

JESUS-CENTERED LIFE

Week 2: Jesus and His Parables

This includes:

1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson you'll help your students explore and understand better some of Jesus' parables, ultimately learning what his "family values" are like through them. Jesus told two kinds of parables. The first kind is designed to help us understand what the kingdom of God, his "hometown," is really like. The second kind is designed to help us understand what God is really like. When we pay much closer attention to the stories Jesus told about who he is and where he's from, we "unlock" his character and personality.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. WHAT: Students will consider the meaning behind Jesus' parables, and how these stories show us what he's really like.
2. WHY: Because Jesus hails from "a far country," it's hard for us to grasp how "other" he really is—that's why he told us stories that would help us understand him.
3. HOW: Your students will tell about their own "family stories" and learn how Jesus' "family stories" reveal who he is.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 13:10-13

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 55:8; Matthew 9:10-13; 13:24-52; Luke 7:40-47; 15:3-32

TEACHING PREP

The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you'll definitely want to refer to it as you lead.



Read Matthew 13:10-13.



Jesus plants parables, like seeds, in our hearts so that insights into his character and his kingdom slowly sink in for us. Think of Jesus as if he was a guest in your home from a distant country (actually, he is!). What if the culture your guest comes from is so different from your own that it's hard to explain that culture in ways you'd quickly understand? So, what if that guest told you stories about his culture that would help you get a flavor for what life is like there?

Well, this is what Jesus is doing when he tells his parables. We all need the special help of parables to understand a God who is more glorious and amazing than our natural understanding can comprehend. But we'll have to dig deep into his parables to "mine" the gold that is in them.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

Text Message Questions

We've provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- What can you learn about a person when you understand what life is like in their "hometown"? Come to small group to learn about Jesus' hometown.
- Ready to unlock a mystery? Come see how Jesus uses parables to help us understand who he is, and why he says and does things so differently.

Parent Email

We've provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We're in the second week of our six-week study that's focused on answering the question Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" In this lesson, we drilled deep into the parables Jesus told, to understand better what the "values" of his "family" are like (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and to understand better the character and personality of God.



As you go throughout the week, help reinforce this lesson in your child's life by using these questions to fuel conversation as you have the opportunity.

- What do Jesus' parables reveal about his "family values"?
- What do Jesus' parables reveal about who God is?

Thanks for all your prayers for our small group ministry. Have a great week!



JESUS-CENTERED LIFE

Week 2:
Jesus and His Parables

2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then jump into today's lesson.



If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you'd like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING GUIDE



The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen are (1) Jesus and his “family values,” (2) The kingdom of God is like..., and (3) God is like....



Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Matthew 13:10-13 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so everyone has a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *In this lesson we'll dive into the parables of Jesus. We want to go beyond just discovering their meaning to understanding why Jesus told so many of these stories. Take a couple of minutes to ask God to bring to mind a story—a specific story—that's a good example of what it was like to grow up in your home when you were little. For example, maybe the story of a specific family vacation would tell a stranger everything he needs to know about your family. Don't work too hard on this. Once you think of a story, write a few words or sentences to describe it. [Wait a couple of minutes while kids think and write.] Now take a few minutes to ask God to bring to mind a story—a specific story—that captures the essence of either your father or mother. For example, what did your father do every day when he came home from work? Write a few words or sentences to describe this story.*



After a couple of minutes, have students each find a partner and then share both stories—about growing up in their families, and about one of their parents. Have one partner tell both stories first, then switch. Tell them that if one finishes before you say time is up, the partner should ask follow-up questions. After two minutes or so, tell partners to switch. After another two minutes or so, get their attention. Ask for a volunteer to share his or her two stories with the whole group. Then pursue that person's story by asking questions that illuminate the value system, habits, practices, priorities, and driving force of the person's family. Here are some examples; you don't need to ask all of these...

ASK:

- *What values were very important to your family?*
- *How did you see those values lived out in your family?*
- *Looking back at the way your parents made choices with their time, what was most important to them?*
- *How did the values your parents expressed agree or disagree with their actual life choices?*
- *How did your parents express love in your home? Was it generally conditional or unconditional? Why would you say that?*

1. Jesus and his “family values”

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Just as you told stories about your home and about a parent, Jesus also told stories about his Father and about life in his family. These stories are called parables. Jesus told 55 parables—they make up a large percentage of his “teaching.” If you collect all the parables together, almost all of them answer one (or both) of these questions:*

- *Who is God?*
- *What is life like in God's kingdom (his home)?*

Jesus' Father's name is Yahweh. His “home” is called the kingdom of God. The Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—existed before everything. They had—and still have—a life together. They have their own community. They live with one another according to a deeply rooted value system. In the Old Testament, God repeatedly urges his people to walk in his ways. But he also says: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (Isaiah 55:8).



