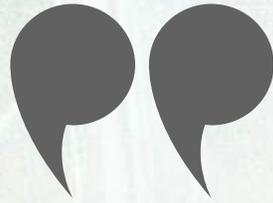




# PARABLES



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.

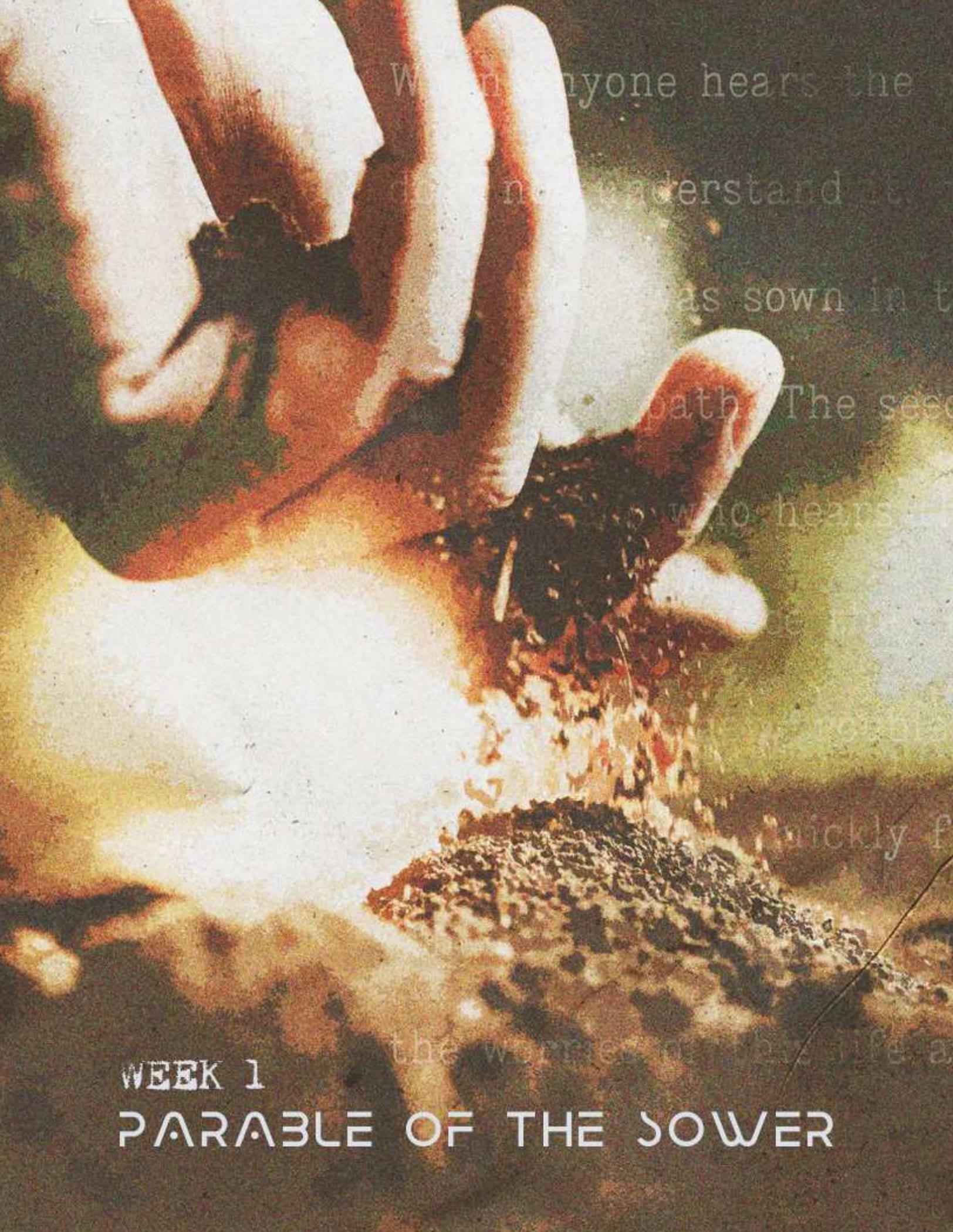
The Gospel writers tell us that Jesus was familiar with the power of stories. In fact, He used them all the time. A Lost Son. A Pearl of Great Price. A Good Samaritan. A Mustard Seed. Jesus used these images – and so many others! – to point us toward the realities of His Kingdom. Through simple images 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

**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.

## Read Luke 8:1-15

### QUICK NOTES ON THE PARABLE

- 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.
- 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.
- **The four types of soil represent four types of hearts:**
  - 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."

