

Great Stories

1: A TALE OF TWO SONS

This series explores some of the parables that Jesus told. Some may be very familiar to some of you, and it may be tempting to draw quick conclusions. But try to re-visit them afresh together. There are often many layers and always many applications of Jesus' parables.

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...
All share: What are your favourite children's stories and why?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Find a painting of the Prodigal Son returning to the Father – and sing a song about the love of God the Father.

WORD

Read Luke 15:11-32 Try acting (or reading) it with the roles of: the narrator (Jesus), the father, the younger son, the older son.

Now watch this video by Ethos: 'Home - Inhabiting the story of the prodigal'. It's at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDNyb-flhcc> (if you need help viewing it, then let me know)

Now reflect on what was said, as you re-read the reading.

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage & the video:

- Does anything in the passage or video jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Dec 2017



- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What was helpful about the video? What particularly struck you?
- Imagine you are one of the characters at a time (the younger son, the older son, the father).
 - * How do you feel about the actions of the other characters?
 - * How do you relate to this character in your own life?
 - * What might this character encourage you to be more thankful for in your life?
 - * Thinking about this character, what changes do you think you need to make in your life?
 - * Who do you know who is like the other characters in the story?
- How, as a church, can we be more like the father and less like the older son?
- Jesus is saying that God is like the father in the story. In what ways do you like this picture of God? In what ways do you not?

WHAT NEXT?

- Who do you know personally who seems to be far from God? Pray for these people that they would know God's love.
- Pray too for us, as a church – that we would be welcoming to 'prodigals' – with the attitude of the father, rather than the older son.
- Pray for our Autumn events, including the Alpha Course starting. Thank you if you are involved in organising one of the events. Do please come along to some of the events to encourage the organisers and to welcome others.

Great Stories

2: THE GREAT SAMARITAN

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Share a time when you were in a mess and someone helped you.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Find some paintings of the Good Samaritan parable. Play or sing a song that expresses thanks to God for saving us (eg 'Thank you for saving me', 'There is a redeemer', 'Thank you for the cross Lord' etc)

WORD

This is a well-known story and it's easy to think there is only one message, but as with many of Jesus' parables, there is a lot more going on – so try to re-read it afresh and see it from different angles.

Read Luke 10:25-37

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

There was a lot of prejudice between Samaritans and Jews, who generally despised one another.

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Dec 2017



- Read back through the story step-by-step. At each stage, pause and imagine how each character was feeling. Share your thoughts.
- If Jesus were to re-tell the story here today, what different groups might he use? Try to think of at least 3 or 4 – local and global.
 - * Now split into 3s or 4s for 5-10 minutes. Each group take a different scenario. How would you re-tell the story in a modern day form? Where would it be set? Who would the characters be? What would happen? Share your ideas with the whole group.
- Imagine a situation that you could face in your daily life where your attitude might be like the priest. If you can, share it with the group.
- If you needed help, who do you feel would be the most unlikely people to help you? Why?
 - * Who can you think of who might not expect you to give help to them? Is there anything you could do about this?
- The expert in the law tries to challenge Jesus' knowledge. Jesus commends him on his understanding of God's word, but also responds with a story about putting knowledge into practice.
 - * What do you feel personally are your strengths and weaknesses regarding knowledge and practice as a Christian? What steps could you take (or are you taking) to address these?

WHAT NEXT?

- **The Group Samaritan Challenge:** Plan something you could do as a group to be like the Samaritan – to help those in need who might not expect it.
- Pray for the people who you have mentioned during this session.
- *To Take Away:* At some point this week, stop and imagine Jesus as the Samaritan, then as the beaten-up man. How does this change your view of the story?

Great Stories

3: A SOWER AND SOILS

Preparation: Lay out 4 areas representing the 4 types of soil in the middle of the room (maybe on a tray). Be as creative as you like.

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

What do you like or dislike about gardening? Share your thoughts and any stories you have about gardening or farming.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Share round some pieces of fruit. Read out Galatians 5:22-25 together. Each pray silently: as you eat the fruit, each think about one of the fruit mentioned in the passage. Say sorry to God for times when you haven't shown that fruit and ask God to grow more of that fruit in you. Finish by reading through the verses together out loud again.

WORD

If you haven't done the preparation above, nip out and raid the garden!

Read Luke 8:4-15

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Dec 2017



- Consider each of the four soil types in turn...
 - * Who today is like that soil type? How common do you think it is?
 - * What things contribute to that soil type today? Write answers on small pieces of paper and put them on the different soil types on the tray.
 - * When in your life are you like that soil?
 - * What can we do to improve that soil?

