



# GOD'S TREASURE

## THE PARABLES OF JESUS



### Small Groups

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#### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Sometimes Jesus teaches us what to treasure. It's wiser to store up heavenly treasures than earthly treasures. And he tells us to "seek first the Kingdom of God." But even more deeply, his parables are about what God treasures. In our summer VBS series, we will learn how God seeks and treasures people who need forgiveness, healing, and rescue—which is for all of us! Have you ever considered that God's treasure is for you?

As we approach VBS, UALC we be hearing these sermons around these parables, so that we can join the hundreds of kids who attend VBS this year in rejoicing in and seeking the treasures of God's Kingdom.

If you and your group would like to volunteer to serve our kids in this year's VBS, we know it would be a great blessing to the kids and to you. You can learn more about VBS and register at [ualc.org/vbs](http://ualc.org/vbs).

## HOW TO USE THE FACILITATOR GUIDE

This is meant to be a resource to help you guide your group through a Bible-based discussion and into your prayer response time. You'll begin with a brief introduction to the topic, followed by a warmup question, often somewhat related to the topic of the study ahead. From there you'll read Scripture together, explore questions in an open conversation (remembering to practice good listening and encourage dialogue), and close with a time of prayer with one another. We end with prayer prompts that may help you tie these passages to the needs or desires of your group, and to bless what the Lord has done in your time together.

**There are likely more questions and, at times, Scripture, than your group will have time to cover.** This is by design. We would rather you have more questions than you need than too few. We advise that the facilitator review the lesson ahead of the meeting and choose a few questions they'd most like to ask, so that you can skip over some questions for the sake of time. Remember, you're meeting routinely, so there will be time to circle back on these conversations again.

Please allot appropriate time for prayer at the end of your meeting. Prayer is an essential and irreplaceable part of small group. We'd rather you abbreviate the discussion and move on to prayer rather than have a long discussion and speed through prayer. That doesn't mean you can't pray efficiently (Mat 6:7), but we believe that God hears and responds to our prayers, and that we are knitted together when we pray with each other.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Dan Kidd at [dkidd@ualc.org](mailto:dkidd@ualc.org) For more small group resources, including facilitator training, visit [ualc.org/smallgroups](http://ualc.org/smallgroups)

Special thanks to our authors: Elaine Pierce and Katie Borden.

# PARABLE OF THE DINNER GUESTS

Luke 14:15-24

## FACILITATORS:

## WEEK 1

In this 5 week series, we will be exploring several of Jesus' parables about the treasure of God's Kingdom. Parables are a form of communication that Jesus (and others in the Bible) use often. The Greek word *parabolē* literally means "putting things side by side." The Hebrew word for parable is *mashel*, and is also translated a few other ways, including "proverb", "riddle", or "taunt." The word parable is hard to define, because there are a lot of passages in the Bible identified as parables that are not like other parables. That said, when Jesus uses them, they are usually short stories which use symbols to reveal (or conceal) what Jesus is doing, how he is doing it, or a truth that God has for us. In this series, we will be reading several parables together, discussing what they might have meant to the people hearing them at that time, and how these parables might have significance in our lives, and help us to see the treasures of God's Kingdom.

## INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Sometimes Jesus teaches us what to treasure. It's wiser to store up heavenly treasures than earthly treasures. And he tells us to "seek first the Kingdom of God." But even more deeply, his parables are about what God treasures. In our summer VBS series, we will learn how God seeks and treasures people who need forgiveness, healing, and rescue—which is for all of us! Have you ever considered that God's treasure is for you?

In today's passage, we will hear a parable about a man who threw a dinner party and his invited guests all declined his invitation, so he made other plans.

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## OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What is the best meal experience you've ever had? Where were you? What did you eat? Who were you with?
- What is your go-to potluck contribution?

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## OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Lord, as we hear these parables of Jesus together, we ask that you would use these words to speak to our hearts, that we may encounter you, that we would know of and hope for the treasures of your Kingdom, and that we would witness your Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.. Amen.*

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## SCRIPTURE:

Read for the group Luke 14:1

Have someone else read Luke 14:15-24. Thank them for reading.