- 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.”
  - 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.”
  - 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.”
  - 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...”
- 

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?

# 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



## 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.



## Read Luke 8:1-15

### QUICK NOTES ON THE PARABLE

- Jesus told these parables in response to the religious leaders of His day, who scoffed at the “sinners” looking for 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.
- 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.
- 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? As Darrel Bock said: “Evangelism is grounded in the joy of recovery.”
- The “silver coins” mentioned in the second story might be significant for a couple of reasons. For starters, the “coins” mentioned (‘drachmas’) are each worth a day’s wage. But, they 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.
- 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 where he loses all of his wealth.

- 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. The father sees his son walking down the pathway and runs out to greet him.
  - 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. The father tries 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?
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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.

# 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



## “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.

## Read Luke 10:25–37

### QUICK NOTES ON THE PARABLE

- 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, making it a perfect ambush spot for thieves and bandits.
- The beaten man seems to have some immediate luck, as both a priest and a Levite make their way down the road. Jesus' audience would think that such righteous men would certainly help. Though we may speculate as to why neither the priest or Levite stopped to help, Jesus offers us no motivation.
- 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?'"

- Jesus' choice of a Samaritan not only subverted expectations, it defied the prejudices of His day. 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.
- 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. The Samaritan even takes the man into town and puts him up in a hotel for the night. 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.
- 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.

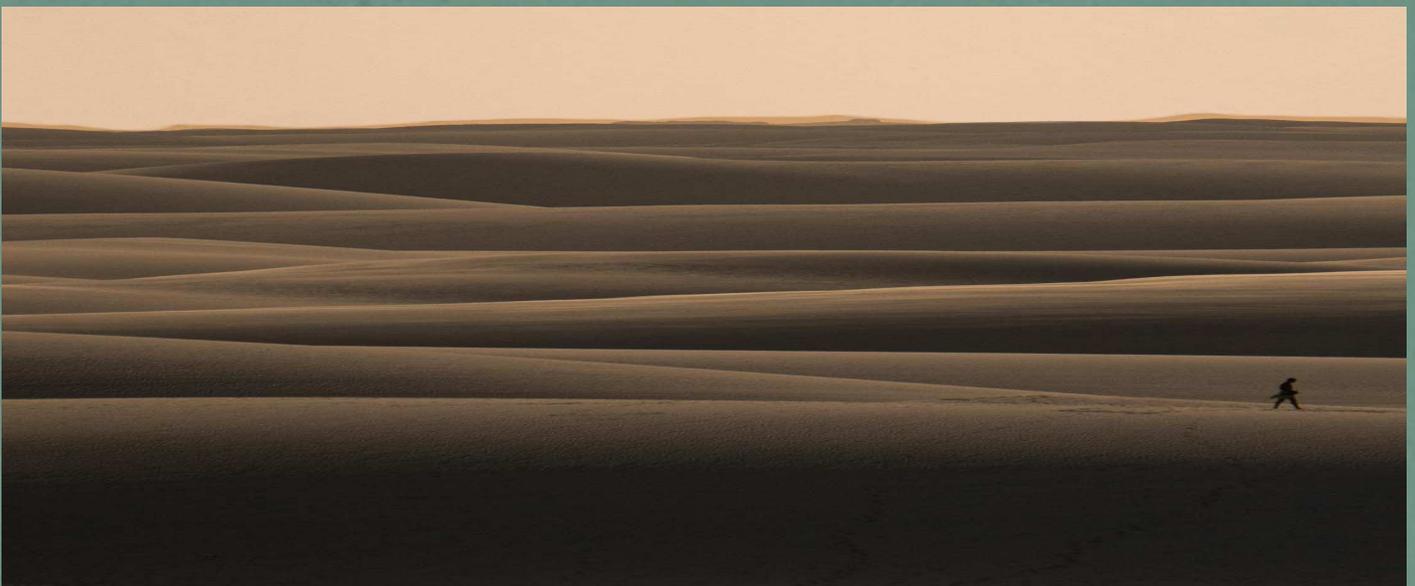
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In our day, it's not hard to find someone to be a neighbor to. All around us, there are people who are bruised and bloodied by sin. They've been left for dead on the side of the road. Our job's not to pass them by or kick them while they're down. Our 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.

