



# the domain of God

a study on the parables in the gospel of luke

Fall 2009 Small Group Leader Guide  
Campus Ministry @ GVSU - Allendale, MI

## How to Use This Guide

This booklet is intended to be a guide through the Gospel of Luke, especially focusing on the parables. It is not a study in itself but simply a tool to help us discover for ourselves the story of God relating to human kind. Obviously, the study is not exhaustive. It is merely a taste of the richness set forth in the Luke parables.

The entire Gospel of Luke is included in the reading. Those who wish to use the book of Luke as a daily devotional can follow the daily reading guide at the beginning of each lesson. Specific portions have been selected for focus. Each focus text brings light to the question, “What is the Kingdom or Domain of God?” In Luke, we begin to discover the Kingdom of God via Jesus character, actions, and words.

The parables were one of Jesus’ favorite teaching methods. They are stories or comparisons drawn from the everyday experiences and problems of the people of the day. Jesus uses these parables to set forth spiritual truths. Or as Walter Wink puts it, “Parables are tiny bits of coal squeezed into diamonds. Condensed metaphors that catch the ray of something ultimate and glint it at our eyes.” This study guide focuses on some of the most well loved parables as well as some of the less familiar.

Questions are presented at one of three levels. The first level, **Discover (D\*)**, asks questions which do not assume much previous Bible knowledge. **Discover** is appropriate for those who are curious about Christianity and the Bible, those who have recently become Christians or those who have not had much Bible background. The guide will help you discover the new territory of God’s story and consequently your story.

The second level, **Explore (E\*)**, assumes some previous Bible knowledge such as may have been attained via Sunday school, other Bible studies, or personal study. **E\*** questions will help you **explore** the territory you’ve already discovered on your journey. The Spirit will make connections with the rest of the story and with your life.

**Settle (S\*)**, the third level, is designed for Christians with significant previous experience, who wish to camp in the territory; to live in the story. **Settle** level questions may involve more theology, Old Testament echoes and processing. Many have no obvious answers.

The three levels can be intermixed to meet the needs of an individual or group. Simply use the questions that best enable you to grasp what God is saying through Luke. Leaders should be sensitive to the spiritual development of their group members so that no one feels completely lost yet all have an opportunity to dig deeper.

In the study of the parables, the majority of the questions are at the **D\*** level and those with little previous knowledge will be at an advantage because they have fewer preconceived notions. Others should do everything possible to shelve their previous learning, especially about the most familiar parables. In that way, perhaps we can truly know what we see in the text instead of simply seeing what we already think we know.

You will notice that the guide contains blank pages opposite each group of questions. Use the blank page to answer the questions, draw pictures or diagrams and take notes during the group time. It is not intended that every question be answered. Simply select those you find most helpful and understandable.

Sometimes the symbol **\*TOOL\*** will appear among the questions. In such a case, the **\*TOOL\*** symbol is followed by a brief explanation of a simple tool which can be helpful in opening the Scriptures for our understanding. The next question then utilizes that particular tool.

The symbol **+** indicates additional information for the previous question. It contains such things as definitions, cross-references, original language notes and cultural insights. Use this information to process the questions.

The group study will be most effective if participants come with the Scripture studied and questions considered ahead of time. However, if some week you cannot prepare ahead of time, you can

still benefit from the discussion. There is no need to stay away if you are not prepared from time to time.

The questions in the guide are intended to stimulate other questions. Some questions have specific answers in the text but many questions necessitate processing and reflection. We encourage you, as you journey through the Gospel of Luke, not to look for answers but to look for The Kingdom of God.

At the end of each session an **INTEGRATIVE CONNECTION ACTIVITY** will be provided. These exercises are designed to pull us out of the intellectual, logical, sequential mode we often function in and propel us into the imaginative, artistic, intuitive mode in which we can experience the Scripture holistically. Impetus for these activities comes from Walter Wink's book, *Transforming Bible Study*. These activities may feel strained at first, since we typically approach study of the Bible with our minds instead of our hearts. However, after a little practice, we may be able to enter the Word in a fresh, new way.

