



Jesus loved to teach in stories. Short, concrete, memorable, vivid. He used everyday images, like seeds, sheep, soil, treasure, travelers, to communicate the deepest realities of God's Kingdom. Over the next five weeks, we get to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to five of his parables. Through these stories, the King reveals two truths at once: the nature of his Kingdom and the heart of the King who reigns over it.

ABOUT PARABLES

Jesus' parables are not simple moral lessons or decorative illustrations. They are a distinctive form of teaching that both reveals and tests the listener. A few helpful principles to keep in mind as we study together.

First, parables usually have one main point. Resist the temptation to assign symbolic meaning to every minor detail. Look for the central truth Jesus is communicating.

Second, parables work on two levels. They reveal kingdom truth to the receptive and expose the resistance of the hard-hearted. In Matthew 13, Jesus himself says the "mysteries of the kingdom" are given to some but hidden from others.

Third, parables call for response. They are not abstract lectures, or just teaching for teaching-sake. They invite us into a story, ask us to identify with the characters, and press us to make a decision. A parable that does not change us has not been truly understood. A working definition for the series: Jesus' parables are short, concrete stories that reveal kingdom truth to receptive hearers, expose resistant hearts, and call for decision¹

¹ R.C. Sproul, "The Purpose of the Parables," Ligonier Ministries, May 30, 2008, accessed May 13, 2026.

WEEK 1

The One Worth Finding

Tax collectors and sinners draw near to Jesus. The Pharisees grumble. So, Jesus tells a story. A shepherd has a hundred sheep. One wanders off. Does he write it off as a rounding error? No. He leaves the ninety-nine and goes after the one. He searches until he finds it. He lifts it onto his shoulders. He rejoices. And he calls his neighbors to rejoice with him. In this opening parable of our series, Jesus reveals the heart of the King and the values of his Kingdom. The Kingdom of God counts what others discount. The King runs toward the one.

LUKE 15:1-7

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

WEEK 1
LIFEGROUP QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Tell us about a time you lost something valuable. What did the searching look like, and how did you feel when (or if) you found it?
2. Have you ever felt overlooked or undervalued in a crowd? Without going into too much detail, what was that experience like?

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3. Look carefully at verses 1 and 2. Who is drawing near to Jesus, and who is grumbling about it? How does the audience shape the story Jesus tells?
4. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one. What does this say about the worth of a single soul to the King who tells this parable?
5. Now read Matthew 18:10-14, where Jesus tells a similar parable to a different audience. Who is he speaking to there, and how does that audience change the emphasis? What does it teach us that the same parable could be used in two different settings?
6. Verse 7 says there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. That is a striking comparison. What is Jesus communicating about the heart of God?
7. Imagine a friend says to you, "I've drifted so far that God has surely given up on me by now." How would you use this parable to answer them? Taking a page from Jesus's methods, how could you illustrate the message of this parable using concepts that an average person in your setting would understand.

8. Think about the Pharisees in verse 2. They grumbled because Jesus welcomed sinners. In what ways might we be tempted to grumble like the Pharisees today, even unintentionally?

9. Who is one person in your circle who might be a “lost sheep” in this season of their life? What is one step you could take this week to demonstrate the King’s pursuing love for him or her?

10. As we begin this series on the parables of Jesus, what strikes you about Jesus’ choice to teach through stories? Why might a story be more powerful than a lecture?

WEEK 2

A Seed, A Shrub, A Kingdom

The Kingdom of God can be easy to miss. It does not arrive with armies. It does not announce itself with fanfare. It begins like a mustard seed: tiny, buried, unimpressive. But Jesus says do not be fooled. The seed grows. The shrub becomes the largest of all the garden plants. Birds find shelter in its branches. This week's parable teaches us not to despise the day of small beginnings. The King is at work even when his work looks small. And the smallest seed sown in obedience can grow into something far greater than we imagine!

MARK 4:30-32

³⁰ And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

(For more, check out the parallel accounts: Matthew 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19)

WEEK 2 LIFEGROUP QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Think of something in your life that started small but became significant: a friendship, a habit, a hobby, a project. What was it, and what surprised you about how it grew?
2. When you were a child, did you ever grow a plant from a seed (in school, at home, anywhere)? What do you remember about the experience?

DIVING DEEPER

3. Read all three accounts of this parable: Mark 4:30-32, Matthew 13:31-32, and Luke 13:18-19. What details are consistent across all three? Are there any differences worth noticing? What seems to be Jesus' central point?
4. Jesus chooses the smallest seed in his setting to picture the Kingdom. What does the contrast between the smallness of the seed and the largeness of the plant teach us about the way the King works in the world?
5. Verse 32 ends with the birds of the air making nests in the shade of the plant. Look at Daniel 4:10-12 and Ezekiel 17:22-24, where similar imagery is used in the Old Testament. What might Jesus be communicating about the reach and shelter of the Kingdom?
6. Jesus' original audience was a small band of fishermen, tax collectors, and ordinary men. How would this parable have shaped their hope and steadied their nerves as they followed him?
7. Our year-long theme is **MAGNIFIED**, drawn from John 3:30: "He must increase, but I must decrease." How does the mustard seed parable echo this same dynamic of unexpected, God-sized increase?

8. A friend says to you, "My faith feels so small. I don't see how it could matter to anyone." How might you use this parable to encourage them?

9. Where, in your own life or in the life of our church, might you be tempted to despise small beginnings? Where do you find yourself wanting immediate scale rather than patient, hidden growth?

10. Identify one small seed (a habit, a relationship, a quiet act of obedience, a ministry) you sense the Lord asking you to plant or tend this week, trusting him for the increase. Name it specifically.