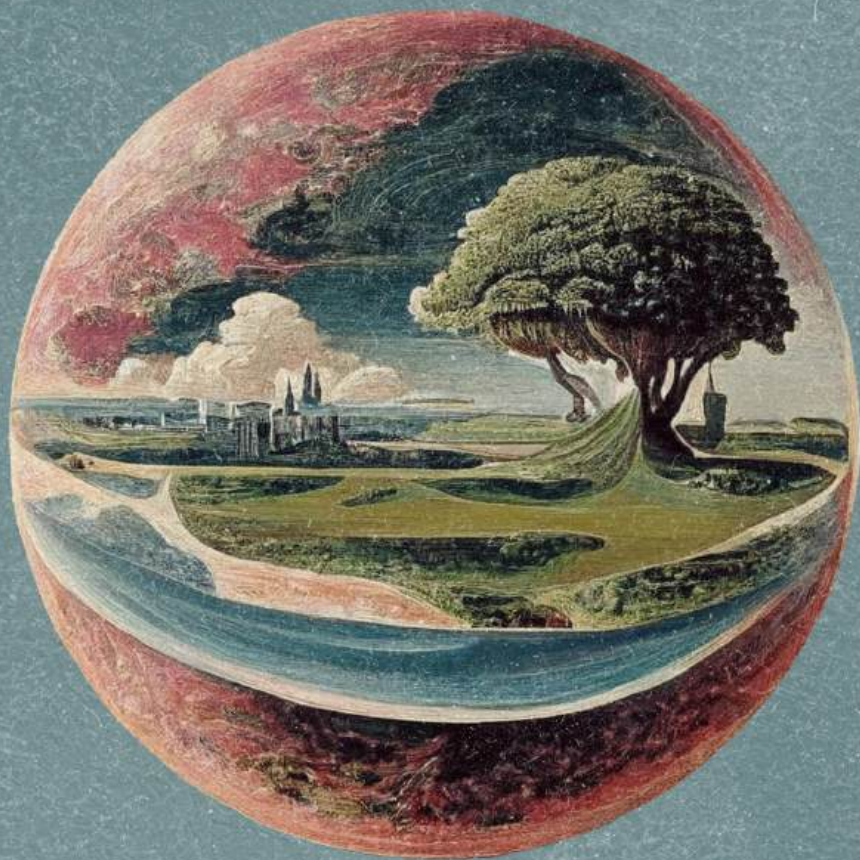


# WITH GOD

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM



A CROSSING CHURCH STUDY

## Notes

# WELCOME

At The Crossing, we fully believe that God speaks to us through the Bible and uses it to transform our hearts, lives, and relationships. Our team has developed this study with the hope that you will not simply read the Bible, but that you would also experience the life-changing ways of Jesus through it.

This is a companion to our weekly Sunday message series entitled, WITH GOD, a study of the Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. Use this book for discussion at small group and/or personal study.

As we learn what the Parables of the Kingdom are and what they mean for our everyday lives, this book will lead us to:

## **PRAY**

We have included a prayer prompt each day to help you grow in your practice of both communicating with and listening to God throughout this study.

## **READ & REFLECT**

We have divided our study into four days per week. Day 1 will focus on the context and theme for the parable. Day 2 will provide supporting Scripture and personal reflection. Day 3 will help connect the parable with the Kingdom of Heaven. Day 4 will offer a deeper dive. Each day we will read, pray, reflect.

*Bible verses are in the NIV version unless noted.*

## **CONNECT WITH OTHERS**

We hope you will join one of our small groups, which are designed to align with your personal season of life. Groups will meet each week, giving you the opportunity to discuss what you've been learning.

Our goal is for this resource to help you explore your faith and experience the life-changing ways of Jesus, wherever you are in your spiritual journey.

## INTRODUCTION:

# Parables of The Kingdom

Matthew 1:23 *And they will call him “Immanuel” (which means “God with us”)*

God is with us and we are already with God.

The present reality of God in action and how we can change our lives to be a part of it all is the central message of Jesus. He called it the Kingdom of Heaven. And he taught us to pray that it will be “on earth as it is in heaven.” This was not wishful thinking, Jesus was letting us know that in some way it can be.

What is the Kingdom of Heaven like? How does it play out in our everyday lives? That’s what we are going to explore. And it will change our lives, if we let it.

This book is about the stories Jesus told about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus knew that stories speak to human hearts. And he needs our hearts involved. His stories help us understand that God’s presence and power are openly available to us here and now, and we choose whether to accept his invitation to participate.

Matthew 13:10-13 (MSG) *The disciples came up and asked, “Why do you tell stories?” He replied, “You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn’t been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That’s why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward a welcome awakening.”*

### **Definitions to get us started:**

Kingdom of Heaven: The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now.

Parable: A parable is a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson.

**“Review your plans for living and base your life on this remarkable new opportunity. The Kingdom of God/The Kingdom of the Heavens is available, here and now.”**  
-Dallas Willard



# Week 1: The Parable of the Weeds

**Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43**

Sermon Notes

## WEEK 1: DAY ONE

# The Parable

Matthew 13 is a chapter full of parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. There are eight parables in this chapter alone! Jesus wants to make sure that his disciples are deepening their understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven because it's already here, now, and waiting for our participation. His disciples ask him why he insists on telling parables rather than giving straight up information. He replies that stories create a readiness in us to wake up to deeper spiritual truths. They make us want to know more. So we begin with one of the trickier parables: The Parable of the Weeds.

### PRAY

Thank you, God, for being with me here and now. Help me hear you speak through your Word. I pray that this parable will ready my heart to see you more clearly and to live more fully connected to The Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

### READ

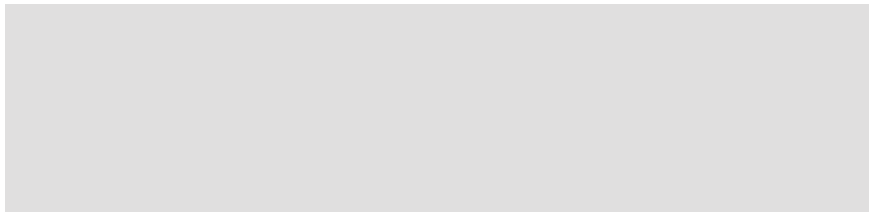
Matthew 13:24-30 Jesus told them another parable: *“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ““An enemy did this,” he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ““No,” he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”*”

## REFLECT

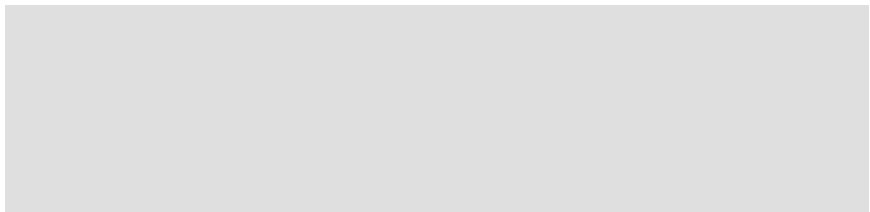
There are 3 main characters in this parable; the man who sows seed, an enemy and the harvesters. What role does each character play in the story?



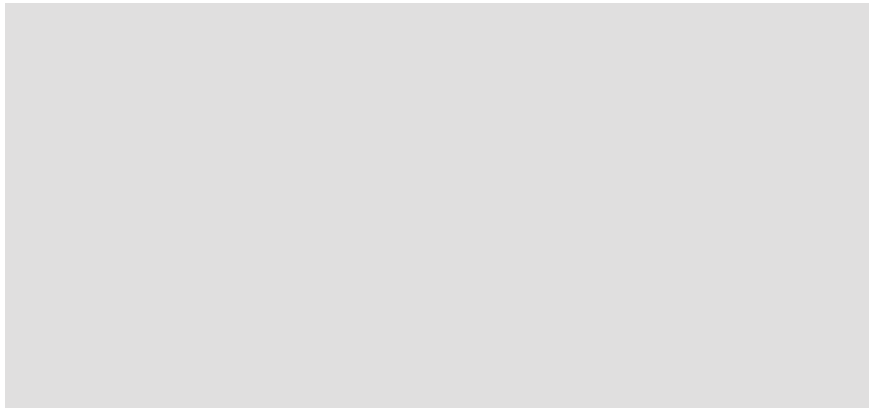
The enemy comes in and sows weeds. The Greek word for weeds here is the word “Darnel” which is a weed that looks like wheat but will slowly suck the life out of the wheat over time. Why does the owner of the field wait to collect the weeds?



The owner of the field shows patience, even with weeds causing harm. What does this teach us about God?



A key attribute of God is His patience. Would people describe you in the same way? Why or why not?



**WEEK 1: DAY TWO**

# The Posture of Patience

One thing we notice in the parable this week is how patient God is with all people. God is willingly, patiently waiting for us to grow spiritually. Today, we will read two more Scriptures about the patience of God. Notice that patience and love are connected. Take a few moments to read and answer each question as we reflect on God, who is patient with us.

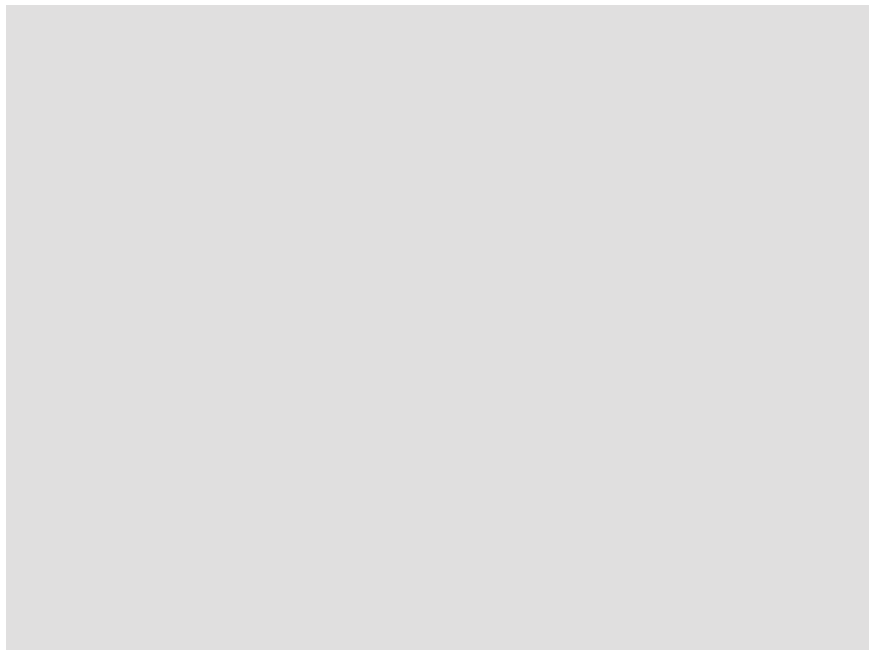
**PRAY**

God, help me to sit still for a moment and prepare; to be patient with myself as my mind comes to rest and I focus more on you. Thank you for your patience with me. Please help me trust in just how patient you are. Show me who you are in these Scriptures. Amen.

**READ & REFLECT**

*2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

Think of a time where God was patient with you. It could be during a season where you turned your back on God or did something you knew was wrong. What happened? How did God show His patience with you?



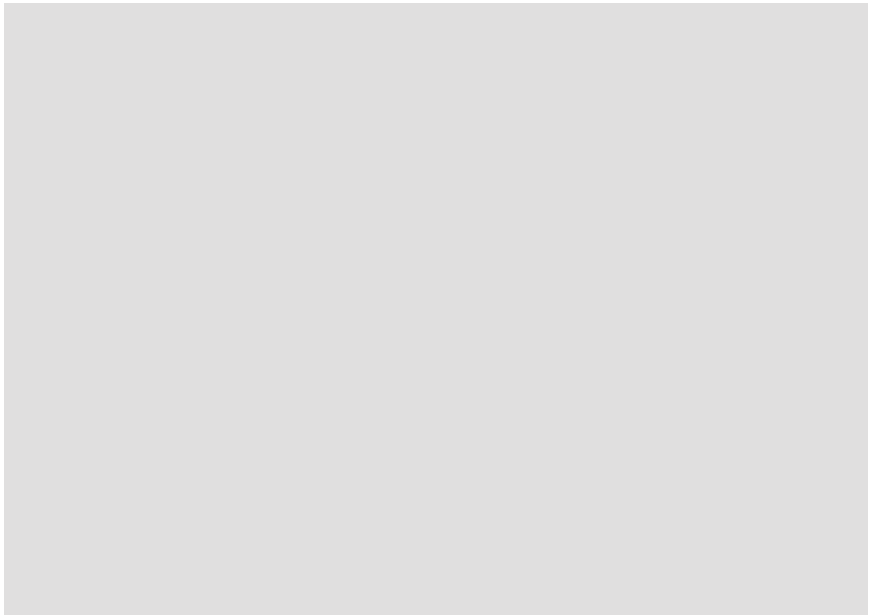


Psalm 103:8 *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

What do you think it means to be “abounding in steadfast love”?



Can you think of a person in your life who demonstrated this kind of love for you? What happened? How did you know?



**“When God gives you a vision and darkness follows, wait.”  
-Oswald Chambers**

## WEEK 1: DAY THREE

# The Kingdom of Heaven

Our working definition of the Kingdom of Heaven: The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now.