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## DISCUSSION:

- What prompted Jesus to tell this parable about the man throwing the banquet? What about the goings-on at this meal caught Jesus' attention?
  - Jesus is at a sabbath meal at a leading Pharisee's home. Jesus healed a man with "abnormal swelling" or "dropsy." In other instances of Jesus' healing on the sabbath this brought ire and resentment from Pharisees who forbade healing on the sabbath. Then, Jesus noticed how the guests were sitting (according to social honor) which led to the first parable. After which, in response, one of the guests says, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God."
- Why do you think the guest at the banquet responded to Jesus' first parable saying, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God?" What do you think he meant by this?
  - The tone of this guest's comment is not explicitly evident, so take time to speculate with the group. Consider with your group how you might relate to the guest. Notice that the comment leads immediately to Jesus telling another parable.
  - The comment from this guest seems like an agreement with Jesus' former point. Perhaps Jesus is agreeing with the guest and then using his comment as an opportunity to describe just how blessed those who eat bread in the kingdom truly are.
  - Alternatively, the guest may be too easily including himself among those who are certain to dine at the kingdom banquet, prompting Jesus to tell a parable about how many of the people you might expect to be at the banquet won't be.
- What do you make of the excuses the invited guests make for not attending the dinner? Do these seem like reasonable excuses to you? Why do you think excuses like those given might have caused the host to be angry?
  - You might notice that these are not altogether "bad" excuses. If a friend of yours couldn't make it to dinner because they just bought a new property, you'd likely be understanding. In fact, in the Mosaic Law a newlywed was exempt from being in the army or "any other public duty" for a year after the marriage. These are the activities of the lazy or inconsiderate. And yet, it seems that the important things they chose to attend cost them a seat at the banquet table.
- If we interpret the banquet to mean a kingdom meal, how might we be distracted from coming to eat at the table?
  - Consider that this may be a parable for great banquet after the resurrection, but it might also mean the many kingdom meals we are invited to throughout our lives—the communion and meals we are invited to share at the Lord's table with one another. What things might distract us or prevent us from these kinds of meals?

- How does the man throwing the banquet (in the parable) behave unlike what one might expect? How would you anticipate someone would react when their banquet guests declined at the time of the event?
  - We might relate to the anger of the host towards the guests and their excuses (v.21), but would most of us be inclined to then send out the invitation to just anyone we found on the streets and alleyways?
- Do you think it's significant that the host directs his servant to seek out and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame? Why do you think he might call these out specifically?
  - There seems to be a rather clear indication that Jesus intends to express that God defies the normal social orders of the day and instead seeks out the least, the last, and the lost. From an internal narrative perspective, perhaps the host has decided he would rather dine with those who would truly appreciate the feast set before them.

Remember, Jesus is telling this parable at the house of a leading Pharisee. In relation to a comment about the blessedness of eating bread in the kingdom of God, Jesus has told a parable about a host inviting the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, and anyone else who responded to the compelling request to join the banquet.

- How do you imagine the Pharisee hosting Jesus might have received this parable?
  - Given how often Jesus taught and rebuked the Pharisees about being exclusive in the perception of who was worthy of God's kingdom, this was probably a rather challenging thing to hear. It's interesting that this parable ends without commentary about how it made the hearers feel.
- Why might the idea of the least, the last, and the lost being invited to the kingdom feast make us uncomfortable?
  - Receive all answers. Encourage your group to think about how we might be inclined to exclude or write off people from God's table. Who might we be surprised to see at such a meal?
- In what ways is this broad, audacious, and compelling invitation illustrated in the parable good news for us and for others?
  - It is very good news that those who are considered lowly and less in the eyes for the world have a place and God's table.

A banquet is a familiar illustration used to describe fellowship in God's kingdom.

- Why do you think that is? In what ways is the kingdom of God like a banquet?
  - Receive all answers.
  - In the Parable of the Lost Son, the father throws a banquet to celebrate his son returning home.
  - Psalm 23 uses the image of a banquet table to describe God's peaceful provision, Isaiah promises a feast at the day of the Lord, in Revelation 19 we hear of a marriage feast of the Lamb.

