

Youth Ministry 2:2
Bible discussion lessons for youth groups
from the Old and New Testaments

Bible 101 - year 1

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Parables of Jesus



CONTENTS

1. Don't get lost - The parable of the lost sheep	2
Matthew 18:12-14 (Life's paths)	
2. Use it or lose it - The Parable of the Talents	5
Matthew 25:14-30 (Managing talents)	
3. "Will you be my neighbor?" - The Parable of the Good Samaritan	9
Luke 10:25-37 (Attitude toward "others")	
4. Keep on praying - Parables of perseverance	12
Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8 (Persistence in prayer)	
5. Same Pay for Everyone - The parable of the laborers	18
Matthew 20:1-16 (God's grace)	
6. Wise Investments - The Parables of the Hidden Treasure	21
and a Pearl: Matthew 13:44-46 (Treasure in heaven)	
7. Where's my place? - A parable about choosing a place at a feast	24
Luke 14:7-11 (Humility)	
8. What kind of soil are you? - The Parable of the Sower	27
Matthew 13:1-9,18-23 (Receptivity toward the Word of God)	

Don't get lost!

Mathew 18:10-14

1. Have you ever gotten lost?

What usually keeps you from getting lost?

- a compass a map directions
- your phone asking a stranger
- being with someone who knows the way
- something else _____

2. The parable of the lost sheep

A parable is a short story with a _____.



The Story	The Spiritual Meaning
The shepherd	
The sheep	
The sheep who wanders off	

What does this parable tell us about God?

3. What can cause a person to get “off the path” in their relationship with God?

What are ways we can keep ourselves from going astray?

How can we help others stay on God’s path?

4. What’s one thing that helps you draw closer to the Shepherd?

Who needs to return to Christ or to the “flock” (other believers)? _____

How can you help him/her? _____

Don't Get Lost! (Life paths – Matthew 18:12-14)

Significance for teens:

At this age, teens begin to choose the direction of their lives. As children, they were strongly influenced by their parents. In adolescence, their friends play a bigger role in their choices. Under their peers' influence, Christian teens can gradually veer off the path God has for them. But the good news is that God can strengthen Christian teens to be the influence that helps their friends and others stay the course.

1. Hook:

Start with a prayer and a game: "Find the Lost Sheep". Before the meeting, hide one or two prizes (candy or money) in the room. To make it harder, you can tape them under a table or chair. Then ask the kids to find them. (If they are having trouble, you can make it easier with clues like, "cold" / "warm" / "hot").

When they are finished and gathered together again, say: *"Imagine you have lost something and need to find it. Or maybe you are lost. Have you ever gotten lost?"* Have some of them talk about a time that they got lost. You can also share a story from your own life. Ask: *"How does a person feel when they lose their way?"* (Possible answers: scared; confused; bewildered; upset that they are wasting time, etc.).

Ask the kids to mark their answers to the question, *"What usually keeps you from getting lost?"* Losing things and getting lost is no fun.

2. Book – Mathew 18:10-14:

Jesus often taught people in parables. Ask, *"What is a parable?"*

A parable is "a short story with a spiritual meaning." (Underlined words in the text are words to be written on the handout.)

A parable uses everyday stories to illustrate unseen spiritual truths. Jesus told three parables about lost things: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the son who lost his way in life - the prodigal son.

Today we will look at the parable of the lost sheep. Read Matthew 18:12-14. *In this parable we see that the shepherd looked for the sheep and found it. OK now what is the spiritual meaning of the parable? Who is the shepherd? (Jesus).* Read John 10:11. Jesus even calls himself the Good Shepherd. *Who are the sheep in the parable? (people; us). Who is the sheep that wanders away? (Someone who wanders away from following Jesus).* Ask, *"what does this parable tell us about God?"* (Possible answers: Jesus still cares for those who wander away; each individual person is valuable to the Lord, etc...).

3. Look:

But how does this relate to our lives?

There is a path that leads toward God, and there are paths that lead away from God. (You may want to draw two lines going away from one point, and at the end of one write "God".) Ask, *"What can cause a person to get off the path toward God?"* (Possible answers: not following the Lord; wanting our way; seeking popularity; bad habits like pornography; thinking good deeds are enough; no friends are following the Lord; sin, etc.).

Getting off course often begins imperceptibly, but after a while the person finds himself farther away from Christ, like the sheep that wandered away from its flock and its shepherd. Probably everyone knows someone who used to love the Lord and be with other Christians, but then gradually drifted away from God.

Ask, *"What are ways we can we keep ourselves from going astray?"* Write down the kids' answers. (Possible answers: read the Bible; pray; ask God for help; trust God when things are tough; spend time with Christian friends; go to youth group, etc...)

Ask the kids, *"How do these things on the list help a person stay on the path toward God and not get lost?"* (Review their answers and discuss how they help us stay on course.)

Then ask: *"How can we help others stay on the path?"* (Possible answers: be a good listener; be friendly and welcoming at church, at school; study the Bible and pray together; pray for that person; spend time with that person; show that you want what is best for that person.)

We need each other to stay on the right path and not get lost. Tell this story about a farmer and a pastor: "One day a farmer decided that he did not need to go to church or be with other believers. He thought it was enough to worship God in the beauty of the nature around him.

One cold morning the pastor came to visit him and to ask him about his absence. The farmer explained to the pastor why he had decided not to go to church. There were hot coals glowing in the stove. The pastor took one of the red-hot coals out of the oven and set it aside. Soon the coal cooled and turned black. The farmer understood the illustration: a coal by itself can't stay warm, just like a person might grow cold towards the Lord when he tries to live a Christian life on his own. He decided to go back to church."

4. Took:

Look at the answers to the question about what helps us stay on the right path to God. Ask, *"What's one thing that helps you draw closer to the Shepherd?"* Have the kids write down their answer.