Each week we are going to keep circling back to the Kingdom of Heaven because that's what these parables are all about. Jesus is creating pictures of The Kingdom because explaining it in words is sometimes like trying to explain colors to someone born blind.

What is "yellow" like?

Yellow is buttery and rich, like sunshine on your face. Yellow is like happiness.

What is "blue" like?

Blue is cool and smooth, like dipping your hands in the ocean. Blue is like calm.

What is the Kingdom of Heaven like?

Let's read the parable again and see how Jesus describes it.

### PRAY

God, help me to understand more and more about you and your Kingdom. Help me to keep changing and growing into someone who loves living by your ways everyday. Amen.

### REREAD THE PARABLE

Matthew 13:24-30 *Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' " "An enemy did this," he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' " "No," he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"*

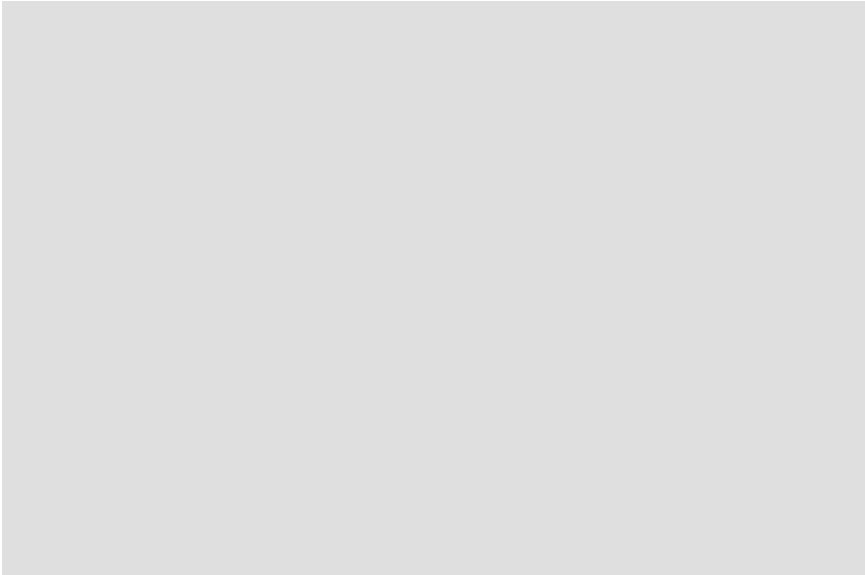
**REFLECT**

Keeping in mind the Kingdom of Heaven, consider these questions:

In the parable, we learn that God is patient. So as we learn to live in God's Kingdom, we will need to become more patient. In what areas of my life do I find myself most impatient? At home? At work? At myself?



Who is the person you are most often impatient with? Often we are most impatient with the people closest to us- a spouse, friend, parent, child or co-worker. Write down their name(s) here. What would it look like to live out the Power and Presence of God in these relationships?



## WEEK 1: OPTIONAL DAY FOUR

# Deep Dive

The disciples think about this parable all day, but it's like a riddle they can't figure out. So when they get back to the house they ask Jesus to please explain it to them. But as you'll see, His explanation brings up more questions. This is the way of parables; they teach us and they also make us hungrier for more. This is a good thing. Let's go deeper.

### PRAY

God, help me to feel safe in your presence and power, and to be patient with my understanding of your word. You are God and I am not. Please help me see more and go deeper with you. Amen.

### READ

Matthew 13:36-43 *Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.*

This entire week we have learned how incredibly patient God is with us. And yet, as Jesus explains this parable to his disciples, He also emphasizes God's justice; that there will come a time of judgment and justice for "everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (vs. 41).

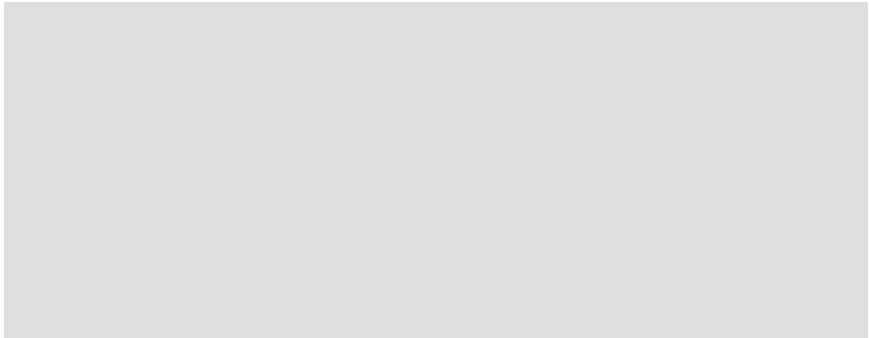
The image of God's justice can be troubling at times for us, and yet, it is important to remember that it is impossible to love well without a deep commitment to justice. For example, if a child has been treated unfairly, it's in love that a parent will seek to correct that wrong. The same is true of God. God shows incredible patience with the evil and injustice in our world, but also makes a promise that the greed, evil and wickedness will not continue forever. In Revelation 21:4, God promises that "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

## REFLECT

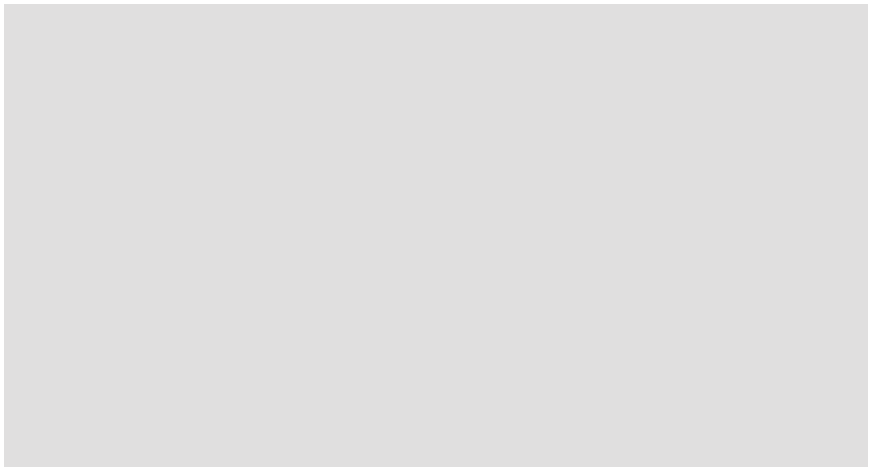
What are some of the wrongs in our world that you look forward to God setting right? List 5 injustices that are regular occurrences in our world today.



How do you balance the tension between God being a God of patience and mercy, and God being a God of justice?



Think about a time you were wronged or hurt by someone. Describe it below. Did you ever experience justice?



# **Week 2: The Parable of the Mustard Seed**

**Matthew 13:31-32**

Sermon Notes

Sermon Notes



## WEEK 2: DAY ONE

# The Parable

We are still in Matthew 13 this week with a short parable. Jesus is filling his listeners with Parables of the Kingdom. He wants his disciples to start living like the Kingdom of Heaven is here and now, because it is! This week's parable is actually sandwiched in Matthew 13 between the Parable of the Weeds (from week one) and the disciples asking Jesus to explain the Parable of the Weeds. It's almost like it is purposefully placed in the middle of a discussion on a parable about patience. This one is simple but takes time to grow in us, just like our faith. We will need patience as our faith grows.

### PRAY

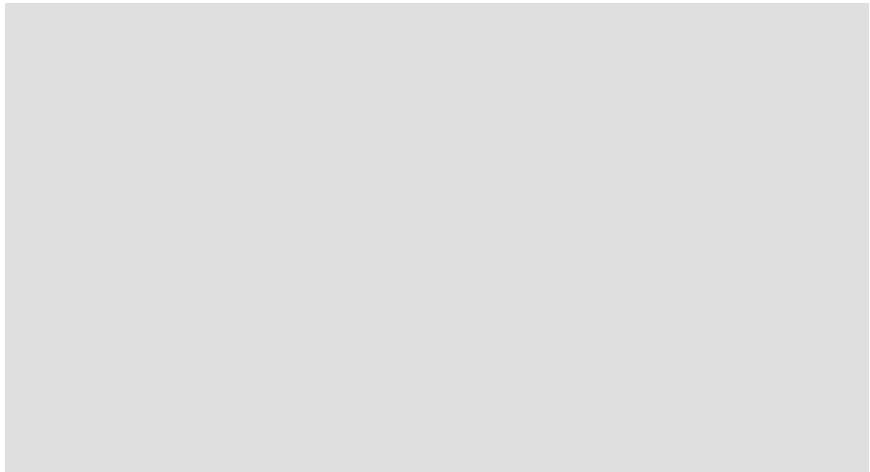
Thank you, God, for being with me here and now. Help me hear you speak through your Word. I pray that this parable will plant the Kingdom of Heaven like a seed in my heart so my faith can grow huge and strong. Amen.

### READ

Matthew 13:31-32 *He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

### REFLECT

The man in this parable believes that a little seed can survive all the challenges the world will throw at it, like too much water or lack of sunlight. Take a moment and list 6 things that could easily have stopped this seed from growing.

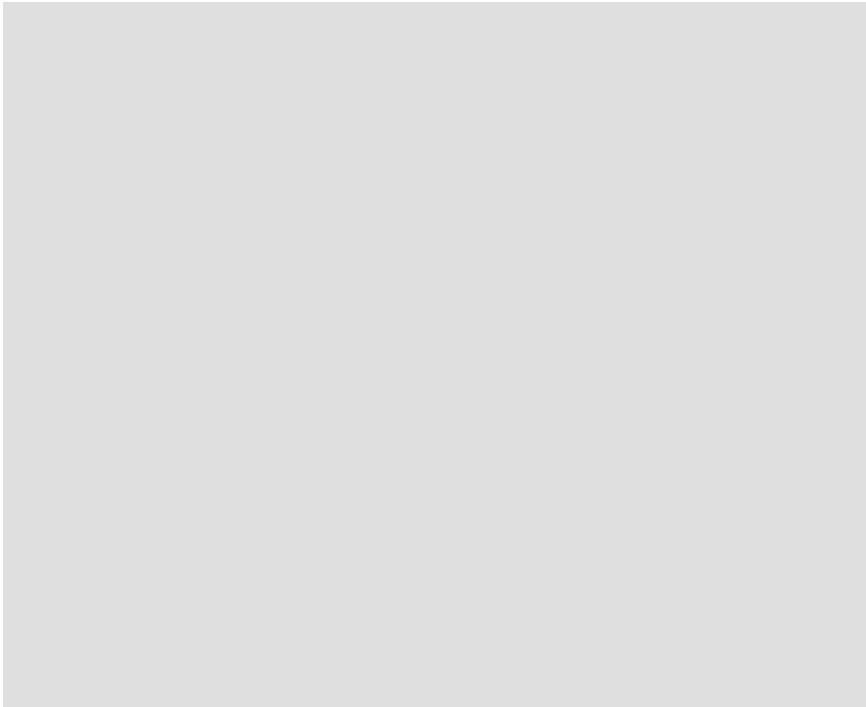




In spite of all of this, the man (who represents God) believes that this little seed (you) has the potential to grow, and not only grow, but grow in such a way that will benefit others (the birds of the story). Does it surprise you that God has such faith in you to grow? Why or why not?



If we are the mustard seed, what stage are you at today? The mustard seed, a small plant, a full grown tree, or maybe even a tree where birds come and perch? Why?



## WEEK 2: DAY TWO

# Having a Faith that Grows

This week's parable reminds us that healthy faith is always growing and changing. (From a seed, to a small plant, to a tree, to a vital part of the world that serves others too.) Growth doesn't happen by accident. It takes nourishment, commitment, and time. Today, we will read two more Scriptures about how our faith must grow. Let it sink in that you will need to nourish, commit, and give time to your spiritual growth. Take a few moments to read and answer each question as we reflect on God, who is patient with us.

### PRAY

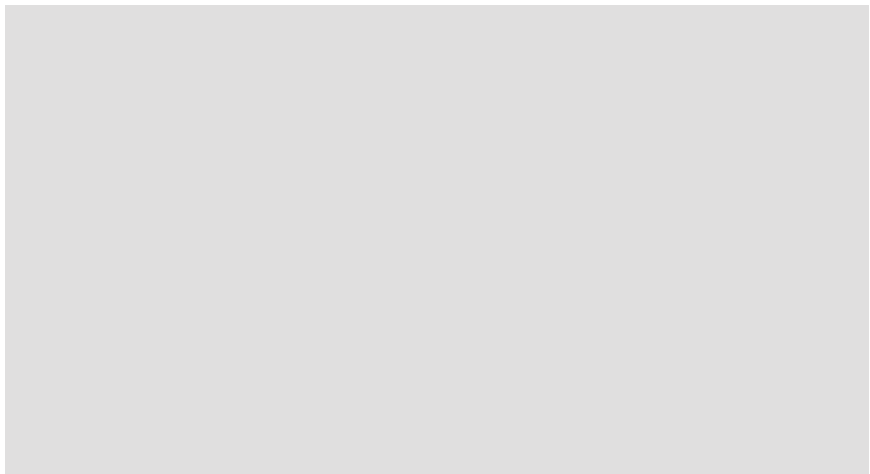
God, thank you for the reminder that it will take nourishment, commitment, and time to grow my faith. Light a fire in my soul to want my faith to grow bigger and stronger. As I grow, please help me take the lesson about patience in the Kingdom of Heaven and apply it to myself here and now. Amen.