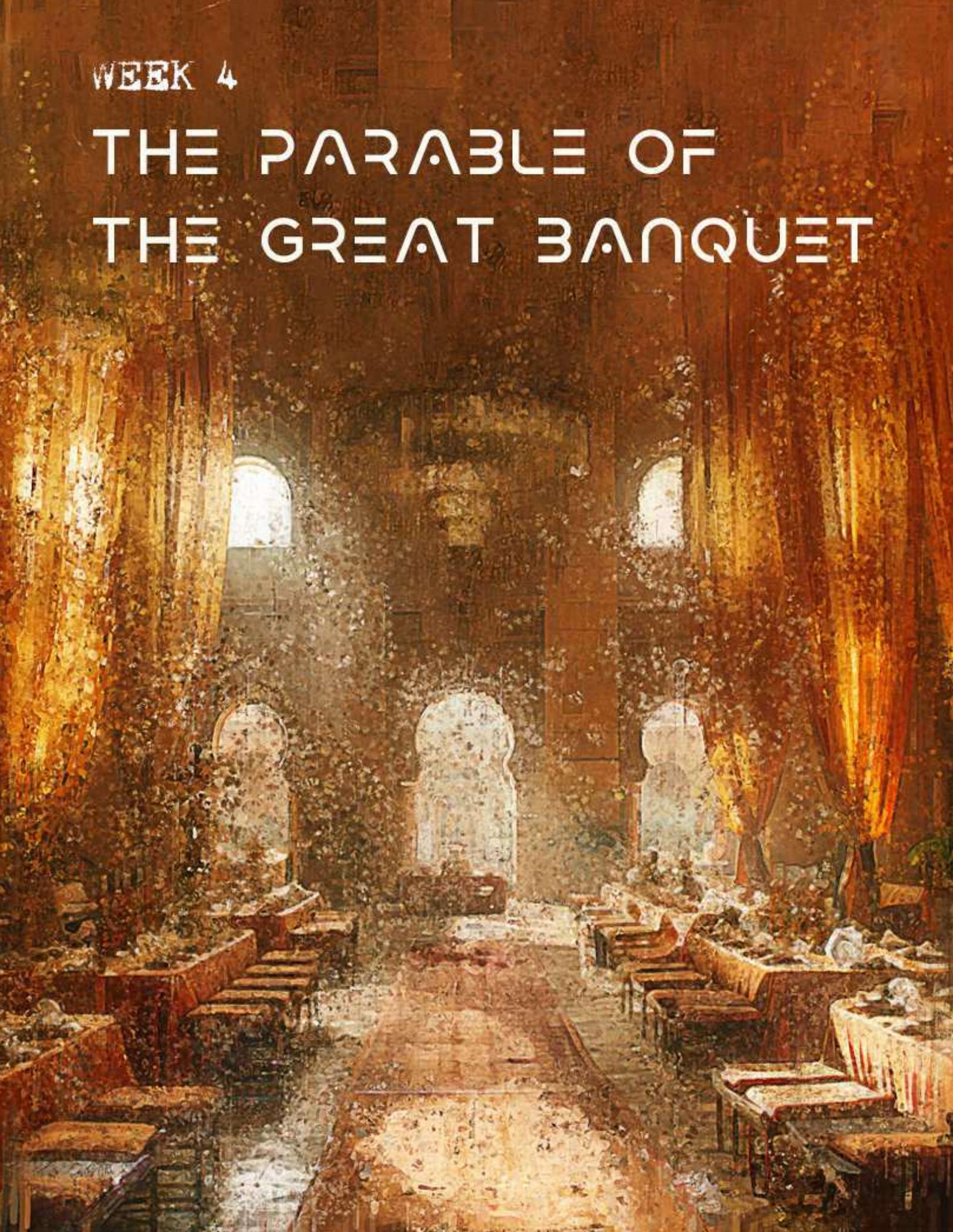
# GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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



## 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.



## Read Luke 14:7-24

### QUICK NOTES ON THE PARABLE

- 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. The imagery of the Kingdom as a banquet once again reminds us of the joy Jesus came to bring.
- In that day, when you sent out invitations to a banquet, you would set the date for the feast, but not the time. 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.
- 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 feebleness of their excuses hides their obvious disrespect for the invitation.
- The host understands the insults implied in these excuses. The original invitees have dishonored their host and created an awkward situation for him. With no guests to enjoy the banquet, the festivities seem to have ended before they had a chance to begin. But, the host refuses to let this banquet go to waste and invites any and everyone to his table.
- 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.

- This phrase “compel them” 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.