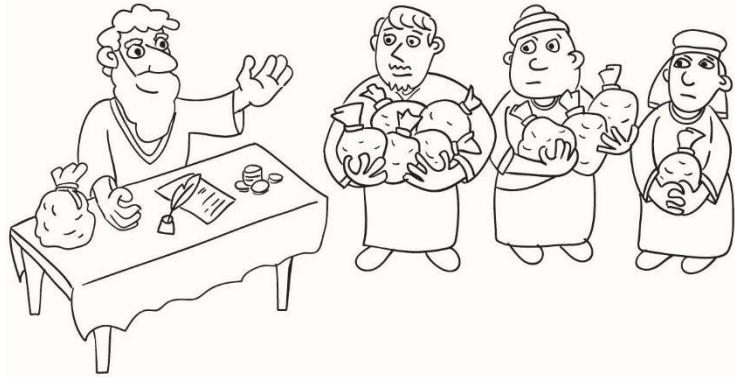
Then encourage them to think of someone they can reach out to by asking, *"Who needs to return to Christ or to the 'flock' (other believers)?* *It's probably better not to name these people in front of the group. If they wish, they can write that person's name on the handout and then answer the question, *"How can you help him/her?"*

Pray that we will not get lost, that we will stay on God's path, and that we can help others do the same.

Use it or lose it!

Matthew 25:14-30

1. What would you do if you received a million dollars?



2. The earthly story

	The first 2 servants	The third servant
<i>What did the master give the servants?</i>	5 talents of silver 2 talents of silver	1 talent of silver
<i>What did they do with their talents?</i>		
<i>By how much did the value of their talents increase?</i>		
<i>What words did the master use about each servant?</i>		
<i>What did they receive from the master for their work?</i>	They were entrusted with something bigger: more money and whole cities (see Luke 19:16-19). They went to share the master's joy.	What he had was lost; it was given to someone else; Darkness and suffering.

3. The spiritual meaning of the story

We are all given different abilities: some less, some more. But everyone has been given something. Talents are whatever we have that can be used to serve God.

What has God given you?

Fill in Questionnaire – “CAPES”

4. Use what God has given you.

QUESTIONNAIRE "CAPES"

What has God given you?

C _____

1. What do you prefer (*choose one of the given options*)

Hanging out with friends OR Watching an interesting movie

Knowing what's coming up OR Being surprised

Spending time by yourself, Being with people you know OR

Getting to know new people

A _____

2. What do you do in your free time? (5 activities)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

P _____

3. If you could choose to do anything for the Lord, what would you choose (money is not a factor)?

E _____

4. What are your favorite subjects in school? (3 subjects)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

S _____

5. How have you served God in the past? (1-3 types of service)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How satisfied were you with each of these experiences?



Use it or lose it! (Managing talents – Mathew 25:14-30)

Significance for teens:

Teens are the future church. Some of the kids in your group may become pastors, some may become teachers, missionaries, or church workers. But teens are also the church of today, and they can start to use their talents to serve the Lord and His church now. Help them discover the gifts and abilities God has given them.

1. Hook:

Begin with a prayer and then ask, "What would you do if you received a million dollars?" Have the kids write down their answers and then share with the group. If someone answers that they would use the money to make more money, pay special attention to that answer. Ask, "why don't we usually choose to invest our money?"

(Possible answers: we are afraid to invest money in something because we might lose everything; we don't know how to do it; we think we have too small an amount; we think it is better to spend what we have, etc...).

2. Book – Matthew 25:14-30:

Jesus' parable of the ruler who entrusted his servants with large sums of money is a similar situation. Read Matthew 25:14-30 and fill in the chart on the handout.

Question One: What did the master give the servants? (Five talents, two talents, and one talent. Some translations say "bags of gold"). We will discuss how much this money is in just a moment. Ask: *According to verse 15, why did they receive different numbers of talents?* (Answer: they received according to their abilities. One was able to handle more than the other.)

Discuss: How much is a Talent? A "talent" is the most money ever mentioned in the Bible. In biblical times, the average wage for a day's work was a denarius. One talent of silver was equal to 6,000 denarii (i.e., equal to 16.5 years' wages. According to other calculations - 20 years of work). Thus, five talents of silver are equal to a salary for almost 100 years. Let's try to convert this money into dollars. (You can make the conversion for your country's currency.) In 2023, the average annual salary in the United States was \$59,428. So, in 100 years a man could have earned \$5,942,800 (almost 6 million dollars). This was not a small amount of money that the master entrusted to the servant!

Question 2: "What did they do with their talents?" (Answers: the first two servants put the money to work, and the third servant buried the money.)

Question 3: "By how much did they increase the amount of money?"

(Answers: the first and second servants doubled it, but the third servant did not increase it at all).

Question 4: "What words did the master use to evaluate his servants?" (Answer: he called the two servants good and faithful and the third servant wicked and lazy).

Question 5: "What did they receive from the master for their labor?" Read the answers in the chart. In Luke 19:16-19, it is written that the faithful servants were put in charge of some cities. The lazy and unfaithful servant was punished severely.

3. Look - Application:

It is interesting to note that our modern English word "talent" was borrowed into our language from Latin, and then it changed from the "a specific weight of money" to the meaning of "skill or ability." We are all given different abilities: some less, some more. But everyone has something they can give. Talents are gifts that we can use to serve God.

We can spend our talents on ourselves or use them for others. Jesus, like the master in the parable, has gone away for a long time, entrusting Christians to take care of things for Him. When Jesus comes back, He will be pleased by our faithfulness to use well what He's given us, whether it seems like a lot or a little. Ask, "What has God given you?" Invite the kids to fill out the CAPES questionnaire and then share their answers. As the kids read their answers, notice whether they are drawn to music, sports, socializing, writing, creative writing, or something else. This may indicate a talent they can use for the Lord.

The word "CAPES" is an acrostic for identifying strengths/preferences/gifting in five areas.¹

Have the kids write the following words next to the letters: **Letter "C": Character.** God created people differently: introverts and extroverts; those who like order and those who like spontaneity; thinkers and feelers, etc... We read in the Bible that God uses very different people. There is no exceptional personality for ministry. Do not try to imitate others. Serve according to your personality, and then ministry will be enjoyable.

Letter "A": "Abilities" (skills, aptitude).

This is what you are good at. Most people possess several abilities. E.g.: physical, mathematical, artistic talents; writing talent; ability to decorate, plan, paint, hospitality, repair, cook, etc.