### READ & REFLECT

*2 Peter 3:18 Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

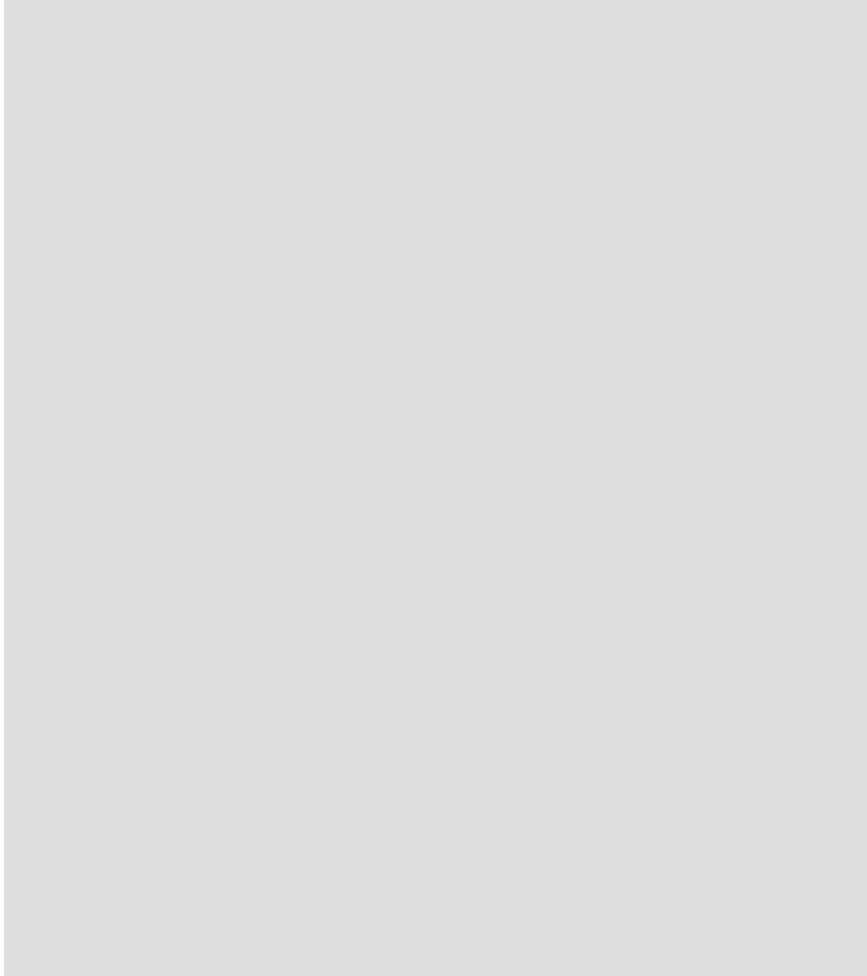
We can trust that what begins as a tiny faith can grow into something huge in the future. This can be true of our own faith when we nurture it to grow. Growth comes when we purposefully read, obey, and apply the Word of God.

Think of a season where you were growing a lot spiritually. It could be years ago or even recently. What are all the things that helped you grow? Be as specific as possible.



Colossians 2:6-7 *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

A strong plant, like a strong tree, will have roots that connect it to the source of life. What practices in your life help you stay rooted and strengthened in your relationship with God?



**“The central basis of Christian assurance is not how much our hearts are set on God, but how unshakably his heart is set on us.”**  
**-Timothy Keller**

## WEEK 2: DAY THREE

# The Kingdom of Heaven

As we continue to talk about the Kingdom of Heaven, here is a reminder of the definition: The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now.

To help people understand the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus often compared it to something they already knew about. The Kingdom of Heaven is like...this.

We still do this, today, to help us understand big or new truths. Here's an example from Albert Einstein to his son: "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving."

So, what is the Kingdom of Heaven like?

Let's read the parable again and see how Jesus describes it.

### PRAY

God, help me to understand more and more about you and what your Kingdom is like. Help me to keep changing and growing so my faith is strong enough to help others too. Amen.

### REREAD THE PARABLE

Matthew 13:31-32 *He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

### REFLECT

This week we see an emphasis on growth in the Kingdom. At The Crossing we started using the acronym G.R.O.W. to talk about practical ways we can grow in our faith. Spend a minute thinking about how you are intentional about growing in your faith.

**Let's look at each letter in the G.R.O.W. acronym:**

**Gather together:** We gather on Sundays as an entire church and we gather in small groups throughout the week. So that together we learn to love God and love others better than we could alone. How have you grown spiritually because of the people around you?

**Risk our comfort:** We risk our comfort by volunteering and giving. We use what we have to show our love for God and others, and to make it possible to reach new people. How are you risking your comfort by using your time and treasure to advance the kingdom of heaven?

**Openly Share Our Story:** We openly share our stories with other people. We tell friends and family about how God is showing up in our lives, to help grow their faith too! It's amazing to invite people to church, but our greatest impact on people is when they see and hear from us that God is working in our life. Think of a time you worked up the courage to talk to someone about faith. What happened?

**Walk every day with Jesus:** We walk everyday with Jesus. We make every single day an opportunity to spend time with God through prayer, reading the Bible, and giving God our attention and love. Do you have any regular practices to walk everyday with Jesus? Do you want to develop any in this season?

## WEEK 2: OPTIONAL DAY FOUR

# Deeper Dive

By the end of the parable, the seed has grown into something new that is participating in life in a new way. It's giving back. Not only is it a safe place for others, it can reproduce and drop new seeds. Sharing our stories of faith - sharing moments you experienced God's love or forgiveness or a moment of divine coincidence - is like dropping seeds to help other people's faith grow. Today we will develop a way to tell our stories of faith to others.

### PRAY

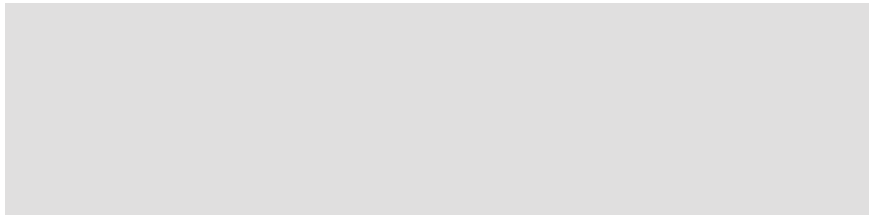
God, help me to see you in my life and to unapologetically share my story with others. As I reflect on my journey of exploring faith and experiencing your love, please help me remember moments that really changed my life - both big and small. Show me when to share what you have done for me. Amen.

### READ

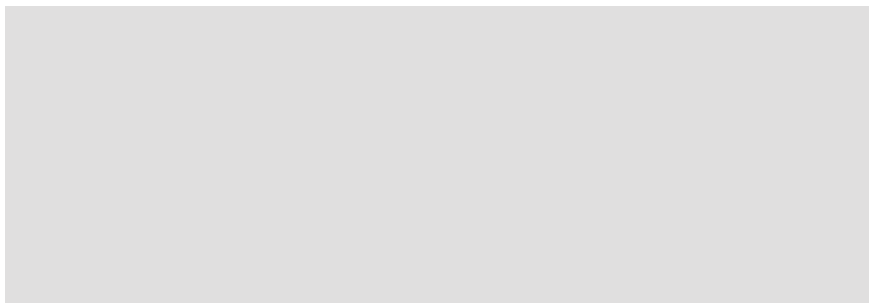
Mark 5:19 *Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.*

### REFLECT

Can you think of a time before you knew about God's grace and mercy? Describe that season of your life in a couple sentences.



How did you become curious about faith? Did someone invite you to church? Did you read a book about Jesus? Did something hard happen in your life that led you to seek help from a church?



How is your life different because of Jesus?

What is one moment, even a small one, when you felt God was working in your life?

**If you've never had a moment of "Saying Yes" to Jesus, this is a perfect opportunity to let someone else know. Head over to [www.thecrossing.com/imnew](http://www.thecrossing.com/imnew) so our team can connect with you!**

Our stories of faith are the answers to the questions you just answered. Most people are willing to listen to a story for about a minute. You've just written a compelling story of faith to share with people in your life. Now, when someone asks you "What's New?" or "How are you really doing?" You can answer with, "I'm good. It's so interesting. I've been thinking about God. Can I tell you the one-minute version?"

# Week 3: The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

**Matthew 13:44-46**

Sermon Notes



Sermon Notes



## WEEK 3: DAY ONE

# The Parable

Jesus shared the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearls immediately after the parables of the weeds and mustard seed. We see Jesus giving his listeners perspective on the Kingdom of Heaven: Have patience...God has patience with you...The ways of the Kingdom will grow in your life...Stick with it. Jesus knows that having patience is hard, especially when we are waiting for something to grow or be fulfilled. So he follows those up with these parables: the parables of the treasure and the pearl. Both are stories about people who knew the worth of what they had discovered. That it was worth waiting for, searching for, facing challenges in order to have.

### PRAY

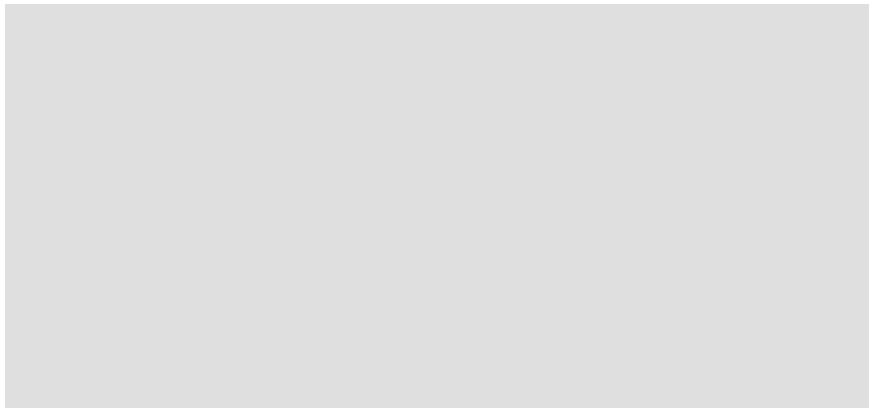
Thank you, God, for being with me here and now. Help me hear you speak through your Word. I pray that this parable will remind me how precious and priceless it is to have you here with me. Open my heart to believing there is nothing better than You. Amen.

### READ

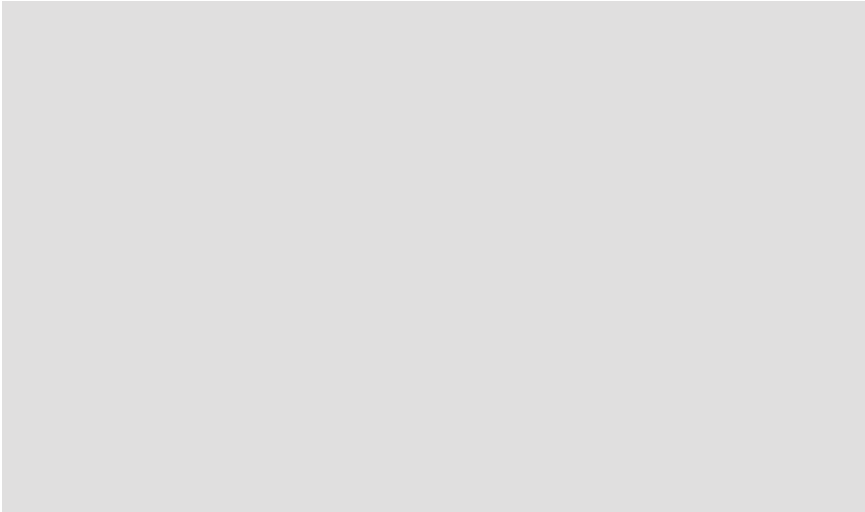
Matthew 13:44-46 *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

### REFLECT

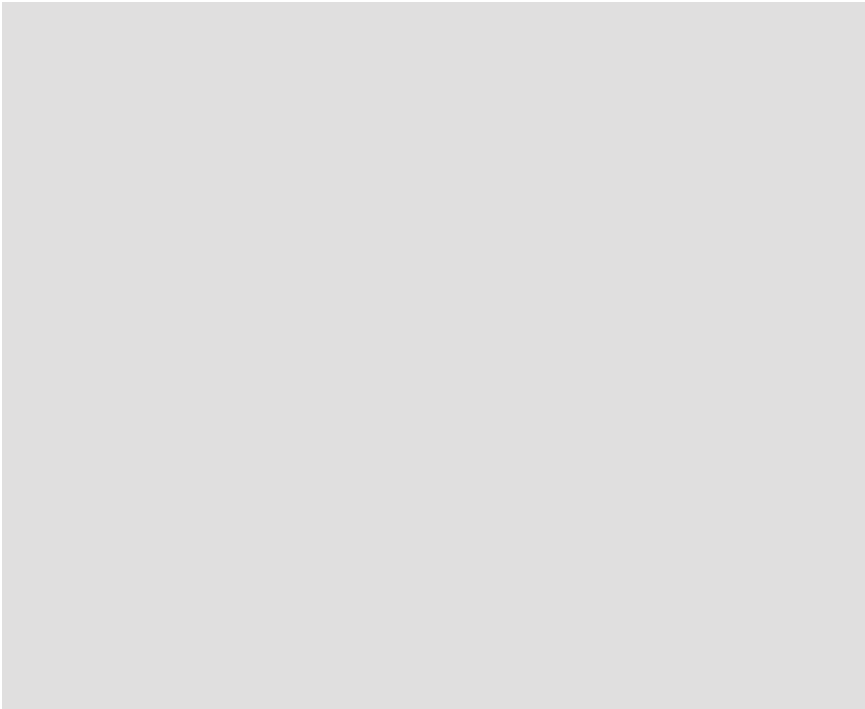
Each of these stories only has one character in it: a person who searches and sacrifices for something of great value. List 5 or more things he probably had to sell to secure this great treasure.