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## **PRAYER AND MINISTRY:**

This week's passage we are told about a banquet that illustrates for us the nature of the Kingdom of God. Take some time to quietly reflect on what this Kingdom meal is like—what it is like to sit with the incredible variety of people who have responded to the Lord's invitation to feast. Do any faces in particular come to mind? Who are they?

We eagerly long for the full measure of God's Kingdom's treasure, but in this time and place we only receive these treasures in part. Share with one another the requests you have for the Lord, so that you might pray for them together. Take time to pray over each other.

# PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

Luke 15:1-7

## FACILITATORS:

## WEEK 2

In today's passage we're speaking again about Jesus' parables, and specifically about the parable of the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to seek, find, and rescue the one lost sheep. Pray for your group ahead of time that this parable, and the discussion around it, will lead us to have eyes to see, hearts to hear, and hearts that are moved for those who are lost, and who were lost but are not found.

## INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

This is our second week in our God's Treasure series, where we are hearing how the parables of Jesus describe and offer us hope about the wonders of God's Kingdom. As we discuss these parables together, will learn how God seeks and treasures people who need forgiveness, healing, and rescue—which is for all of us!

In today's passage we will hear a parable about a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine of their sheep to seek, find, and return one lost sheep.

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## OPENING QUESTION:

- Have you ever lost something dear to you and found it days or weeks later? Describe your search and how you felt when you found it.

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## OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Father, as we hear your Word about the shepherd seeking and rescuing the lost sheep today, we seek to encounter, to know, and to love you more. Speak to us from this passage and in our discussion with one another. Let us not only hear of your love but receive it today. Amen.*

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## SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Luke 15:1-7. Thank them for reading.



## DISCUSSION:

- Let's set the scene. Who was Jesus speaking to in this passage? What prompted him to tell this parable?
  - Both 'sinners' and tax collectors, Pharisees and teachers of the law were listening to him. This is a diverse group of people, and the Pharisees/teachers of the law held 'sinners' in contempt. They were not even trying to follow the Torah! Note that they 'muttered' about the company Jesus kept.
- What come to mind when you hear the word "sinner?" What might it have meant in the context of this story?
  - Receive all answers.
- How do cultural and societal norms influence our inclinations to worry? In what ways are we "trained" to worry about things?
  - Think with your group about how the various forms of media rely on our raising our anxieties and adding to our lists of concerns: shows and movies, advertisements, athletic competitions, news media. Each of these things, in their own way, uses concern and worry to influence us. It's no surprise that this would have a cumulative effect on us.
- Why did the Pharisees have such little respect for "sinners?"
- What did Jesus do instead of rebuking these religious leaders directly? Why did he use this approach?
  - v.3: He tells a parable. Reflect with your group the purpose of parables, remembering that often parables describe Jesus' earthly ministry and they are often meant to be opaque or riddle-like, forcing the hearers to ponder and seek to understand.
- What does a shepherd do when a sheep is lost? Will a sheep likely return to the fold on its own?
  - Adam Clarke, a British, Methodist minister who wrote in his commentary on this passage, "No creature strays more easily than a sheep; none is more heedless; and none so incapable of finding its way back to the flock, when once gone astray: it will bleat for the flock, and still run on in an opposite direction to the place where the flock is: this I have often noticed."
- In what ways are we like sheep who have wandered away from our Shepherd? What does wandering like this look like, in practical terms?
  - Consider the ways we live that indicate we've lost our way, wandered from the path of faithfulness, or we're no longer with our Shepherd or our fellow sheep.



- How did this attitude – actively looking for the lost sheep – contrast with the pharisees’ attitude toward “sinners?”
  - This is truly revolutionary. Instead of presenting ourselves to God as ‘worthy,’ God finds us and brings us to himself. The focus is on God’s work, and his timing, not our efforts to be ‘good.’ The rabbis of Jesus’ today were focused on following the law – they missed the point that God is seeking us.
- How does the shepherd bring the sheep home?
  - (v.5) Again, the sheep doesn’t come home on its own effort. The shepherd carries it home.
  - You might ask someone to read Romans 5:6 – Christ didn’t die because we were good.
- What happens when the shepherd brings the sheep home?
  - v.6
- How does heaven react when a sinner repents?
  - There is rejoicing. You might invite your group to consider what that kind of rejoicing might be like.
- If we know that heaven rejoices as often as a sinner repents, why might the church or some Christians not be so consistent or eager to celebrate the repenting of the lost?

