

Four Parables of Jesus

Included in this packet are materials for a series of four lessons on the Parables of Jesus. The leader's guide is included first, followed by student sheets that may be utilized. It is our intention that you find these materials useful for your ministry context. As always, please review the lesson thoroughly before each session.

Leader's Guide

Session One: The Runaway

Group Warm-up: Have everyone complete the statement "I feel most like leaving home when. . ."

In the Word: The parables lend themselves to dramatic interpretations. Your approach will be determined by the size and interest of your group. With minimal effort, a very effective short play using Luke 15:11-31 as its base can be done. With no effort at all, the passage can be read dramatically by assigning parts of narrator, younger son, older son, father. The emphasis should be on having fun with the story so that the feelings of the characters emerge.

Section A: Divide the larger group into three smaller groups. Assign each group one character from the story (father, younger son, older son). Have them as a group to discuss the possible feelings of that character.

Section B: The multiple-choice responses can be an effective tool in helping the students evaluate where they are spiritually. Encourage an atmosphere of openness and honesty. Set the pace by being the first to share.

Section C: Discuss this question only if time permits.

Section D: Use the questions in this section for group discussion. Remind your students that the older son, in the end, was farthest from really being home even though he never left.

Closing: Close your session with prayer for one another that we may all be continually moving into the open arms of God.

Session Two: Forgiving

Group warm-up: Have each person in your group complete the phrase: “The best thing about my week so far is . . .”

In the Word: Have someone read Matthew 18:21-35.

Section A: Discuss the reasons that may have prompted Peter to ask his question.

Section B: Explain that a parable often contains symbolism. Have them identify the various elements of the parable. Here are the correct answers:

- King: God
- Servant: US
- 10,000 talents: Our need of forgiveness before God
- Releasing the debt: God’s forgiveness
- Fellow servant: Those who offend us
- 100 denarii: Their need of our forgiveness

Draw out of the group that God has forgiven us at such great personal sacrifice, through the Cross. Our forgiveness of others is small in comparison.

Section C: Allow plenty of time for the students to write their response. This is the crux of the whole lesson. Allow each person to share, beginning with yourself. Do not force anyone to share.

Closing: Use the questions of Section D to lead into a prayer time of seeking God’s strength to forgive others and remove hindrances from our relationships.

Session Three: Plant Those Seeds

Group Warm-up: Ask the students a few “Would You Rather?” questions:

- Would you rather live the life of a cat or live the life of a dog?
- Would you rather be considered good-looking or be considered a good person?
- Would you rather have a pet monkey or have a pet seal?
- Would you rather live the rest of your life with no teeth or live the rest of your life with the hic-ups?
- Would you rather have the ability to fly or have the ability to become invisible?

In the Word: Have someone read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23. This parable could lend itself to an art activity. Divide into four groups: the birds, the rocks and sun, the weeds, and the growing plants. Using four long strips of wide butcher paper, have each group draw their section of the parable. Once completed, have each group put their picture on the wall with masking tape.

Section A: Use the responses of this section by having students label the pictures with their responses.

Section B: Use James 1:22-25 to help students evaluate their openness to God’s Word and to what they understand. This is a great opportunity for you as a leader to share your own personal spiritual journey...your own steps of obedience.

Closing: Spend time with your students in prayer. Invite a few to pray for the group and for individual needs that were discussed.

Session Four: Pass the Mustard

Group Warm-up: Divide the group into pairs. One person is the observer and the other person is the transformer. Have the observer study the transformer for a few seconds, then turn their back or shut their eyes and have the transformer change something about their appearance, remove glasses, button top button, etc. then have the observer see if they can determine what has been changed. Reverse roles and do it again.

In the Word: Have someone read Matthew 13:31-32. Discuss their responses to sections A and B. then have each one complete this statement: "The person, outside of Jesus, who has made a real difference in my life is..." Set the pace by being the first to share.

Section C: Before you do section C, have them share their positive differences with each other.

Closing: Memorize as a group Romans 12:2. One way to do it is to memorize the verse in sections. Going in a circle, have each person say one word from the verse. Eugene Peterson's The Message paraphrase may be a good version to use for memorization.

