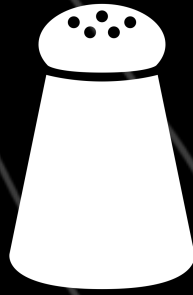


DISCUSSION GUIDES
PARABLES



CIRCLE 1/4: SALT

Let's talk about parables. No, we are not doing complex math. A parable is a teaching tool commonly used by Jesus throughout the Gospels. It's basically an illustration that teaches an applicable life lesson. Jesus was the greatest storyteller to ever live. He seldom just said things matter-of-factly. Rather, He would tell relatable stories that helped people understand complex principles. Simply put, a parable is a natural story that explains a spiritual truth.

I really enjoy cooking. A few weeks ago, I was making a mess in the kitchen by cracking eggs, grating cheese, and chopping onions. It was a relaxed Saturday morning, and I had one objective— make an outstanding omelette. I had plenty of time, so I was sure to do everything just right. After patiently stirring the eggy-goop on low heat for about five minutes, it had finally formed a near-perfect omelette. However, I still had to pull off the most difficult part of the omelette making process. I had to flip the thing out of the pan and onto my plate without compromising all my hard work.

Nervously, I turned the pan over while the yellow egg-cloud began to fall. With a slight plop noise, it landed perfectly on my plate. I did it! I stuck the landing. I proudly placed a piece of parsley on my perfect omelette (even though I was going to scrape it off in a few seconds). Cup of coffee in hand, I made my way to the dining room table.

I took a bite and dropped my fork. It was... absolutely awful. In all my hyper-focused preparations, I had forgotten one crucial ingredient. I forgot salt. All you need is a small pinch, but I missed it, and it ruined the whole breakfast.

READ: MATTHEW 5:13

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."

This parable is taught during the Sermon on the Mount, which is a massive message that Jesus preached early in His ministry. In this sermon, Jesus lays out the core truths that are designed to both change your life and change the world.

Salt is an influencer of flavor. It brings out the best in every food. You don't realize it, but it's what makes most food taste good. From french fries to steaks to pizza to

cookies, salt brings out the best of their flavors. Who does Jesus say is the salt of the earth? You! This means that ***you should bring out the best in people.***

Are you a salty person? No, not like passive-aggressive. Do you bring out the best in the lives of those around you? Everywhere you go, you should see a change in the atmosphere. Your friends should be better because you're in their lives. Your school should be better because you're in it. Your team should be better because you're a part of it.

Furthermore, salt is under-the-radar. You don't really notice it in most food. No one eating a steak says, "Wow, this salt is amazing!" People compliment the steak. Salt is not meant to overshadow other flavors. This should be true in your life, too. Your life shouldn't be self-centered or overwhelmingly about yourself. Rather, you should give glory to God to show others how awesome He is. Your choices, your actions, and your relationships should all reveal the glory of God.

Jesus calls you to be the salt of the earth, enhancing the lives of those around you while giving all the glory to God. Are you bringing out the best in others or dragging them down with negativity, gossip, and temptation? Think about it. Who are you glorifying and praising in life, God or yourself?



THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE WAS WRITTEN BY JACKSON GARRELL. FOR ALL THE LATEST CIRCLES DEVOTIONALS, FOLLOW @STUDENT_CIRCLES.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Q1: What is your favorite salty food?

Q2: Let's clear this up from the start! What is the difference between someone today calling you "salty" and Jesus calling you the "salt of the earth" during His Sermon on the Mount?

Q3: What do students do to intentionally or unintentionally bring their friends down? How can you instead bring out the best in your friends?

Q4: How can someone glorify God with their life?

Q5: What's one, specific way you can be the salt of the earth this week?

READING PLAN FOR SALT

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Acts 24:1-13

1 Peter 3:15

Acts 27:1-12

Acts 27:13-26

Acts 27:27-44

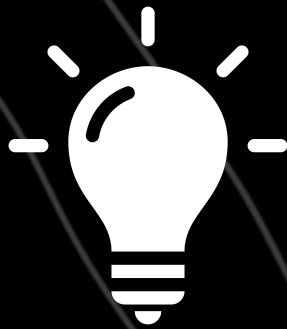
Do the following with each passage:

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READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.



CIRCLE 2/4: LIGHT

I love New York City, but I hate crowds. Thus, I found myself extremely conflicted when I went to New York during the holiday season. I flew into Newark, met my wife and her family, and then ventured into the dead-center of the city. It was the day after Christmas. There were people everywhere, and all of them were walking in the same direction. We swam through the crawling crowds for nearly an hour. With each block, the population seemed to double.

Finally, we turned the corner at Fifth Avenue and there it was— that big tree at Rockefeller Center. I was excited to see it because I had just watched the live lighting ceremony. It looked absolutely gorgeous on television. However, it looked pretty lame in person. It was just a massive, brown tree in the middle of a city block. It was covered in over 50,000 lights, but it looked dull. The lights simply didn't have the same impact in broad daylight. Why is that? Light is most effective in the dark.

