



PARABLES

Small Stories – Big Truths



CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH
2023

Introduction to *Parables*

In this series, we will be looking at just a few of the parables Jesus used to illustrate His teaching and to make a point. The Greek word for parable is “paraballo” (παραβαλλω), a compound of two very vivid words; “para-”, which means beside or alongside, and “-ballo”, which means to throw. So, to teach by a parable is literally to throw a lesson alongside the true object of the teaching. I.E., The teacher illustrates *this* point by describing *that* point.

But Jesus would often conclude His parables with a certain saying, “*He who has ears, let him hear!*” Jesus was saying that it’s not enough for His words to enter your ears, or even your heart, it’s what you do with them that counts.

Introduction To The 4G Guide

GATHER – GOD – GROUP – GIVE

It's important that we *GATHER* each week as a church family. Still, God wants us to take what He's teaching and apply it to our daily lives. This is the heart of the 4G Guides. These guides are written to encourage you in your personal *GOD TIME* and in your small *GROUPS*. They are designed to help you understand what God is teaching and apply it to your life. This understanding through application enables you to take what you are learning and *GIVE* it to others.



USING THE 4G GUIDE

Each week is divided into four sections:



Gear Up

Each week starts with the Gear Up section. This section introduces the weekly topic and expounds on Scripture. Also provided are some practical steps to putting the subject matter into practice.



God Time

Personal time with God is vital to the Christian walk. Five daily devotionals are provided for each week’s topic. This is your one-on-one time in a guided devotional format. At the conclusion, we encourage you to pray, seeking direction for the day and the rest of the week.



Group Time

We learn from one another! In small groups we meet to dig deeper into the weekly material. This booklet contains lesson outlines for discipleship discussion. For more information on available groups and forming a group, go to our Groups webpage:

cbcfamily.net/groups.



Family Group Time

Family worship glorifies God. Each week we have simple devotionals just for Families. Plan ahead though, as many of these lessons include fun experiments or video shorts to discuss.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the *Christian Standard Bible* (CSB Text Edition: 2020).



Gear Up: Soil

Jesus often used parables to teach truths about the Kingdom of God. While the crowds who followed Him may have gathered to be entertained or amazed, Jesus told stories that would demand a response. These parables served as a sort of diagnostic of the heart— a tool to prompt personal evaluation and a subsequent Kingdom-oriented decision. He also emphasized hearing or listening (that is, *receiving*) His words. In Matthew 13:9, Jesus ends His parable with the words, “*Let anyone who has ears listen.*”

Jesus tells a parable about soil in Matthew 13. He tells of a sower (planter) who sowed seed along four different types of soil. Each type of soil resulted in a different outcome once the seed was scattered. Later, in Matthew 13:18-23, Jesus explains that each soil is representative of people’s hearts and how they respond to Jesus and the gospel message of what He has done.

In Matthew 13:3-9, Jesus says:

³Then he told them many things in parables, saying, “Consider the sower who went out to sow. ⁴As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn’t have much soil, and it grew up quickly since the soil wasn’t deep. ⁶But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it. ⁸Still other seed fell on good ground and produced fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times what was sown. ⁹Let anyone who has ears listen.”

A Hard Heart

The first soil falls along a path. The illustration is of a path that had become hardened by many footsteps. This is representative of a hard heart. When the message of the gospel falls on a hard heart, Satan comes and snatches it away before it can take root.

A Shallow Heart

The second soil falls on rocky ground. The seed here makes its way in a bit but doesn’t grow deep roots. This refers to someone who hears the message of the gospel, receives it with joy, but falls away as soon as any trouble or persecution comes.

A Divided Heart

The third seed falls along thorns. Jesus tells us that the seed makes its way in but is choked out as soon as thorns grow up alongside it. This refers to someone who allows the worries of life and the deceit of wealth to choke out the growth of the seed.

A Right Heart

The fourth seed falls along good ground. The illustration here is that the seed has fallen along healthy, receptive soil. This refers to the person who truly receives the gospel message and responds appropriately— by placing faith in Jesus Christ. This results in a fruitful crop. This crop will be displayed in our attitudes (see Gal 5:22-23) and in our actions (see 1 John 3:18).

What Is Your Response?

Since Jesus’ parables serve as a diagnostic tool for personal evaluation, the question becomes, “What is your response to the gospel?” Have you placed faith in Christ? Have you surrendered to Him? He loves you and died for you. Open your heart and respond to Him today. Then display a “fruitful crop” for His glory!

WEEK 1 – THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

God Time Day 1: Hearing vs. Listening



Even though we have different words for the physical process of sounds registering in the ear compared to giving attention to a message, we still sometimes use “hear” when we mean “listen.” (Hear ye, hear ye!) Jesus also used the word “hear” in this way as He taught using parables.

Read Matthew 13:9 (NIV).
Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Jesus was urging people to dig beyond the surface to get to the meaning of the story. If one is not intent on understanding the meaning of what one hears, it will slip past them without them even knowing it.



Rate yourself on a scale of 1-10; how serious are you about understanding and applying God’s word:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

God Time Day 2: First Soil: A Hard Heart



This week we will be looking at the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:3-9 & 18-23.

Now let’s look closer at the first soil: Matthew 13:4 & 19.

<i>⁴As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them</i>	<i>¹⁹ When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and doesn’t understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path.</i>
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The seed had no impact on the soil at all, since the hard-packed earth along the path allowed the birds to eat it before any change could take place. Their ears may have picked up the sound and it even made it to the heart, but...