Letter "P": "Passions". This includes hobbies, desires, inclinations - things that bring pleasure. What do you love to do? What do you like to think about in your free time? Could that be used to serve God? When we identify our passions, we identify areas of potential service.

Letter "E": "Experience." God can use a person's past experiences, such as years in school (what are your favorite subjects?); spiritual life (what have been your most significant experiences with God?); ministry efforts (how have you served God in the past?); pain (what problems, pains, and trials have you gone through?) and so on.

Letter "S": "Service." Some ministry experiences may have been small, such as at camp or in your group, or none at all. Your teenagers probably haven't had a chance to try a lot of different ministries, or maybe they are not even Christians yet. One way they will discover their spiritual gifts is to try different areas of service, and maybe some of them have. If they don't have an answer for the last question, they can leave it blank.

4. Took:

Have kids share what they have written about themselves on their survey. Encourage them to consider how they can use what God has given them to serve Him. End with prayer.

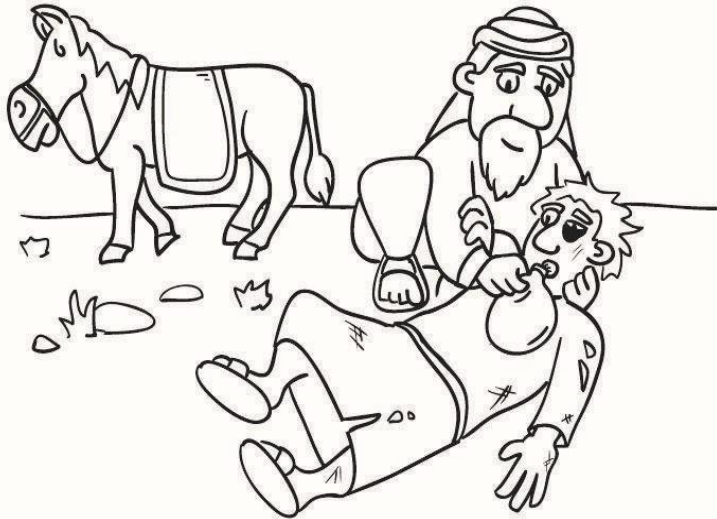
Leader's Guide

¹ Information and acrostic adapted from Rick Warren's book "The Purpose Driven Church. See Chapter 19: "Turning Members into Ministers" pp. 369- 375.

“Will you be my neighbor?”

Luke 10:25 – 37

1. On the back of the handout write down one word to describe your first impression of the people in the pictures.



2. The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Two unexpected moments:

- A priest and a Levite _____ the man in distress.
- The Samaritan showed _____ for the injured man and took him to an inn.

Jesus asked: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who was caught by the robbers?"

3. Why are people not equally kind to everyone? For example, to people of a certain nationality?

What nationalities do you have in your school?

What else besides nationality divides people?

How can you 1) notice and 2) show your kindness to people who are different from you?

4. Are there people around you who need support and help or who don't have many friends, perhaps because they are ethnically or culturally different from the majority?

How can you be a neighbor to these kids? _____

Will You be my Neighbor? (Attitude towards "others"– Luke 10:25-37)

Significance for teens:

The world has become a much smaller place. People move from one country to another in search of work or to escape persecution or oppression. It is likely that where your teens are studying, there are kids of other nationalities, races, religions, or socio-economic classes. Teens need to understand that as Christians, we believe our neighbor is anyone who needs help and support, whether they are like us or not.

1. Hook:

Start with prayer. Show kids pictures of all kinds of people of different nationalities. (Example: a poor family from India; a wealthy businessman from Asia; an Arab; a Russian grandmother; an African soldier, etc...) See the PowerPoint connected to this lesson. Have them write down, in one word, their first impression of those in the pictures. Then have everyone share their responses.

Say, *“we don’t know these people, but we judge them by their appearance. It often happens in life: we look at a person and judge them by their clothes, their cleanliness, their nationality. Or we don’t even notice those who are different from us, or we try to avoid contact with them”.*

2. Book – Luke 10:25-37:

Today we are going to look at a well-known parable about a man who helped someone who needed help, even though the injured man was not one of his own kind: the parable of the Good Samaritan. Read the parable together (Luke 10: 25-37).

IDEA: Act out the parable as it is read, with one person reading it and the others acting it out silently (but make sure that the kids playing the role of the robbers do not hurt the one playing the traveler!). Use six actors: the traveler, the robber(s), the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan, and the innkeeper.

Before reading/acting out the story, explain who the Levite and the Samaritan are. The kids probably have an idea of who the priest is. (Levites were appointed by God to assist the priests in the temple. If priests are like our pastors, then Levites are like our deacons or other church leaders). Here is the first unexpected point: both of these religious servants, from whom one would expect help, passed by the man in distress: they crossed to the other side of the road.

The second unexpected point: The Samaritan showed compassion for the injured man and took him to an inn. Why is this unexpected? Jews did not like or trust Samaritans. When Jesus introduced him into the story, his listeners probably expected the Samaritan to add more blows to the injured man and rob him.

Who were the Samaritans and why did the Jews hate them so much? The Jews and Samaritans had a shared history, but the Samaritans rebelled against God, broke off from the Jewish nation, lived in their own territory, mixed with other cultures/races, and had altered their worship from God’s design. They were considered ‘unclean’ or dirty by righteous Jews.

3. Look - Application:

Hatred and misunderstandings between different people still exist today. Ask, *“why are people not equally kind to everyone, to people of a different nationality, for example?”* (Possible answers: prejudice; fear; misunderstanding; parents warn against contact with them; peer influence, etc.).

Ask: *“What nationalities do you have in your school?”* Write down the answers of the kids. (Possible answers: Mexicans; Haitians; Ukrainians; Japanese; Chinese; etc.)

Ask: *“What else besides nationality divides people?”* (Possible answers: faith; race, subculture; values; socio-economic status, etc.).

Ask: *“How can you 1) notice and 2) show your kindness to people who are different from you?”* Write down the kids' answers. (Possible answers: pray for them; help them; sit with them; talk to them; get to know them; protect them; help them with English; share your faith with them).

We should love all kinds of people and show our love by helping them when they need it.