ASK:

- What are some of “the ways” of God?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: [After a few responses, add the following insights if no one has mentioned them.] *God’s first shot at teaching us his ways—his value system—was, basically, the law and the prophets in the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments provide a great example of God’s value system. God’s second shot at teaching us his ways was, essentially, through his Son, Jesus.*

Even though God took great pains to share his family value system with us, these values sometimes seem like customs from a foreign culture. For example, ever wonder why instead of shaking hands in many cultures, people bow to each other? Well, in India, a jug and the left palm take the place of toilet paper, while in Indonesia, one might grow a long fingernail on the left hand for this purpose. As North Americans, we have a hard time understanding these customs. We need an explanation!

Sometimes the customs and traditions and practices of God’s family also seem foreign to us. Jesus must translate the personality and practices of his Father and the nature of life in God’s kingdom into something we can understand—something that gives us a flavor of the mystery that represents his personality and kingdom. That’s why Jesus told stories or parables. [Read aloud Matthew 13:10-13.]

The disciples came to him 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.’ ”

ASK:

- What did Jesus mean by this explanation of why he spoke in parables?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Jesus seems to be “planting” parables, like seeds, so that insights into God’s character and kingdom slowly grow in people. Maybe those seeds stay in the soil of our souls until they’re watered and fertilized and poke through into the light of our understanding. We all need the special help of parables to understand a God who is more amazing than our natural understanding can comprehend.*



2. The kingdom of God is like...

EXPERIENCE: Have students get in groups of three—assign each trio one of the following parables. Instruct trios to read their assigned parable and list as many truths as they can about the values, practices, and priorities of the kingdom of God.

- Parable of Wheat and Weeds—Matthew 13:24-30 (God is more concerned about growing wheat than pulling weeds.)
- Parable of the Pine Nut (or Mustard Seed)—Matthew 13:31-32 (What seems small can grow huge. Strength is nurtured over time.)
- Parable of the Yeast—Matthew 13:33 (A small addition makes a big difference.)
- Parable of the Treasure in the Field—Matthew 13:44 (Treasure belongs to those who appreciate it.)
- Parable of the Pearl of Great Price—Matthew 13:45-46 (Good things come to those who know treasure when they see it.)
- Parable of the Big Fishnet—Matthew 13:47-50 (The redeemed and unredeemed are allowed to grow together. It's not obvious which is good and which is bad.)

After five minutes or so, ask someone from each trio to tell about the parable they studied and what truths their trio gleaned about Jesus' home, the kingdom of God.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *What happens when we more deeply understand the values and priorities of the kingdom of God? In Matthew 13:52, we have Jesus' answer to that question: He said to them, "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."*

ASK:

- *So what happens when you understand and follow the ways of Jesus' family?*
- *What happens when you live like a brother or sister of Jesus—as someone shaped by the values and practices of his and your true home?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *When you adopt the "family system" of the kingdom of God, you can give others what they need whenever they need it. You become like a generous, well-stocked storeroom, full of the "fruits of the Spirit"—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control, and so on. Our purpose is to give "out of our good treasure." But we don't have treasure to give unless we live in the "treasure house"—the kingdom of God.*



3. God is like...

EXPERIENCE: Now that students have explored some “Kingdom of God” parables, they’ll do the same with some “Character of God” parables. This will help them more deeply taste the personality characteristics shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Assign each trio one of the “Character of God” parables from the following list, then instruct trios to read their assigned parable and list as many truths as they can glean about the nature, personality, values, priorities, and passions of the person of God.

- Parable of the Great Physician—Matthew 9:10-13 (Healer and inviter of the outsider.)
- Parable of the Moneylender—Luke 7:40-47 (Appreciator of the desperate and indebted.)
- Parable of the Lost Sheep—Luke 15:3-7 (Pursuer of lost valuables; partier.)
- Parable of the Lost Coin—Luke 15:8-10 (Diligent, won’t give up until he finds what he’s looking for.)
- Parable of the Prodigal Son—Luke 15:11-32 (Forgiving, passionate, just, noncontrolling, full of grace and truth, firm, sees the heart, celebrates repentance.)

After five minutes or so, ask someone from each trio to tell about the parable they studied and what truths their trio gleaned about the character of God.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Through the parables in the Bible, Jesus reveals his Father’s nature and shows what life is like in his kingdom. Sometimes we see parables that reveal his nature or his kingdom in the films we watch or the stories of our life. Take a few minutes to ask God to bring to your mind a scene from a film or a story that happened to you that helps answer one of these two questions:*

- *Who is God?*
- *What is life like in God’s kingdom?*

I don’t want you to “create” the meaning behind the story. Instead, simply ask God to show you the meaning. Don’t work too hard—just see what surfaces in your head.

After a few minutes, ask one or two people to report on what they discovered. If they don’t make the connection, help find the connection to one of the two big questions that parables answer: “What is God like?” and “What is life like in God’s kingdom?”



SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *The more you tune yourself to the parables in your life, the more you'll know who Jesus is. You'll experience more intimacy with Jesus.*

SUMMARY



LEADER
TIP

End your lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.



LEADER
TIP

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

"This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand' " (Matthew 13:13).

