

DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES

WEEK 1: THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

You will need:

- A pen and a sheet of lined paper for each person

CONNECT

- What's one thing you admire about old people?
- Where is the best place you've ever been?
- Finish the sentence: 'Today I'd like to get on a plane and go...'

DISCUSS

Ask for a volunteer from your group to read Matthew 18:21-35 out loud.

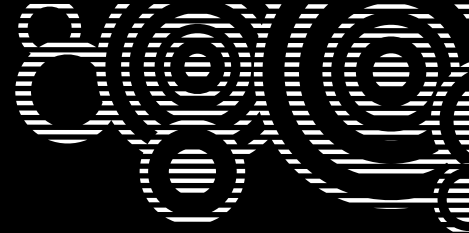
(Sometimes it is worth hearing it twice, from 2 different translations)

NEW CHRISTIANS

- What jumps out to you from the passage you just read?
- What do you think Jesus means when he says we should forgive up to 77 times? Why this seemingly random cut off point? (*Leaders: He is basically saying that there should be no limit.*)
- Ask a volunteer to retell the parable in their own words. Does everyone agree with their summary?
- Put yourself in the shoes of the servant who was forgiven. You owe the king \$1 million, can't pay it back and he cancels your debt and lets you go free. Can you imagine then getting aggressive towards someone who owes you \$50 and demanding they pay you back immediately? Why/why not?
- Can you think of a time when you acted like the servant who was forgiven?
- Why do you think we find it hard to forgive people?
- Have you ever had someone beg you to forgive them? How did you respond?
- Are you holding onto any unforgiveness in your heart right now? What does this passage suggest to you about how to deal with that? (*Leaders: e.g. Remember and reflect on the forgiveness that has been shown to you, know that God commands forgiveness, etc*)



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ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What do you think is the main message of this parable?
- Who does the King represent?
- Who does the servant who was forgiven represent?
- What do you think is the significance of the number of coins? The king forgave the servant 10000 *gold* coins and he refused to forgive 100 *silver* coins.
- Based on this Scripture passage, do you think Jesus cares if we hold onto unforgiveness?

According to the passage, what are the consequences of us holding grudges?

- Most of us are aware that God wants us to forgive. Why do you think we find it so hard? When have you found it hardest to forgive?
- Do you think there are any sins that are unforgiveable? What's the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation? (*Leaders: forgiveness doesn't mean what they did was okay, and it doesn't mean the relationship needs to be restored. We don't have to keep letting people hurt us.*)
- Have you ever decided to forgive someone, but found that the next day you are still feeling the same way towards them?

It can be easy to give up on the possibility of forgiveness at this point.

CS Lewis suggested that Jesus might have been suggesting that sometimes choosing to forgive someone once is not enough. Sometimes we need to keep repeatedly choosing to forgive someone until we've truly let it go – even if it takes 77 times.

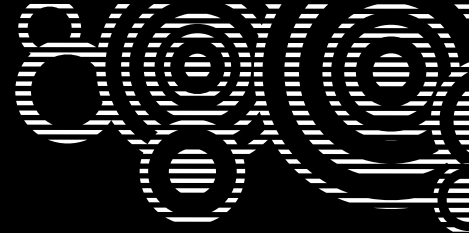
INVOLVE

Often when someone has done something to hurt us, we play over things in our mind that we wish we could say to them. These things can often stop us from being able to move forward and forgive them.

Get the group to write a letter to the person they are struggling to forgive, but don't send it to the person.

APPLY

What is one thing you will do differently, based on this week's discussion?



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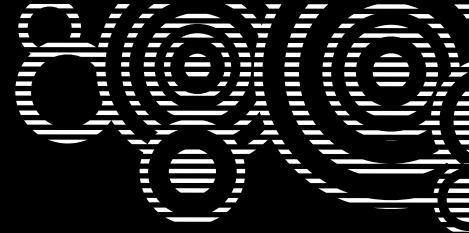
LEADER'S NOTES

- Head to our youtube channel: www.youtube.com/savegrowserve and click on 'What is forgiveness?' for a clip that could help get your discussion going!
- 3 things that can help us forgive are: 1. *Remember* – i.e. Remember that God has forgiven us 2. *Relinquish* – Trust God to handle justice and 3. *Repeat* – keep making a choice to forgive until you've fully let it go.
- Your group might want to consider these quotes together:

"Forgiveness is setting a prisoner free and finding out that the prisoner was you."

