

The Power of a Story

Week 4 – February 20, 2022

Scripture: Matthew 13:44-46; 7:7-8

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Look up the verses below and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Have you ever discovered or realized something, and then changed the way you behaved because of it?

Read the scripture from Matthew 13:44-46 and Matthew 7:7-8 together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

This parable teaches about the infinite value of the Kingdom of God. In one moment, the person in this parable valued his possessions, but once his eyes were opened to the value of the treasure, he sold all he had and purchased the field. Likewise, when our values shift, we also shift what we give our energy to. More so, what we give our energy to gives us good insight into the things we value. This parable gives us profound understanding into what is truly valuable in this world and how God can radically shift our value system. It is a story about the shifts we will make when we begin to value the things God values.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Jesus talked about a king and a certain kind of kingdom, i.e. a certain kind of rule/reign/culture/economy/justice. His version of a kingdom took people by surprise. It was different than the Roman Empire (a kingdom ruled by Caesar) or what the Jewish people expected. Read the following verses. How does Jesus describe the Kingdom of God in them?
 - Matthew 13:24
 - Matthew 13:31
 - Matthew 13:33
 - Matthew 13:44
 - Matthew 13:45
 - Matthew 13:47
 - Matthew 13:52
2. When an opportunity outweighs the cost, what changes in a person's behavior and priorities?
3. Consider the pattern of this parable (Matthew 13:44-46): discover, repent, pursue. Discovery brings about joy and a sense of urgency. Repentance brings about real and defining change. Pursuing brings about something worth giving your life to.
 - a. How is your faith journey marked by this pattern?
 - b. Read Matthew 7:7-8. What could God be inviting you into that brings about the pattern of discover, repent, pursue?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Ask God to help you discover the beauty of His Kingdom and His purposes. We desire to repent and pursue Him, not out of obligation, but out of passion; we desire to value what He values. He is so precious that the value of everything we possess deflates by comparison.

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Week 3 – February 13, 2022

Scripture: Luke 18:1-8 and Philippians 4:6-7

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Look up the verses below and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Think about the last story you told to make a point about something. How was it received by its intended audience?

Read the scripture from Luke 18:1-8 and Philippians 4:6-7 together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

God wants to be in communication with His people. Life will present challenges, and in those moments God wants His people to communicate with Him and not give up. Does prayer work? Does God answer prayers? There might not be an immediate response, but prayer is a way to draw close to God and develop a relationship with Him. Many of us fall into the trap of thinking prayer is mostly about what we ask God for—our opportunity to tell God what we think we want, or what we need, and we expect Him to comply. But often we end up frustrated because our expectations were not met through our prayer life. What if prayer is not about getting God to do what we want, but God getting us to do what He wants?

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Jesus told a parable to better understand prayer. **Read Luke 18:1-8.** Jesus is letting His followers know what life in His Kingdom is like. What does this parable reveal about God's heart?
2. We don't live in the fullness of God's Kingdom yet; God understands this and wants to encourage us while living in our earthly kingdom. To help us navigate the broken kingdom we live in, He teaches us to pray so we do not lose hope. God's promise is that one day it will all be made right, but until that day comes, He wants us to be people of faith.
 - a. Can you think of a situation in your life when your prayer life was not moving you closer to God?
 - b. When prayer does not get us what we want or think we need, it can be devastating. Have you ever lost hope? What restored your hope, if it was restored?
3. **Philippians 4:6-7** says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This is about a state of mind where the circumstances we face won't dictate whether or not we have peace. What can change in our lives if we consistently seek God without giving up?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Tell God your desire to spend time just talking to Him every day. Tell God what you are thankful for, what you'd like to see Him do, and ask Him what He would like you to know. Just have a conversation with Him about life!

"Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference." Max Lucado

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Week 2 – February 6, 2022

Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35 and John 8:34-36

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Look up the verses below and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Have you ever been hurt, wounded, or scarred by a boss, co-worker, friend, parent, family member, classmate, etc? Share about this experience.

Read the scripture from Matthew 18:21-35 and John 8:34-36 together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

One of the most painful human experiences is to be hurt or wounded by another person. Often in our lives we hold onto that hurt and pain which turns into more pain inside of us. One of Jesus closest disciples wrestled with this issue and asked Jesus what seemed to be a simple question. In paraphrased form he said, "What if someone I know does something to truly hurt me. How many times am I required to forgive them? Seven times?" Jesus tells him a parable about an unforgiving servant and the consequences that come with unforgiveness. Through His teaching we ask these questions: What is forgiveness? How do we forgive? Why do we forgive? How can forgiveness lead to freedom?

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. **Matthew 18:21-35:** Jesus equates this parable to the Kingdom of Heaven; God's principles are different than the principles of any system of the world. In our western world we work off the legal system for justice, a "guilt/innocence" model. If you are deemed guilty by a jury of your peers you are judged; if you are deemed innocent by a jury of your peers you are made clean. In an "honor/shame" culture this act of mercy would be seen by its audience as one of the greatest acts because it restored all of the servants relationships/standings within the community.
 - a. The question the King asks is one for us to hold onto today: "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" Have you ever had anyone pay off a debt for you or show you extraordinary mercy?
 - b. How have you shown compassion, as a person with power, over a person who is powerless?
2. Forgiveness is not equal to reconciliation. Forgiveness can be a one-way street; reconciliation requires both parties to come to the table. Forgiveness can happen even if the parties won't come together because the ability to forgive only comes from the power of God. How does this kind of forgiveness lead to freedom?
3. Jesus' parables warns that forgiveness brings with it a call for reform. If forgiveness does not effect change, it is not truly experienced. **Read John 8:34-36.** What does it mean to be "truly free"? How will your life change?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Ask God to show us how His Kingdom expands and grows when we forgive. Thank God that forgiveness comes through the power of God, and not of our own strength. Without God unforgiveness leads to bitterness. Praise Him that He offers us freedom through forgiveness.

The Power of a Story

Week 1 – January 30, 2022

Scripture: Luke 6:46-49

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Look up the verses below and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Think about a favorite story you loved as a child, a special story from a parent, or a beloved movie. What about this story connects so deeply with you?

Read the scripture from Luke 6:46-49 together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

Did you know that Jesus taught about 35% of the time through parables? Parables are a short story or metaphor that Jesus used to help His followers imagine a different way to see the world. Parables were used to provoke people to think deeply about what they believed, consider how they saw God in their world, and helped move people to action on behalf of the Kingdom of Heaven. What parable or story that Jesus told do you remember best and why is it memorable to you?

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. **Read Luke 6:46-49.** Notice how Jesus says, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" in verse 46. When Jesus offers this question, how does it challenge you right now? Why would it be important to Jesus that a person does just say He is Lord but follows Him and His teachings?
2. Discuss the two types of foundations Jesus talked about. How have you seen something you put your trust in not "hold up" when the storms of life came? What did that moment teach you? How did you shift something in your life as a result?
3. If we believe that Jesus is Lord and are willing to follow Him, how can we adjust our rhythms and lifestyle in this next season to grow in our relationship with Him and increasing our understanding of His love?
 - a. What holds us back from keeping Jesus as the foundation of our life?
 - b. How can we support each other to keep digging deeper?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today.

Pray about some of the distractions that offer a false sense of security or foundation.

Pray for wisdom to seek out Jesus and His presence in the midst of the storm.

Pray for passion for Jesus in this season regardless of what is coming at us.