- For what reasons do you think Jesus uses a picture of sowing seeds for spreading the word of God?

- The sower scatters seed everywhere. The quality of the soil only becomes evident (to us) by its response. So...
 - * Who should we tell about Jesus and what responses we should expect?
 - * Are there places that we don't 'scatter'? Why?

- What does it mean for the seed to bear fruit in our lives?
 - * What can we do to go on nurturing and encouraging this process?

- Who do you know for whom the Word of God is just starting to grow in their life? How could you help nurture it?

WHAT NEXT?

- In 3s-4s: Share where you will be tomorrow. Pray for one another and the people you will meet – as you seek to sow good news into those situations – through what you say and do.

- How are you getting on with the Group Samaritan Challenge from last week? When you complete the challenge, it would be great to hear about it so we can share it with others.

Great Stories

4: SAVING UP

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...
What's been one of your 'best buys'? Why was it so good?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Put a cross on the table. Get some magazines and newspapers. Cut out some ads related to money or possessions. Put them on the table and put the cross on top of them. Reflect on the contrasting messages of the cross and the pictures. Say some prayers of thanks and commitment to Jesus.

WORD

Read Luke 12:13-21 Try taking parts to read this. It's a bit tricky because it's a story within a story, but have a go! The parts are: Luke (narrator), Jesus, the person in the crowd, the rich man, God

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- The person in the crowd asks Jesus to sort out an issue he has with his finances, family and his long-term security (v13). We're not told his reaction to Jesus' answer (vs 14-21). How do you think he felt? What do you think he said and did?

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Dec 2017



- If you re-told the parable according to popular opinion today, how would it go? Which version do you feel most comfortable with – the popular version or Jesus's? Why?
- Wasn't the rich man being sensible when he built bigger barns to store his crops? What else could he have done with his excess harvest? Are Jesus' comments in verses 33-34 realistic?

Before reading the next section, try the following...

- On a scale of 0-5, how important are comfort and security to you:
 - * a) now b) in the long-term?
 - * Give examples of how these views affect your life – both positive and negative

Now read on – Luke 12:25-34

- What does it mean to put seeking God's kingdom first (v31) – both for our attitudes and our actions?
 - * How can we practically put God's kingdom first in our lives before possessions and security? How would our lives be different?

WHAT NEXT?

- In 3s-4s: Share: Jesus implies from his comments in verse 22 that the man was worrying about something. What do you worry or get anxious about? Pray for one another about these things. Then pray that you would be able to put God first in those areas.
- Pray for one of the church's linked organisations working with those who have very little (eg Tearfund, ICFeM). More info on our website.
- How are you getting on with the Group Samaritan Challenge?
- **Take-Away:** Some of the issues raised in Jesus' parable are very personal and challenging. Why not spend some time this week re-reading, thinking and praying about this passage on your own.

Great Stories

5: PARTY TIME!

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Read out a children's story. How many different messages or morals can you draw from it? Which do you think are good or bad?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Take some random objects and give one each to everyone. Have a time of quiet. Each think about how you could use your object to convey a message about God or life in his kingdom. Share your ideas – even if they're a bit contrived!

WORD

Read Luke 14:12-24

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Jesus tells the story at a meal where he has been invited as a guest. How do you think his hosts felt about the parable he told?
- Imagine you were someone in the parable. How would you feel if you were: a) The host b) Someone invited originally c) Someone invited at the end

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Dec 2017



- In the parable, Jesus gives 3 excuses for people not going to the banquet. If Jesus told the parable here today, what other excuses might he add to the list?

In the last parable, we explored how possessions and security can divert us from following Jesus and putting his kingdom first.

- What other things do you find it easy to put before God in your life?
- In what ways do these other priorities affect your response to God? (both day-to-day or in bigger life decisions)
- Do you know of people who are better at getting their priorities right?
- Share as many practical ideas as you can on how you can prioritise God in your life.
- If we are to be like Jesus, how can we become more like the host in the parable?

For a different angle on priorities, try watching 'Pricetag' – a video from Ethos at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v91iyPMqk0c>

- How do you feel about the video? What do you agree/disagree with?

WHAT NEXT?

- Take time to share anything that you want the group to pray for. Start by praying for one another (people who are in the room) – things to ask for and things to give thanks for. Afterwards, pray for other people you are concerned about (those outside the room).
- **Take Away:** During the week, try choosing a piece of teaching from the Bible. Then write your own parable about it. If you're brave, share it with the group next time.

Great Stories

6: PRAY AND DON'T GIVE UP!

As a church, we want to pray more together. As part of this, we would like each Growth Group to dedicate one meeting to prayer. Here's a framework, similar to the one we use on Sundays for Prayer at 6.