Circle why the evil one was able to snatch the word away.

Are you listening to God’s word and understanding it? (We’ll find out on Day 5 how we can know if we are.)

Reading this 4G Guide makes it less likely that this kind of soil represents you, but there are three more.

God Time Day 3: Second Soil: A Shallow Heart



Read about the second soil in Matthew 13:5-6 & 20-21.

<i>⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn’t have much soil, and it grew up quickly since the soil wasn’t deep. ⁶But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.</i>	<i>²⁰ And the one sown on rocky ground—this is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. ²¹But he has no root and is short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away.</i>
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Compare the parable with the explanation:

It grew up quickly = *hears the word and _____ receives it with _____*

But when the sun came up, it was scorched = *When distress or _____ comes because of the _____*

Since it had no root, it withered away. = *But he has no _____ and is short-lived... immediately he _____ away.*

Based on verse 20, did this person hear and believe the word – the Gospel message?



In your own words, explain what happened after the initial response of joy which led to “he falls away.”

While we need to give credit to this one who got out there (plants need the sun) and was bold enough to even receive persecution “because of the word,” at the same time it’s vital to be rooted, to receive nourishment for growth.



How can you be *rooted* in the Word? (See Ephesians 3:17-20)

God Time Day 4: Third Soil: A Divided Heart



Read about the third soil in Matthew 13:7 & 22.

⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it.	²² Now the one sown among the thorns—this is one who hears the word, but the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.
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When first reading this story, one might wonder why someone would deliberately waste seed by planting amid existing thorns. The reality is that the thorns did not come up in the soil until later.

Underline “the thorns came up.”



Circle the items in verse 22 that Jesus identifies as “thorns.”

Any loyalty, pursuit, or activity that steals from our commitment to Christ is a thorn.

Just like the shallow heart from Day 3, the person represented by this soil does hear and receive the word, yet there is more to fulfilling God’s purpose than just receiving.

Underline “and choked it” in verse 7.



Circle “and it becomes unfruitful” in verse 22.

We all have our thorns, our human condition that robs our devotion to God. What matters is how we deal with them.



Using the following verses, devise a plan to eliminate the thorns from your life so that God’s word has room to flourish and be fruitful in you.

Philippians 4:6 1 John 2:15-17 1 Timothy 6:10

God Time Day 5: Fourth Soil: A Right Heart



This week we have seen several ways that a fruitful crop growing from the seed – the word – may be prevented. But Jesus talks about one more kind of soil.



Read about the fourth soil in Matthew 13:8 & 23.

⁸ Still other seed fell on good ground and produced fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times what was sown.	²³ But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown.
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Circle what qualified this soil as “good ground?”

Good Ground = _____ the word = Fruit

Notice the varying levels of fruitfulness (30/60/100). The implication is that not everyone will be a “superstar,” but we all need to “produce fruit” to be counted as “good soil.”

The point of Jesus’ parable is clear: we should bear fruit. But what is fruit? Some kinds of fruit are easy to identify but difficult to measure, like attitude (see Galatians 5:22-23 for a list of the “Fruit of the Spirit”). Other kinds of fruit are measurable and evident based on actions:



- How did you demonstrate God’s love this week?
- To whom did you declare the Good News of the Gospel?
- Who are you discipling to do the same?

If your attitudes and actions are not reflecting the kind of fruit listed above, you should seriously examine which of the other three types of soil you are exhibiting. Dig deeper into the Word. Get rid of the things preventing you from understanding and bearing fruit.

And if you are bearing fruit, keep in mind John 15:2:

[God] prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit.

WEEK 1 – THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Group Time

LOOK BACK:



1. Each participant shares one praise and one prayer request. (Commit these to prayer for the coming week.)

2. ENCOURAGEMENT 1-on-1 (See last page for directions)

Y / N	Y / N	_____
_____	_____	

3. Starting a new series.



What do you hope to gain from this series?



LOOK UP:

Question: What is the difference between knowledge and understanding? Watch this short video from Francis Chan:



1. **FYI:** The Greek word for parable is “paraballo” (παραβαλλω), a compound of two very vivid words; “para-”, which means beside or alongside, and “-ballo”, which means to throw. So, to teach by a parable is literally to throw a lesson alongside the true object of the teaching. I.E., The teacher illustrates *this* point by describing *that* point.

2. Discussion:

Read Matthew 13:3-9 & 18-23.

- What is the seed? Who is the sower? Who is the soil?

The Path: Reread verses 4 and 19.

- Who is represented by the birds? What happened? What was the reason why?

The Rocky Places: Reread verses 5-6 and 20-21.

- What is represented by the sun? (Because of what?) What happened? What was the reason why?

The Thorns: Reread verses 7 and 22.

- What is represented by the thorns? (Where do thorns come from?) What happened? What was the reason why?

The Good Soil: Reread verses 8 and 23.

- What happened? What was the reason why? What is fruit? (What is the significance that it is measurable?)

Answer these using specific words from today’s text.

What is the main difference between soil 1 and soil 4?

What is the primary difference between soils 1-3 and soil 4?

Which of these soils can we find in our church today?

Reread Matthew 13: 9.



LOOK FORWARD: Application

Point: *An understanding heart produces fruit, 30-60-100-fold.*

Which soil are you and how can you achieve a fourth soil heart?