Session One: The Runaway

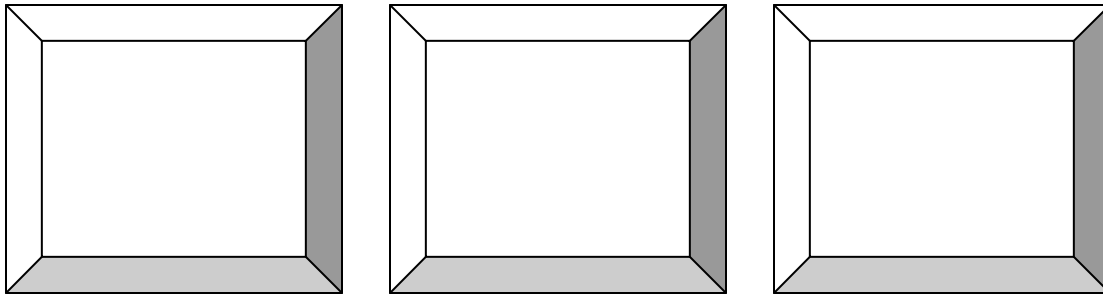
Luke 15:11-31

I guess at some point in our childhood all of us have loaded our prized possessions in our little red wagon and left home. Personally, I never got further than the edge of our rather large front lawn. I would turn and see my dad standing on the front porch. I would run back into his arms and realize that I really did want to stay home.

As I've grown older, I have had many homes. But in my heart, that green two-story house on Fourth Street will always be home-home, that place where I can go back and retrace the hours of warmth and love.

Jesus tells us a story about a runaway that finds his way home-home. Take time to read that parable right now: Luke 15:11-31.

- A. In the three boxes below list the three main characters in this story and write a brief description of the various feelings that they must have felt:

Three empty rectangular boxes with a double-line border and a shaded right and bottom edge, intended for students to write the names of the three main characters and a brief description of their feelings.

- B. Right now I feel most like:

- The prodigal son in the far country... away from God but having a good time
- The prodigal son when he was knee-deep in pig manure...very far from God.
- The prodigal son on the road home... growing closer to God
- The prodigal son in the arms of his father...very close to God
- The older brother...I've kept all the rules but I'm not close to God

- C. In your own words, what keeps people from running into the open arms of a forgiving Heavenly Father?

- D. In looking at the response of the older brother (vv. 25-30), what made him the angriest? Were his feelings justified? (See vv. 31-32.) What are the dangers of keeping the rules...playing the nice guy or girl without a personal relationship with the Father?

Other Scriptures for reflection: 2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2, Romans 8:35-39, Luke 15:1-7

Session Two: Forgiving

Matthew 18:21-35

- A. Read Matthew 18:21-35. Why do you think Peter asked this question?
- B. Parables often have symbolic material. Write out what you think each element of the parable represents.

In the Parable, the _____ represents:

- King
- Servant
- 10,000 talents
- Releasing the debt
- Fellow servant
- 100 denarii

C. Right now I find it hard to forgive _____. Because . . .

D. A big mistake that we often make is to think that we can punish someone by withholding our forgiveness. The only person we punish is ourselves. An unforgiving spirit in our life produces an inner anger that could eventually destroy us. Read Ephesians 4:32. Who has set an example in forgiving?

Forgiving means to not allow anything to hinder a relationship

Respond:

- The thing that could be hindering my relationship with God is...

- The thing that could be hindering my relationship with others is...

Yes, with God's help, I will seek to forgive others unconditionally just like God forgives me!

Session Three: Plant Those Seeds

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

A. Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23. Oftentimes God's Word comes into our lives... a sermon, a Sunday school lesson, our personal devotions... and our heart response is like the various soils that Jesus mentions. Complete the following:

- The seed-snatchers in my life right now are...
- My response to God's Word is short lived when...
- Right now some things that demand all of my time are...
- The last time I really understood and obeyed God's Word, the result was...

B. Read James 1:22-25

Right now in my life I'm...

- Not hearing the Word and not obeying
- Hearing the Word but not obeying
- Hearing the Word and obeying

The areas where it's hardest for me to obey God's Word are...

- In my family life
- At school
- With friends
- _____

Spend time in prayer asking God for strength to become an obedient Jesus-follower

Session Four: Pass the Mustard

Luke 13:31-32

When I read the parable of the mustard seed, I immediately think of mustard seed faith. While that is a good topic (and Jesus did talk about it) in this parable, He is illustrating something different. He is talking about small beginnings. God's plan for mankind did not start out as a giant promotional campaign. Throughout history, it has been one person who is faithfully following God that makes a difference. Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Mary. And it has been Jesus who has made the ultimate difference! The accumulative effect of individual obedience has been the growing of God's Kingdom. You can make a difference... person to person.

- A. I have been waiting to make a difference because...

- B. The difference I would like to make is...

- C. The parable of the leaven (v. 32) is tricky because Jesus has used leaven in a bad sense: "A little leaven spoils the whole lump." But in this parable He is using it in a good sense. The point of the story is that as Christians encounter society, transformation (often unseen) takes place.

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your effectiveness in transforming those around you:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Read and memorize Romans 12:2:

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."