Write out 10-20 things you are grateful for in the box below. Then say this prayer: “Thank you for everything I have. God, help me value you above it all.”



What is something you’ve given up to gain something greater in the future? For example, it could be changing your diet to be healthier tomorrow. It could be giving up the freedom of singleness for a relationship. It could be giving up free time for a college degree. Describe it below.



**WEEK 3: DAY TWO**

# The Precious and Priceless Kingdom

One thing we notice in the parable this week is how knowing the worth of the Kingdom of Heaven will change our lives. We will make new choices, set new priorities, and basically orient our lives around it. Take a few moments to read and answer each question as we reflect on God, who is precious and priceless to us.

**PRAY**

God, help me to know how awesome you are. Help me to reprioritize my life with you as the most important thing. I would love to see my life change this year because I learn to love you more and more. Amen.

**READ & REFLECT**

Psalm 34:8 *Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

One of the clearest promises in the Bible is that the more we follow God, the more we see His goodness in our lives. Take a few moments and list 5 of the greatest blessings God has given you in life.

Philippians 3:7-9 *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

The author of this passage describes that knowing Jesus is of incredible worth. Have you ever felt like God asked you to sacrifice something to follow him? What happened?

Is there anything in your life today that you feel like God may be asking you to walk away from or give up today? Who do you know who can help you do this JOYFULLY?

**“We are never more like God than when we love, and our love is never more pure than when we sacrifice for others.”**

**-Eugene Peterson**

### WEEK 3: DAY THREE

# The Kingdom of Heaven

What is the Kingdom of Heaven? The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now. But as we see in this parable... it can be easy to miss.

## PRAY

God, help me to see your Kingdom all around me, in my everyday life. Help me to see you working in my family, my job, my commute, my friends. I value so many things. Open my heart to valuing YOU above it all. As I become like one of the people in these parables, God, I am searching for your precious and priceless Kingdom today. Amen.

## REREAD THE PARABLE

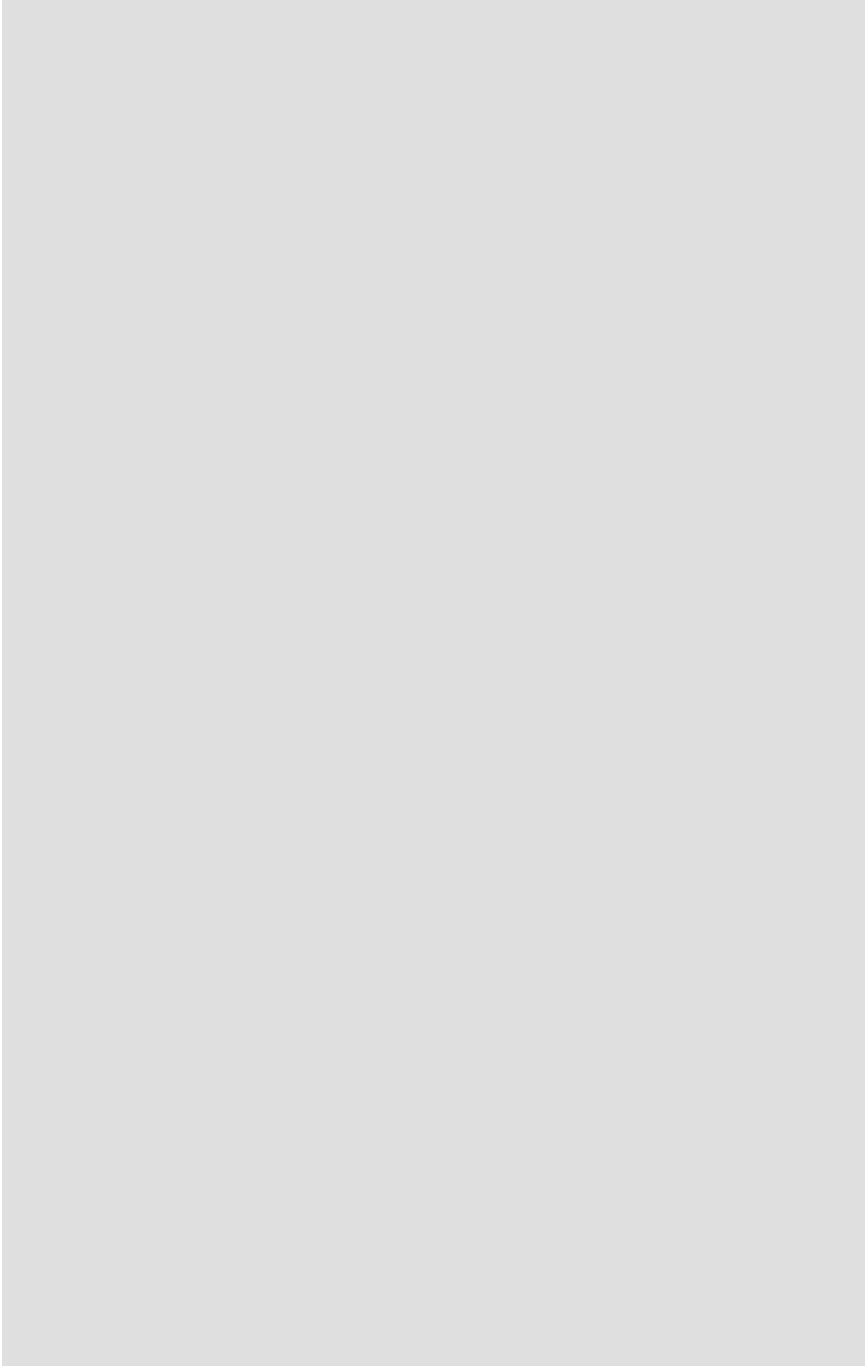
Matthew 13:44-46 *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

## REFLECT

In both parables, precious and priceless treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven are hidden, indicating that they are easy to miss. Take a few moments right now and pray through these areas and ask God if there is anything He has been trying to tell you is missing.

Family  
Friends  
Church Community  
Work  
Neighborhood

How was the Kingdom of Heaven revealed to you for the first time? If you feel like you've found glimpses of it, explain what it was like and how it happened.



### WEEK 3: OPTIONAL DAY FOUR

# Deeper Dive

## PRAY

There are so many things fighting for my attention. God, help me to be here with you with my whole self because I know you are here with me... waiting patiently for me to see how priceless this relationship with you is in my life. Today, right now, I make you a priority. I don't always understand your parables, but I want to. Open the eyes of my heart, I want to see you. Amen.

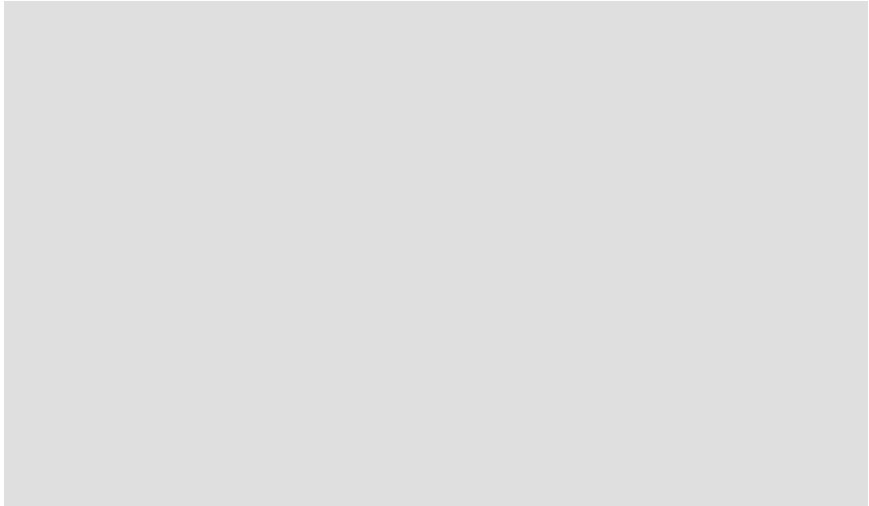
## READ

Matthew 13:10-17 *The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."*

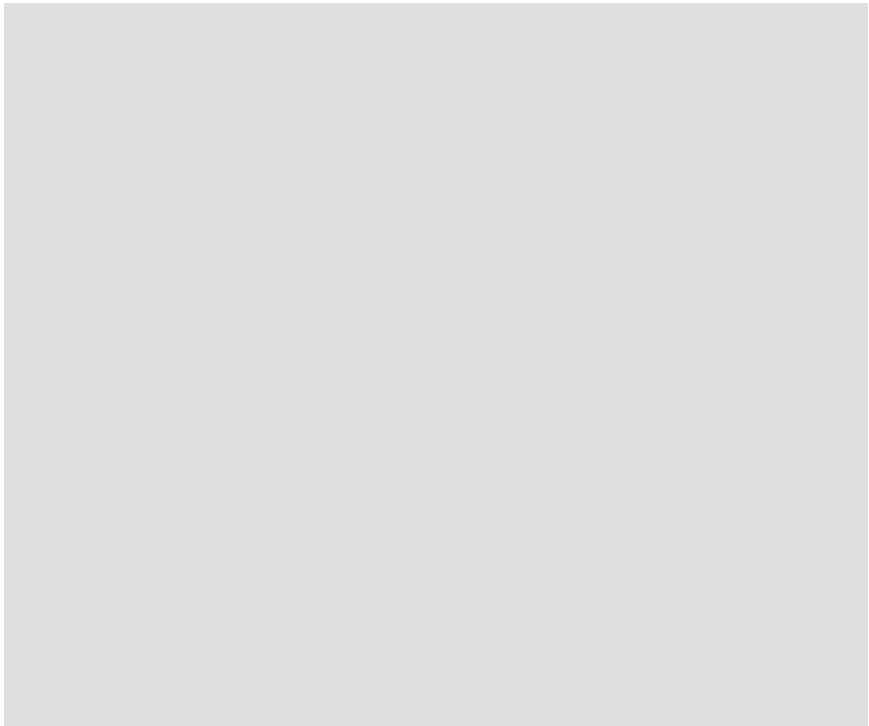


## REFLECT

As we approach the halfway point of this study, we are seeing just a handful of Jesus' parables. Why do you think Jesus spoke so often in parables?



Jesus talks about two groups of people. Some people take his message to heart, and others ignore his words and continue on in their everyday lives. What is one area where you have felt God challenge you so far in our study?



# **Week 4: Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard**

**Matthew 20:1-16**

Sermon Notes

Sermon Notes



## WEEK 4: DAY ONE

# The Parable

This parable follows one of Jesus' most famous quotes, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." So as we read this parable, we already know a little of what it is explaining about the Kingdom of Heaven. There is abundance and generosity here. As people accustomed to fighting for what little we can get, earning everything we have, it is disorienting to live as if there's nothing to prove and enough for everyone ... and possibly even more for those who need more so that everyone has their fill. In the Kingdom of Heaven, here and now, the grace and generosity of God is ginormous.

### PRAY

Prepare my heart for two things, God. First, to know your endless grace and gifts. And to know that I have nothing to earn. Second, make me generous enough to enjoy the way you are generous with others too. To never compare but celebrate instead. Help me see your heart and your Kingdom in this parable today. Amen.

### READ

Matthew 20:1-16 *For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' " 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*

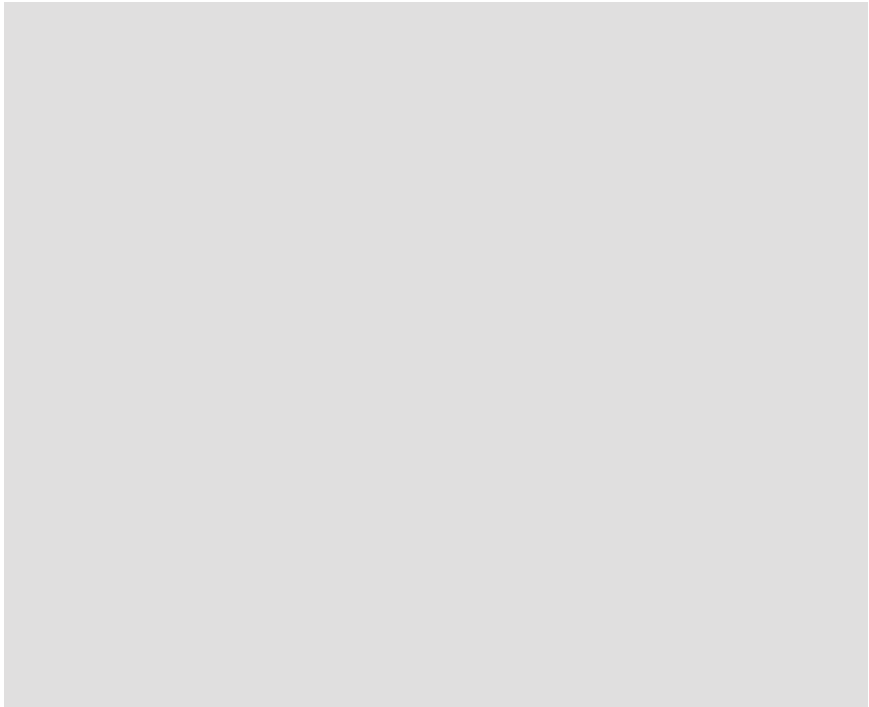
## REFLECT

The main characters in this parable are the landowner, the people hired early, and the people hired late in the day. Take a moment and think about what each person felt at the end of this parable.