1. Identify the “birds” that steal from your heart. What don’t you understand?

2. How can you deal with fears of being scorched by the “sun”?

3. What “thorns” are choking you? How will you deal with them?

4. Is there fruit have you produced that can be measured? _____

How can you produce measurable fruit? _____

Commit To Greater Understanding!

Family Group Time



Main Idea:

The Farmer and the Kingdom



Key Verse: Matthew 13:9.

Whoever has ears, let them hear.



Show: Before the devotional time, gather four clear cups, each filled with different substances. Fill one with dirt but fill the others with things like rocks, blocks, marbles, water, etc.

Present the cups before the family, and ask them, “if they were going to plant a seed, which cup they would plant it in?”

Explain that Jesus often told stories when He was speaking to people, and those people received His teaching in all kinds of ways. You might say that the hearts of people were like the cups. One story, in particular, was about planting seeds, and this story shows us why Jesus told all His other stories.



Read Matthew 13:1-13.

Explain: The story is a simple one. A farmer spreads the same seed out on different kinds of ground. But what happened next depended on the kind of ground the seed fell on. In Jesus’ story, the seed represents His words. Jesus preached to and taught all kinds of people. Some of them believed in Him, some did not, and some only believed for a short time. This is how the message of God’s kingdom worked, and it’s also why Jesus spoke in stories like this one called parables.

Those whose hearts were like good soil were ready to receive His teaching. Because they believed in Him, they were able to receive, understand, and obey His words. But many others had hearts that were like other kinds of soil, and though the seed was good, it did not grow and bear fruit because the soil was bad.

One of the ways God works in us is by preparing our hearts to receive the words of Jesus. We should be praying not only for our hearts, but also that the hearts of those around us would be like good soil – fertile ground that will bear much gospel fruit.



Reflect:

1. Have each family member retell Jesus’ story of the farmer in their own words.
2. What does the seed represent?
3. What does the soil represent?
4. How should we respond to the Parable of the Sower?



Pray:

Jesus, please make our hearts good soil for your word. We also pray that you would go before us and make good soil of the hearts of those we have the chance to speak to about You. Amen



Gear Up: Foundations

How do we build a life that lasts? In other words, what does it take to have a life that is eternally secure and solid enough to withstand storms and trials? Jesus tells us in the parable found in Matthew 7:24-27.

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus says:

²⁴Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash.

Again, how do we build a life that lasts? Verse 24 gives the answer: we hear the words of Jesus and put them into practice. We must build on Jesus, the Rock. But how do we do that?

Hearing and Doing

Jesus teaches us that to have a life that is secure, we must hear His words and act on them. When we do this, our foundation is built on Him; He keeps us secure.

We all build, whether we realize it or not. Notice, in Jesus' parable, both the wise and foolish people built. Yet, the foolish man's house collapsed even though he also "heard" Jesus' words. He didn't really receive those words, though, because he did not build on the Rock. His faith was not in Jesus.

When we truly hear, we do. When we receive Jesus' words, and place our faith in Him, we make the decision to build on the Rock. Our foundation is then secure. We demonstrate this by continuing to live a life of obedience, doing what He says.

Put the Word to Work: Dig Deep

Luke 6:46-48a says:

⁴⁶"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things I say? ⁴⁷I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them: ⁴⁸He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.

Obedying what we believe takes effort. To lay a secure foundation, we dig deep. So many of us want transformation without excavation. But Jesus wants us to be transformed from the inside out— and this means working "below the surface." Yes, sometimes we must dig out (or allow Him to dig out!) what's inside that needs to go. This is never easy and will take faith, trust, and surrender. God will help us!

Start Building

When we put God's words into action, we start (and keep on) building. Colossians 2:6-7 tells us "*to continue to walk in Him*", 1 Corinthians 3:13 says that "*each one's work will become obvious [when it is tested]*", and Hebrews 10:24 encourages us to "*provoke love and good works*" in each other. These all remind us to start and keep putting God's words into action in our lives, and to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ to do the same.

When we trust Jesus and follow God each step of the way, we can be assured that our lives are planted firmly on the Rock. When the rain falls, the rivers rise, and the winds blow, we are secure on our Firm Foundation. We have built a life that lasts!

WEEK 2 – THE PARABLE OF TWO FOUNDATIONS

God Time Day 1: Things Change/Shift



This week as we look at the Parable of the Two Foundations, one thing you can count on in life is that storms will come, and circumstances will change. The challenge is to lay a foundation that can weather the ups and downs – even when the very ground shifts. It should not surprise us that Jesus would teach about laying a firm foundation.



Read Hebrews 13:8.
Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

A life lived for Jesus Christ will always be subject to change. What does it mean to you that He is always the same?

God Time Day 2: A Life that Lasts



Remember as a kid the feeling you had when someone knocked over a tower of blocks you had been constructing or ran over a sandcastle you had spent all afternoon building? That is just a tiny version of what we feel when life itself comes crashing down around us. But how can one build a life able to hold up and carry on?



Read Matthew 7:24.
Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Read Psalm 18:30-31:
³⁰ God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is pure. He is a shield to all who take refuge in him. ³¹ For who is God besides the Lord? And who is a rock? Only our God.

Rewrite Psalm 18:30-31 in your own words:

God Time Day 3: Hearing and Doing



Last week we looked at the importance of doing more with God’s word than merely letting our ears hear His commands. Putting God’s Word into action so that it bears fruit is truly listening. This week we learn that failure to act upon His word is a recipe for disaster.