READ: Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

In this passage, Jesus is saying that you are the light. When Jesus comes into our lives and lights us up, we are like a city on a hill. His love changes us into people who radiate love, joy, hope, and compassion that is evident to anyone who sees the way we live.

Jesus was likely motioning over to the city of Tiberias, which was nestled just across the Sea of Galilee, while He was teaching this parable. It was a large metropolis perched atop a hill. At night, you could see that city from far, far away. The same should be said about you! Jesus is teaching us that we should stand out from our surroundings in a beautiful way. The light inside you should shine around you. Everyone should be able to see that there is something different about you.

Have you ever used your cell phone's screen as a flashlight? During the day, the glow is practically unnoticeable. However, it can light up a whole room at night. This proves an important principle. Light destroys darkness.

No matter how much darkness is surrounding us, a little bit of light will draw it out. John 1:5 says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Sadly, our world can be full of darkness— bullying at school, depression, destructive lies, broken relationships, and so much pain. Be the light by illuminating those dark situations. Reveal God's goodness everywhere you go. Your love can overcome hate. Your encouragement can speak louder than lies that tear down. Your friendship can change the entire direction of someone's life.

Here is the challenge: Be the light.

There is a whole lot of darkness around you every day. You need to be like a light and change the environment.

If there are kids in your school who always sit alone— be the light.

If you know someone going through a really hard time in her family— be the light.

If someone's whole mood has changed recently and you're worried about them— be the light.

Light can drive out darkness. Light can change lives.

Are you being the light? Or just casting a shadow?



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TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Q1: Think of someone you know who you would describe as a light. How would you describe that person?

Q2: What "dark" circumstances give students the opportunity to shine for Christ?

Q3: How can you be a light in your school, church, sport, or family? Go around the circle giving examples.

Q4: Commit to being a light in one place or person's life this week. What will you do to shine God's goodness to those around you?

READING PLAN FOR LIGHT

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Acts 25:1-12

Acts 25:13-27

Ephesians 2:1-10

Acts 24:1-13

Acts 24:14-27

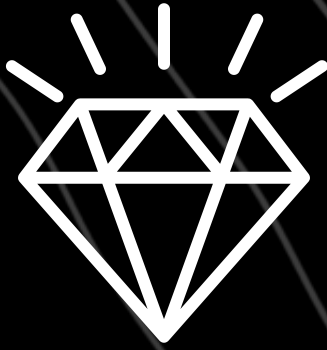
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REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.



CIRCLE 3/4: TREASURE

When people value you, they make time for you. One of the harshest realities most people face as young adults is that the opposite is also true. It's a hard pill to swallow. If you know someone who is always too busy to hang out, then they likely don't prioritize your relationship. People get busy. Just because someone cancels plans a few times doesn't mean that they don't see your worth. However, if it's a constant pattern, then you may need to evaluate what's happening. It's usually not a matter of availability; it's a matter of priority.

Do you want to know what people value? Look at how they spend their time and their money. Calendars and bank accounts reveal a lot. If a person spends hours in front of the mirror or shopping online, she prioritizes her appearance. If someone spends all his time looking at shoes on Instagram and spends all his money on Jordans, he values sneakers. If someone takes you to coffee and puts his phone down to talk, he values you.

READ: MATTHEW 13:44

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

In this short parable, Jesus explains that a relationship with God is like a hidden treasure. It's not just good— it's worth sacrificing everything for. In ancient times, real estate contracts were very simple. When you bought land, you also got everything that sat on the land. Does the land have a bunch of bees on it? They're your bees now. Does it have a herd of cats living on it? They're your cats. Does it have a box full of gold and jewels on it? Congratulations! You get the treasure! God's Kingdom is like a hidden treasure in a field. Once you experience it, it's worth sacrificing anything to make it your top priority.

Our culture has convinced us to be fixated with the idea of "more." We want *more* stuff. We want *more* popularity. We crave *more* money. We want *more* Instagram likes. It can quickly become an unhealthy obsession. More is a myth. All of those possessions will one day end up in a landfill. Money will not give your life purpose. When you choose to prioritize Jesus, everything else in life will fall into place.

This passage is not about buying heaven. It's encouraging readers to check their priorities. Jesus is asking, "What do you value? Are you willing to sacrifice everything

for a life with me?” The man in the parable was willing to give up what he had because he knew life with God would be better. He sold everything he had with a heart of joy! He knew that it was worth it. Sacrifice isn't always dreadful. It brings great joy to pursue God— even when it means sacrifice.

Sacrificing popularity to do the right thing for Jesus is worth it.
Sacrificing the higher paying job to uphold your ethics for Jesus is worth it.
Sacrificing your pride to be honest for Jesus is worth it.