The goal of this study of the Gospel of Luke is not information, but formation and transformation. Let the parables seep into you and saturate your soul and in the process you will see God and you will be changed!

## Resources used in the preparation of this guide:

- Bailey, Kenneth. *The Cross and the Prodigal*. St Louis: Concordia, 1973.
- BibleWorks 5 software including the Friberg Lexicon 1992-2002.
- Bruce, F.F. Ed. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971.
- Capon, Robert Farrar. *The Parables of the Kingdom*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- Craddock, Fred. *Interpretation: Luke: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990.
- Malina, Bruce and Richard Rohrbaugh. *Social-Scientific Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Piet, John. *A Path through the Bible*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia. 1981.
- VanVoorst, Robert E. *Reading the New Testament Today*. Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, CA, Copyright pending.
- Wink, Walter. *Transforming Bible Study*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.

*Biblical quotes in this guide are from the New American Standard Version (NASV) of the Bible.*

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### The Gospel of Luke

#### Overview

Session	Reading (chapters)	Focus (verses)	
Session 1	1 - 4:13	1:1 - 4	<i>Introduction</i>
Session 2	4:14 - 6	6:37 - 45	<i>Blind Leading the Blind</i>
Session 3	7 - 8	8:4 - 15	<i>The Sower</i>
Session 4	9 - 10	10:25 - 37	Who is My Neighbor?
Session 5	11 - 12	12:13 - 34	<i>Eat, Drink, and Be Merry</i>
Session 6	13 - 14	13:18 - 21	The Domain of God
Session 7	15 - 17	15:11 - 32	<i>The Forgiving Father</i>
Session 8	18 - 21	18:1 - 14	The Pharisee & Tax Collector
Session 9	22 - 24	24:13 - 35	Jesus, the Living Parable

## Session 1

### Introduction and Overview

#### Discover (D\*)

The Christian Bible has two main divisions. The first, the Old Testament, was originally written in Hebrew by the Israelites, who are the ancestors of the Jews. It is God's revelation of himself to humankind. The second division, the New Testament, was originally written in Greek, by early Christians, after Jesus lived on earth. It is the record of the further revelation of God in the story of Jesus, the Son of God.

The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels. The word "gospel" is inter-changeable with "good news." The Gospels present four different accounts of one story; the story of Jesus life, death and resurrection. The Gospel according to Luke is the third Gospel in the New Testament.

The books of the Bible were not originally written with chapter and verse divisions or even punctuation. Scholars added these later, for ease of reference. Bible texts are usually referred to by book name, chapter number, then verse number. For example, Luke 1:1 means: the Gospel of Luke, first chapter, first verse. You can locate the books of the Bible by referring to its table of contents.

1. At this point in your life, what is your impression of what the Bible is? Is it important? Why or why not?
2. To see what the Bible (Word of God, Scriptures) has to say about itself, read Isaiah 55:8-11, Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What do we learn from these? According to this, what is the Bible?
3. What is Luke about? Why was it written? (See Luke 1:1-4)

4. Flip through the entire book of Luke, taking note of the headings. Like chapter and verse divisions, headings are not part of the original text. Rather, they are added by scholars. From the headings try to determine what kinds of things Luke is going to be about. What particularly stands out to you?
5. What do you hope to gain from this study?

#### Explore (E\*)

The power of the Bible is not in the diversity and brilliance of its human authors, or the variety and genius of its styles, or the coherence and insight of its history. Rather the power of the Bible is twofold. First, God's Spirit, who chose to use imperfect human beings to reveal God's perfection, induced the writing of the story. Second, God's Spirit influences the reading and hearing of the story. Therefore, the Bible is not merely another book to be examined for literary content and style. Rather it is a living, active entity that speaks endlessly into the hearts of people about God's overwhelming concern for all. It is God's story. It is our story.

When we open up the Bible, we open up our being to the activity of God. That may seem a bit frightening and well it should. For God and God's word are nothing to be trifled with.