Read Matthew 7:24-27 .
²⁴ Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn’t collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn’t act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash.

Underline the description in verse 24 of the person who acts on Jesus’ teaching.



Circle the description of the person in verse 26 who does not act upon it.

Jesus draws a strong contrast between wise and foolish choices, and it all boils down to obedience.



Take time in prayer to confess the times you have failed to do all that you knew God wanted you to do.

What was the result of your prayer?

What next step will you take to act on Jesus’ Word?

WEEK 2 – THE PARABLE OF TWO FOUNDATIONS

God Time Day 4: Dig Deep

In Day 3 of this week, we read Matthew’s rendering of Jesus’ parable. Let’s take a look at Luke’s account.



Read Luke 6:46-48.

⁴⁶Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” and don’t do the things I say?

⁴⁷ I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them: ⁴⁸ He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. When the flood came, the river crashed against that house and couldn’t shake it, because it was well built.

Draw a box around the work to be done before laying the foundation on the rock in verse 48.

Digging is hard work and requires a significant investment of effort up-front to ensure lasting value. But before we discuss how we can dig deep as Christians, we should first go back and re-read the first verse in this passage.

Reread verse 46 and underline the question Jesus asks.

Notice how this question is another addition to what we read in Matthew yesterday. Laying a shallow foundation relates to shallow faith. Remember the second soil from last week? It was rocky but shallow.

Digging deep requires a significant investment of effort, time, and finances. We refer to it as our fourth 4G – Giving – giving our time, talent, and treasure. But digging deep is more than just investing, it’s a newfound lifestyle.

Digging deep requires starting some things and stopping some things. Seek God’s wisdom and make a list:

What I need to start:	What I need to stop:

God Time Day 5: Build Up (aka; Start Building)



In this week’s parable, Jesus emphasized the need to build on the rock – to put His words into action. This same word picture is also used in other Bible verses.



Read Colossians 2:6-7.

⁶ So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, ⁷ being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:13.

Each one’s work will become obvious. For the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one’s work.

Read Acts 4:12.

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.

Read Hebrews 10:24.

And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works.

To summarize both Day 4 and Day 5 of this week, it is not up to us to come up with the complete plans and steps to map out our spiritual life or to “drum up” the energy to accomplish all our plans. Rather, when we trust Jesus as our Rock and follow each step God lays before our feet, He will ensure that we reach the end. We just have to keep going and giving thanks for all His goodness.

What is the next step God has laid before you? (Reference your lists from Days 3 & 4.)



Who can you share this with to help hold you accountable?

Perhaps a first step might be to join a women’s Agape Group or a men’s Fireteam. See cbcfamily.net/groups.

Group Time

◀◀ LOOK BACK:



1. Each participant shares one praise and one prayer request. (Commit these to prayer for the coming week.)

2. ENCOURAGEMENT 1-on-1 (See last page for directions)

Y / N	Y / N	_____
_____	_____	

3. Review last week’s lesson.

How can we produce measurable fruit?

Read Matthew 7:28-29.

- Take a moment to ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and then explain these verses in context.
- How can building our houses on the rock be a witness to others in both easy and hard times? If possible, share a real example.

▶▶ LOOK FORWARD: Application

Point: *Build your house on the solid rock of Jesus Christ.*

1. Make a list of what you are building – your “houses” (career, family, home, hobby, community, ministry, etc.):

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. Analyze each. Are you building on rock or sand?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. What might need to change for each? How will you do that?

Start Building Your Foundation!

▶▶ LOOK UP:

Question: What is the difference between hearing and listening?

1. **Context.** Today we are looking at the Parable of the Two Foundations. Children’s Sunday Schools may sing songs about it, but it’s a very serious parable. Let’s look at the context. Jesus is closing His Sermon on the Mount and he is talking about how difficult it is to live in God’s will, how false prophets are going to try and deceive you, and how you can recognize people by their fruit – which we looked at last week. Now, read the three verses prior to today’s parable in Matthew 7:21-23.

2. **Discussion:**

Read Matthew 7:24-27.

- Make a list of what the “house” can represent.
- What does the “rock” represent? (Ok, that’s a softball pitch)
- Make a list of “sand” examples in today’s world.
 - Relooking at verses 21-23, how can being very religious still be like building on sand?



Family Group Time

Main Idea:

God's Promises – Like a Rock.



Key Verse: Matthew 7:28.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teachings.



Ask:

Ask the kids to go outside and find a rock that they like. It needs to be about hand size. They will be using this rock to help them remember that God's promises are strong and sure.



Read Matthew 7:24-27



Explain:

Jesus said that whoever heard His words and did them would be like a man who built his house on a strong rock. When the storms came, the house did not fall apart. Another man built his house on the sand, and the house fell apart when the storms came.

If we live by God's words, we will have the strength to face the storms (trouble) that come. If we live by our ways and feelings, we will not be strong. If we believe and live by God's promises, they can protect us when trouble comes. By putting God's promises in our minds and thinking about them, we can be hopeful when sad and worried feelings come.



Ask:

How are God's promises like a rock? (They are strong and sure, not always changing; they last a long time; they are strong enough to build on.)



Activity:

With a fat Sharpie or paint, write a message or a Bible verse on the rock. (Here are some good promise verses you could use: Hebrews 13:5b; Psalm 27:1; Romans 8:28; Jeremiah 31:3.)