- There’s a great reversal in Jesus’ 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.

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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!

# 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

## 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.



## Read Luke 19:11-27

### QUICK NOTES ON THE PARABLE

- 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.
- 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.
- Unlike Matthew's version of this parable (Matt. 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.
- A "mina" – or "pound of silver" according to the NLT – 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. This was incredibly risky. The nobleman hasn't been crowned king yet. This money bears his image and authority. 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.
- 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. The faithful servants are given something they never could have earned on their own.
  - 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. The fact of the matter is that the third servant didn't want anyone to know that he was aligned with the master.
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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.

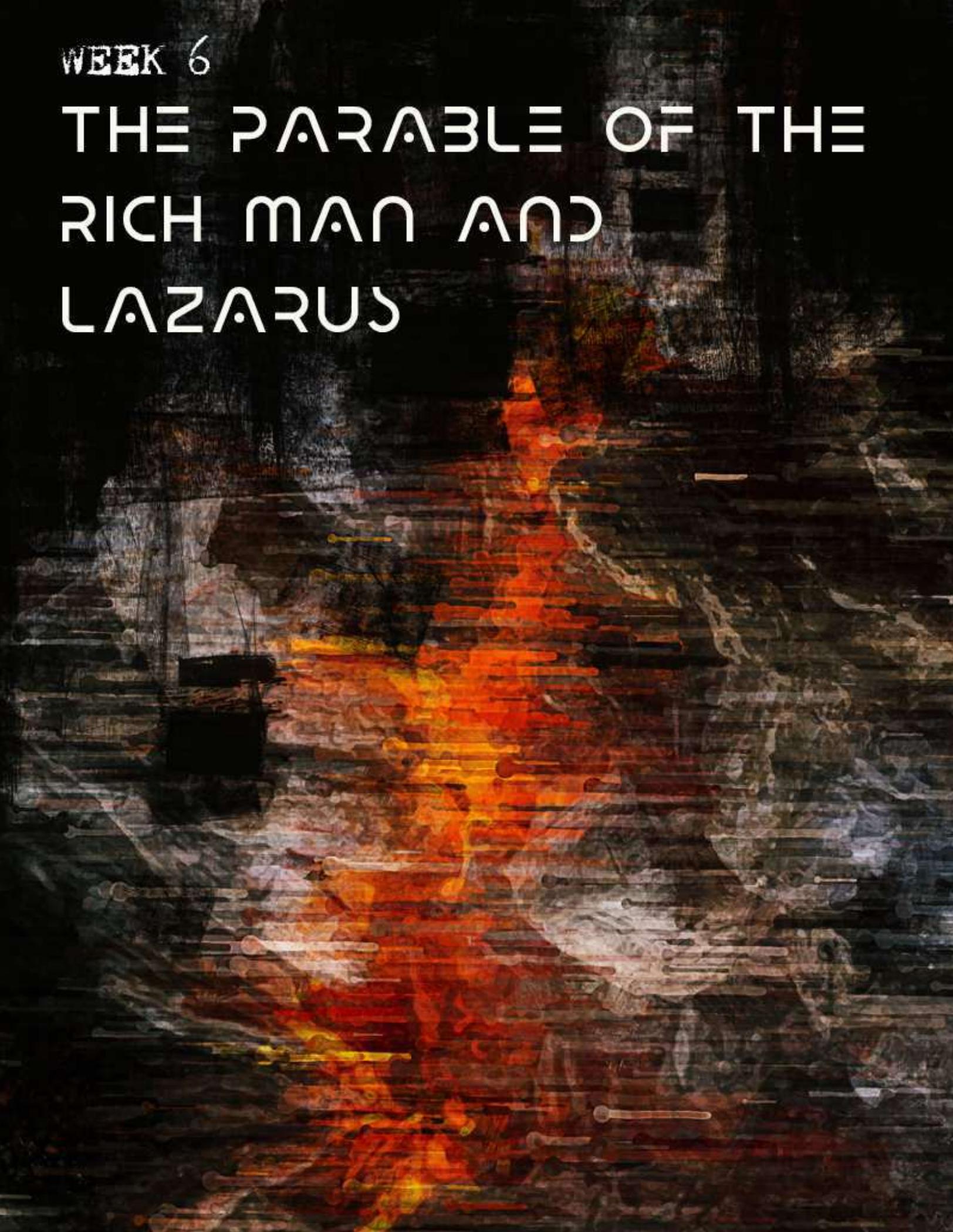
The reality of that day ought to affect our priorities on this day. How would you live today if you knew the King was coming back? What would you change if you knew you were one day going to stand before His throne? The King has given us a lot. He's given us our possessions, our families, our finances, 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?

