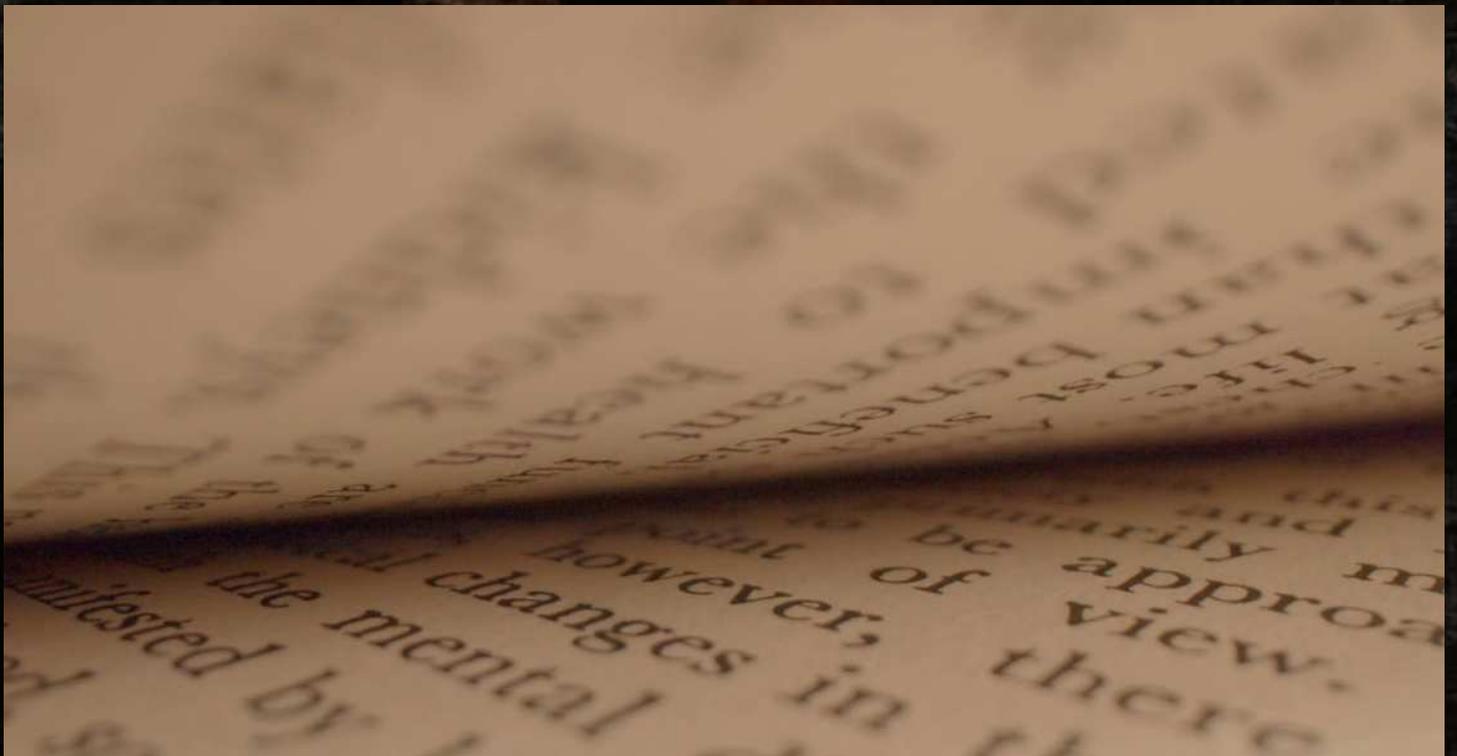
In what ways do you hope your story ends in this same way?

There are times when it can be hard to wait for the final page of the book.

You want to skip ahead to solve the mystery and see who committed the crime. A story's darkness can leave you hungering for the assurance that everything is going to be alright in the end. There's a certain amount of catharsis in an epic battle and the defeat of evil once and for all. When it comes to the stories we tell, we all want that happily ever after.

But, have you ever stopped to think about the story we're living? How will that story end?

Jesus' parables not only get us ready for the end of the story; they also prepare us for what comes next. In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Jesus talked about what happens after we die. It turns out that the end really isn't the end. There's more to our stories than we could ever imagine. And yet, just because the story continues doesn't mean that the ending is a good one. Only by listening to Jesus can we be sure that the ending we want is the one that we get.



THE SETTING

Luke 16 opens with an often overlooked parable – the Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-12). Though a little confusing from our perspective, Jesus seems to have told the story to convince the religious leaders to use their wealth for godly purposes. Rather than hoarding money for themselves, they needed to utilize their resources to bring others closer to God. When they failed to grasp His point, Jesus decided to make it more pointed:

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.' The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at Him. Then He said to them, 'You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God.'"

Luke 16:13-15

The Pharisees claimed to love God. Their actions made it clear that they really loved money. So, Jesus went on to tell them a second story. The first parable encouraged them to use their money to build bridges. This second parable would focus on the eternal barriers money can create.



Why is it impossible for us to serve both God and money?
How can money hijack our priorities and passions?
How do we know which master we are serving?

THE STORY

“Jesus said, ‘There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man’s table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet. The rich man also died and was buried, and he went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. The rich man shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.’ But Abraham said to him, ‘Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.’ Then the rich man said, ‘Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father’s home. For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don’t end up in this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.’ The rich man replied, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.’ But Abraham said, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Luke 16:19-31



“CERTAIN RICH MAN”

- As is typical for Jesus’ parables, the rich man goes unnamed. All we are told about him is the extravagant level of wealth he enjoyed. Jesus paints the man’s lifestyle in exorbitant terms, implying that every item of clothing he wears is made of the finest imported linen. His lifestyle of leisure and feasting stands in direct contrast to the lifestyle of the other character in this drama.
- Later in the story, Jesus tells us this man has five brothers, making him part of a family of six. In the Bible, seven is generally considered to be a number representing completion. The implication could be that there’s another character in the story who the rich man should have treated like a brother.