Keep the rock as a reminder to focus on God's promises.



Pray:

Dear God, thank you for giving us the Bible. Help us to hear your words and live by them. Help us to understand it better when we read it. Help us to find out what pleases you and help us to live like that. Amen.



Gear Up: Treasure

A The value you place on something is shown by what you'll give up for it. Jesus illustrated this concept using two parables that both involve valuable treasures.

In the first parable, found in Matthew 13:44, Jesus says:

⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a treasure. In the story Jesus tells, a man finds treasure buried in a field and realizes how valuable it is. In his joy at finding this precious and important thing, he sells everything he owns so that he can purchase the field to secure it—that's how valuable it is to him! It far surpasses the worth of all he has sold.

What a lesson for us! Parables often serve as a diagnostic tool for heart evaluation. We must ask ourselves: do we value the Kingdom as we should?

In the second parable, found in Matthew 13:45-46, Jesus says:

⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

In this parable, we see a merchant who is searching for precious pearls. When he finds one, he sells all he has in order to attain it. Again, Jesus paints a picture of someone who has placed such a high value on a treasure (in this case, pearls) that they are willing to give up everything in order to attain it.

What Do These Parables Teach?

The Gospel is Hidden

This statement might sound puzzling. We know that God wants everyone to come to salvation through knowing Jesus Christ. So how can we say that the gospel is hidden? Though the gospel is clear, some people still miss it. They are blinded by Satan or their own ideas; they refuse to accept the treasure of the gospel. They *will not* give up what they have (their beliefs) to receive something better (Jesus)!

But not only is the gospel hidden in this way, it is also “hidden” in that it is so simple and doesn't look like what people expect. Jesus came to earth as a humble child, died a criminal's death, and the Holy Spirit lives within ordinary people like us! The “plainness of the package” of Christianity has nothing to do with the value of the treasure.

The Gospel Treasure is Joy

The man in the first parable sold all he had, “in his joy.” Some people might describe Christianity as a list of to-dos, something to feel guilty about or keeps us from having all the fun, or something that just keeps us out of hell. Instead, the gospel treasure is described as something that brings us joy. This statement invites personal evaluation, doesn't it? Do we truly respond to the gospel with joy?

The Gospel Requires Leaving it All

Both parables emphasize the importance of leaving everything behind to pursue God's Kingdom. God invites and calls us to follow Him wholeheartedly. When we answer His call and leave behind a life without Him, we receive the greatest treasure the world has ever known: God Himself!

WEEK 3 – THE PARABLES OF TREASURE

God Time Day 1: What You Value Takes Priority



Where we place our priorities has a significant impact on the direction of our lives. All decisions take priorities into consideration.



Read Matthew 6:24.

²⁴No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Money is not a bad thing but allowing money to be master over our lives is. Wanting to be financially secure is not sinful, but if the pursuit of money results in working all the time and neglecting your family, it has become a problem. The only person who is right to fill the role of Master in our lives is Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, people tend to fill the role with all kinds of substitutes.

Be honest, right now, where is God on your priority list? ____

Look at your prayer list. Where is God on that list? _____



How can you make sure God is your first priority on both?

God Time Day 2: Treasure and Pearls



Read Matthew 13:44-46.

⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

As Jesus was teaching, he addresses priorities directly. The message is simple: if you want the Kingdom of God, you must be willing to make it your highest priority. We will be looking at this more over the next few days. But, in the meantime, take some time to continue considering yesterday's final question: how can you make sure God is your first priority?



God Time Day 3: The Gospel is Hidden?



Reread Matthew 13:44-46 from Day 2.

In both parables, Jesus describes a great treasure (the Gospel) that is hidden, found, and then pursued.

First, let's clarify that statement. When we say that the Gospel is hidden, it sounds like God has set up some type of scavenger hunt and only those people who are either lucky or skilled at following the clues get the prize. On the contrary, God wants everyone to receive the gospel.



Read 2 Peter 3:9.

The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

If God's desire is for everyone to reach repentance and to be reconciled to Him, then why is the gospel hidden?



Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-5.

³But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus's sake.



Circle the words "the god of this age" and underline "has blinded the minds."

The desire of God is for everyone to experience forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, many people are so tangled up in alternative ideas, their insecurities, or selfish ambitions (soils 1-3 from Week 1) that they are unwilling to pursue the Gospel. That is why the gospel is hidden.

So, what holds you back from pursuing the gospel?



Pray to God and repent over these stumbling blocks.

God Time Day 4: The Treasure Leads To Joy



Have you ever watched a professional poker tournament on television? In every tournament, there inevitably comes a moment when it is down to the last two players, and one of them believes they have the winning hand, and they decide to go all in. They put all their money behind their cards, willing to risk everything to gain victory.

The kingdom of God is like that, but with one big difference: if you are willing to go all in for Jesus, you automatically win. It's not about the cards, it's about priorities.

Again, reread Matthew 13:44-46 from Day 2.



Circle the words "in his joy" in verse 44.

In both parables, the men give up everything they had to obtain the treasure they found. They are not hesitant or reluctant, nor do they look back at what they sold and wonder, "Did I make a mistake?" They are joyful in giving up everything they once had to gain the treasure they found.

Unfortunately, we often focus on the perceived loss and discomfort of change. We can get so caught up in our familiar routines, perspectives, and behaviors, that the idea of change, of losing the familiar, is scary.



Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!

To have a new life, the old life must die. This means God becomes our highest priority and Jesus is our Lord.

This is more than Good News because there is more joy available in following Christ than in the ways of the world.



Read Psalm 4:7.

You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and new wine abound.

Make a list of how putting God first and choosing to make Jesus your Lord has brought you joy.

Share this with someone today.

God time Day 5: Leaving It All



This week we looked at going all in for Jesus. This requires making God our highest priority, and it means letting go of the things of this world to live according to God's will. Yesterday, we spent some time talking about the joy we find in allowing Jesus to be Lord of our lives. But it is important to make one thing clear: having joy in Jesus Christ and letting Him be Lord of our lives does not mean our lives will be devoid of suffering or hardship. On the contrary, following Jesus can be very difficult.



Read Hebrews 12:1b-2.

^{1b}Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, ²keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus endured all kinds of struggles and pain, ultimately suffering death on the cross, for the joy of knowing that it would lead to salvation and reconciliation of people to God. Similarly, we are called to live our lives to follow Christ, taking joy in knowing that Jesus is part of our lives.



Paul puts it another way in Philippians 3:8-9.

⁸More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith.

Going all in requires giving up somethings to pursue God in all things. It might be a lifestyle choice, an addiction, an attitude, a relationship, or even a perceived right.



What is something God is asking you to give up so that you can experience greater joy?

WEEK 3 – THE PARABLES OF TREASURE

Group Time

LOOK BACK:



1. Each participant shares one praise and one prayer request. (Commit these to prayer for the coming week.)

2. ENCOURAGEMENT 1-on-1 (See last page for directions)

Y / N	Y / N	_____
_____	_____	

3. Review last week’s lesson.

What needs to change? Need any help?

- What does it mean to go “all in” to pursue the Gospel?
- Share a personal story of you or someone you know who went all in for the Gospel. Was it done “*in joy?*” (v. 44.)

LOOK FORWARD: Application

Point: *Discover Jesus as your treasure and discover joy.*

1. Make a top ten prioritized list of what you value (E.g., family, house, career, vehicle, hobby, relationships, ministry, etc.):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

2. If you gave up one of those for the sake of the gospel, what could you do with the finances or time gained? (E.g., volunteer time, offer financial help, start a project.)

Your Treasure Is Here!

LOOK UP:

Question: What is the most expensive thing you ever purchased without making payments? Did you make any sacrifices to purchase it?

1. **Context.** The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Priceless Pearl in Matthew 13:44-46 are in a section where Jesus is jamming in parables, one after another. These two parables focus on the priceless value of the “kingdom of heaven.”

The gospel is much more than mere salvation. It goes beyond saving us and culminates in a new heaven and new earth. Unfortunately, this Gospel is hidden to those unwilling or unable to hear it and accept it.

2. **Discussion:**

Read Matthew 13:44-46.

- Be real. Make a list of what you treasure – your lifestyle, relationships, and stuff. (What would your bank account and credit card statements say about this?)
- Share your list and answer this question honestly, “Would you be willing to give up or sell off any of these for the sake of the gospel?”

Family Group Time



Main Idea:

The Hidden Treasure

**Key Verse:** Matthew 13:44.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.

**Talk About It:**

If you found a treasure in a field, the treasure belongs to the person who owns the field. But if you buy the field, the treasure becomes yours. That is why the man in Jesus's story hid the treasure he found and bought the field. The man who found the treasure may have walked through that same field 100 times, but he had never thought of buying it. But once he knew it held a great treasure, he sold everything that he had to get it.

That is what it is like when we first learn what a valuable treasure Jesus is. A lot of people have heard about Jesus, but they think of Him as just a good teacher – like any other man. But once they realize that Jesus is the Son of God who came to die on the cross to take away their sins, they see Him as a treasure. Like the man in the parable, they will give up anything they have for Jesus.

**Ask:**

- What did the man in the story find in the field? (He found a treasure.)
- Why did the man hide the treasure again after he found it? (The man wanted the treasure for himself, but he had to buy the field before the treasure could be his.)
- Why is Jesus our treasure? (Jesus gave up his life for us so that we could be forgiven for our sins. You can't buy forgiveness no matter how much money you have. Even the richest person in the world can't buy forgiveness. But God gives it to us for free if we trust in Jesus, God's Son.)

**Pray:**

Ask God to help you love Jesus so much that you would give up anything that might draw your attention away from the Lord.





Gear Up: Tenants

Jesus often began His parables with a call to “*listen*.” This is a critical skill that He knows we need to develop, especially when we are hearing hard truths.

Read Matthew 21:33-44.

Listen to another parable: There was a landowner, who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. He leased it to tenant farmers and went away.

³⁴*When the time came to harvest fruit, he sent his servants to the farmers to collect his fruit. ³⁵The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Again, he sent other servants, more than the first group, and they did the same to them. ³⁷Finally, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.*

³⁸*But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers? ⁴¹‘He will completely destroy those terrible men,’ they told him, ‘and lease his vineyard to other farmers who will give him his fruit at the harvest.’*

⁴²*Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures:*

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what the Lord has done and it is wonderful in our eyes?