Of the 3 main characters, who do you most connect with? Why is that?



Jesus said, *“But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”* How does this parable help us understand what he meant?



## WEEK 4: DAY TWO

# Generosity in the Kingdom

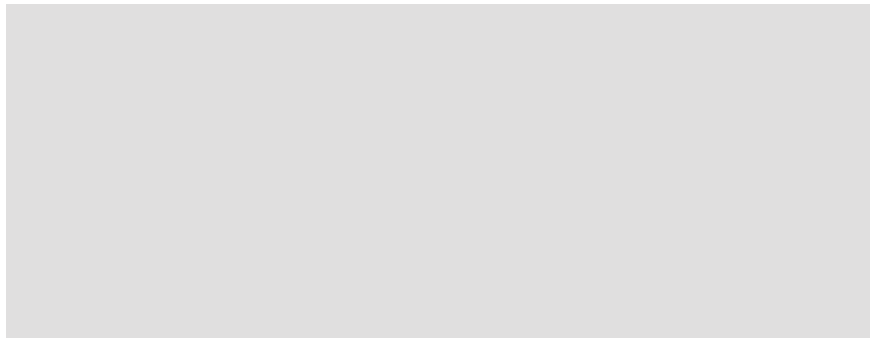
Among world religions, a unique aspect of Christianity is the emphasis on the grace of God. Tim Keller says, “The gospel (The message of Jesus) is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.” It can be difficult on our “good” days to admit how flawed we are. Then, on our “bad” days, we can barely believe we are worth forgiving. God’s generosity flows beyond our pride and our brokenness to simply love us unconditionally.

### PRAY

God, please prepare my heart to accept your love and generosity for myself. And, please help me not be the person who tries to keep your love and generosity away from someone else. Help me learn the ways of your Kingdom - especially your generosity. None of us are perfect. We all need your love and grace. Show me how to believe that in a deeper way today. Amen.

### READ & REFLECT

Ephesians 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* Most people believe you have to fix yourself up before God will accept you. Have you ever wrestled with that? In what ways?

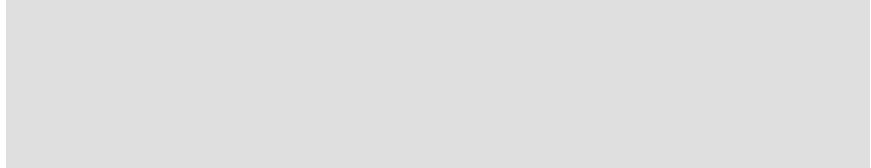


In Luke 15:11-32 there’s a story of a man who had two sons. The younger one demanded his inheritance so he could leave his father behind and live however he wanted. But following his own cravings and pride left him starving, broke, and alone. So he decided to return to his father and beg to work as a servant. But when his father saw him walking back to the house, he ran out to meet him, threw his arms around him, and took him back as his son, saying:

Luke 15:24 *For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate.*

Overjoyed, the father immediately threw the most extravagant party possible to celebrate his son being alive and home.

Like the prodigal son's father, God is always ready and waiting for us to turn to Him. What was it like when you realized God is waiting for you with open arms, ready to celebrate your homecoming?

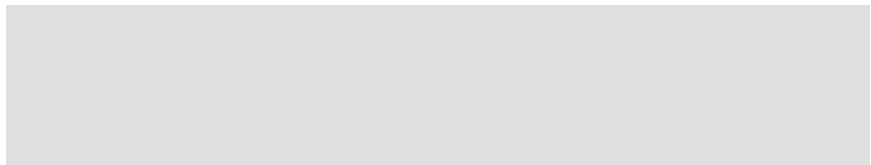


The father also had an older son, who resented his brother and refused to come to the party. We can relate to the younger brother through the times we know we have turned away from God. We can relate to the older brother only through realizing the times we thought we were earning God's love or doing the "right things" out of grim, bitter obedience... but we were actually missing the generosity and celebratory heart of God, our father.

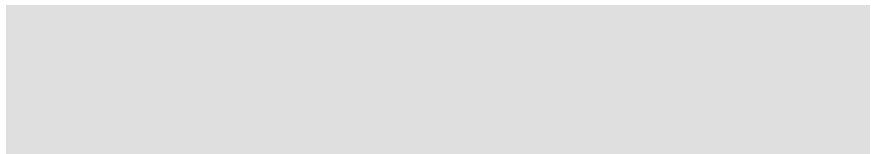
In the story, when the older brother refuses to celebrate the father's generosity, the father goes out to meet this son too, pleading with him to come in.

*Luke 15:29-32 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"*

How does the older son's response to his father show us what he thinks about generosity or grace?



Have you ever felt like you were working hard for God but God wasn't giving you what you wanted? Explain what that felt like.



**"God has given us two hands, one to receive with and the other to give with." -Billy Graham**

## WEEK 4: DAY THREE

# The Kingdom of Heaven

The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now. This definition takes on more immediacy when we think about God's generosity. Today, there are people we wish God wasn't generous with. Today, there are people we think we've been "better than." And yet, to live in the Kingdom of Heaven, here and now, is to accept that it doesn't matter what we think. God is generous with all of His kids. It's our job to submit to God's loving authority.

### PRAY

Right here, right now. I admit that there are people I wish didn't receive the same blessings or gifts that I get to receive. I admit that it looks like other people are getting unfair generosity from You, God. Please help me submit to your authority, Lord. To trust you. To let you lead all of life with generosity and grace. Help me receive it. Help me celebrate when others receive it. As I read this parable again today, please let it pierce my heart. Amen.

### REREAD THE PARABLE

Matthew 20:1-16 *For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' " "Because no one has hired us," they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*



**REFLECT**

Compare the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard to the story we talked about yesterday with the Prodigal Son. What parallels between characters do you see (The Landowner and The Father, for example)? Why do you think Jesus taught both these parables?

“The workers who have been around longest believe they deserve more than those who are just joining. Is the Landowner being unfair? Why or why not?”

“People who have been part of churches for a long time can begin to believe that the focus on new people is unfair, or that new people need to clean up their act before they can be fully in. How does this parable help us understand what the church should be like in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

**READ FURTHER**

“If there was any idea that God had set us a sort of exam, and that we might get good marks by deserving them, that has to be wiped out.... God has been waiting for the moment at which you discover that there is no question of earning a pass mark on this exam, or putting Him in your debt.” -C. S. Lewis

**REFLECT**

We can never earn God’s generosity. His generous love and care are disproportionate to what we have to offer. Does that mean we stop working for the Kingdom and just receive? How do we stay motivated and balance the tension?

## WEEK 4: OPTIONAL DAY FOUR

# Deeper Dive

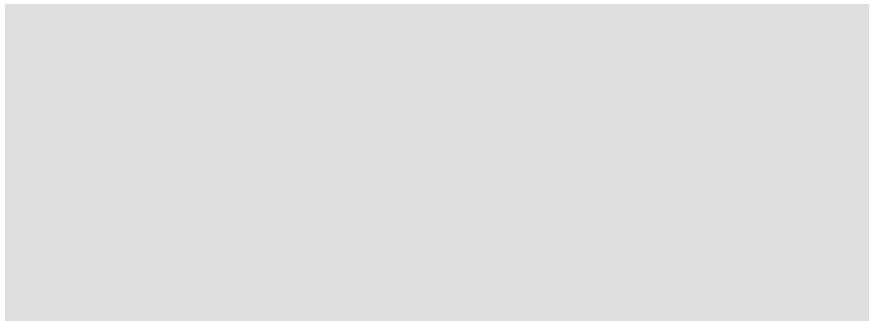
The church (not just The Crossing, but the gathering of Jesus followers) are meant to live in and reflect the Kingdom of Heaven. Which means, we should be representing the generosity and grace of God on earth. Let's go deeper into just how generous Jesus and the church need to be as part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

### READ & REFLECT

*Luke 23:39-43 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

The parable shows us that all believers receive the generosity of God regardless of whether we accept Him at age 9 or 99. This story is of a thief who was hanging on a cross next to Jesus who was doing the same. After a lifetime of pilfering, he received the reward of eternal life in heaven just like anyone else which reiterates the truth that the ultimate reward of eternal life will be achieved by all equally.

Who do you know that needs to hear this message of God's generosity? List their first names here and write out a short prayer for them.



### READ & REFLECT

The church is not an institution or a building; the church is people playing an integral part in bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. The church is designed to lead the way in demonstrating God's power and presence and purpose.

Below we see the very first example of the early church learning to be generous and loving to all.

*Acts 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

What key activities do you see the early church participate in? Name at least 4.

If people from outside the church were to look at your life, would they describe it with the same words and phrases you listed above?

The final verse says, *“The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* The idea here is that a healthy church should reach people. Why do you think these actions listed in Acts 2 ended up reaching more and more people? How did they reflect the Kingdom of Heaven we’ve been learning about in the parables?

# Week 5: The Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor

**Matthew 18:23-35**

Sermon Notes

Sermon Notes



## WEEK 5: DAY ONE

# The Parable

The parable of the unforgiving debtor is the answer Jesus gave to a question his disciple, Peter, asked. Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the Kingdom of Heaven is like...” And he tells the parable we are studying this week.

Forgiveness flows freely in the Kingdom. “Seventy-seven times” was the Biblical way of saying “one billion, zillion times.” Endless forgiveness, we will see, is possible in the Kingdom. The power to forgive flows from God to us ... and then THROUGH us, when we are participating in the Kingdom of Heaven.

### PRAY

God, help me to sit still for a moment and prepare; to be patient with myself as my mind comes to rest and I focus more on you. To understand that as my faith slowly grows, forgiveness will be a bigger and bigger part of living in your Kingdom. I look forward to the day that forgiveness flows freely in my life. Show me who you are in these Scriptures. Amen.

### READ

Matthew 18:23-35 *Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”*

## REFLECT

There is an obvious connection between the two servants. Both servants when confronted with their debt exclaim, “be patient with me and I will pay it back” and yet the king forgives while the first servant does not. Why do you think it was hard for the servant to forgive?

Why do you think the King was able to forgive such a large sum of money?

Jesus intentionally uses money to teach us something in this parable. Why do you think he does this?

## WEEK 5: DAY TWO

# Willingness to Forgive as God Forgave us

Here, on Day Two, we do some personal reflection. This week's parable gives us a vivid picture of what we are really doing when we take the forgiveness God has given us, and refuse to forgive others. Jesus taught us to pray, *"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."* (Matthew 6:12) Forgiveness really does feel like a debt someone owes us, doesn't it? Forgiving means giving up the right to repayment from the person who hurt you, who owes you. It's tough, but it is the way of the Kingdom and it is possible because of God's power, purpose, and presence, here and now.

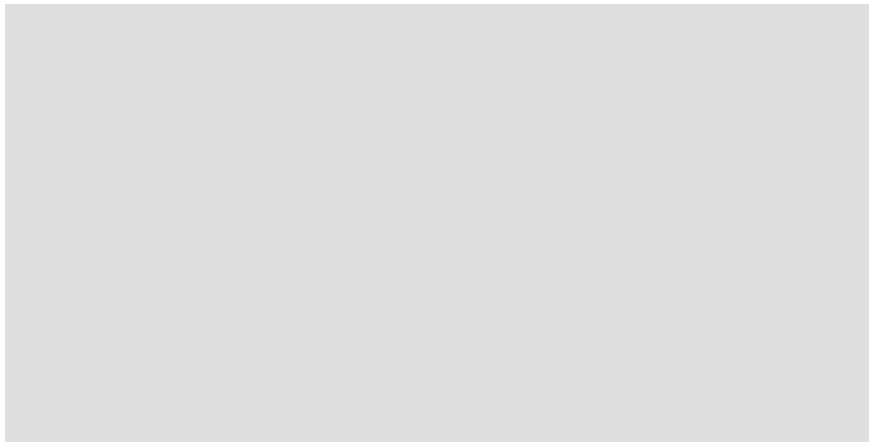
## PRAY

God, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Some days I am so aware of the ways I have made mistakes. Thank you for forgiving me. Thank you that I get to start over every day. Help me really receive your forgiveness. Help me admit when I'm wrong. And as I receive your forgiveness, please help me to forgive others just as freely. I may not be able to forget the pain but please help me release the debt I feel owed. I trust that justice is yours and I can forgive. Amen.