"Unforgiveness is like eating rat poison and expecting the other person to die"

"Forgiveness doesn't change our past but it does enlarge our future".
- Search 'Philip Yancey Forgiveness' on YouTube for a powerful clip about forgiveness
- Can you remember the 5 things that every life group leader absolutely needs to know? If not, it's time to pull out the LIFE leadership handbook and give yourself a refresher course. Head to: salvos.org.au/more/life



DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES

WEEK 2: THE PARABLE OF THE BAGS OF GOLD

You will need:

- Pens and a copy of the handout for each person

CONNECT

- Would you rather not be able to talk or not be able to hear?
- What has been the best part of your week?
- Who or what is inspiring you at the moment?

DISCUSS

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 25:14-30

NEW CHRISTIANS

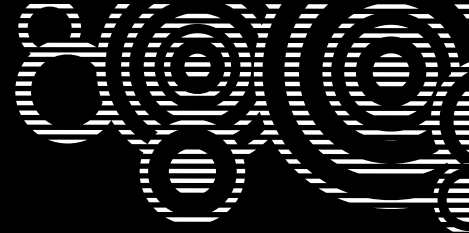
- What jumps out to you from the passage we just read?
- What do you think is the point of the parable? Does everyone agree?
- Who does the master in the story represent?
- Who do the servants in the story represent?
- What do the 'bags of gold' represent?
- Do you ever feel like you have a lot or not much to contribute to God's work? Why?
- In the story, are there any servants who don't get given any gold to look after? What does this tell you? (*Leaders: Everyone is given gifts and blessings from God. We all have something to contribute to his work.*)
- In verse 18 one of the servants buries his 'bag of gold'. Have you ever knowingly hidden one of your talents away? What motivates us to do this?
- According to the parable, what will Jesus judge us according to? (*Leaders: e.g. faithfulness, not usefulness; sincerity, not success; he will judge us according to what we've been given.*)

ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What do you think is the main message of this parable?
- Which line do you find encouraging? Why?



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WEEK 2: THE PARABLE OF THE BAGS OF GOLD

- According to the parable, who will Jesus expect the most from? (*Leaders: Those who have been entrusted with the most!*)

- What stops you from doing more with what God has given you?

Do you ever think about the day when you will stand before Jesus for Judgement?

How do you think you would feel to hear Jesus say to you the words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant'?

- How can we be sure that we are using what God has given us to the full? (*Leaders: e.g. embrace opportunities to try new ministries out, pray that the Holy Spirit would lead us, take note of what we've been given.*)
- It has been said that: "Every blessing we have been given is for others" and that: "We are blessed to be a blessing". What do you think these phrases mean? Do you agree?
- Do you think the consequences for doing absolutely nothing in your life for Jesus (verses 27-30) are too harsh? Why?

INVOLVE

When the servants report to their master they specify what they were given. They name it.

It's a good habit for us too!

Give each group member a copy of the handout and give them some time to list the things God has entrusted to them.

Maybe play some reflective music in the background.

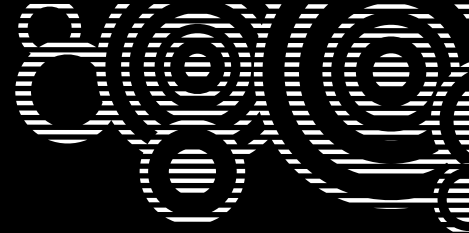
Once they're finished, have each person share 1 or 2 gifts that they feel challenged to use more for God.

APPLY

What's one thing you will do differently this week based on what we've discussed?

OR

Ask each person to choose one thing on their list that they will use for God in a new way this week.

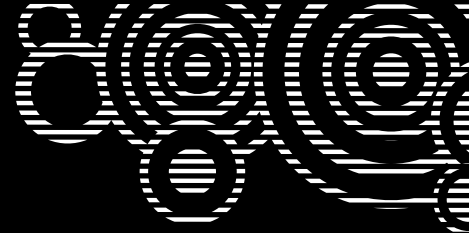


DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES

WEEK 2: THE PARABLE OF THE BAGS OF GOLD

LEADER'S NOTES

- Ephesians 4:7-8 confirms that each of us have been given different gifts from God.
- The long journey the master has gone on is the time between Jesus ascension and his final return
- Don't forget to set aside some time to ENJOY – have supper, play a game, or just chill!
- Have you noticed the white space down the side of every page? It's there for you to write comments, notes and ideas as you plan your group meeting.



DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES

MY 'BAGS OF GOLD'

Natural born strengths

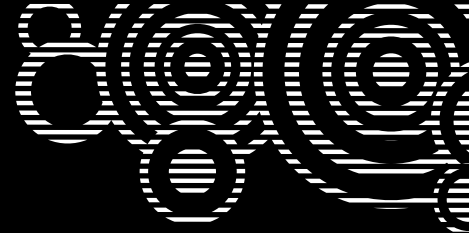
Spiritual gifts

Experiences

Resources

Finance

Learned Skills



DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES

WEEK 3: THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

CONNECT

Ask your group your choice of the following:

- Name a true and false assumption people make about you
- What is a new skill you have learnt in the last year?
- Which angers you more - hypocrisy, laziness or lying?
- What things are you praying for this week?

DISCUSS

Read Matthew 21: 28-32 (*Jesus is speaking to the chief priests and elders of the people in the temple courts.*)

NEW CHRISTIANS

- What do you think the parable is about?
- What is the difference between the two sons?
- Why do you think the elders said that the first son was better?
- Can you think of a time when you were willing to do something but failed to act on it? What kept you from following through?
- Which do you think Jesus would prefer – people who respond to an alter call (response time) but don't then live for God or people who don't respond to an alter call but then so live for God?
- Do you think it's possible for someone who is disobeying God in their heart to have everyone at their church think they're a great Christian?

Do you think it's possible for someone who is obeying God in their heart to have everyone at church think they're a bad Christian?

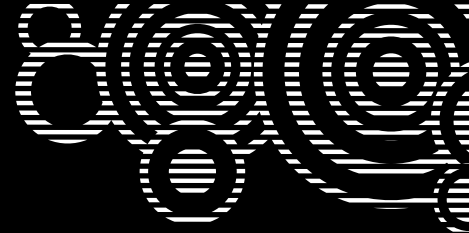
- What is one thing Jesus might be saying to you personally through these verses?

ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What do you think Jesus' aim was in sharing this parable?
- Which of these two sons do you think you are most like? Share some reasons.



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WEEK 3: THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

- How do you think the Pharisees would have reacted to being told that prostitutes and tax collectors would enter the Kingdom of God ahead of them? (*Leaders – the tax collectors and prostitutes represented the lowest of the low. The Pharisees would have been shocked, highly offended, and angry*).

Jesus surely would have known that this would offend them – why do you think he said it?

- The Pharisees assumed they were in better standing with God than the tax collectors because they attended church regularly and knew all the right answers about God. Do you think church attendance or bible knowledge is impressive to God? (*Leaders - Not anywhere near as important as an obedient, surrendered heart!*)
- Can you think of any verses throughout the Bible that suggest God prefers rejection over falseness? (*Leaders - E.g. Luke 18:10-17*)
- The second son says he will obey but never walks the talk. His hypocrisy is revealed. Can you think of an occasion when you showed hypocrisy in your life?
- Do you ever focus your attention on convincing church people that you're a 'good Christian'?

Why do you think we do this?

- Ask a volunteer to read Luke 6:46 – 49 out loud. What is Jesus saying in this verse? How does it add to your understanding of the parable?

INVOLVE

God sees our heart.

He sees us for who we really are.

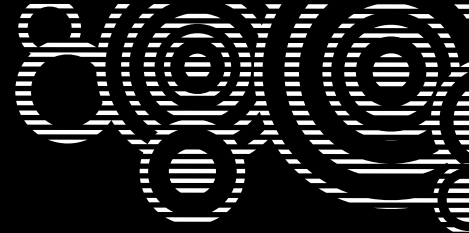
He isn't influenced by whether everyone in the church thinks we're a great Christian or a terrible one.

He longs for us to come before him in truth.

Give each group member a pen and paper and ask them to write an honest letter to God, expressing where their heart is really at, starting with the words: 'Dear Jesus, the truth is...'

(Ask if anyone is willing to read their letter to the group)

OR



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WEEK 3: THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

In this parable one son starts out on the wrong track and eventually repents and goes to work for his father, entering the Kingdom of God. The father accepts him. Spend some time in prayer for those you know who are still refusing God.

OR

Ask each group member to make a list of the top 5 things they value (e.g. active worship, honesty, family, perseverance, integrity, growth in Christ etc).

Then ask them to think about their conversations, actions, reactions and attitudes lately.

Do they match up with what you say you believe? Share with one another about the things that do and don't match up.

APPLY

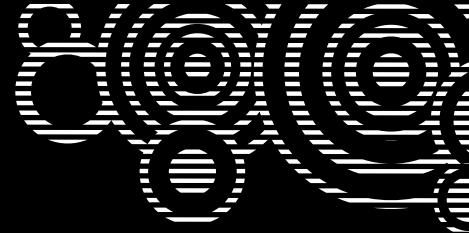
The church elders could not see that Jesus' story was about them. Often we are blind to things in us that others see. Find someone you trust this week and ask them to reveal any areas where your stated values and actions don't match up. Ask God to give you a gracious heart as you listen.