⁴³*Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruit. ⁴⁴Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will shatter him.*

This parable is so sad. Jesus tells a story of a landowner who leases his vineyard to renters. When harvest time came, the owner sent his servants to get the fruit. But the renters beat, killed, and tortured the servants. Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking the renters would have respect for him. But, of course, they didn’t; they threw him out and killed him, just as they did to the servants.

Jesus is clearly the Son in this parable, and the landowner is God the Father. The renters (or tenants) are the Jewish leaders—the very people Jesus was speaking to! And they knew it. They knew that He was accusing them (as a nation) of doing horrible things.

Unbelief Is Often Willful

The religious leaders had convinced themselves that Jesus was dangerous. They willfully did not believe that He was God’s Son. While Jesus invites us to “*listen*,” they would not. Their pride and arrogance later resulted in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Rejection Is Often About Control

Instead, the leaders wanted control, and this is why they rejected the Son. Rather than submitting to God, they set themselves up as the sovereign rulers. They wanted to be in charge!

God’s Grace Is Amazing

When Jewish leaders and Jewish nation rejected Jesus, the gospel was then given to non-Jewish people. Because of this, by God’s grace, any who believe can be saved. Though this parable is sad, it explains God’s amazing grace. Though Jesus knew what would happen to Him, He still came to rescue us from the penalty and power of sin. Believe, submit, and experience His amazing grace today!

WEEK 4 – THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

God Time Day 1: Background



This week, we will look at the Parable of the Tenants (aka, the Parable of the Vineyard). At this time Jesus' authority is being called into question by the priests and elders. Jesus responds with two parables to attack their intentions. In the first, just before this, Jesus shares about two sons (nations): one who was obedient (the Gentiles), and one who was disobedient (Israel). In addition to calling them disobedient, Jesus goes on to share the parable we'll read this week – a story that confronts the evil condition of the priests' hearts.



Read 1 Samuel 16:7b.

Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart.

We may often be able to fake outward holiness, but underline what God sees.

What will you pray in response to that knowledge?

God Time Day 2: The Parable Begins



Read Matthew 21:33-36.

³³Listen to another parable: There was a landowner, who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. He leased it to tenant farmers and went away.

³⁴When the time came to harvest fruit, he sent his servants to the farmers to collect his fruit. ³⁵The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Again, he sent other servants, more than the first group, and they did the same to them.

The landowner is God, the vineyard is the Jewish nation, and the tenant farmers are the Jewish leaders. The fruit is all the good, beneficial results that come from the nation.



Circle the three ways Jesus says the tenants treated the servants God sent to collect the fruit.



Think about this: who does all the fruit belong to?

Who do you think the leaders thought it belonged to?

God Time Day 3: Willful Unbelief

The parable continues. Read Matthew 21:37-39.

³⁷Finally, he [the vineyard owner] sent his son to them. "They will respect my son," he said. ³⁸But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.



Circle who Jesus says the vineyard owner sent this time.

In verse 37, underline what response the vineyard owner expected from the tenants.

What did the tenant farmers say in verse 38?

Did they do it? (Verse 39) _____

This parable was spoken on the Tuesday before the Friday Jesus was crucified. His story is a clear illustration of how serious the conflict was getting between Him and the Jewish leaders. God had sent His Son, Jesus, and the nation would reject Him and kill Him. This is a picture of their willful unbelief and a prophecy of what would come.

The Jewish leaders were proud and arrogant, and they willfully rejected Jesus. Their hearts were wrong, and they would not repent. In other places in the Bible, Jesus calls them out for caring about looking holy outwardly while inwardly they were anything but. (See Matthew 23) He even says that the reason they did not know Him was that they didn't even know God in the first place.



Read a couple of Jesus' responses in John 8:19 & 47.

¹⁹ Then they asked him, "Where is your Father?" "You know neither me nor my Father," Jesus answered. "If you knew me, you would also know my Father." ⁴⁷ The one who is from God listens to God's words. This is why you don't listen, because you are not from God."



Even if you are a saved Christian, you may have areas in your life where you need to repent. Do it now!

God Time Day 4: Rejection and Control



The parable resumes. Read Matthew 21:40-41.
⁴⁰Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers? ⁴¹“He will completely destroy those terrible men,” they told him, “and lease his vineyard to other farmers who will give him his fruit at the harvest.”

Underline the question that Jesus asked (verse 40).

What is the two-part answer given to Jesus’ question:

1. _____

2. _____



Circle who gave this answer.

Did you circle the words “they told him”? _____

Who do you think “they” are? _____

The correct answer is the hearers of this parable. We don’t know for sure if it was the Jewish leaders or the bystanders, or both who answered. But as we will discuss tomorrow, they tell Him the right answer.

No matter who answered, the fact is that the vineyard will be taken away and given to others. But for now, let’s think about this:

Why would the Jewish leaders continually reject Christ?

Often, rejecting good things is linked to the fear of losing control. (The Jewish leaders liked being in charge.) But, what about us? Do we ever reject God’s ways because we don’t want to give up control?

What is one major area of your life that you have a hard time giving to God?



Ask Him to take control. Submitting is hard, but God’s hands are a great place to put our lives!

God Time Day 5: Grace and Mercy

The parable finishes. Read Matthew 21:42-45.

⁴²Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what the Lord has done and it is wonderful in our eyes?

⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruit. ⁴⁴Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will shatter him.” ⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they knew he was speaking about them.

Underline what the rejected stone (Jesus) would become in verse 42.



Because the stone was rejected, what would happen? (V. 43)

Underline the words “a people” in verse 43.