## READ & REFLECT

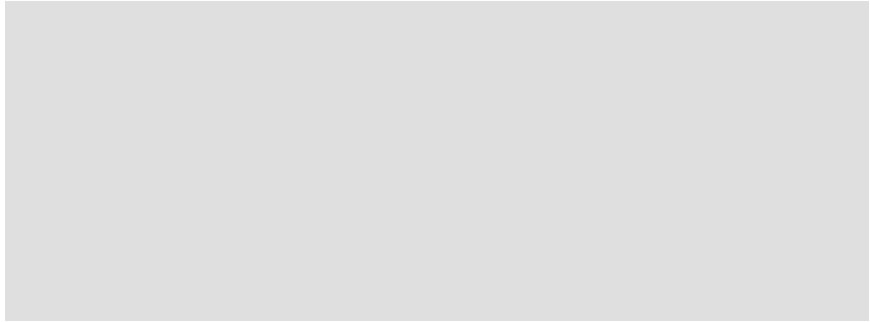
Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

In this week's parable, the first servant is forgiven an enormous debt. Have you ever been forgiven for something significant? What happened?





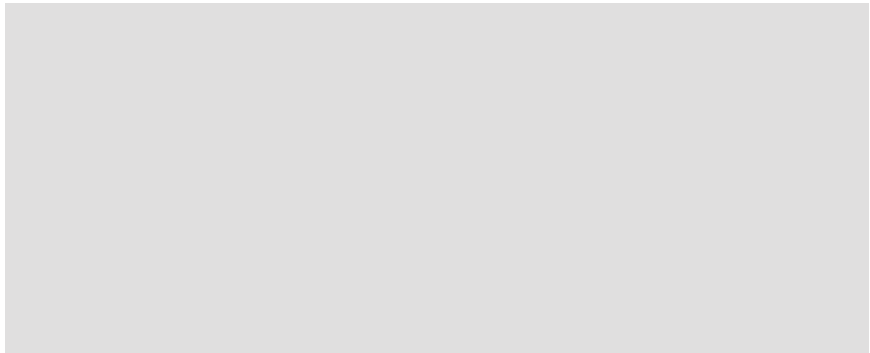
Now, think of a time you needed to forgive someone who wronged you. Why was it so hard for you to forgive?



Psalm 86:5 *You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you.*

The writer of this psalm highlights key character traits of God. He is forgiving and He is GOOD. The image here is of a parent who has seen their child make a mistake and in their goodness, they offer forgiveness.

Have you experienced forgiveness from God for anything in your life?



**“Anyone who wishes to live under the direct, immediate availability of God’s Kingdom today can do so. That means you and me and all of the circumstances in which we live...with all of the threats that come to us day to day, the chances of failure, the anxieties that flood upon us. You see Jesus, with this message as the background, spoke directly to those kinds of common, human concerns. He constantly dealt with them to lead us into a rule of God over our lives, which would set us free from every fear and empower us to be the kinds of persons that God intended us to be.”**

**-Dallas Willard**

## WEEK 5: DAY THREE

# The Kingdom of Heaven

The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now. There's possibly no other time we need to believe in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now more... than when we need to forgive. This is the invitation: Will we participate in the ways of Jesus or will we fight them and go against them. Will we forgive as we have been forgiven?

### PRAY

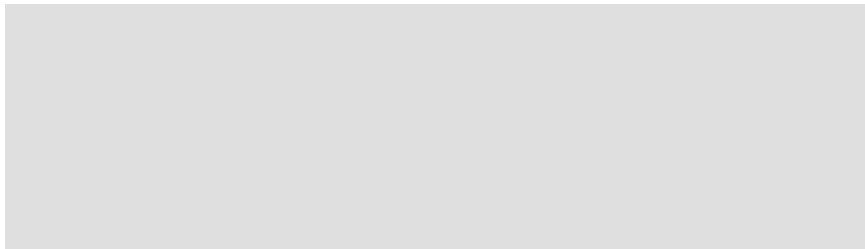
God, help me to become so aware of the generous gift of forgiveness that you have given to me that it flows through my life and I can forgive others. Help me understand my own heart's challenges when it comes to forgiving and please help me understand your heart's passion when it comes to forgiveness. Amen.

### REREREAD THE PARABLE

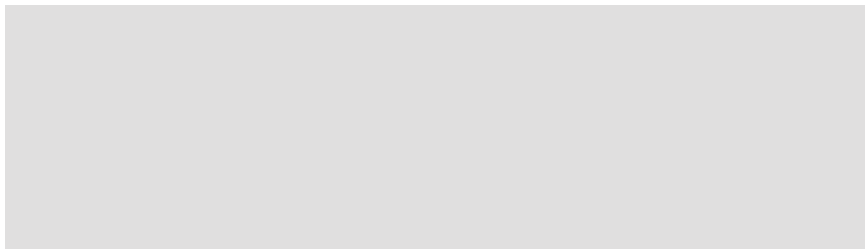
Matthew 18:23-35 *Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."*

## REFLECT

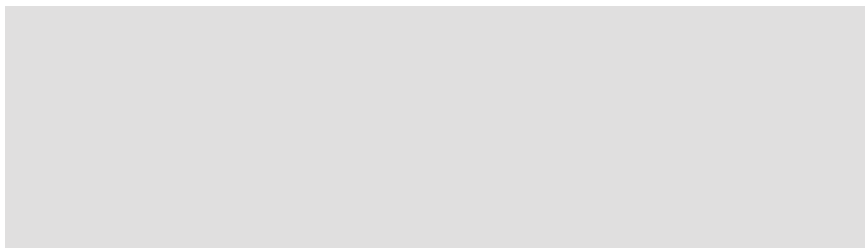
If we follow a King that offers forgiveness for a servant who has racked up an enormous debt, then can we also lead the way in offering forgiveness?



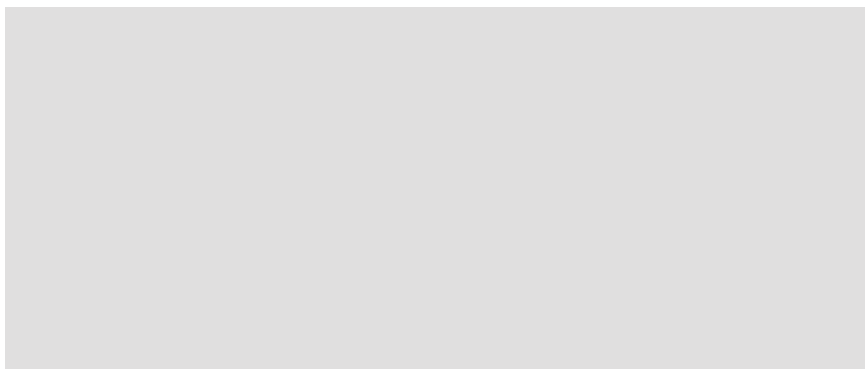
Sometimes we are wronged and the person who hurt us doesn't ask for forgiveness. What does forgiveness look like when this happens?



Is there someone who has wronged you that you haven't forgiven? Write their name and what happened, below.



How can you begin to forgive?



## WEEK 5: OPTIONAL DAY FOUR

# The Kingdom of Heaven

Let's continue the work from Day Three. Forgiveness flows freely in the Kingdom of Heaven, but what do we do in abusive relationships or with people who are not trying to live on earth as it is in heaven?

### PRAY

God, there's a lot to unpack in my heart when it comes to forgiveness. From people who cut me off on the freeway, to my family and parents, lovers and coworkers...forgiving is an ongoing and sometimes very challenging part of living in the Kingdom of Heaven. I'm just admitting it to You. Please give me perspective on forgiveness from your point of view. Please give me the ability to release the people who owe me so that I can be free. Amen.

### READ & REFLECT

Dr. Henry Cloud says this: "Nothing clarifies boundaries more than forgiveness. To forgive someone means to let him off the hook, or to cancel the debt he owes you. When you refuse to forgive someone, you still want something from that person. It keeps you tied to him forever."

Refusing to forgive a family member is one of the main reasons people are stuck for years, unable to separate from their dysfunctional families. They still want something from them. It is much better to receive grace from God, who has something to give, and to forgive those who have no money to pay their debt with. This ends your suffering, because it ends the wish for repayment that is never forthcoming, and that makes your heart sick, because there's no hope.

Forgiveness gives us the freedom and distance from a painful person or situation so that we can see clearly enough to set new, healthy boundaries.

When we forgive, we are the ones who are set free to make new choices out of love for our neighbor and ourselves. Forgiveness doesn't mean we continue to take abuse. Forgiveness means we cut ties of debt and debtor.

One more important quote from Henry Cloud: “The Bible is clear about two principles: (1) We always need to forgive, but (2) we don’t always achieve reconciliation. Forgiveness is something that we do in our hearts; we release someone from a debt that they owe us. We write off the person’s debt, and she no longer owes us. We no longer condemn her. She is clean. Only one party is needed for forgiveness: me. The person who owes me a debt does not have to ask my forgiveness. It is a work of grace in my heart.”

Forgiveness is a work we do in our hearts, with God’s help.

Who do you still need to forgive and release from their debt to you?

If you want to have an ongoing relationship with that person, what boundaries do you need to create for a safer, healthier relationship?

# Week 6: The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

**Matthew 22:1-14**

Sermon Notes

Sermon Notes



## WEEK 6: DAY ONE

# The Parable

Jesus tells the parable of the wedding banquet in the context of rising tensions between himself and the powerful religious leaders in Jerusalem. As Jesus' reputation grows and crowds come to welcome him to the city, the leaders grow aggressive in their denial and public distrust of Jesus. This parable is about a wedding reception where the people invited decide that their regular lives and agendas are more important than making time to attend. And so the King decides to invite a new group of people to the celebration.

Notice that Jesus is making a connection between what he is doing in the world and a celebration. And notice how some people are willing to stop everything, get ready, and celebrate... but many are not.

### PRAY

God, help me to sit still for a moment and prepare...to imagine I am in this story, a person you have invited to celebrate what you are doing in the world. Help me imagine being invited into your house and getting ready for your party. Show me where I am valuing my agenda over your priceless invitation. Show me who you are in these Scriptures. Amen.

### READ

*Matthew 22:1-14 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen."*



## REFLECT

The main characters of this parable are the king, the people who reject the invitation, those who accept the invitation, and then the final man without wedding clothes. What do you notice about each group?

Those that reject the offer of the King have varying responses, from indifference (“I have to go look at my field”) to anger and violence. (vs 6- The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.) What do we learn from them?

What do you think about the connection between what God is doing in the world through the Kingdom of Heaven and celebrating something super important? How often do you celebrate what God is doing? When or why is it difficult to celebrate God’s activity in the world?

## WEEK 6: DAY TWO

# The King Requests a Reply

In the parable, the King requests a reply. Will you come and celebrate or will you reject the invitation? Jesus knows how most people will respond, it's not a surprise to him. Today, we will read two more Scriptures about how often we reject Jesus. Notice that even when we start to follow Jesus and initially accept the invitation, there are moments each day when we are tempted to reject him again. Take a few moments to read and answer each question as we reflect on God, who is patient with us.

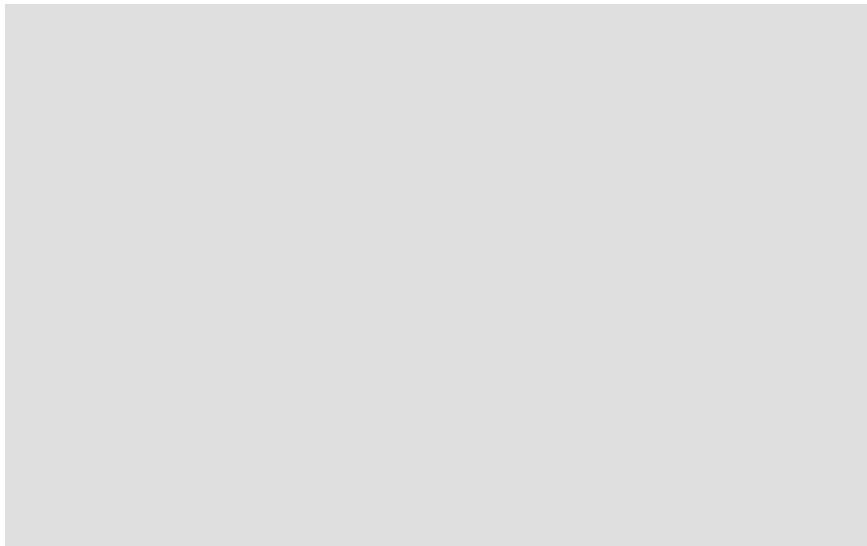
### PRAY

Lord, I come to you with a humble heart. Please forgive me for the times you have invited me to celebrate and participate in what you are doing in the world and I rejected you. Please open my heart to notice when I am wrapped up in my agenda and missing your invitations. Thank you for inviting me again and again. I am here to connect with you today. Amen.

### READ & REFLECT

Isaiah 53:3 *He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

The prophet Isaiah who lived hundreds of years before Jesus predicted that there would be many who reject the message of Jesus. Why do you think it's so easy to dismiss and reject Jesus in our world today?



As we grow in our faith, each of us will have moments when we realize we have dismissed or rejected the person of Jesus. There are times when we are impatient, unforgiving, busy, impulsive, hateful; and we turn away. In what ways are you most likely to turn away from Jesus?

On the other hand, the invitation of God is for everyone- 1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Have you ever seen someone accept the invitation from God and seen their life change? If so, spend a minute and write what happened below.

**“Gospel’ is the announcement that everything has changed in the coming of Jesus and it leads us to a new kind of living. It is a Kingdom of God lifestyle with allegiance to a King as the ultimate restorer.”**

**-NT Wright**

## WEEK 6: DAY THREE

# The Kingdom of Heaven

The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now. We've read this definition every week, but let's read it again in light of this week's parable. *The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now.* The invitation is open, here and now. And it is an invitation to a celebration. It's worth celebrating God's power and purpose and presence being available to everyone!