In v.7, we’re told that there’s more celebration over the repentant person than the “ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

- Who might be considered among those righteous people who do not need to repent?
  - Often in our weekly liturgies of repentance, we quote from 1 John 1:8, “those who claim to be without sin are deceiving themselves and lack truth.” We are all sinners in need of repentance and forgiveness.
  - That said, there are those who have, for some time, lived as strangers and enemies towards God, who need to hear the Gospel that they are welcome to come home into the family of God, returned to the flock and the Shepherd where they belong. For those who have been far, we can rejoice when they are brought near again.
- Why did the religious leaders miss the point of what Jesus’ ministry was about?
- Why did Jesus choose a parable about sheep to make his point?
- Have you ever found yourself tempted to judge the “lost?” What might this parable offer us in those times of temptation?
- How might we be in danger of being like the sheep that lost its way? What practical steps can we take to avoid being lost? How can this faith community support each other in staying safe and sound?

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## **PRAYER AND MINISTRY:**

Spend some time praying for one another – this parable may lend itself to praying in smaller groups – twos or threes if your group is large. Thank God for searching for you and for giving you the gift of eternal life. Ask for forgiveness for those times that you have gone astray, and thank him for the grace and mercy that he freely gives each of us, each day.

# PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

Luke 15:11-24

## FACILITATORS:

## WEEK 3

In this discussion guide your group will hear the parable of the lost son, or the father of two sons. This parable follows the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin, so you may take a moment to remember with your group some of the things that came from that previous discussion. We also begin the discussion by reflecting back on vv.1-2 to set the narrative stage. You might read vv.1-2 prior to having someone read vv.11-24.

## INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

This week we will continue to hear about the incredible treasures of God's Kingdom through the parables of Jesus. This week's parable is likely to be a familiar one: the parable of the prodigal or lost son, or the of the father of two sons. In this rich, beautiful story we will witness together how the father of these two sons loves his children and celebrates in profound honor his lost son's homecoming.

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## OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever purchased something that, on reflection, you came to regret? What led you to that purchase to begin with, and why did you come to regret it?
  - Can you recall a time when you attended or witnessed an event where someone was being honored? What was that experience like? Do any details or portions stand out in your memory?
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## OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Father in Heaven, as we read and discuss together this parable from Jesus, give us ears to hear and hearts to receive your word to us today. Let us know you as our Father and know ourselves as your beloved children, so that we would again receive your grace, your love, and join in every homecoming celebration alongside you. Amen.*

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## SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Luke 15:11-24. Thank them for reading.

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## DISCUSSION:

At the beginning of the chapter (Luke 15) we're told that "all the tax collectors and sinners" (NRSV) came near to Jesus to listen to him.

- What does it tell us about Jesus and his ministry that tax collectors and sinners all came hear him?
  - It seems clear that he has a reputation or track record of saying things that sinners and tax-collectors might want to hear. This also implies that they felt welcome to come and be with him.

In Luke 15:2, we hear that the Pharisees and law-teachers were muttering their disapproval of Jesus welcoming and even eating with sinners.

- Why do you think the Pharisees and law-teachers may have been so displeased with Jesus keeping this company? In what ways might Christians today be tempted to respond similarly?
  - Self-righteousness can be an alluring trap to fall into. On the one hand, we can be so prideful that we are blind to our sinfulness, or the depths of it. On the other hand, we can be so self-conscious or ashamed of our sinfulness that we sooth our wounds by comparing ourselves to others we deem "worse."
  - To some degree, the company we keep will have an influence on us. It is, for instance, unwise for Christians to not have close and meaningful friendships with fellow Christians who mutually shape us to be more like Christ. But, there is a true danger in keeping to a "holy huddle" where we withhold our friendship, love, and care for the many around us who are not Jesus-followers. And especially when we hold a spirit of condemnation towards others.
- Turning now to the parable, what might have motivated the younger son to ask his father for his inheritance rather than continuing to live in his father's house? Do you relate to the decision of the younger son at all?
  - It's likely that we can relate to the sentiments of this son. In our own culture, it is routine and expected that young adults would leave their parents' house and make a life and living on their own. Though, within the parable we can gather the sense that this was not what was wise for the son or what the father wanted.
  - You might consider with your group to what end our individualistic, trailblazing mindset can serve us and how it might harm us. How do the trailblazers among us mitigate foolishness?
- How do you imagine the father might have felt when hearing this request from his son?