This is usually translated as “nation”, but here it is translated as “a people.” This helps us understand what is happening in this parable. The Jews collectively rejected Jesus (see Day 1 where Jesus tells about this in the Parable of the Two Sons), so God the Father takes the vineyard and gives it to Believers – those who are “producing its fruit” – and makes a new nation of Jesus-followers. This is what we call the church universal, that is, Christians all over the world.

This is an incredible act of grace and mercy! The Jewish nation’s original purpose was to bless the world through a coming Messiah. Because of mankind’s sin, a Savior was needed. But when Jesus came, the Jews rejected Him, and the gospel message was given to the Gentiles. The gospel tells us that God’s grace is freely offered to all who believe, and His mercy is overwhelming.



If you are a born-again believer your role is now to share God’s grace and mercy with others. Do you have someone to forgive? Something to let go? Know of someone who needs to hear the Gospel? Do it today!

WEEK 4 – THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

Group Time

LOOK BACK:



1. Each participant shares one praise and one prayer request. (Commit these to prayer for the coming week.)

2. ENCOURAGEMENT 1-on-1 (See last page for directions)

Y/N	Y/N	_____
_____	_____	

3. Review last week’s lesson.

What did you give away and what did you start?

Reread Matthew 21:43.

- Can “the kingdom of God be taken away” today?
- What qualifies “a people” it is given to?

(Helpful references from this series: Matthew 12:46-50, Matthew 7:21-23, Luke 6:46-48, Matthew 13:23.)

LOOK FORWARD: Application

Point: *if you are in the family, you have a role to play in the family business, and while the business needs tending and new growth, it’s not your business.*

1. Review the Parable of the Sower from week one and reread the Parable of the Tenants from this week. Honestly define which of the four soils you are at this moment and why.

2. What can you do as an individual or group to be more fruitful?

Your Harvest Is Waiting!

LOOK UP:

Question: Remind us, why did Jesus teach using parables?

1. **Context.** Most of Jesus’ ministry was in Galilee – fly-over country. Now He’s in Jerusalem, the center of everything and home to the economic, social, and religious elite, and for the Jews, these were all one in the same. Things never go well in Jerusalem for anyone with an alternative message, and Jesus uses the Parable of the Tenants to go after the elite. And the elite have had enough of it.

2. Discussion:

Read Matthew 21:33-45.

- Depending upon your age, verses 33-40 sound like a tale out of Dynasty or Yellowstone. How might a similar tale play out in the church today?
- This can happen when we 1) assume ownership of what is not ours, and 2) fight for said misguided ownership. Have you seen this happen in the church?

Family Group Time



Main Idea:

Faith in Christ Alone



Key Verse: Matthew 21:42-43.

⁴²Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what the Lord has done and it is wonderful in our eyes? ⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruit.

**Show:**

Tell the family that you are going to have a pushup contest. Ask for two or three volunteers, and then have them assume the pushup position. But for the strongest volunteer make them do their pushups with several books balanced on their back. Obviously, the strongest person will not be able to do their pushups as well as the others.

Agree that it was an unfair contest because you put extra weight on one person’s back. Use the illustration to help explain that unlike the books that moved around and how it was unfair that only one person had the books, when we accept Jesus into our hearts, He gives us all of himself equally to each one.



Read Acts 15:1-12



Explain: The gospel message continued to go out. People like Paul and Barnabas had been to distant lands and they had seen many people from many different countries believe in Jesus. But the church back in Jerusalem was not sure yet. They knew that the message of Jesus had started with the Jewish people, but now other people who were not Jews were believing also. They were trying to decide whether these new people were really Christians, or whether these people had to become Jews before becoming Christians. If they had to become Jews, it meant they would have to do things like stop eating certain foods and observe certain holidays. In the end, the church decided, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they should not weigh down these new Believers unfairly (like trying to do pushups with books on your back). They knew the only thing it took to become a Christian was faith in Jesus.

We must remember this today as well, so we don't put more weight on people as they come to faith. Faith alone in Christ is the way to salvation.

**Reflect:**

1. Why did the church in Jerusalem have to make a decision?
2. What did they decide?
3. Why does this matter to us today?

**Pray:**

Thank you, God, that it is only by faith and faith alone that we come to Jesus. Help us to keep you as our cornerstone as we make choices each day of our lives. Amen

The 3-Step "1-on-1 Encouragement" Process

Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Hebrews 10:23-25

1. Partner-up: Partners should be of the same gender. If there is an odd number three is okay but work swiftly.
2. Partners ask each other these five questions:

	1) Did you spend specific personal time in the BIBLE <u>each day</u> this past week?	These are "Yes" or "No" questions.
	2) Did you spend specific time in PRAYER <u>each day</u> this past week – not just for meals?	Any hesitations or "Well..." responses are circled "No."
	3) Did you do something specific to show Godly LOVE to someone this past week?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, the partner briefly shares the encounter(s) with their partner and, on the provided line, writes the name(s) of the person(s) they showed love to, shared the gospel with, or disciplined. • If not, leave the line blank.
	4) Did you intentionally share the GOSPEL with anyone this past week?	
	5) Did you DISCIPLE anyone this past week? (Ex: Sharing with others from any of the Gathering, God, Group, or Family Times)	

3. Each partner prays for the other: No matter how or what the partner has done over the past week, this is an intentional prayer of **encouragement** for the coming week!