1. Do you have ideas about the Gospel of Luke prior to beginning this study? What are they?
2. Do you have ideas about Jesus' parables prior to beginning this study? What is a parable?  
+ Walter Wink says of parables: *Parables are tiny bits of coal squeezed into diamonds, condensed metaphors that catch the ray of something ultimate and glint it at our lives. Parables are not illustrations; they do not support, elaborate, or simplify a more basic idea, they are not ideas at all, nor can they ever be reduced to theological statements. They are the jeweled portals of another world...Lights are refracted through their surfaces that would otherwise blind us - or pass unseen. (emphasis mine)*

3. Why did Jesus speak in parables?

+See Mark 4:33,34, Luke 8: 9,10, Matt 13:34,35,Psalm 78:2

4. What is the purpose of parables?

+ See Luke 8: 16-18

5. How much of the parables did the disciples understand? What does this tell us about the parables? What might this tell us about us?

+ See Matt 15:15, 16, Mark 4:10-13 John 10: 6

6. What do you think might be the result of this study of the parables? What do you hope for? What do you fear?

### **Settle (S\*)**

Scholars generally believe the Gospel of Luke was written sometime after 70 CE (AD) by the same highly educated, upper class author who wrote Acts, which is volume II of this work. Luke is the longest, most polished and most skillfully written of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). Synoptic means, “presenting a common view.” Luke has also been argued to be the most theologically sophisticated of the synoptics. You can judge for yourself.

Although the Gospel of Mark is considered to be a primary source for Luke, one third to one half of the material in Luke is peculiar to Luke. Thirteen parables are found only in this book, including some of our favorites, such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

Predominantly Luke paints Jesus as the Savior of the world. Fred Craddock, in his commentary on Luke, suggests that we view the author of Luke as a preacher. This means, among other things, that in order to understand why Luke says what he does, we must pay attention to the form he uses to cast the message. Also, we will note Luke’s prolific use of the Hebrew Scriptures, which he obviously considers foundational.

**\*TOOL\* - Overview** – Getting the broad sweep of a portion of Scripture is invaluable to understanding each individual passage. Ask yourself, “What is the point of the whole book?” and “What is the point of the whole Bible?” Without this perspective it is possible that we “can’t see the forest for the trees.” Another way to say this is “Scripture interprets Scripture,” meaning that every interpretation MUST be consistent with the entire Bible.

Read the book of Luke in one sitting. To the very best of your ability, consciously set aside your previous opinions about the stories and teachings. Make a concerted effort to KNOW what you SEE and not just SEE what you already KNOW.

1. What themes do you see arising?
2. What is your impression of Jesus from this reading? What do Jesus’ main concerns seem to be in Luke?
3. What is your impression of the Kingdom of God? What strikes you about the parables?
4. If you could boil the Gospel of Luke down to a couple of statements, what would they be?
5. What questions have arisen?

**\*TOOL\* - Verb Forms** – The original Biblical languages have some verb forms that do not have parallels in English. They also have some verb forms that cannot be distinguished in English translations. Therefore, we can gain valuable insights into the nuances of a passage by understanding the form the verb was originally written in.

### **Read Luke 1:1-4.**

6. What do you make of Luke’s purpose? What are the things that “have been fulfilled?” Why does it matter that the verb is ‘perfect’? (See below)

+ The verb in verse 1 translated *have been fulfilled* is in the perfect tense. That means that it happened in the past but it has ramifications continuing into the present.

+The verb in verse 2 translated *handed down* can also mean *deliver, entrust, commit, pass on, commend*.

+ *Theophilus* in verse 3 means *lover of God*.

+ The verb in verse 4 translated *know* also means perceive, understand, recognize, acknowledge, learn, know well, find out.

7. What has God impressed on your heart?

## Session 2

### ***Blind Leading the Blind***

Imagine you woke up blind today. What would be the ramifications of that?

#### **Read Luke 4:14 – 6: 49**

1. What strikes you in these chapters?
2. What event immediately precedes these chapters? How might that be significant?

#### **Focus on Luke 6:37 – 45**

3. **D\*** What impresses you as the general feeling and attitude of this passage?

4. **E\*** What is your understanding of verses 37, 38?

+ *Not judge, not condemn, forgive, and give* are all imperative Greek verbs. That means they are direct commands.