In this parable, Jesus chooses to use an example of a man who "squandered his wealth in wild living," rather than using the example of someone who lived as wisely as he could but came on hard times during the time of famine.

- Why do you think Jesus chose the example of a man who lived foolishly rather than a man who lived wisely but came into unexpected hardship?

Eventually, the young man came to a point where he determined he would return to his father. Jesus describes that as a moment where he “came to his senses” (NIV) or “came to himself” (NRSV).

- What might it mean for someone to “come to their senses” or “come to themselves?” Have you ever had a moment like this?
- What factors might lead someone to come to themselves?
  - The phrase “came to himself” might be particularly helpful, as it begins with the premise that the person this young man truly was and was intended to be had been lost, but upon disaster, his eyes were open to distance between where he was and what he was doing and the “true self” he’d abandoned. This might help us think that our true and rightful place—for which we were created—is with and under the care of the Lord, living as God’s children and beloved.
- How did the son expect to be treated by his father upon his homecoming? Do you think the father’s response surprised him?
  - Consider what might have led to the son not anticipating his father’s response. Discuss what might have led the son to misjudge or underestimate his father’s affections and mercy for his son.
- What thoughts, fears, or emotions might have prevented the son from returning home?
  - Consider all the ways the son may have felt judged by or severed from his father, and the shame and dishonor he must have felt even at the time of his greatest need.
- What do you think the father meant by saying that his son “was dead and is alive again?”
- Why did the older brother respond in anger upon hearing that their father was throwing a feast to celebrate the return of his younger brother? Why didn’t the brother instinctively join in the celebration?
  - The older son expresses resentment that he’s remained faithful to his father and worked for him “like a slave” (which we might question the accuracy of). He seems to expect a different response to the younger son from the father. And the older son accuses the father of favoritism, withholding a goat from him while slaughtering one for his brother.

It’s reasonable to infer that Jesus means for the Pharisees and law-teachers, who were grumbling over his eating with tax-collectors and sinners, to relate to the older brother in this story. Which means that the father’s words to the older son could be understood as the Father’s words to the Pharisees and law-teachers.

- How might the Pharisees and scribes receive the words “you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours?” How might the religious leaders at the time treated Jesus and his company of sinners differently if they had known and believed these words from the father to his elder son?
  - In many ways the reasons the older son was bitter about the father’s response to the younger son stemmed from the same soil as the religious leaders’. Whether it was self-righteousness, jealousy, resentment, mercilessness, or a combination of those, they, like the older son, didn’t appreciate the value of a life lived with and cared for by Father. Had they embraced that good fortune, they could

join the father in celebration of the homecoming of the lost.

- In what ways, practically speaking, can rejoice alongside the Father over the homecoming of lost children? What barriers or temptations stand in our way from celebrating this?
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## **PRAYER AND MINISTRY:**

Take time to prayerfully meditate on these questions:

How have I received the mercy and love of the Father? Was it lately? When?

How have I seen the mercy and restoration of the Lord at work in those around me lately? How have I seen you, God, welcoming your children home again?

Spend time sharing what came to mind. Pray thanksgiving over the ways the Lord is drawing us back to himself, and pray that this invitation will be heard, that we and others will continue to come to ourselves and return to the Oasis of the Father's house.

# PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25-37

## FACILITATORS:

## WEEK 4

This parable of Jesus, like others we are studying in this series, points to the Kingdom of God, but also sets before us an example of how to live; which may be unsettling for those deeply steeped in the Lutheran understanding that we are “saved by grace through faith alone.” This is true, and Jesus’ parables should never be seen as demanding works that earn salvation. Rather, they point to our desperate need for our salvation. Klyne Snodgrass has laid out more information on this and other parables in his work “Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus,” which could be helpful for further study. If group members are disheartened by the example set in this parable, be sure to circle back and highlight the Gospel news: that Christ has done all the work for us, knowing that we could never accomplish what is required.

## INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

This week, we will be exploring the parable famously known as “The Good Samaritan.” While this may be one of Jesus’ most well-known parables, impacting even our secular society with the implementation of “Good Samaritan laws” and such, the depth and complexity of the puzzle that is this parable is not so often comprehensively explored, nor is the connection to the Kingdom of God so evident in society at large. We will explore this parable today and seek the treasure that awaits us in Jesus’ words of life found in Luke 10.

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## OPENING QUESTION:

- Have you ever had a neighbor do something unexpectedly kind for you? (Perhaps they lent you a tool, watched your kids last-minute, or mowed your yard for you in a time of need?) How was that experience?

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## OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to gather as your children in your presence today. Holy Spirit, as we read your Word today, open our eyes to the truth of your Kingdom, your grace, and your love for us expressed in Jesus Christ. We come with expectant hearts and eager minds to learn and be enlivened by your good news. Amen.*

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## SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Luke 10:25-37. Thank them for reading.



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## DISCUSSION:

Consider re-reading vv.26-29.

- Why do you suppose the teacher of the law wanted to justify himself after he “answered correctly?”
  - It is likely that the teacher of the law was interested in less than saving faith; that is, he wanted to seek “works-righteousness”, a manner of earning purity and salvation in God’s eyes, rather than allowing the saving work of God to enliven his life and enter a relationship with Jesus as Lord and King. Thus, it is likely that he wanted to know “just how far” he had to go to “check the box,” rather than seek Jesus and his neighbor in love. Thus, he was revealing his own lack of love
- In vv.31-32, what do you suppose is the significance of a priest and a Levite passing by the man in need?
  - As Jesus often does in parables, he challenges our preconceived notions of “the way things are” and upends our expectations. Thus, the religious leaders of the day were presented as falling short of loving the one in need. In this way, Jesus challenges his hearers’ (and our) notion that religious leaders are by default “moral exemplars” simply by their title. If they have not love (1 Cor 13:1), their title and status is irrelevant.
- What do you suppose the significance of a Samaritan taking pity on the man (v.33) and acting toward him in love was for the original Jewish hearers?
  - Samaritans were seen in Jewish eyes as impure because their heritage dates back to the intermarrying of the Jewish people with people groups that were seen to be not God’s chosen. Therefore, they were considered repulsive to the Jewish community (perhaps how many in Columbus view residents of Ann Arbor).

Consider for a moment a person with whom you may have had a falling out, or someone who is not in your good graces—a person that would cause you to have to “work really hard” to be kind to.

- As you read about the Samaritan’s actions toward the man left for dead (vv.34-35). What kinds of emotions do you experience as you read this passage and imagine helping the person you have in mind?
  - Answers will vary, but it’s likely that many experience a range of uncomfortable emotions.
- How do you imagine the teacher of the law received this parable from Jesus? What thoughts do you imagine he had in response?
  - Answers will vary, but it is likely that similar uncomfortable emotions may arise. Or, your group may feel like they are sufficiently obeying this directive. If that’s the case, consider pressing in a bit to open us to see where we are still missing the mark.

