

Small Group Guide PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

March 11, 2012

Matthew 13:1-52

This guide is a tool to help you lead your group into spiritual transformation. Use it as a resource to train your group into potential disciple-makers and lead your group in discovering, owning, and applying the truths of God's Word. There may be aspects you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on an aspect of their relationship with God. Your role is to help facilitate this encounter with God in His Word with His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

Relate . . .

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

***Welcome**—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.*

***Review**—a time to review the truths discussed last week and report on how members have had success or frustrations in applying those truths during the week. (The leader will want to provide encouragement and shepherding during this time.) Periodically, the leader will also want to review the gospel and allow members to share reports about opportunities they've had to share the gospel. Occasionally, the leader will want to review the vision for the group and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.*

***Prayer**—a time of general prayer with the whole group praying for struggles regarding the application of truths, for those with whom the group is sharing the gospel, and for understanding of today's truths.*

Reflect . . .

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications for our lives. (As a training tool, leaders might want to have various members summarize the teachings in their own words each week sharing how they think the Scripture applied to the original hearers and how the principles apply to us today.)

Message Outline

Four Questions...

- **What is a parable?**
 - **A practical story, often framed as a simile, that illustrates spiritual truth.**
- **How do we understand parables?**
 - **Listen from the hearer's perspective, look for the main point, and then let the truth change your perception.**
- **Why do we have parables?**
 - **Jesus was revealing truth to those who were believing the mysterious.**
 - **This was evidence of God's mercy.**
 - **Jesus was concealing truth from those who were denying the obvious.**
 - **This was evidence of God's judgment.**
- **What is the kingdom of heaven?**
 - **The redemptive rule or reign of God in Christ.**
 - **A present reality: The King is here, and His kingdom is advancing.**
 - **A future realization: The King is coming back, and His kingdom will be complete.**

Eight Parables...

- **The parable of the sower...**

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- The sower is the Son of Man and the seed is the message of salvation.
- The soil is the human heart.
 - The hard heart.
 - The superficial heart.
 - The divided heart.
 - The fruitful heart.
- The parable of the weeds and net...
 - The weeds...
 - The good seed represents true believers.
 - The weeds represent counterfeit believers.
 - The harvest represents future judgment.
 - A day of terrifying condemnation for the wicked.
 - A day of triumphant celebration for the righteous.
 - The net...
 - Coming judgment is inevitable.
 - Coming wrath is unimaginable.
- The parables of the mustard seed and leaven...
 - Outwardly, the kingdom grows from an insignificant beginning to an extravagant end.
 - Inwardly, the kingdom permeates every facet of our lives and every corner of the earth.
- The parables of the treasure and pearl...
 - The kingdom of heaven is something worth losing everything for.
 - We joyfully let go of all things in order to passionately take hold of one thing.
- The parable of the homeowner...
 - The disciple's treasure: We have seen the secrets of the old covenant revealed in the new covenant!
 - The disciple's task: We now proclaim the good news of the kingdom to every person and people group on the planet!

Two Applications...

- Humbly and joyfully receive the message of the kingdom.
- Confidently and urgently spread the message of the kingdom.

Message Summary

When a very large crowd approached Jesus, he drifted out in a boat on the lake and began to teach them about the kingdom of heaven through the use of parables—a practical story that illustrates spiritual truth. When his disciples inquired as to why he was teaching the curious crowd with seemingly confusing stories, Jesus responded that the parables revealed God's truth, by God's mercy, to those who believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the Messiah. To those who rejected God's truth about Christ, the parables continued to hide the truth as part of God's judgment for their denial. Jesus taught his disciples about the kingdom as both a warning of judgment, an encouragement to his followers, and a challenge to his followers. The kingdom of heaven can be understood most basically as God showing his sovereign rule and authority in redeeming sinners through Christ. As such, the kingdom is both present and future—God's kingdom is advancing now but will be made complete at the second coming of Christ. Therefore, unbelievers should tremble at the sure and coming judgment; believers must respond to God's grace with humility; and believers must continue to spread the message of the kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Group Discussion

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Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- In the parable of the sower, Jesus explained that the sower was Christ, the seed was the message of salvation, and the soil was the human heart. What was the different variable in each of the four circumstances?
- What does this variable reveal about the cause of the different outcomes? What does it reveal about the Christ and the Word?
- How can we tell which soil best represents our own hearts?
- What can we do to prepare our hearts for God to make them soft and receptive? How can we do the same in the lives of our families?
- How does this parable encourage us to continue sowing seeds of salvation even when we are discouraged?
- Thinking about the parables of the weeds and net, how should we respond to the truth that many people are deceived in their own beliefs that they are followers of Christ?
- Why is it so easy in our North American culture to pretend to be Christians? How do we as a community contribute to this dangerous culture?
- What does it reveal about our hearts if we are unmoved by the reality of impending and terrifying condemnation for those who do not know Christ at judgment?
- What aspects of our lives can we evaluate to determine if we are counterfeit believers (unbelievers)?
- In the parables of the mustard seed and leaven, items that were small and seemingly insignificant made huge impacts in the world. Thinking about how leaven affects an entire piece of dough, how should the kingdom of heaven affect our lives?
- How does society today often compartmentalize spirituality in our lives? Why do people think that spirituality should be confined to an individual's private life?
- What does keeping our beliefs private reveal about the impact that we are allowing Christ to make in our lives?
- How can we be respectful of others and specific laws while still being a part of advancing the kingdom of heaven? What kind of response can we expect from living this way?
- What did Jesus' parables about the treasure and pearl indicate about the importance of the kingdom of heaven?
- Considering the scribe's responsibility to teach in the parable of the homeowner, how does that inform our role in the kingdom?

Respond . . .

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of today's study. These groups will share with one another based on the following questions and then close in prayer:

- What are some of the main truths that God wants you to know from this study?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from this study, what does God want you to desire/value?
- How do your values need to change to align with His values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this study?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?
- What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength to apply these truths, for personal needs, for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel, and for our weekly prayer focus as a church..

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Weekly Prayer Focus ... (from our worship guide)

- *Pray for our lives: As we look this Sunday at Matthew 13, we will see Jesus begin using parables to appeal to what people know in ordinary life in order to communicate the truths he wants to teach in the spiritual life. In this series of parables, Jesus explains the course of the gospel in the world and the spiritual course of the kingdom of heaven in this present age. Pray that as people hear these parables through preaching that the kingdom of heaven would be established in their hearts. Pray that God would give us grace to live according to his ways as revealed in the parables. Pray that God would help us also to use illustrations from ordinary life to communicate spiritual truths to those around us.*
- *Pray for our city: This week we are praying for Bethel Baptist church, Thomas Wilder, Pastor. We are also praying for the ministry of Truth in Love led by Mark Shaw, one of Brook Hills' members. Truth in Love (www.histruthinlove.com) is a ministry to the Body of Christ through the local church that provides biblical counseling and training at several locations in Birmingham. Truth in Love serves hurting people, including individuals, married couples, children, teens, and families.*
- *Pray for our world: This week we are praying for Brook Hills' field partners Brian and Sara Beth G. serving East Asia. They have served in East Asia for over 10 years as small business owners running an adventure travel company. This company helps them employ and engage locals in their city as well as facilitate exposure to outsiders in this area of the world. The business gives them access and integration into the lives of one of the largest unreached people groups in East Asia. Brian and Sara Beth are key partners for our East Asian Church Planting team and host short-term teams from Brook Hills.*