5. **S\*** Given the information in questions 4 and 5 write an expanded version of verses 37 and 38 that expresses more fully their meaning. What might this mean for us?

+ All the verbs in #4 and all the 'you's in verses 37 and 38 are plural ('you all')

+*Judge* can also be translated *pass judgment on, condemn; decide, determine; consider, regard, think; prefer*

+ *Forgive* can also be translated *release or set free*.

+*Give* can also be translated *grant, allow, permit; place, put; appoint; establish; give out, pay; produce, yield, cause; entrust;*

6. **D\*** Verses 39 and 40 are a miniature two-verse parable. What might it mean? For us?

+ See Isaiah 9:16, Matt 15:12 –14, 2 Timothy 3:13.

+ The word translated *student* in verse 40 also means *disciple, pupil, follower*

7. **D\*** What might be the link between the parable in 39 and 40 and the warning in 41 & 42?

8. **D\*** Draw a picture of verses 41 and 42. What becomes clear from the picture?

9. **D\*** What might be the significance of the frequent use of words related to sight in these four verses? (11 times)

+ The Greek word translated *look* or *see* also means *be able to see, consider, regard, perceive, discover, find*

+ *See clearly* also means *look hard, or have one's eyes come into focus.*

+ In the Mediterranean culture of Jesus' day the eyes represent the zone of emotion-infused thought, including will, intellect, judgment, personality and feeling.

10. **D\*** What might be the point?

+ *Hypocrite* means *one who pretends to be other than what he is*

+ *Take out* (the speck) also means *force out, drive out, expel, exclude, reject.*

11. **D\*** Visualize the situation with the trees in verses 43 and 44. Describe what this would be like.

many study helps available to provide such information for those who have not studied Greek and Hebrew. (For instance; *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* and *Vine's Expository Dictionary* both from Thomas Nelson Publishers)

12. **D\*** What insights can be gained from this parable (verses 43 - 45)?

+ The following are the range of meaning for some of the words used in this parable:

+ *Good* (tree) = *good; right, proper, fitting; better; honorable, honest; fine, beautiful, precious*

+ *Bad* = *bad, rotten, worthless, harmful*

+ *Bear/produce* = *make, do, cause, effect, bring about, accomplish, perform, provide; create (of God); produce, yield, bear, put forth.*

+ *Fruit* = *fruit, grain; harvest; result, outcome; deed, action; return, gain, advantage; tribute, praise (of the lips); offspring, descendant*

+ *Known/recognized* = *know, have knowledge of find out, learn, understand; perceive, discern; to have knowledge; acknowledge, recognize*

+ *Good* (person) = *good; useful, satisfactory for one's (its) purpose, fitting, beneficial; sound (of trees), fertile (of soil), happy (of days); in a moral sense upright, just; kind, generous; clear (of conscience); perfect, inherently good (of God);*

+ *Evil* = *evil, bad, wicked, sinful, guilty (of conscience); unsound (eye); bad, worthless (of fruit); malignant or painful (of sores).*

+ *Treasure* = *treasure; store; treasure box, storeroom*

+ *Heart* = *heart, inner self; mind; will, desire, intention; interior*

**\*TOOL\* - Range of Meaning** - Exploring the many meanings that a word from the original language can carry will help us see a fuller picture of what is being said in a particular statement. There are

13. **D\*** How might this learning effect your own life?

### **INTEGRATIVE CONNECTION ACTIVITY**

During group time, each person chooses one of the short parables in this passage. Take several minutes to create an oil pastel picture that shows how this parable speaks to your own life at this time. Share with the others, as much as you wish, about your experience.

## **Session 3**

### ***The Sower***

Talk about your gardening experiences.

Read Luke 7 and 8

1. **D\*** What do you notice about Jesus in these chapters?
2. **S\*** What patterns or connections emerge in these chapters?
3. **E\*** What do you notice in the section about John the Baptist? What do you make of this?