PREPARATION

Start by reading Luke 18:1-8 – a parable Jesus told 'to show his disciples that they should always pray and not give up'. Then for **5 mins**...

- In silence or to instrumental music . Each replay a 'video of your day' in your mind. Silently talk to God about what happened & the people you met.

ADORATION, PRAISE & THANKSGIVING

Spend **5 mins** praying prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God – for who he is and what he has done.

You could try this...

- If there are more than 7 of you, split into two groups
- In a minute of silence, reflect on: What do you like about God? and What has he done for you and for others?
- Read out Psalm 150 together. Now in your groups, for about 3 mins, say short prayers. Begin each with 'We praise you Lord for...' Then all join in with 'Amen'. (For example: 'We praise you Lord for your forgiveness. Amen. We praise you Lord for giving us food. Amen etc)
- You could finish this part by singing or reading out a song of praise.

CONFESSION

Do an activity of confession for **3 mins**. You could try this...

- Put out a shredder. Each write on a piece of A4 paper something you want to say sorry to God for (eg pride, gossip, not loving etc). Quietly say sorry to God as you put your paper through the shredder.

LISTENING TO GOD

This is a 'Lectio Divina' pattern. It can be used with any passage individually or as a group. Here, I suggest using **Luke 12:22-34** (from last time)

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Dec 2017



- Go around the circle reading the whole passage one verse at a time slowly
- Each spend 3 mins quietly reflecting on which word, verse or part of a verse particularly strikes you today?
- After, in turn – each just share the few words/phrase which struck you (without explaining why)
- Read round circle again – starting with a different person
- Spend 5 mins in silence. Ask God to speak to you. Reflect on any of the verses you've heard & why they're important. What might God be saying?
- In turn – briefly share anything that struck you.
- Have 2 mins more of quiet. Ask God what he wants your response to be. Is there anything you need to change or do?
- Read round once again.

INTERCESSION

Please pray for the church for 10 mins. You could do it like this...

- Try and list as many aspects of the church that you can think of (eg Revive, Breakfast, Musicians, Alpha, Christmas events etc). Put them in the middle of the room as reminders. (The church website could help).
- Now pray short prayers for the different things you've written down. All finish each prayer with Amen.

Pray for our local community for 5 mins. You could do this in the same way as for the church. Your list might include schools, businesses, the elderly, shop workers, the council etc

Pray for national and international issues for 5 mins. You could make this fun by each drawing a picture of something you want to pray for. Explain your picture, then say a prayer based on it.

TO FINISH

Split into 2s-3s. Share anything else you want to pray for at this time in your life. Pray for one another.

Finally: Read out 2 Corinthians 13:14 as a whole group & finish with 'Amen'.

Prayer is vital – for us as individuals and together as a church. It would be great if you could join us sometimes on Sundays for Prayer at 6.

Great Stories

7: THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX MAN

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...
Talk about how you found the Prayer Week last time.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Each write a few words or draw a picture that expresses how you feel about God. Share what you've written or drawn.

WORD

Read Luke 18:9-14 Try parts (Luke, Jesus, Pharisee, Tax Collector)

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- You could also watch a video of the parable. There's a simple one at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ufe6zouTq8g> What's helpful or unhelpful about the way it's shown?
- What was the Pharisee doing right? In what ways was he wrong?
- What was right about the tax collector's attitude?
- Get some newspapers/magazines. In 2s or 3s, look through some and cut out any stories about people who you think Jesus would tell

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Dec 2017



this story to today. Also find any about people who are like the tax collector. Explain what you've found to the whole group.

- In what ways might we be like the Pharisee?
 - * How can we do what's right and stand up for our beliefs without becoming like the Pharisee?
- How popular is the attitude of the tax collector today? Why?
 - * How would our lives be different if we had the attitude of the tax collector?
- Name some things that you think we should be proud of, and some that you think we shouldn't.

As we come to the end of our series of parables:

- Do you like parables or would you prefer Jesus to be more direct? Why?
- Have a vote on which is your favourite parable of the ones we've looked at in Growth Groups. Discuss.
- Have any of your views/attitudes/habits changed or developed as a result of this series?
- What have you found helpful about this series? Are there ways it could have been improved? All feedback is welcome!

WHAT NEXT?

- Pray for the Christmas events at the church and the Alpha Courses. Also think about who you could invite.
- Share something about what you're looking forward to (or not) this Christmas. Is there anything from any of the parables that might affect what you do or how? Pray for one another.
- Pray too for those who might be left out or struggling this Christmas.
- **Take Away:** Take some time this week to read back through the parables that we've looked at. They're all in Luke 7-20.