4. Took:

Have teens think about kids at their school who are different from them. Ask, *“Are there people around you who need support and help or who don't have many friends, perhaps because they are ethnically or culturally different from the majority? How can you be a neighbor to these kids?”*

Review the answers you have written down from section 3 on how to show kindness to others.

End the lesson with prayer.

Keep on praying!

Luke 11:5-10; Luke 18:1-8

1. We often ask people for things.

2. Two parables about persistence in prayer.



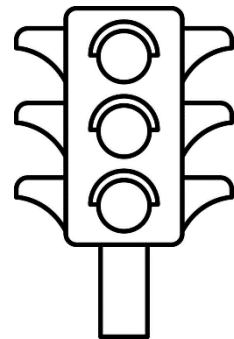
The parable of:	the persistent neighbor Luke 11:5-10	the persistent widow Luke 18:1-8
What was the request?	_____ for a friend who came to visit.	_____ from her enemy.
Why was the one who was asked not willing to grant the request?	The door was _____ and he and his children were already _____.	The judge did not fear _____ or care about _____.
So why did he eventually respond to the request?	Because of the neighbor's _____.	Because the widow was _____.

What do we learn about prayers of petition from these two parables?

3. Three answers to prayer

You will receive what you ask for.	You will not get what you ask for.	You will get what you ask for, but not yet.

What interesting answer to prayer can you tell us about?



What is the best way to pray: once a day for a long time (20 minutes), or many times but short?

4. What special needs have you been praying about for a long time?

"For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." (Luke 11:10 NIV)

Keep on praying!

(Persistence in Prayer - Luke 11:5 – 13; 18:1-8)

Significance for teens:

God wants us to bring our requests to Him. Teens may struggle with their problems, try to ignore them, or complain about them, but they often forget to bring them to God. In two of Jesus' parables today, we see that God wants us to be persistent in prayer, and He is waiting to answer our prayers.

1. Hook:

Start with prayer. Then do one of two opening activities. 1. You can have two kids or leaders do the "Here comes the judge" bonus skit, or 2. you can play the children's game "**Mother, may I...**". This game requires a rather large space, maybe outside, in the hall or a large room. The "mom" or "dad" stands at the front, with her back to everyone standing in a row about 20 feet back. The goal of the game is to be the first to touch the "mom" and become the new "mother". Players take turns asking: "Mother, may I ... (move forward in a certain way?)" Example: "Mother, may I take six small steps?" Mother has two possible answers, "Yes, you may" or "No, but you can ...move differently." Example: No, but you can take three steps backward, two tiny steps forward, etc."

The first player does what "mom" said. Then the second player makes his request, and so forth. If a player forgets to say the words, "Mother, may I," or moves forward without permission, he or she returns to the starting line.

Here are a few more examples of what can be asked/allowed: "... two giant steps" ...crawl forward for three seconds". ...hop on one foot three times toward you" etc. After the game, say, "*In life we often ask for things from our parents, teachers, friends and others.*"

2. Book – Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8:

Today's lesson looks at two parables where someone asked for something. Read the **parable of the persistent neighbor** (Luke 11:5-13) and fill in the chart: *What was the request?* (Three loaves of bread for a friend who came to visit.) *Why was the one who was asked reluctant to grant the request?* (The door was already locked and he and his children were already in bed). *Why did he eventually respond to the request?* (Because of the neighbor's persistence).

Read the **parable of the persistent widow** (Luke 18:1-8) and fill in the chart: *What was the request?* (Protection from her enemy). *Why was the one who was asked not willing to grant the request?* (The judge did not fear God or care about people.) *Why did the judge finally grant the request?* (Because the widow was bothering him).

In these parables Jesus is talking about asking for things in prayer, but it's important to remember that prayer is much more than asking for stuff. There are prayers of worship, thanksgiving, sorrow, and repentance. All kinds of prayer are important. But today these parables are focusing on prayers of petition; asking for things.

Leader's Guide

Ask, *what do we learn about prayers of petition from these two parables?* (Possible answers: sometimes the answer doesn't come right away. We need to be persistent in prayer (11:7); God's provision is based on our needs (11:8); God *wants* us to ask, seek, and knock (11:9-10)).

Unlike the story, it's important to remember that God is not an unrighteous judge. He is pleased when we turn to Him and wants to answer us.

Ask, *"How do we know this from the story?"* (Possible answers: God is telling us to ask Him (11:9); God won't put off His chosen ones, (18:7); etc.)

3. Look - Application:

Talk about three possible ways God answers prayer. The kids can write them in the "heading row" of "Three Answers to Prayer" on their handout. "Yes" is like a green light: God answers your prayer right now; "No" is like a red light: for good reasons that you might not understand, God does not give you what you ask for. "Wait" is like a yellow light; you will get what you ask for, but not yet. Maybe you (or someone else) may not be ready to receive what you are asking for right now, or maybe there is something important to learn or do while waiting.

Ask, *"What interesting answer to prayer can you tell us about?"* Have the kids share their experience or the experience of others. Then ask, *"Have you ever asked for something in prayer but received a "No" answer?* This question is probably more difficult to answer, but perhaps they have something to share.

Ask, *"Is it better to pray once a day for a long time (20 minutes) or many times for a short time?"*

(Possible answers: there are advantages to both. In longer prayer, you can slow down and hear God's quiet voice; you can pray for more people. Lots of short prayers help us remember God throughout the day; you can pray for something while it is still in your mind).

In fact, both kinds of prayer are important. Just like in friendship, sometimes it's helpful to have a long conversation and really understand what's going on with a friend. But it is just as important to keep in regular contact with a friend with short conversations or texts just to keep in touch.

4. Took:

Have the kids share a special need they have been praying about for a long time (e.g., for a relative to come to Christ; for school; for the next step in their education; for serious health problems of a loved one). Invite everyone to pray together for these needs. Have the kids write their needs down for you so you can pray about them too in your own prayer times. If there are too many, you can break them down and pray for some each day. If your group feels comfortable with each other, suggest that they pray for each other during the week.

Remind the kids that "everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." Finish with a prayer that the group will keep on praying.

Bonus skit for “Keep on praying!” lesson

“Here comes the Judge”

Two characters: the widow (old woman with a shawl) and judge (maybe in a black graduation robe).

Introduce the good widow and the bad judge to the kids.