There is no one, no thing, and no experience in this entire world that is better than Jesus. He's worth treasuring. He's worth the sacrifice. He's worth prioritizing.



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TALK IT OUT

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Q1: What do students our age usually prioritize?

Q2: What are your top three priorities in life? Does the way you spend your time reflect that or something different?

Q3: Have you ever made a sacrifice to do the right thing? Share an example with your circle.

Q4: How would someone spend their time, money, and conversations if Jesus were his top priority?

Q5: What can you do to prioritize Jesus this week?

READING PLAN FOR **TREASURE**

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

John 4:5-6

John 4:15-23

Romans 3:1-10

Romans 3:11-20

Romans 3:21-31

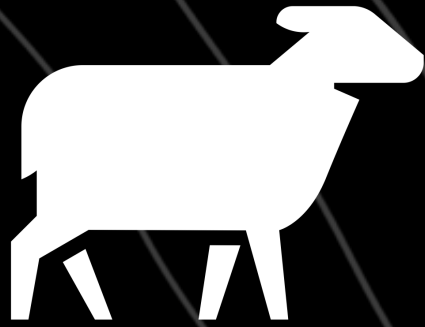
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REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.



CIRCLE 4/4: ONE LOST SHEEP

Do you remember your first crush? I certainly cannot forget mine. The year was 2002, and I was in sixth grade. Brittany Spears was in her prime, everyone wore Abercrombie sweatshirts, and touch-screen phones didn't exist yet. This was also the year I asked someone out for the first time. There was this girl in my school who caught my eye. She was in the seventh grade— an older, mature woman. I fell head-over-heels while barely knowing her. I would always try to find an excuse to talk to her. I would purposely hang out near her locker. I tried to become friends with her friends.

On February 10th, I decided to ask her out. I knew that Valentine's Day was coming, and I wanted to be sure to swoop her up before then. I did what any normal middle-schooler would do— I wrote her a poem. I had always been an artsy kid, so I thought this was a brilliant move. Without consulting a professional, I moved forward with my poetic plot. I sprayed a neatly-folded piece of paper with a spritz of cologne and slipped it into her locker.

This moment was so formative in my young life that every second of it is stored in my mind like a hard-drive. That being said, I still remember how the poem went. It read, "Before I met you, the sky was dark and grey. Before I met you, I never had a good day. Before I met you, the birds never sang from above. But, now that I have met you, I do believe in love."

Yeah, I was a boss.

After the bell rang, I stood around the corner so that I could see her read the note. Nervously, I watched as she walked down the hallway towards her locker. She opened the metal door, and the note flopped to her feet. She picked up the note and confusingly unfolded it. Instantly, her face turned red as a rose. I was thinking, "That's it! That's the look of love!" It wasn't. I watched in horror as she called all her friends over to the note and read it aloud to them. They all passed it around and laughed hysterically. It broke my little heart.

The whole school heard about it in a matter of moments. Girls giggled when I came into a room. Guys would quote parts of the poem to me while walking down the hallway. I even had a few teachers check if I was okay. Honestly, I wasn't. That moment started a very long year of difficult emotions. I felt like I didn't belong. I was an outcast.

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever felt like you didn't fit in or that you were just plain average? Those feelings can quickly evolve from mere emotions into full-fledged identity. I understand. I have been there. However, I want you to hear this— you are far from average. God made you the way that He did because He wanted to make you one of a kind. He loves you. He custom designed you. He chases after you.

READ: Luke 15:3-7

“Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

This parable seems a little confusing at first. Why on earth would a shepherd leave 99 perfectly good sheep to find one wandering sheep? 99% is a great percentage. If that was your grade, it'd be an A-plus. Why on earth would a shepherd risk the well-being of the other sheep just to search for the one. In this parable, Jesus is the good shepherd who is looking for His lost sheep. It seems absolutely crazy until you realize that one is actually you. That sheep's story is your story.

Never underestimate God's passionate pursuit for His people. Whenever you are feeling outcast, alone, average, not-good-enough, or inadequate, remind yourself that you are the one. Jesus chased after you even when it didn't make sense. You might feel like no one notices you, but Jesus does. He does more than merely notice you. He radically loves you. He does this because He wants you to be with Him forever. He wants the best for you. He desires a relationship with you, and He will go to great lengths to make that happen.



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TALK IT OUT

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Q1: As a circle, write a short love poem together that may have gone over better than mine did.

Q2: What is one takeaway that stood out to you in today's reading?

Q3: What does this parable reveal about Jesus's feelings for you as an individual?

Q4: Have you ever been able to relate with the one lost sheep?

Q5: As we strive to love others like Jesus loves us, how does this parable inspire you to care for family and friends?

READING PLAN FOR **ONE LOST SHEEP**

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

1 Corinthians 11:1-2

Romans 8:1-17

Romans 8:18-30

Romans 8:31-39

Matthew 10:7-14

Do the following with each passage:

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