### ***Focus on Luke 8: 4 - 15***

4. **E\*** Why do you think Jesus chose this kind of story to tell these people?
5. **D\*** Draw a representation of the parable. What do you notice?
6. **D\*** Label your picture of the parable with the interpretation that Jesus gives. What becomes clear from this exercise?
7. **D\*** Why do you think God allows the seed to be sown in all the different kinds of soil? What does that imply for us?
8. **S\*** What is “the Word?” According to John 1? Then, who does the sowing? Do we? Where is the Word sown? Then what is our job?

9. **D\*** Consider the four kinds of soil and what they represent

A. Picture and describe the path. What are the plants like?

How does the word become trampled on? In our culture? In your life?

How does the devil take away the word?

B. Picture and describe the rocky soil. What are the plants like?

What might be the rocks in the soil that prevent roots from growing?

In our culture? In your life?

+See Mark 4: 16,17, Ezekiel 36:26, Hebrews 3:15

What might the lack of moisture represent? Picture non sprinkler system yards in mid-August. Think of a time when you felt like an August lawn. What was the moisture that revived you?

C. Picture and describe the thorny soil. What are the plants like?

According to Jesus, what are the thorns? Make a more specific list that applies to you and the Christians you hang out with.

+ *Worries = cares, concerns, anxieties*

+ *Riches = wealth, abundance, rich blessings*

+ *Pleasures of life = passion/lust of livelihood/ property/possessions*

+ See Mark 4:18 and 19

How do the thorns kill the word?

+The word translated *choke* in verse 7 is also the word used for *drown*.

+The word translated *choke* in verse 14 can also mean *crowded around, crush, press against*

D. Picture and describe the good soil. What are the plants like?

+*Good* can also be translated *useful, satisfactory for one's purpose, fitting, beneficial; sound* (of trees), *fertile* (of soil), *happy* (of days); *in a moral sense upright, just; kind, generous; clear* (of conscience); *perfect, inherently good* (of God)

What is the good heart like?

+*Heart* also means *inner self; mind; will, desire, intention;*

+*Honest* or *noble* also means *good; right, proper, fitting; better; honorable, fine, beautiful, precious*

+ *Good* (see above)

What do you see in your life that reflects the good soil and the good heart? (Try to be honest and resist the urge to say there is nothing good in you. Acknowledge the work of the Spirit in your life.)

+In New Testament days, fivefold was considered about the best return you could expect from a field.

**\*TOOL\* - Cross Referencing** – Referring to uses of certain words or concepts as they appear in other contexts in the Old or New Testament can enhance our understanding of the intended meaning.

10. **E\*** What do you make of the last part of verse 8, (“He who has ears to hear, Let him hear!”)

+ *Hear* can also be translated *receive news of, learn, obey, understand, give heed to.*

+ See Jeremiah 6:10, Isaiah 30:21, Ezek 12:2, Mark 4:9,

11. **D\*** Reread the parable again, aloud, inserting the phrase ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’ after each thought. What do you discover from this?

+*called out* is a different Greek verb from those commonly used for speaking or calling. This verb can also be translated *speak loudly, summons, crow, address*. Also the Greek verbs *said* and *call* in this verse denote continuous action. Thus they give the sense of ‘*While he was saying these things, he kept on calling out.*’

12. **D\*** What might it mean that it was given to the disciples to know the mystery of the kingdom of God?" (verse 10)

+ *Given* also means *grant, allow, permit*

+ The word *know* means *have knowledge of, find out, learn, understand; perceive, discern, acknowledge, recognize.*

+ The word translated *mystery* carries the meaning of *secret or something formerly unknown but now revealed.*

### **INTEGRATIVE CONNECTION ACTIVITY**

With clay or play dough, model something of your own life that relates to the parable. Try not to think too much. Just start by moving the clay without looking. After awhile, in groups of three, share your experience.

## **Session 4**

*Who is My Neighbor?*

**Who do you think of when you hear the word “neighbor”? Why?**

**Read Luke 9 – 10**

1. What strikes you in these chapters?

**Focus on Luke 10:25 - 37**

**\*TOOL\* - Cultural Insights** – Understanding the values of the culture of Bible times can offer incredible insights into the meaning of a story. We naturally filter everything through our modern Western mindsets. Information about ancient, Mediterranean mindsets will help us wrestle with what the Scripture meant to those who wrote it and those who heard it, thus helping us figure out what it means for us.