At the end of each scene the judge and widow walk away from each other, take a few steps and then turn around and walk back to play the next scene.



Scene 1:

Woman: Excuse me sir. But are you Judge Wimpler?

Judge: No ma’am. I’m Judge Woppler. Roman Court of Appeals 8th district, 12th precinct, Old Jerusalem quarter.

Woman: I must say, that’s a long name. Do you mind if I just call you “Quarter” for short?

Judge: What is it that you want ma’am? I’m a very busy man.

Woman: Well, you needn’t get hostile about it. I wanted to ask you about the inheritance my boy is to get. It’s all tied up in the courts and he’ll be an old man before he ever receives it.

Judge: Oh, yes. I remember the case. You know a small *bribe* might help hurry things along.

Woman: A bribe! No, no. I’m afraid he’s not even married. I’ve told him a hundred times he needs to find a nice girl and settle down, but will he listen to me, no...

Judge: No! A bribe, a bribe!... money, like five denarii. A little grease for the wheels.

Woman: No, I’m sorry I walked here...

Judge: Never mind (leaves)

Scene 2:

Judge: (Walks in again)

Woman: Excuse me sir. But are you Judge Wimpler?

Judge: That's Woppler ... Judge Woppler.

Woman: That's right! Well, my son has this case in court.

Judge: I know... I know... an inheritance thing.

Woman: No, no ... it's got nothing to do with hair. If it was only a toupee he needed it would be simple.

Judge: I said 'inheritance' ma'am, 'inheritance'

Woman: That's right. Can you help us?

Judge: I'm afraid I'm entirely too busy (leaves)

Scene 3

Judge: (Enters)

Woman: Excuse me sir. Are you Judge Wimpler?

Judge: (*Hand to forehead*). What did I do to deserve this? Did Brutus put you up to this? He and his practical jokes. First it was itching powder in the toga and now this.

Woman: My son has this inheritance case...

Judge: I know...I know... Look ma'am, you may be God's chosen people, but you can just wait like all the rest. (*Leaves*)

Scene 4

Judge: (*enters*)

Woman: Excuse me are you Judge Wimpler?

Judge: NO! I'm the tooth fairy looking for molars!

Woman: Well, I'm sorry but the boy down the street does all of our mowing. He has a John Deere. What kind do you have?

Judge: Look, just leave me alone! Your son will just have to wait.

Woman: I know, I know. He's always late. He'll probably be late to his own funeral.

Judge: Not late... WAIT! WAIT! WAIT!

Woman: Well, you needn't get hostile about it.

Judge: (*exits*)

Scene 5

Judge: *(enters)*

Woman: Excuse me, sir. Are you Judge Wimpler?

Judge: YES! Here, take my watch. *(Gives her his watch)* Take my money. *(Gives her his wallet)* I'll get your son his inheritance this afternoon. JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!!!
(leaves)

Woman: *(Smiles at audience and holds up watch and wallet)* Have a nice day!

Same Pay for Everyone (Amazing Grace)

Matthew 20:1-16

1. Name five good things you have gotten for free:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ 5. _____

2. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard

Matthew 20: 1-16	Meaning
The master/ landowner	
The vineyard	
The workers	
A day	
A denarius (silver coin)	

How did the master explain why equal pay for everyone was fair? (vv. 13-15)

Who do the workers who came early and those who came later represent?

3. Our salvation is based on God's grace, not on our merit.

What does the word "grace" mean in the Bible? (See Ephesians 2:8-9)

What is the advantage of receiving God's forgiveness as early as possible, rather than in the "eleventh hour" of life?



4. "Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch; like me!

I once was lost but now am found, T'was blind, but now I see." (John Newton).

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23-24 NIV)

Same Pay for Everyone (God's Grace - Matthew 20:1-16)

Significance for teens:

One common misconception is that salvation must be earned. Teenagers worry that they may have done something or not done something and, as a result, lost their salvation. But the good news of the gospel is that salvation is available to everyone, starting 'now,' whoever you are. It is "the gift of God: not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

1. Hook

Start with prayer. Have the kids make words with the letters in the words "amazing grace". There can be as many letters as there are in the words, for example, the letter "a" can be used up to three times in a word but the letter "r" can be used only once. Then have each person read out the words they found. See who has the most words.

Then, have the kids write down five good things they have gotten for free.

(Possible answers: life; a gift from someone; food every day; clothes; air; their family; God's love, etc.).

Today we are going to be looking at one of the best gifts we have ever been offered: God's grace.

2. Book – Matthew 20:1-16

Our lesson today will focus on a parable that illustrates God's grace to us. Read Matthew 20:1-16 and fill in the meaning of the parable in the chart.

(Answers: the master/ landowner - God; vineyard - Kingdom of Heaven; workers – people invited into the Kingdom of Heaven/ followers of Jesus, etc.; one day - human life; denarius (silver coin) - eternal life / salvation).

Ask: "How did the master explain why equal pay for everyone was fair?" (vv. 13-15)

(Answers: He had not broken the agreement with the first workers; it was his money, and he used it as he liked, according to his generosity).

Ask, "Who were meant by the workers who came first and those who came later?"

Some believe that this refers to those who belong to Christ early in life and those who come to Him later. They all receive the same salvation and eternal life. Others believe that the parable refers to the Jews, to whom the kingdom of God was revealed first before it was revealed to the Gentiles. Either way, the parable illustrates that salvation is offered to all. We must not think our long Christian heritage makes us more deserving of salvation, nor that our sinful past or lack of knowledge about Christ means it's too late. 'NOW' is the day of salvation when Christ calls.

3. Look - Application

Our salvation and the gift of eternal life are based on God's grace, not our merit. *Ask, "What does the word 'grace' mean in the Bible?"* Teens have probably heard the word but may not know how to explain it. If they know, have them explain it.

Leader's Guide

If they don't know, you can say that according to the Bible "grace" is an undeserved gift from God. Read Ephesians 2:8-9 together. We are all under judgment as sinners, but God offers everyone the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life because Jesus died like a sinner in our place.

Our parable today is a good illustration of grace. Some people serve God all their lives and others accept His invitation on their deathbed, but both receive God's forgiveness and eternal life.