### PRAY

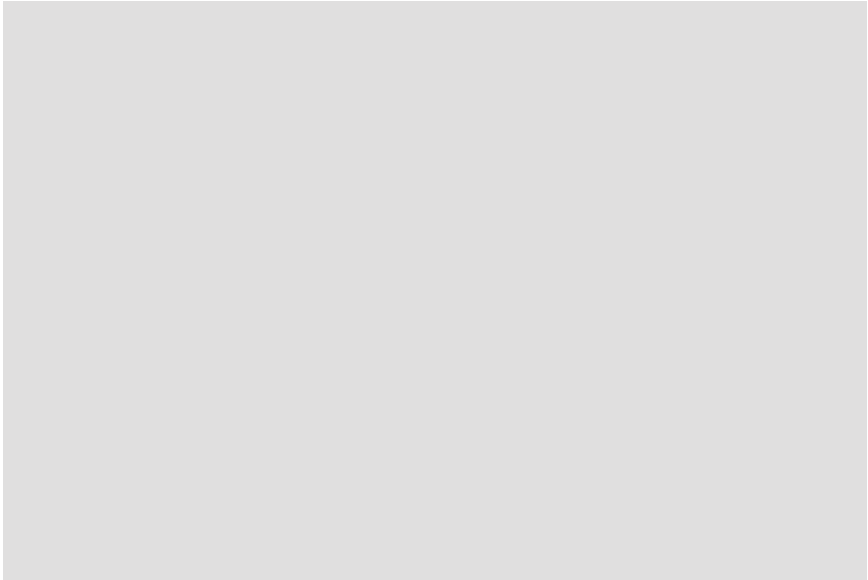
God, thank you for inviting me to be with you. Please help me stay grateful for you. Open my heart to now see the people on the outside. Help me to notice people who I can invite in as well. You don't want anyone to be left out. Show me the people in my life who I need to talk to about you. Amen.

### REREREAD THE PARABLE

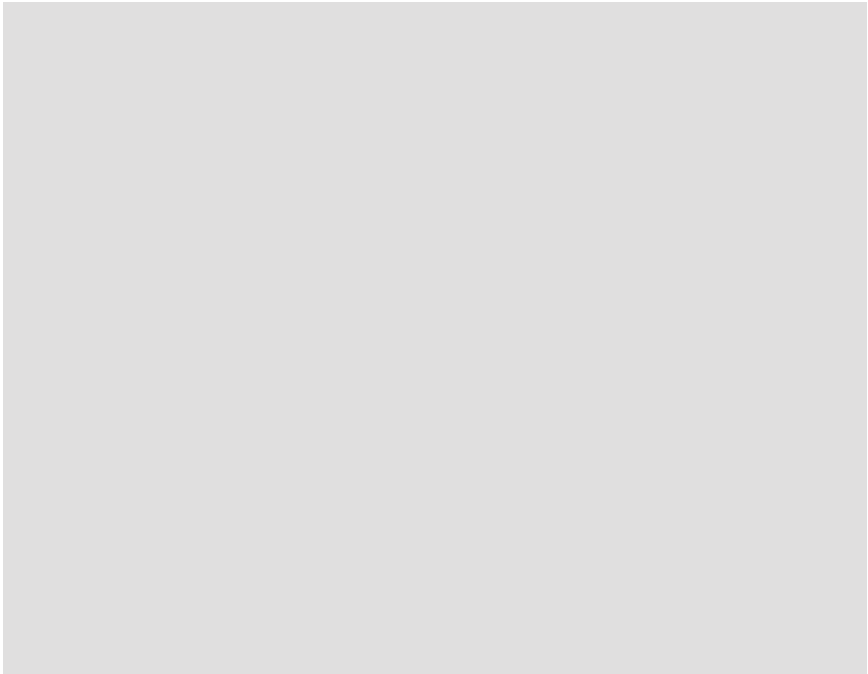
Matthew 22:1-14 *Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen."*

**REFLECT**

Who are the people in our world today who most likely feel like they are on the outside of the Kingdom of Heaven?



Who in your life may need an invitation to be part of a group or attend our church to experience the invitation God offers?



## WEEK 6: OPTIONAL DAY FOUR

# Deeper Dive

While this parable shows us how everyone is invited into the Kingdom of Heaven, we also see that God expects us to show up ready to participate. The invitation requires something of us too. As we go deeper, we get to wrestle with some of the complexities of God's Kingdom.

### PRAY

God, thank you for the parables in the Bible. Thank you that they require me to think and wrestle through things that are not always easy. If you were easy to understand, you wouldn't be God. So today, I come ready to learn more and to see you in Scripture. Help me to keep growing. Amen.

### READ

Matthew 22:11-13 *But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"*

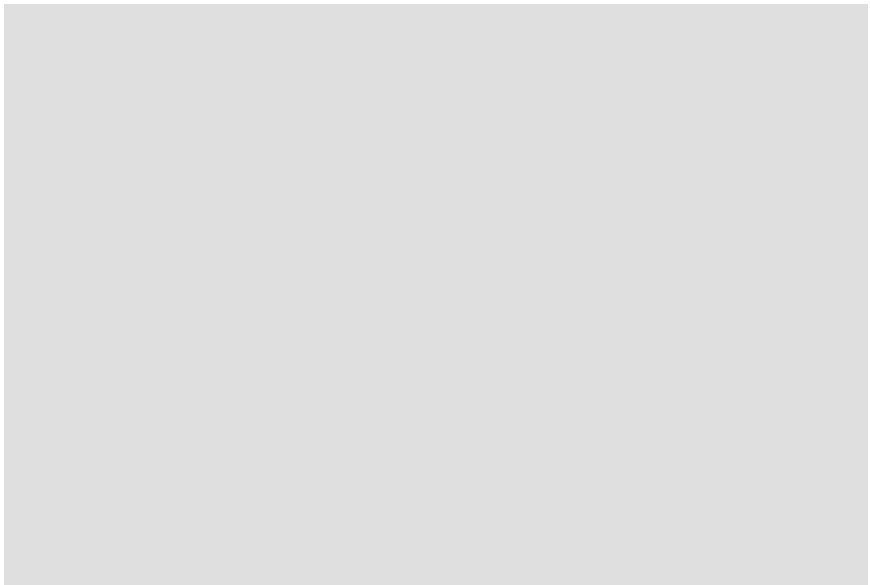
## REFLECT

What were some of your first thoughts as you read about this last guest?



As we read this parable, we find that the final guest said “yes” to the invitation but it brought about no change in his life. He refused to change; He showed up at the wedding feast in his normal clothes. The point Jesus is making is that saying “Yes” to the invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven should change us here and now. A “Yes” to God changes us TODAY and forever.

Have you changed and grown over the years? If so, how?



# Week 7: The Parable of the Bags of Gold

**Matthew 25:14-30**

Sermon Notes



Sermon Notes



## WEEK 7: DAY ONE

# The Parable

The Old Testament stories about the Messiah said that he would return in glory, bringing justice and peace to the whole earth. The disciples started thinking and worrying...if Jesus is the Messiah, when will this all happen? They bluntly ask that of Jesus in Matthew 24:3, saying "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" This parable is one of the ways Jesus answers them. He says, "No one knows." Then, his advice, as we will see in this parable, is to stay prepared, stay calm, and do the most with this life you've been given. The rest is his responsibility.

### PRAY

God, help me to sit still for a moment and prepare; to be aware of the gift of being alive as my mind comes to rest and I focus on you. Thank you for my mind, my health, my gifts and talents. Help me to not worry about the things that are your job and just to do my own daily work. I trust that you are God and I am not. Show me who you are in these Scriptures. Amen.

### READ

Matthew 25:14-30 *Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

## REFLECT

“The talents God has given you are not yours; they have been given to you for your use, for the glory of God. Be great and use everything in you for the good Master.” -Mother Teresa

The Parable of the bags of gold (or talents) emphasizes our responsibility and the consequences of failing to apply ourselves. The parable tells of a Master who delegates responsibilities to his stewards while he is gone. Likewise, the church has been trusted to build the Kingdom of Heaven until Jesus' return. We are assigned to use what we have been given to do just that. We are expected to be prepared and diligent in our work and service.

Reflect on the main characters of the story: the master, the first two servants (one with five bags of gold and one with three bags of gold) and then finally the servant who had one bag of gold. What decisions and feelings do you think they wrestled with when entrusted with the master's resources?

Why do you think the master gave the servants different amounts of talents?

In verse 25 we see what's at the core of the servant with one talent. He says, "I was afraid." Why do you think he was afraid?

## WEEK 7: DAY TWO

# Talents are Treasures

One thing we notice in the parable this week is that we have all been trusted with resources and they are meant to be multiplied. The “gold” is not just money. In the parable, it represents everything we have been given: talent, skills, health...everything. And God has trusted us to use those things to bring more of the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. We do this through love and service.

### PRAY

God, your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. I want to be a good steward of everything you have given to me. Help me to be prepared and diligent and make the most of my life. As I read and reflect today, help me get to know more of what you want me to do. Amen.

### READ & REFLECT

1 Timothy 6:18-19 *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

Can you think of a time someone went way above and beyond to help you? What happened? How did that impact you?

Describe a time in the last month where you used your gifts or talents to help someone in need. What happened? How did you feel afterwards?

1 Peter 4:10 *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*

Are you aware of your spiritual gifts? If so, write them down. If not, we have a spiritual gifts test available on your Crossing account. Log in and scroll down to take the assessment. It takes about 15 minutes.



Will you think about stepping out in faith to use your talents in a ministry that you may not have considered before? Where could you start serving today?

List three ways to use your talents to serve others and build the Kingdom of God. Can you do one of them tomorrow?

**“In the church we need to talk about all of life. What it means to be a follower of Jesus at church and at our job, school, gym, coffee shop, on our day off, when we go shopping or to a movie or on a date. Jesus’s way of living was seamless and integrated because he knew something we didn’t. All of our life is lived in full immersion in what Jesus called the Kingdom of God.”**

**–John Mark Comer**

## WEEK 7: DAY THREE

# Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now. We are to live as people who have accepted the invitation. Like last week's parable talked about, it will change us, here and now. One of the ways it changes us is we learn that our lives matter. Our decisions matter. We are not just floating through life. Who we are and what we have are not accidental. We must invest our lives into the Kingdom of Heaven.

### PRAY

God, help me to see all of the resources you've given me. Help me to be unafraid to take risks and invest my life into building your Kingdom. I want to love well and serve well. As I reread the parable, reveal more truth to me today. Amen.

### REREREAD THE PARABLE

Matthew 25:14-30 *Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' 'His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' 'His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' 'His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

**REFLECT**

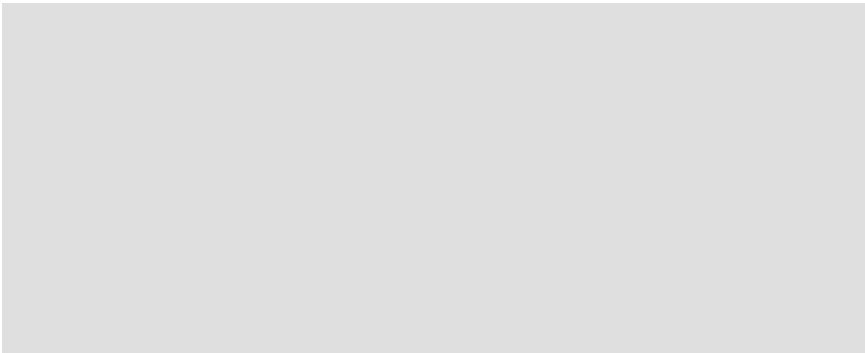
“The core of the Christian faith is that Jesus serves us.” -Tim Keller

Our starting point is ALWAYS what Jesus did for us. Then we RESPOND out of that.

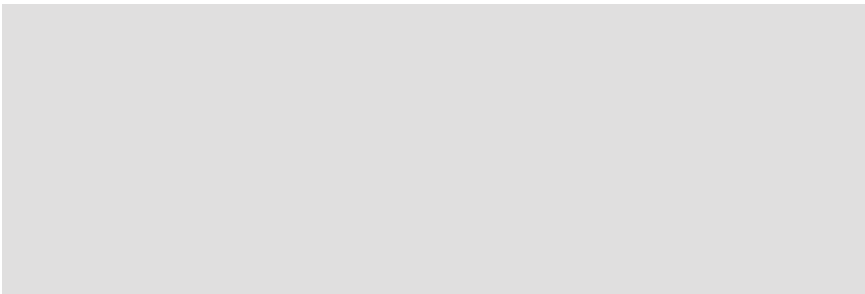
How are you currently using your talents and gifts to bless people in your family/work/community? Use the space below to reflect on all 3 of these categories.



In which of the categories above do you feel like you have room to grow in using your gifts?



How are you using your spiritual gifts to impact others at church?



**WEEK 7: OPTIONAL DAY FOUR**

# Deeper Dive

This week we have looked at the spiritual gifts and talents that are given to us by God, but spiritual gifts are not the same as spiritual maturity. Sometimes the most gifted people in our world lack the maturity needed to lead. While we develop our gifts, we need to also grow in spiritual maturity so that we can be productive, effective, and trustworthy.

Today, in our deeper dive, let's do some introspective work to see where we can mature as followers of Jesus.