2. **E\*** Why did the lawyer ask his question? Why did Jesus respond as he did?

+ In the society of Jesus day, it was common to verbally challenge the honor of social equals. The game, called challenge-riposte consists of (1) a challenge that might undermine the honor of the other and (2) a response that answers in equal measure or ups the ante and thereby challenges in return. Both positive and negative challenges must be answered to avoid a serious loss of face. Skillful riposte (which means comeback, counter, retort or wisecrack) proves a person, such as a teacher or prophet, to be authoritative and honorable.

+ The word translated *inherit* carries the meaning *gain possession of, receive, share in, be given.*

3. **S\*** What do you make of the lawyer's answer? Why did he give this answer?

+ See Deut 6:5, Deuteronomy 30:6, Leviticus 19:18 1, Romans 13:9 John 3:18,

**\*TOOL\* - Repetitions** - In the Bible, repetition often indicates significance or emphasis. Take note of key words that are repeated in a reading, especially three or more times. Then ask yourself what significance these words might hold.

4. **D\*** What does the answer (which Jesus says is correct) mean for us?

+ Consider the fuller meanings of the words in this famous summary  
+The word translated *all* means *whole, complete, entire, wholly altogether*

+The word translated *heart* means *inner self; mind; will, desire, intention.*

+The word translated *soul* means *self, inner life, one's inmost being; (physical) life; that which has life*

+The word translated *mind* means *understanding; intention, purpose; thought, attitude.*

+The word translated *neighbor* means *near one, neighbor or fellow man.*

5. **E\*** Why did the lawyer ask further after Jesus said he was right?

+ *Justify* also means *put into a right relationship (with God); acquit, declare and treat as righteous; show or prove to be right; set free*

6. **D\*** What sort of a person was the one who was hurt (Jew, Samaritan, good, bad, insider, outsider, etc)? What is the significance of this?

7. **S\*** Why do you think the first two people passed by on the other side?

+ in Judaism priests and Levites were at the top of the "purity" list. Lepers and corpses were near the bottom. Thus, priests and Levites must avoid contact with dead bodies. They must also avoid contact with persons of different social status

8. **E\*** What sort of person was the one who helped?

+Samaritans didn't even make it onto the "purity" list. Jews despised them because they were the descendents of Jews who had intermarried with "outsiders," something that was explicitly forbidden by God. Samaritans were considered, ceremonially unclean, social outcasts and religious heretics.

+Because this Samaritan was traveling and because he had wine and oil and considerable funds, the hearers of the story would have perceived him as a trader. Trading was a despised occupation in those days because traders often became rich at the expense of others. Thus, they were considered thieves.

9. **D\*** What is the difference between the response of the first two passers by and the response of the third?

+ The full-blown meaning of 'had compassion' or 'took pity' is 'to be moved with pity or compassion' and 'to show pity or compassion.'

10. **S\*** How had Jesus turned things around with this story? How might this relate to us?

11. **D\*** When was a time when you didn't pass by someone in need? What was the situation? What were your thoughts and feelings? What was the result?

12. **D\*** To what lengths did the Samaritan go in his helping?

13. **D\*** When was a time someone didn't pass by you? What was the situation? What were your thoughts and feelings? What was the result?

14. **D\*** How did Jesus end this challenge-riposte session?

15. **D\*** What was he (the lawyer) supposed to go and do likewise? How about us?

+ *Go* also means *proceed; travel, journey; leave; live, conduct one's life*.

16. **E\*** In this text, what is Jesus saying is important and what does the whole exchange show to be immaterial?

17. So, who is your neighbor?

### **INTEGRATIVE CONNECTION ACTIVITY**

In the group, have volunteers act out the parable. What strikes you from seeing this?

## **Session 5**

### ***Eat, Drink, and Be Merry***

What do you think the saying “Eat, drink and be merry” means?