You may want to ask, *"If this is true, what is the advantage of receiving God's forgiveness as early as possible, rather than in the last minute of life?"*

[Possible answers: it gives us time to share God's grace with others; those who serve God faithfully on earth their whole life will be rewarded in heaven (remember the parable of the talents and see 1 Corinthians 3:10-15); by following God's will, we avoid many mistakes; we do not know when our life will end, etc.].

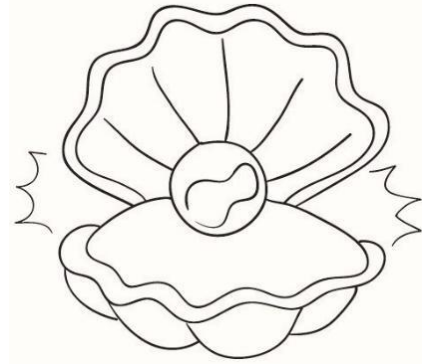
Also, we don't know if we will be able to hear God's call later. If we hear Him now, it's best to join Him now.

4. Took:

A very familiar song in many churches is "Amazing Grace!" The author of this song, John Newton, was the captain of a ship that transported slaves from Africa to America. He led a completely immoral life. When he became a Christian, he was amazed that God could save even a "scoundrel, a wretch" like him. He knew he did not deserve God's love and forgiveness. It was only by God's grace that he received salvation. God's grace is for everyone, even the worst sinner. Read or sing the first verse of "Amazing Grace!" and read Romans 3:23-24 together. Finish with a prayer thanking God for His grace.

Wise investments

Matthew 13:44-46



1. What is something you've bought that took a long time to save for? _____

2. In our Bible passage today, what treasure was found and how was it acquired?

The precious thing	How to get it
	With joy he sold everything he had in order to buy the whole field.
	He sold everything in order to buy the one pearl.

What is the "Kingdom of heaven"?

It is _____ It is _____

Why is the Kingdom of Heaven "hidden"?

3. What might we have to sacrifice for the Kingdom of Heaven?

Three Eternal Investments		
<i>GOD</i>	<i>GOD'S WORD</i>	<i>PEOPLE'S SOULS</i>

4. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

(Jim Elliot)



Wise investments (Treasure in heaven - Matthew 13:44-46)

Significance for teens:

Teens are already starting to think about their future: "Where and what will I study? What profession is right for me?" They are thinking about decisions that could affect them for decades. Your goal is to get them also thinking about choices that matter to the Kingdom of Heaven – in this life, and in the next. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be."

1. Hook

Start with prayer. Ask, "What is something that you bought that took a long time to save for?" Have some kids share their answers. Usually, to buy something really special, one has to save up and even make some sacrifices. Today's parables talk about two precious things that were not easy to get.

2. Book: Mathew 13:44-46

Read Matthew 13:44-46 and fill in the chart.

1.) The first valuable thing is some kind of treasure (hidden in a field). In older times of war or revolution, many people would hide their treasures in the walls or in furniture, hoping to return when the situation was calmer, more stable. Many years later, when old chairs or buildings were repaired, these treasures would be discovered.

Likewise in the first parable, a man found hidden treasure. *How did he acquire it?* In his joy, the man sold everything he had to buy the field where the treasure is buried.

2) The second precious thing found is a pearl. *How is it acquired?* The man sold everything he had to buy it.

That's the first meaning of the story, but what's the spiritual meaning? The precious things represent the kingdom of heaven. Write down the words, "Kingdom of Heaven." Ask, "What does the kingdom of heaven mean? Is the kingdom of heaven the same as salvation, or is it something else?" Have the teens share their thoughts about what the Kingdom of Heaven means.

It may be difficult for the kids to explain, because the Kingdom of Heaven includes both 'already' and 'not yet' meanings. It is citizenship in God's kingdom both now and forever. Write, "It is not yet here." The Kingdom of Heaven will be fully realized at the end of time, when Christ returns and establishes His reign.

But the Kingdom of God is also already here. Write, "It is already here." It is already in the people who are ruled by God. He is their King; they trust Him and live under His direction, according to His priorities. Christians receive salvation from Jesus and immediately enter His kingdom. Thus, the Kingdom of Heaven is both "already" and "not yet."

Ask, "Why is the kingdom of heaven so precious?" (Possible answers: It is eternal; God created it; it is based on love; we look forward to a time when there will be no sorrow and no tears, etc.).

Ask: "Why is the Kingdom of Heaven hidden?" (Possible Answer: God wants people to seek Him, then choose Him; if He showed Himself completely people would have no choice – He would overwhelm their ability to choose; it's more valuable to us when we realize that God is showing Himself to us – amazing and precious).

Leader's Guide

Ask, "How do we 'buy into' the Kingdom of heaven?" We can't, the price is too high. Even if we sold all our possessions, we would still not have enough money to buy the right to be in the Kingdom of Heaven. But Jesus provides what we need and invites us in.

3. Look:

The Bible says we should make it our first priority to seek God's Kingdom. Read Matthew 6:33. Ask: "What might we have to sacrifice for the Kingdom of Heaven?" (Possible answers: time; comforts; money; plans; family and friendships; life).

Ask: "Have you sacrificed anything for the Kingdom of Heaven?" Have the kids share their answers. Remind them that they sacrificed time today to be in this group. (If your group meets on Sundays, they may be sacrificing their only free day). The Bible says that those who make sacrifices for Christ will receive rewards in the kingdom of heaven. In the parable of the Talents, the reward was joy, celebration, and more. We are not told other details about rewards in heaven, perhaps so that we will sacrifice out of love rather than self-interest.

How can we invest already, now, in the Kingdom of God? The Bible says there are three investments we make that matter now and for eternity: in God Himself, in His Word, and in the souls of people. Whenever we care for these, we are investing in the Kingdom of Heaven. We are living as citizens of God's Kingdom now, and also making a difference in God's Kingdom in eternity.

"Let's look at these three more closely."

Have the kids write down their ideas in the chart. *How can we invest in our relationship with God?* (Possible answers: prayer; worshiping Him; time with Him; assurance that He is always near, etc.).

How can we invest in God's Word?