**PRAY**

God, thank you for all you have given me. Please show me where you'd most like me to mature as a believer. Where can I grow stronger? I want to serve you well. Amen.

**READ & REFLECT**

*2 Timothy 1:6-7 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God...For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

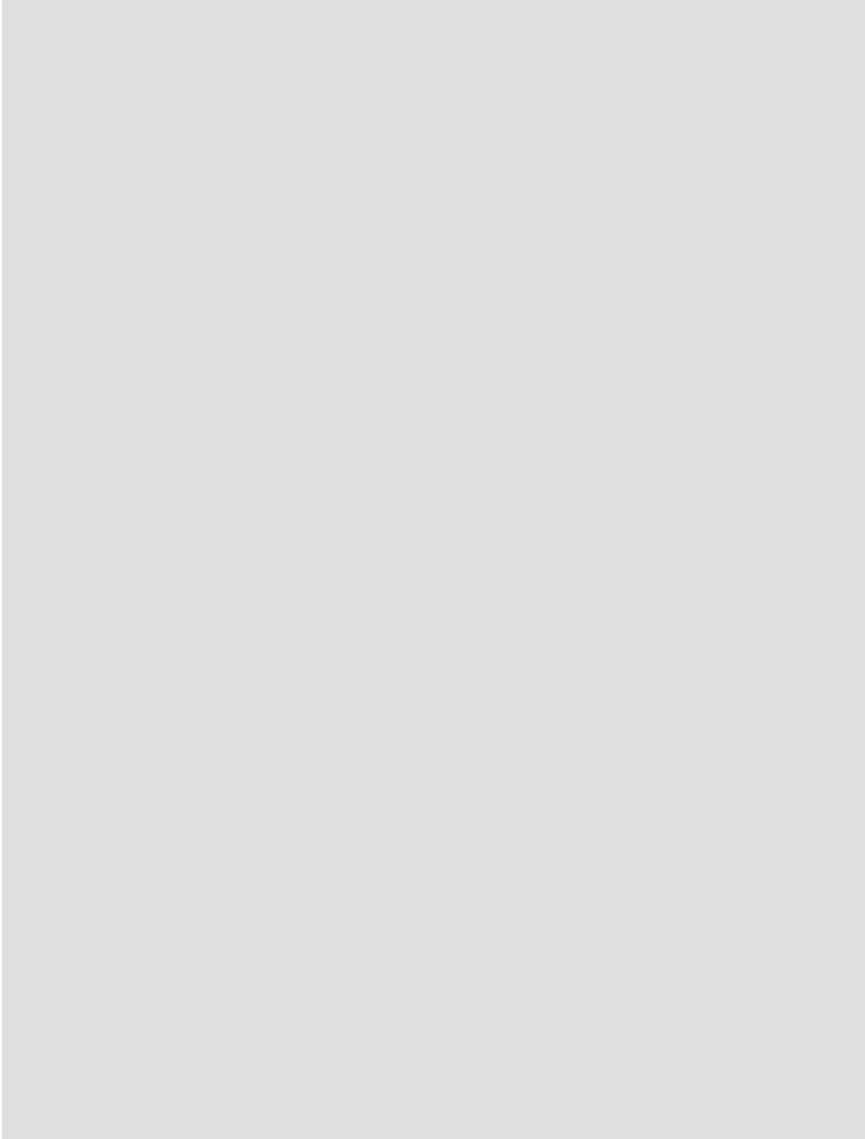
What practices do you have in your life now, or would like to start, that will help you develop or fan into flame the gifts God has given you?

How do confidence, power, love, and self-discipline affect how we use our gifts?



*Colossians 3:12-13 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.*

Take a moment and look at your life. Would people describe you as growing in kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience? Where have you seen growth in your life and where do you see an opportunity to continue to develop these virtues?



# Week 8: The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

**Matthew 25:31-46**

Sermon Notes

Sermon Notes



## WEEK 8: DAY ONE

# The Parable

The parable of the sheep and the goats immediately follows the parable of the bags of gold. Jesus is coming at the same topic from a different direction. As his followers, we are meant to be using our lives to serve others. Last week we learned that the natural next step to faith in Jesus is helping people in need. If we take the life we've been given and bury it, we have not done what God has asked. But if we take our life and use it to help others, we are multiplying what we've been given. In this week's parable, notice that every time we serve someone else, we are actually serving Jesus. Jesus is more among us than we think he is.

### PRAY

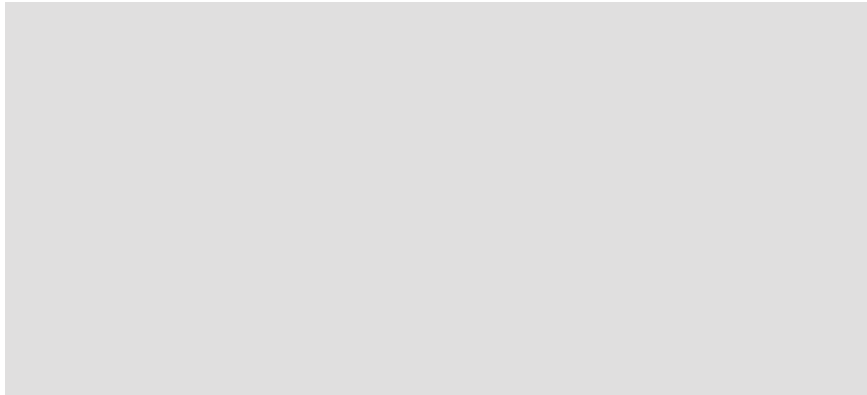
God, this parable is about action. Help me to see where to take action this week and use my life to serve others. When I look at other people, let me see you. When I help other people, remind me I am helping you. Let my faith lead me to action. Amen.

### READ

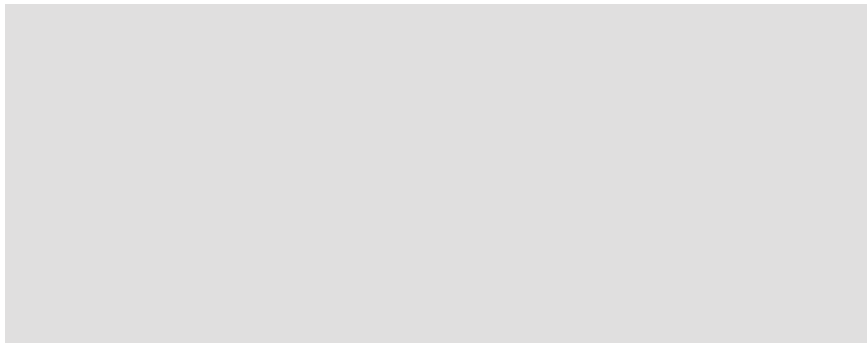
Matthew 25:31-46 *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

## REFLECT

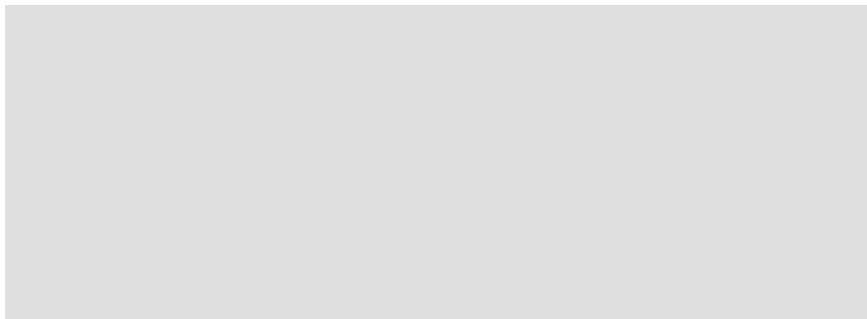
In this parable, people are divided into two categories: sheep and goats. What is similar between these two groups and what separates them?



This parable, when read by itself and out of context, makes it look like people's actions saves them. Fortunately, over the last 7 weeks, we have a full picture of Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of Heaven. How do you think our actions reflect our faith?



While neither group recognizes who they are serving, the sheep take action and show compassion towards those in need even though it comes at a cost. Write down every need met in the parable below.



## WEEK 8: DAY TWO

# Compassion and Care for Others

This week's parable reminds us that faith in action is the fullest expression of our love for Jesus. When our faith changes us and changes our lives, we know it is growing and real. One area Jesus asks his followers to pay close attention to, is how they serve and help others. To refuse to help is an injustice against Jesus, himself. So, we start to see how compassion and justice are at God's core.

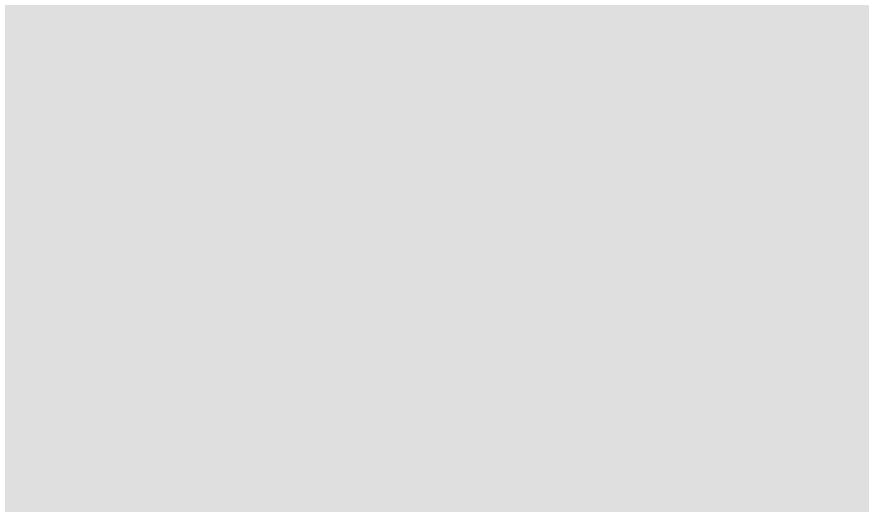
### PRAY

God, I know that my actions don't save me. My salvation, my relationship with you, is because of your love and grace, not my actions. But I also know that a strong faith is one that changes my life and has me doing things I wouldn't do without you. I pray that my love for you grows deep enough that I can't help but want to help other people as a way to thank you for all you've done for me. Amen.

### READ & REFLECT

*Isaiah 30:18 Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!*

Do you think people resonate more with God's justice or God's mercy in our world today? Why?



Throughout our study we have looked at how God is both compassionate and cares deeply for justice. Which comes more naturally to you, compassion to people who are hurting or justice for the marginalized and oppressed? Why?

*2 Cor 9:7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Yesterday, we looked at how meeting needs will often require time and resources. Can you think of a time where someone gave to you joyfully? What happened?

Can you think of a time where you gave joyfully of your resources? What made this moment stand out to you?

**“The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.”**

**-CS Lewis**

## WEEK 8: DAY THREE

# Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the power, purpose, and presence of God here and now. This week's parable makes it incredibly clear that the power, purpose, and presence of God is with those who need help. If we want to participate, it means we will actively look for ways to serve, help, include, visit, feed, invite, love, and more. This is a major way that we participate in the Kingdom of Heaven. When you are helping someone in need, you know you are with Jesus.

### PRAY

God, I accept your love and generosity. Please help me be loving and generous to others. Help me learn the ways of your Kingdom, especially how to serve. Amen.

### REREREAD THE PARABLE

Matthew 25:31-46 *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*



## REFLECT

*The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” As you reread this parable, who in your life best lives this out?*

In Matthew Henry’s Bible Commentary on this passage, he states, “He does not say, ‘I was sick, and you did not cure me; in prison, and you did not release me’ (perhaps that was more than they could do); but, ‘You visited me not, which you might have done.’ Note, [we] will be condemned, at the great day, for the omission of that good which it was in the power of [our] hand to do.”

Jesus is not asking us to do more than is humanly possible. This is good news because many of us feel like we need to do more than what is possible in order to help people. Jesus is asking us to live out of a sustainable place where we can see and meet the needs HE puts before us.

Where is one area where Jesus is challenging you to act in love for others? (Ideas: Reach out to a lonely neighbor or friend. Invite someone to church and lunch. Participate in giving.)

## WEEK 8: OPTIONAL DAY FOUR

# Deeper Dive

As our study on the parables of the kingdom of heaven comes to an end, think back over all of the weeks and write out one thing you learned or one area where God challenged you over each of the parables below

### **Parable of the Wheat and Weeds**

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

### **Parable of the Mustard Seed**

Matthew 13:31-32

### **Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl**

Matthew 13:44-46

### **Parable of workers in the vineyard**

Matthew 20:1-16

### **Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor**

Matthew 18:23-35

### **Parable of the Wedding Banquet**

Matthew 22:1-14

### **Parable of the Bags of Gold**

Matthew 25:14-30


### **Parable of the Sheep and Goats**

Matthew 25:31-46

“When Jesus fed five thousand people with only five loaves of bread and two fish, he was showing us how God’s love can multiply the effects of our generosity. God’s kingdom is the place of abundance where every generous act overflows its original bounds and becomes part of the unbounded grace of God at work in the world.”

—Henri Nouwen

# Notes



**At The Crossing, we fully believe that God speaks to us through the Bible and uses it to transform our hearts, lives, and relationships. Our team has developed this study with the hope that you will not simply read the Bible, but that you would also experience the life-changing ways of Jesus through it.**



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