- How do we reconcile Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves (v.27; Mark 12:29-31) as the way to inherit eternal life (v.25) with the doctrine that we are saved by grace through faith and not by our works (Ephesians 2:8-9)?
  - This is an example of the difference in the function of the Law and the Gospel. The Law is the way of God as he intends the world to be, and the commands given to us to uphold the world as it should be, in the way that honors God and gives him his due glory. One of the functions of the Law is to reveal to us how truly incapable we are to keep it.
  - In this parable, Jesus is upending the Jewish preconceived boundaries of the Law to demonstrate just how impossible it is to rightly keep the Law and adequately give God the glory he is due (and therefore earn our salvation). The good news in this is that the Law, when it functions this way, drives us to know our need for the Gospel, the saving news that Jesus Christ is Lord and has brought us into life with God through his life, death, and resurrection. It is not by anything that we do that we are saved; rather, by revealing the full extent of the Law, we are once again brought to the realization of our need for our Savior
- Does our need for a Savior eliminate the need to act in love toward our neighbor? If Jesus knows that we are incapable of doing so, why say "go and do likewise?"
  - The Holy Spirit, by faith, enlivens our hearts to desire to live more like Jesus and do good, loving the world around us—even the "unlovable." While we may never be able to completely and perfectly "go and do likewise," the work of the Holy Spirit enables us to live more and more in the Kingdom ethic Jesus portrays in this parable.
- How have you seen someone acting out in surprising or sacrificial love?
  - Facilitator, you might follow Jesus' lead and give an unexpected example, perhaps someone who is not a Jesus-follower who you've seen love well.
- What factors do you think led that person to love in this way?
- How else might we see Jesus and his Kingdom revealed in this parable?
  - Answers may vary. However, it is worth noting that, though the parable does not center around a salvation allegory, we might see the way of Jesus in the actions of the Good Samaritan: he comes to the aid of one who is unable to help himself; he heals and restores; he does so at great self-sacrifice; he demonstrates supernatural love.
  - We can do nothing but receive his love, and then once enlivened, live in the way of our Savior.

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## **PRAYER AND MINISTRY:**

Prayerfully reflect on the following.

What lessons have you learned, or are you learning, from Jesus in this season?

How can we as your small group pray for you in this seasonal lesson, and encourage you in this stage of your journey, led by the Holy Spirit?

Take time to pray for each other regarding what was shared. Ask the Lord to continue to bring new life, through Jesus, in each group member.

# PARABLES OF TREASURES

## Matthew 13:44-52

### FACILITATORS:

### WEEK 5

In this concluding discussion of our series, we will read a series of four short parables that have to do with what the kingdom of heaven is like. You might consider having different people in your group read a parable at a time, or, because this is a shorter passage, read it multiple times from different translations.

### INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> and final discussion in our God's Treasure series. Over these past few weeks we've heard several of Jesus' parables about the nature and treasures of God's Kingdom. In today's passage, we will hear a series of short parables that begin with the phrase "the kingdom of heaven is like." Jesus used these parables to describe just how bountiful and valuable the Kingdom is and invite his hearers to know about this Kingdom and put our hope in it.

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### OPENING QUESTION:

- What is something you always keep in your car or on your person as a "just in case" item?
- If you were given the money (no strings attached) to purchase one item at any cost, what would you buy?

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### OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Lord, as we hear these parables today, we ask that you give us ears to hear what you would tell us about the kingdom of heaven. Give us, in our discussion, a vision of your Kingdom that we would count as valuable treasure, worthy of seeking. Enable us, God, to make you our King, that we would continue to inherit the trove of heavenly riches that you so generously provide.*

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### SCRIPTURE:

Have someone, or a few people, read Matthew 13:44-52. Thank them for reading.

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### DISCUSSION:

- Why does Jesus use parables to describe the kingdom of heaven?

- In Mt 13:10, the disciples ask Jesus this very question, and he responds somewhat cryptically, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them [...] ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.’”
  - Jesus seems to intend that parables both shed light on his subject, and confuse and confound some of his hearers. It’s been speculated that one of the reasons for this is that Jesus wants his disciples to “press in” and grapple with content of these parables, and also to seek the Lord to understand them.
- **Beginning with the first in this series of parables, do you think the man who found the hidden treasure in the field acted appropriately? Would you have acted the same?**
    - Certainly we’re to believe the treasure was valuable enough to him to justify selling “all he had,” as radical of an action as that was. Imagine with your group what it might be like to sell “everything” in order to buy a field with a significant treasure buried in it. What kind of treasure would be required for that response?

We are told that it is in response to his joy that he sold everything and purchased the field and treasure.