(Possible answers: trusting it, reading it; memorizing it; obeying it; studying it with others, as we are doing now in our group, etc.).

And how can we invest in people's souls?

(Possible answers: helping others; showing love to neighbors; spending time with people; sharing about God's Kingdom with them, etc.).

4. Took:

Ask kids to circle any ideas they might be able to focus on in the coming week. This is a good investment.

Finally, read the quote at the bottom of the handout together. Who is Jim Elliot? Jim Elliot and four other missionaries took the news about Christ and His Kingdom to a wild and very violent jungle tribe in Ecuador, South America. (Elliot's photo is in the center of the five). At first the missionaries threw them gifts from the airplane. Then they got to know some of the tribe. In January 1956, tribesmen killed all five missionaries who wanted to give them the most precious gift of all—the Kingdom of Heaven. The labor of the murdered missionaries was continued by others, including Jim Elliot's wife. The tribe eventually repented and joined God's Kingdom. If the missionaries never moved down to Ecuador, maybe this tribe wouldn't have gotten that chance. Jim Elliot lived by his words. He gave up his earthly life to help the tribe find eternal life. Read his quote again, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Finish with prayer.

Where's My Place?

Luke 14:7-11

1. How did you feel when you didn't get the seat you wanted (in the game)?

2. The Parable of the Wedding Feast

Why did Jesus tell this parable?

What are the best seats at a wedding feast?

What are the worst seats at a wedding feast?



What will God do ...	Luke 14:11	1 Peter 5:5-6
to the proud?		
to the humble?		

Why does God oppose those who exalt themselves?

3. In what ways do people elevate themselves? _____

In what ways can people humble themselves? _____

4. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 14:11)

Where's my place? (Humility - Luke 14:7-11)

Significance for teens:

Teenagers, like most people, tend to think of themselves first: they take the most comfortable chair or the biggest piece of cake. They probably think that if they don't take care of themselves, they won't get what they want. The purpose of this lesson is for the kids to know that if they put others first, God will exalt them "in due season."

1. Hook

Begin with prayer.

Start with the rhythm game, "**Dethrone the King or Queen**". Have kids put their chairs in a circle. Then go around the circle giving each chair a number from one to the end. If one chair is bigger or more comfortable than the others, that one should be number one and the person in it is the king (or queen).

The king starts a beat by patting his legs twice and then clapping twice. He repeats this pattern over and over. Everyone else follows his beat of patting and clapping with the king. Once the beat is established the king says his number on the pats (1-1) and another number on the claps for instance (6-6). Then that person (number 6) says their number on the pats and another person's number on the claps (6-6-2-2). Then number two says their number on the pats and a different number on the claps and so on. Everyone must pat and clap in sync with the leader as the numbers are called out. *One rule: you may not repeat the number of the person who just called you.*

If a person makes a mistake, they must go to the last seat in the circle. Everyone behind him moves up one place *and receives the number of their new seats.* T

The goal of the game is to move up and eventually sit in the number one chair. There is no end to this game; just play until you are ready to go on.

(Alternatively, you could play "**Musical Chairs**." Or if your group is too small for either of these games you could number the chairs where the players are sitting. Then ask them each a question in turn, on topics from previous lessons. If an answer is correct, everyone stays in their seats. If not, the wrong answerer moves to the last seat and all those sitting below him move up one seat).

All of these games have kids challenging each other for chairs which ties into our parable. When you move into the lesson, ask them "How did you feel when you didn't get the seat you wanted?" "How did you feel when you had to move to the last chair" ("or didn't get a chair"? in Musical chairs)?

2. Book – Luke 14:7-11

"Today we will look at the parable of the guests choosing their seats at a wedding feast. Remember a parable is a short story with a spiritual meaning; we'll look at the story first and then at its deeper meaning."

Read Luke 14: 7-11. Ask, *why did Jesus tell this parable?* (Answer: He saw the people choosing the places of honor).

Ask, "What do you think are the best seats at a wedding feast?"

(Possible answers: next to the bride and groom; close to the food; where everyone can see you).

Ask, "What do you think are the worst seats at a wedding feast?"

(Possible answers: where you can't see anything, such as behind a pillar; far away from the couple; the last to receive food).

Fill in the chart: "According to Luke 14:11, what will God do to the proud?" (Answer: humble them) and "what will God do to the humble?" (Answer: exalt him). If needed, explain "exalt" means to receive a special position of honor. This may not be seen in this life, but God promises to give honor to the humble, who put others first.

Read 1 Peter 5:5-6. According to 1 Peter 5:5-6, what does God do to the proud? (Answer: resist him) And what does God do to the humble? (Answers: give grace (an undeserved gift) - v.5; exalt in due time - v.6).

Ask, "Why does God oppose those who exalt themselves?"

(Possible answers: they think they accomplish everything on their own, without God's help; they put themselves in God's place in their lives; they think only of their own interests and not the interests of others, etc.).

3. Look

Ask, in what ways do people try to exalt themselves? (Possible answers: bragging about their accomplishments; proud of possessions or actions or reputation, etc.).

Ask in what ways can people humble themselves? (Possible answers: think more about others than themselves; put the needs of others first; see themselves as being just like everyone else, etc.).

Divide the group into pairs and give them the task to think of situations in which a person tends to exalt themselves, think only of themselves. Then each pair prepares and acts out two short skits: in the first one, the person puts his or her own interests first, and in the second one, the person puts the interests of others first. They show how a humble person would act in the same situation.

Write down all the situations the kids acted out. Then ask them, what are other situations where kids can act humbly, putting others above ourselves?

(Possible answers: let someone in line; help carry something heavy for someone; hold the door for someone; give someone a better food portion, etc.).

4. Took

It is helpful to point out to the kids what these verses do NOT mean. They do not mean that we should not care about ourselves or acknowledge our own interests; they do not mean that we and our desires are not worthy of attention. Simply that we recognize that all the good things we have come from God and so we share and lift others up as much as we can. It's been said that "humility doesn't mean we think less of ourselves but that we think of ourselves less."

Finally, read Luke 14:11 on the handout and end with prayer.

What kind of Soil are You?

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

1. For a seed to bear fruit, it needs _____.

2. Parable of the Sower

A parable is a short story with a _____.



