

PARABLES PART 2

Lesson 1: Workers in the Vineyard

This includes:

1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson your students will discuss how although God's kind of fairness at first may sound unfair, he is fair. God is fair because he offers us a gift that none of us deserve. All that God requires on our part is to accept that gift. Your students will consider how they are a part of this story that God continues to write and how he desires for us to participate in continuing this story.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. WHAT: God rewards those who serve him, and God wants us to be filled with Christlike motives and kindness.
2. WHY: The parable of the workers in the vineyard illustrates how God works in unexpected ways but always has our best interest at heart.
3. HOW: Your students will be challenged to see how God's grace is a gift and that none of us can do anything worthy of deserving this gift.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 20:1-16

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 6:8 and Matthew 9:35-38

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 20:1-16.

Jesus tells this parable to illustrate the "first will be last" truth from Matthew 19:30—a context that's essential for understanding the reason for this parable.



LEADER
TIP



That declaration had come after Peter opened his mouth and asked what reward the disciples would receive for following Jesus. It is as if Peter wanted to weigh the reward with the amount of work it would take to get the reward.

When we discover the cost of an item, often our minds immediately turn to the question “Do I really need it?” This is what some of your students may be asking themselves as they wrestle with idea of following God. Is the reward of a relationship with God worth giving up fitting in? Is the reward worth maintaining a pure dating relationship?

Like many things in life the benefits hugely outweigh the costs, but that doesn’t make it any easier. We all know that to be in shape we have to eat less of the \$5 pizza we buy for youth group and step on the treadmill more than once a year, but that knowledge doesn’t make it any easier. Our desire and our passion for the results of the work are what drive us. It is seeing the scale drop that motivates us to continue to lose weight. It is hearing a student prayerfully asking God for help in making a decision and then listening to God even when it is something the student may not want to hear. The reward is what motivates us, just like the workers in the vineyard.

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

- Is it wrong if you work more hours than a co-worker but receive equal paychecks? Let’s look for biblical answers tonight!
- If a farmer upsets his workers, who’s in the wrong? Join us to explore an important parable Jesus taught!

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 have launched a three-lesson study on parables, and began with the parable about workers in the vineyard found in Matthew 20:1-16.

We challenged our students to see that God's grace is a gift and that none of us can do anything worthy of deserving this gift. We saw how God desires for us to participate in sharing this gift with those around us. God wants us to focus less on ourselves and more on the work that needs to be done.

As you go throughout the week, I encourage you to keep the conversation going at home by asking your teenager the following questions as you have the chance:

- When in your life has God worked in a way that you didn't understand, but you later saw the wisdom in his actions? What did you learn from that experience?
- Are your inward motives less important than your outward actions? Why or why not?
- How has another person's kindness affected your life? How has your kindness impacted someone else?

Have a blessed week!



PARABLES PART 2

Lesson 1: Workers in the Vineyard

2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

Bring some candy or other food items as a reward for your students. Make sure that the items can be distributed evenly among all the students (snack-size bags of candy or chips often work best for this). You'll also need to plan a series of meaningless or repetitive tasks for students to perform. The tasks could include stacking and unstacking chairs, picking small objects out of a tub of rice, or cleaning your meeting area.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead them in this activity:

Begin by asking for volunteers. Explain that you need students to help with some seemingly meaningless tasks, but that there's a reward involved—however, students must continue the tasks until you say their time is up, or else they won't receive the reward. Depending on the size of your group, take the first one to three volunteers, and give them the most difficult of the tasks you selected.

Make small talk with the rest of the students for a few minutes, and then ask for another group of volunteers. Give them a specific task. Continue this pattern of making small talk and assigning tasks until everyone in the group is doing something—and be sure to assign the first workers the hardest job and the later workers the easiest jobs.

After just about a minute of the final group working, tell students to stop, and bring everyone back together. Distribute the identical rewards, starting with the group that worked the longest and ending with the group that worked the shortest period of time.

ASK:

- *Did each of you get rewarded fairly for the work you did? Why or why not?*
- *If you were one of the first people that I "hired," how did it feel at first? How did it feel toward the end?*
- *Did the workers who were hired first deserve to be paid more? Why or why not?*



SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *This activity reveals some of the tensions that Jesus created for his audience with the parable of the workers in the vineyard, which we'll discuss today. It's likely that we've all felt like we weren't treated fairly in certain situations or circumstances, but in this instance the workers confront the farmer about being unfairly rewarded.*

TEACHING POINTS



LEADER
TIP

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) We don't always understand God's ways, (2) God cares about our attitude and motives, and (3) God's heart is filled with kindness.



LEADER
TIP

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 20:1-16 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so everyone has a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let's dig into this passage of Scripture to see what Jesus was teaching the crowd—and us—through this parable.*

1. We don't always understand God's ways

ASK:

- *What is most confusing or frustrating about the landowner's actions in this parable?*
- *When in your life has God worked in a way that you didn't understand, but you later saw the wisdom in his actions? What did you learn from that experience?*
- *Verse 16 connects to Matthew 19:30 and the idea that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. How does this concept relate to your daily life—or does it? Explain.*



SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Have you ever felt like you were getting the short end of the stick? The workers in this parable who worked all day definitely thought they did, but the landowner had a different perspective on things. Similarly, we don't always understand God's ways because we are finite, limited humans—and God is infinite and divine. But we can still trust God, even when we don't know what he's doing or why he's doing it. God's grace is a gift, and none of us can do anything worthy of deserving this gift. God wants us to focus less on ourselves and more on the work that needs to be done.*

2. God cares about our attitude and motives

ASK:

- *When do you find it most difficult to maintain a Christlike attitude? What situations make it tough to stay focused on Jesus?*
- *What attitudes do you see displayed by the workers in this parable?*
- *Are your inward motives less important than your outward actions? Why or why not?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Our actions and deeds matter, but God also cares about the inward stuff that other people can't see—our motives and attitudes. These are the things that shape what others see on the outside, and God calls us to rely on his Spirit to develop more Christlike attitudes and motives. And when we do that, our outward behavior will change, too.*

3. God's heart is filled with kindness

ASK:

- *Look at verse 15. How did the farmer display kindness to his workers? How was his kindness a reflection of the kindness God displays?*
- *How has another person's kindness affected your life? How has your kindness impacted someone else?*
- *When have you experienced God's kindness in your life?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Scripture teaches us that God is just, but God is also kind. The landowner in the parable was kind to all of the workers because he cared about them—and God demonstrates kindness to us because of his love, too. Truly, nothing compares with the love of God.*



ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three for these questions.

ASK:

- *What do you believe is the underlying message of this parable in Matthew 20? Explain.*
- *Read Matthew 9:35-38. How does this passage challenge you to respond to the spiritual needs of the people in your world?*
- *Read Isaiah 6:8. How might your community, school, or culture be different if you and other Christ-followers responded like Isaiah did?*



Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

APPLICATION

ASK:

- *How can you demonstrate Christlike kindness to other people this week? Be specific.*
- *If you want to develop more Christlike motives and attitudes, what kind of prayer might you pray this week?*
- *What are some “God-sized” goals that you would like to see happen in your school and community? How might the idea of “the first shall be last and the last shall be first” help you pursue these goals?*
- *Commit to praying every day for one person you know who would be considered a part of the “harvest” mentioned in Matthew 9.*



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.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]



**LEADER
TIP**

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

Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