“POOR MAN NAMED LAZARUS”

- Breaking convention, Jesus gives the poor man in this story a name. In fact, Lazarus is the only named character in any of Jesus’ parables. The fact that he shares a name with one of Jesus’ best friends (John 11) makes this story all the more intriguing. Given the subject matter of this parable, it’s not difficult to imagine that Jesus had the coming resurrection of his friend Lazarus in mind.
- The poor man’s poverty is described in the starkest terms. Instead of being covered with the finest linen, his body is covered with sores. Rather than feasting with his friends, Lazarus sits with stray dogs waiting for table scraps. The rich man has everything; Lazarus has nothing.



"...SIT BESIDE ABRAHAM..."

- Upon their deaths, the rich man and Lazarus end up in an inverted version of their lives here on earth. Lazarus is taken to a place of comfort at the heavenly banquet. The rich man ends up in a place of torment. The role reversal reiterates Jesus' earlier point: "What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God."
- Literally, Jesus says that Lazarus is "in Abraham's bosom." The picture there is one of a party. When you were at a feast, you would recline at a table with your friends. Lazarus is said to be enjoying a feast with Abraham – the patriarch of the Jewish faith. There's this promise of heaven as a place of relationship.
- While this story isn't intended to give us a systematic theology of heaven and hell, Jesus' words here do contrast these two places. Heaven is portrayed as a place of joy (a banquet), with relief for Lazarus' pain, and relationships he lacked in life. Hell is portrayed as a place of deep regret, suffering, and isolation (the rich man only ever appears alone). The broad strokes of the parable paint a vivid picture of our potential destinations.

"SEND LAZARUS"

- The rich man's request condemns him in at least two ways. For starters, it reveals that he knew Lazarus' name all along. He didn't ignore some nameless man outside his gate. He knew who Lazarus was and yet did nothing to help! Secondly, his request to send Lazarus back to the land of the living shows that he still sees Lazarus as a subordinate. For as different as their circumstances are now, the rich man still sees things the way he did on earth.
- Amy-Jill Levine: "Had he been more clever, the rich man might have asked Abraham for permission to take the message to his brothers himself... At least the short trip would have eased his torments. But the rich man cannot divest himself of his status or change his ways: Lazarus is still the slave whose job it is to serve the master."

“NO ONE CAN CROSS OVER”

- The separation between heaven and hell is here presented as utter and eternal. There’s no crossing from one to the other. The rich man’s lament for his brothers assumes that nothing can be done for them from the other side. It’s the choices we make in life that affect what happens in death.
- Hebrews 9:27: “Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...”

“IF THEY WON’T LISTEN TO MOSES...”

- Abraham bluntly says that Scripture gives us what we need to know about hell. He warns us about what awaits us on the other side of death. Nothing can be done once you cross that threshold.
- The story ends with an implied question: Would you believe in Jesus if a man named Lazarus rose from the dead? Jesus' actions later in His ministry will prove that the Pharisees wouldn't believe even if a man named Lazarus did come back from the dead (John 11)!

Is it difficult for you to believe in the reality of hell? Why or why not?
How should the pictures painted in this parable motivate us to share the Gospel with others?

THE SIGNIFICANCE

There are some who believe the story ends when you die. The curtain falls, the lights go out, and the show is over. That's all folks. Nothing more to see here. The End. It may sound depressing, but it's hard to argue with. After all, funerals feel final. The story of your life gets distilled into one single dash on your tombstone. All your hopes, all your dreams, all of you – all of it gone forever. If that's the way the story ends, then what's the point?

On the one hand, Jesus was insanely optimistic about life after death. There is a place of eternal rest and relief. There, the suffering of life is replaced by joy. The pain of life gives way to delight. The troubles we faced here become nothing more than temporary speedbumps on the way to eternal glory. Death is not an end to the story, but the beginning of something much greater than we could ever imagine.

On the other hand, Jesus was also depressingly realistic about life after death. While there is such a thing as eternal life, Jesus lets us know that there is also an eternal death. There are those who turn away from God and go their own way. They want nothing to do with Him or His Kingdom. In the end, they isolate themselves from the One who is Life. The stories we tell don't end when we die – far from it! Death may be the end, but it is not the destination.

What are some of the things this world values?

How do these values compare/ contrast with what God values?

How does this parable highlight that comparison?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? As you think back over the past six weeks of the study, what has been the biggest lesson you've learned from the Parables? Which of the parables was your favorite?

2. Read Luke 16:19-31. What are some of the ways you react to this story? In what ways does it encourage you? In what ways does it challenge you? What did Jesus teach us about the reality of heaven and hell through this story?

3. Jesus told this parable in the context of telling His audience they couldn't serve both God and money. Why do you think He warns us so much about the potential conflict between God and money? How can money hijack our priorities and passions? What are some tests that can help us know which master we are serving?

4. Though not a systematic theology of heaven and hell, this parable tells us a lot about both of them. How would you describe heaven based on this story? How would you describe hell? Why do you think we have an easier time thinking/talking about heaven? How should this parable motivate us toward sharing our faith?

5. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. How does Paul describe the end of the story in these verses. What stands out to you as the most significant part of this passage? How can we better encourage each other with the good news presented in these verses?

6. In what ways does this parable point us towards what's really significant in this life? How does it open our eyes to what's at stake here? Close your time together in prayer by asking God to give you opportunities to share the Gospel with those in your life who need to hear it.