# 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

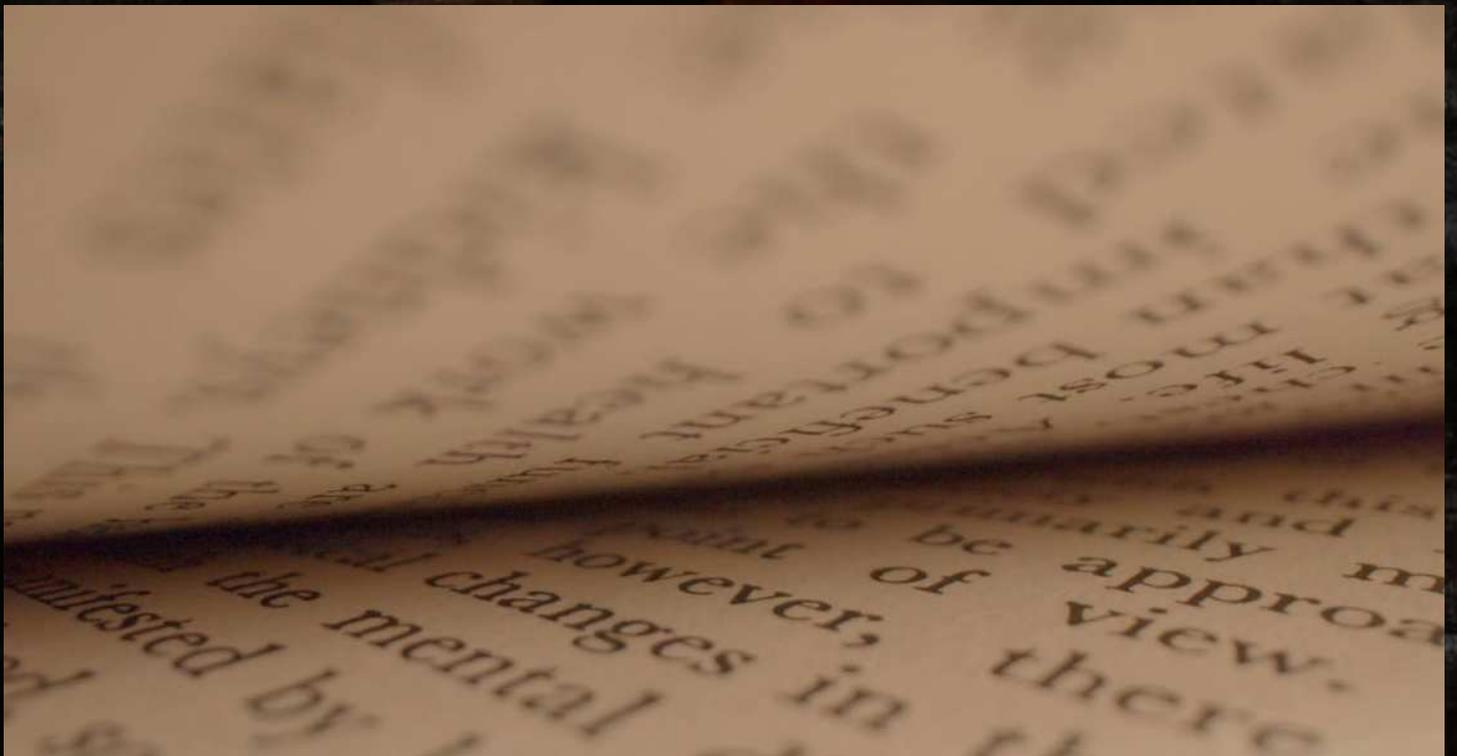


## There are times when it can be hard to wait for the final page of the book.

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.



# Read Luke 16:19–31

## QUICK NOTES ON THE PARABLE

- 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. 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.
- 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.
- 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. Literally, Jesus says that Lazarus is "in Abraham's bosom." The picture here is one of a feast.
- 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 broad strokes of the parable paint a vivid picture of our potential destinations.
- Jesus tells us the rich 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 the rich man should have treated Lazarus like a brother.

- The rich man's request to send Lazarus to his brothers condemns him in at least two ways. For starters, it reveals that he knew Lazarus' name all along 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.

- 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?

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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.

# 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.