- **Can you imagine what it might have felt like to have discovered such a valuable treasure? What emotions do you imagine you might feel? How might you share the news of this with your loved ones or close friends?**
- **What does Jesus mean when he speaks about the kingdom of heaven as though it’s something valuable to be found? What is the kingdom of heaven in this context?**
  - Broadly and simply speaking, the Kingdom of God is anywhere and everywhere the Lord is King.
  - Theologian and author Howard A. Snyder writes about 8 “models of the kingdom,” including the kingdom as a future hope, as an inner spiritual experience, as an institutional church, as a political state, and as an earthly [elusive] utopia.
  - However we might categorize the natures of the kingdom, it is safe to say that in the case of these parables, we are not *only* talking about the kingdom of heaven in future terms (the paradise of the new heaven and new earth), but about things also in the present—like the fruit and gifts of the Spirit and how that changes us and the world around us.

Next, we’re told a parable of that the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls, and upon finding one of “great value” he too sold everything he to purchase it. Unlike in the former parable, in this parable it’s clear that merchant was actively looking for a valuable pearl.

- **How do we see people “discovering” the kingdom of heaven both by actively seeking it out and by being surprised by it?**
  - Discuss with your group the different ways we and others come to find and embrace God’s kingship, in various aspects of our lives.

The parable of the fishermen’s net stands out in this series, as it is the only one that doesn’t speak directly about treasure, and Jesus describes an event at the “day of the Lord” where angels will sort out the

wicked from the righteous and discard them into a blazing furnace like bad fish.

- Why do you think this parable appears among the others? What does this parable share with the others?
  - First and perhaps most obvious, this too is a parable that begins with the phrase “the kingdom of heaven is like.” It might also be worth considering that a fundamental feature of the Kingdom is that it is valuable in its distinction. For those suffering because of others, a promise of a time and place where that suffering will be no more, and those causing suffering will no longer plague them, is a significant part of what makes the future Kingdom so prized a possession.
  - This is also a sober reminder that those who purchased the treasure made a choice in response to that treasure, because they saw its value. This may serve as a warning about the mistake of undervaluing the kingdom.

In the final parable of this passage, we “*Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.*” Part of Jesus’ Kingdom ministry was to honor, restate, and fulfill the things of the Old Testament. Hence why the New Testament authors, and Jesus, so frequently quote, allude to, and build upon Scripture.

- Why is the whole counsel of the Bible, Old and New Testament, valuable to us?
  - Knowing the history of God’s people and their relationships with God, one another, and God’s creation, are vital context for the ministry of Jesus. For instance, knowing that God created a world without death helps us understand why resurrection is a restoration of what was meant to be. Knowing how humanity has turned from the Lord over and over again, pursuing what is right in their own eyes, is crucial to appreciating the marked difference walking in the Spirit makes.
  - And so, a teacher who knows their whole Bible can offer the gift of old and new(er) treasures to the body.

In the first two parables Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a treasure of great worth. Over the last weeks we’ve discussed features of the Kingdom, and its value.

- Why is it that we sometimes treat the Kingdom as something less than a treasure to sell everything for? What might distract or tempt us away from the Kingdom?
  - Receive all answers.
  - Part of this could be that we do not appreciate what we cannot immediately see. A significant part of the treasures of the Kingdom are future hopes—the new heaven and the new earth, but also the eventual fruit of gradually walking faithfully in the Holy Spirit. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” We can, because of the work of God in the world, believe that justice, God’s peace and restoration, will come, but that it is rarely immediate. And so, we cling to things more immediate and self-serving. We may also struggle to recognize that God’s treasure is meant to be shared, which means that we cannot hoard it for ourselves.
- What might it look like for us to embrace God’s Kingdom as the treasure that it is?

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## PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Since the Kingdom is a major theme in today's parables, consider leading the group in the Lord's prayer, with a particular emphasis on the highlighted portion below:

*Our Father, who art in heaven  
Hallowed be thy Name.  
**Thy Kingdom come.  
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive them that trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
The power, and the glory, Forever and ever. Amen.*

Take a few moments prayerfully reflecting on ways that you would like to see God's Kingdom come in this time and place. What things would you like the Lord to heal, restore, reconcile? Share the things that come to mind with the group, and pray for one another, that the Lord would make these particular things of earth like they are in Heaven.