OR

Ask each person to share one thing they will do differently this week based on your discussion

LEADER'S NOTES

- The story reveals that God isn't looking for people with a perfect church attendance record who know all the right answers. He is looking for authentic obedience.
- The first son is independent and disobedient but later changes his mind and returns to fulfil his responsibilities. The second son is all talk but no action. Through the story Jesus is describing sinners (tax collectors, prostitutes) who eventually repent and obey God contrasted with the 'religious and righteous' people who like to talk about their passion for God but don't actually live in obedience.
- How's the atmosphere in the room? Is it relaxing and inviting? Do people feel comfortable when they arrive?



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WEEK 4: THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

CONNECT

Ask your group your choice of the following:

- If you could try out any career for a week what would it be and why?
- What's the best reality show of all time and why?
- Would you rather live in permanent winter or permanent summer?

INVOLVE

Time for some honest sharing and prayer!

Throw a 'prayer cushion' or 'prayer bean bag' in the middle of the room.

Give each person in your group an opportunity to sit on the prayer spot.

1. Have them finish the following sentence: 'If I had to describe my relationship with Jesus at the moment in just one sentence I'd say it's...'

THEN

2. Lead the remaining group members in praying for the individual on the prayer spot. You might like to encourage them to stand to their feet and place their hand on their shoulder or back. (Check first that the person being prayed for is okay with this).

Leaders: If your group is uncomfortable or uncertain about praying out loud this is a great opportunity to help them move past that.

Remind your group that long prayers are no better than short prayers, that God doesn't require us to use big or special words and that he hears the prayers of our heart.

Before you start, remind them of the power of prayer – maybe refer to the Scripture verses about prayer that have been included in the leader's notes.

DISCUSS

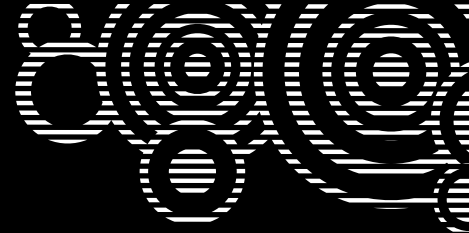
NEW CHRISTIANS

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 13:1-8 and 18-23.

Your group might find it helpful to read from The Message paraphrase.



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WEEK 4: THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

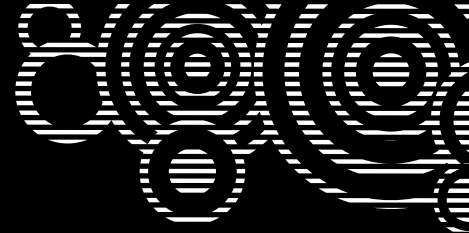
- What do you think is Jesus point in telling this parable?
- Based on this parable, do we get any credit with God for having merely heard the good news preached?
- Can you relate to the seed that falls in the gravel? Have you ever got caught up in the moment, and felt compelled to live a certain way for Jesus but felt differently later when the emotion died down? Tell us about that
- Read verse 22 again. How do you respond to worry? Does it lead you away from God or draw you to him? (*Leaders: See Phil 4:6-7 for some advice on how to deal with worry!*)
- What do these verses teach us about the work of the Evil One? (*Leaders: He is actively trying to stop people from following Jesus – see verse 18*)
- Which type of seed are you?

ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- Imagine you are there in the crowd, as Jesus is teaching from the boat. What thoughts/feelings are you having?
- Do you think those who have heard God's word but not applied it are treated more or less favourably than those who have never heard it? Why?
- Which of the types of soil best describes your current response to God's word? Why?
- Do you think the different types of soil represent different types of people or different stages in our journey? (Or could it apply to both?)
- How can we become more like the good soil?
- What things can we do to help brand new Christians avoid becoming like the soil in verses 20-22 (*Leaders: e.g. disciple them, equip them with Scripture and other spiritual weapons that will help them when difficult times come*)

APPLY

Ask each person to share one thing they want to do differently this week based on what you've discussed this week

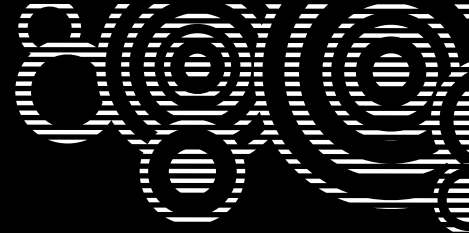


DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES

WEEK 4: THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

LEADER'S NOTES

- You might find the following Scripture verses helpful when leading through the 'Involve' section this week: Matthew 7:7; Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 14:13-14; James 5:14-16.
- Be real with your group. Be open to share your own successes and struggles in your relationship with God.
- Anyone missing from your group? Why not take 30 seconds to call him during group time, put them on speaker phone and let them know you're thinking about them. If they don't answer then leave a message on their voicemail.



DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES

WEEK 5: THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

CONNECT

Ask your group your choice of the following questions:

- What is 1 word that sums up your day? Explain why you chose that word.
- What was one of your favourite toys as a kid?
- When was the last time you cried?
- What is the main thing you feel like God has been teaching you lately?

DISCUSS

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 18:12-14

NEW CHRISTIANS

- Have you ever lost/misplaced something you really loved? What was it? What did you do?
- What/who would be the most valuable thing in your life? How far would you go to keep that valuable item/person safe? Would you 'take a bullet' for them?
- Does it surprise you that a shepherd would leave behind 100 sheep to find just 1 that is missing? Would you do that for a sheep?
- In Jesus' day shepherds had a special relationship with their sheep. They spent all day with them, slept with them in the fields at night and knew exactly how many sheep they had. They loved the sheep and knew them by name. If one was missing, they would immediately know which one it was. It was normal and expected that they would go searching for them.

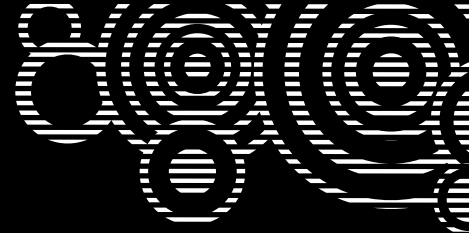
What does this tell you about the shepherd's relationship with his sheep?

How is this similar to the way Jesus treats us?

- What do you think Jesus is trying to communicate through the parable? What's the main point?
- How could Jesus' death on the cross for us be likened to the role of a shepherd and his sheep?
- Should we be more focused on those outside the church than inside?



DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES



DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES

WEEK 5: THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- As Christians, how can we sometimes act like sheep?
- In verse 12 Jesus talks about the sheep that wanders away. Have you ever 'wandered' away from God? Was it a deliberate choice or did it just happen over time? Tell us about it.
- We read that the shepherd leaves the flock to go looking for the single lost sheep and we see that the reunion is instigated by the shepherd. Do you think God does that for us? Does he go looking for us?
- In verse 13 we read that the shepherd will rejoice more over the single sheep that was found than the 99 who didn't wander off. Do you think this is fair? Do you think the shepherd values that one sheep more than the others?
- What is your experience of the Shepherd? What are the characteristics of the Shepherd that you have experienced? Have you felt loved, protected, found, celebrated?
- If this story tells us about Jesus' heart for the lost – how do you think he wants us to respond to those who wander away from him?
- If the Shepherd celebrates so passionately about the one sheep who is now found, how can we (as a life group, or as a youth group, or as a church) better celebrate when people meet Jesus for the first time?

INVOLVE

Place yourself in the story...where are you?

Do you identify with the sheep who was lost but has recently been found?

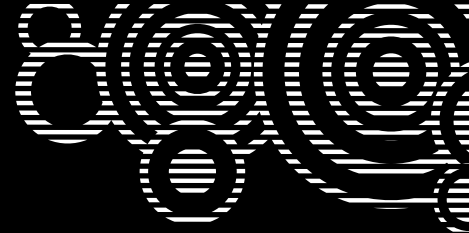
Do you feel like you're one of the 99 sheep who hasn't left the shepherd?

Maybe you feel like you're still lost from the shepherd.

Give everyone an opportunity to share where they are at – where they see themselves in the picture.

APPLY

It's never too late to have an earthly party for someone who has been found by the Shepherd.



DELVING DEEPER: THE PARABLES

WEEK 5: THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

Think of someone in your life group, youth group or your church who has recently become a Christian or come back to faith. Plan out how you might be able to celebrate this awesome step in their faith journey with them: you could take them out for a feed, buy them a Christian resource pack, send them a text saying how excited you are for them etc. Come up with a plan and then make it happen!

AND/OR

Ask each person to share one thing they're keen to do differently this week, based on what you've discussed

LEADER'S NOTES

- The parable tells us that Jesus' love for us is incredibly deep and strong. He knows us by name. He wants to be close to us. He wants to take care of us. If we wander off, he searches us out and pursues us. He never gives up on us
- In looking at the role of a shepherd it could be useful to talk about OT David being a shepherd; he had to kill wild beasts to protect his flock. David talks about his dangerous shepherding career in 1 Sam 17:34-37.
- The parable of the Lost Sheep is also told in the Luke 15. It may be helpful to cross-reference to this version of the story as it holds some additional details that might help the discussion.