<i>The Parable</i>	<i>The Spiritual Meaning</i>
The seed	_____
The different types of soil	_____, who respond to this message in different ways.
The seed by the roadside <i>Problem: Birds flew in and ate the seeds.</i>	Problem: the hearers _____ message; the evil one hijacks it by suggesting, "Don't believe it."
The seed in the rocks <i>Problem: the seeds can't grow deep roots; the seedling is burned by the sun.</i>	Problem: the Word does not go _____ into the heart of its hearers. As soon as difficulties come, they give up.
The seed in the thorns <i>Problem: thorny weeds choke out the young plants</i>	Problem: the cares of life, the love of wealth _____ the message, and the person does not bear fruit.
The seed in good soil <i>yields a good crop.</i>	the person hears the message, understands it, and _____ (each to a different degree).

3. Problem #1: not understanding

1. What are some reasons why people do not understand the Word?
2. How can we help people understand the Word?

Problem #2: no deep roots

1. What does it mean to have roots?
2. Through what do these spiritual roots grow in our lives?

Problem #3 - the cares of this life and the deception of riches

1. How do the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the Word?
2. What should we do to keep the cares of life and pursuit of wealth from taking control of us?

4. How will you 'work the soil' in your own heart so that God's word can grow there?

**What kind of soil are you? (Attitude toward the Word of God –
Matthew 13:1-9,18-23)**

Significance for teens:

Your group probably has teens in various spiritual stages. Some may have been in the group for a long time, but still don't seem to understand the message of the gospel. Others have decided to follow Jesus, but their understanding of the Word and commitment to God is not very deep. Still others have responded to the gospel, but they are so busy with music, school, sports, etc. that there is no time for the Lord. But some have a living relationship with Jesus that gradually grows deeper and already bears fruit. Today's parable has something to say to each one.

1. Hook:

Begin with prayer. Today is the last lesson on the parables of Jesus. You might like to review the parables you have studied.

Show the teens a packet of seeds, such as pumpkin seeds. Say, *"I love pumpkin! Cookies, pies, pumpkin soup! It would be good to grow a pumpkin. I bought good seeds, and I'll have lots of pumpkins!"* (Open the packet of seeds and pour them into a bowl). *"They need water"*. (Pour water into the bowl). *"They need sunshine. Good thing it's a sunny day!"* (Put the bowl on the windowsill). *"How many days until the pumpkins grow? Uh-oh, I forgot something very important. I forgot the soil."* This is a basic principle: for a seed to bear fruit, it needs good soil.

2. Book – Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23:

Some of the kids will immediately guess the parable you are going to discuss. It is a well-known parable - the parable of the Sower. Read the passage together up to verse 9.

Idea: If you have enough kids, you can dramatize the story as it's read. One person reads the parable and 8 others act it out.

Roles: *the sower, 4 seeds; a bird; the sun in sunglasses; and a weed. If needed you can have one person play more than one role. You also need fruit – real or plastic or drawn.*

Read and Pantomime: *When the sower plants the seed, he puts the other person on the floor. When the parable says the seed has sprouted, the person on the floor begins to "grow" like a plant. 1. The bird swoops down and takes the seed. 2. The sun (wearing sunglasses) shines and the plant shrivels up. 3. The weed (without hurting the seed!) chokes out the young sprout. 4. The seed that fell on good soil grows and can be given the fruit.*

Remind students that a parable is a short story with a spiritual meaning. There is always a second deeper meaning in a parable. Often people are left to discover this meaning for themselves, but in this parable, Jesus clearly explains the spiritual meaning to His disciples.

Read Matthew 13:18-23 and fill in the chart.

The **seed** is the Word of God - the message of God's Kingdom. It gives life and produces fruit.

The different types of soil are the hearts of people who respond to this message in different ways.

The **seed that fell by the roadside** is eaten by birds. The spiritual meaning: the hearers do not understand the message; the evil one hijacks it by suggesting, "Don't believe it."

The seed that falls on the rocks cannot take deep roots; the plant is burned by the sun. The spiritual meaning: the Word does not go deep enough into the heart of its hearers. As soon as difficulties come, they give up.

The seed that falls in the thorns produces sprouts, but they are choked out by thorny weeds. The spiritual meaning: the cares of life, the love of wealth crowd out the message, and the person does not bear fruit.

A seed that falls on good soil brings a good harvest. Spiritual meaning: the person hears the message, understands it, and bears fruit (each to a different degree).

3. Look:

In the parable we see three specific problems that prevent the Word from bearing fruit in **someone's life**: a lack of understanding of the Word; a lack of deep relationship with God; and an abundance of daily worries. Divide the kids into three groups to discuss what each problem means and how to solve it. Then have them share their answers.

Group Questions #1. "Not understanding":

1. What are some reasons people don't understand the Word?

(Possible answers: there are too many difficult words for them; they are blind to the truth; it is not given clearly; they lack basic knowledge, etc.)

2. How can we help people understand the Word?

(Possible answers: by using a modern Bible translation; by asking questions during study of the Word to find out if it's understandable; avoiding complicated terms in the conversation; praying that the Holy Spirit would help us understand His Word).

Questions for Group #2. "No Deep Roots": 1. What does it mean to have deep roots?

(Possible answers: having a deeper understanding of God and His Word; not just stopping on the basics of faith; obeying God's Word).

2. Through what do these spiritual roots grow in our lives?

(Possible answers: listening to God's Word and obeying it; there is a parallel with the parable of the two builders: good roots are like a good foundation).

Group Questions #3. "The cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches":

1. How do the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the Word?

(Possible answers: they eat up all our time and we don't have time to read God's Word; we only think about this life and don't consider the Word important).

2. What should we do to keep the cares of life and pursuit of wealth from taking control of us?

(Possible answers: set aside special time devoted to God in His Word; find friends who also follow God's Word; ask God for help; go to a church where God's Word is preached, etc.).

Have the groups then report their answers to the whole group.

4. Took:

Have each person think about their own relationship to God's message. Do they lack understanding? Do they live in deep relationship with God? Are the cares and busyness of life keeping it out? Have the kids think about how they can improve the soil of their hearts. Finish with prayer for God's help in reading His Word, understanding it, and doing it.