#### **Read Luke 11 - 12**

1. What is the tone of these chapters?

2. How much of these chapters are in some way related to eating or processions?

#### **Focus on Luke 12:13 - 34**

3. **E\*** Who is Jesus speaking to in this passage?

4. **D\*** What does the man in the crowd want? How would this look today?

5. **D\*** How do you perceive Jesus' reaction to the request in verse 13?

6. **E\*** What do you make of Jesus' warning in verse 15?

+*Watch out* or *beware* can also carry the meaning *observe, notice, perceive, understand, recognize; experience; visit, come to see*

+*Be on your guard* also means *guard against, avoid, abstain from*

+*Greed* also means *covetousness* or *something one feels forced to do*

+*Abundance* carries the meaning – *more than enough, the left over, excess, overflow*

+*Possessions* is also *property, means, resources*

+See also Exodus 20:17, I Tim. 6:6-10, Luke 8:14

7. **D\*** In your group, have a volunteer retell the parable in their own words. Try to see what's happening in your mind's eye. What is the attitude of the man in the story?

**\*TOOL\* - Context** - Context is perhaps the single most important tool for determining the meaning of a passage. Context must ALWAYS be considered in interpretation. Context can be determined by taking into consideration the entire content of the Bible, reading an entire book, and noting passages before and after the one being studied.

8. **S\*** How does the context (the verses before and after) affect the understanding of the parable? How does the parable relate to the instructions about worry?

9. **D\*** How does the parable relate to the warning in verse 15? What is wrong with this picture?

+ *Fool* in verse 20 carries the meaning *foolish, senseless, ignorant, unlearned*.

+ See also Ecclesiastes 11:9, Proverbs 18:11, 1 Timothy 6:17

10. **D\*** How does this parable relate to American culture? To American Christian culture?

11. **D\*** In verses 22 and 23, what is Jesus trying to get across to his disciples in relation to possessions?

+ The Greek verb translated *worry* is used three times in this passage and means *be anxious, worry about; care for, be concerned about*.

12. **D\*** Why would Jesus choose ravens and lilies for a comparison?

13. **D\*** What point do you think Jesus is trying to make with the ravens and the lilies?

**\*TOOL\* - Key Words** – Sometimes the meaning of a statement or verse hangs on one or more key words. Careful consideration of such words can help us experience the power of the text. Ask why these particular words have been chosen and what their significance is to the meaning of the passage. Key words can sometimes be identified by repetition. Or a key word may be an unusual word with a very specific meaning.

14. **D\*** Where is the line between worry and responsibility? How does verse 29 fit with this?

+ The word translated *seek* is a common Greek word used three times in these last three verses. It has a significant range of meaning including *seek, search or look for; try, attempt, strive for, want, ask, ask for; demand, require, expect; consider, deliberate, examine investigate*. This verb is written here in the form of a plural command and suggests ongoing action. Thus “*You all, do not keep on striving for....!*”

15. **D\*** Who “*seeks*” after those things according to verse 30? What things?

+ *Ethnos* = *gentiles, nations, heathen, unbelievers*

16. **D\*** What difference might it make that the father ‘*knows*’ what we need?

+ The verb *knows* is another ongoing action verb (“*The Father is continuously knowing*”) It also means *know, understand, perceive, experience, learn, know how; be acquainted with, recognize, acknowledge; remember*

17. **D\*** What are the disciples/we to ‘*seek*’ instead?

+ The word translated *seek* in verse 31 is exactly the same word used in verse 29. This time it is used as a positive command.

18. **D\*** What are we supposed to do with our possessions, according to verse 33? What does that look like today? In American culture? In your life?

+ See also Luke 14: 33

**19. D\*** What things do you find yourself seeking most? What takes most of your energy, time, thinking and effort? Where is your treasure stored? Where is your heart?

### **INTEGRATIVE CONNECTION ACTIVITY**

Write a prayer, as the Spirit leads you, related to this text. Share your experience with the group to the extent that you wish.

## **Session 6**

### ***The Domain of God***

**King and Kingdom are words that mean little in our culture. What are these things? What movies or images help us understand them?**

#### **Read Luke 13 - 14**

1. What assumptions does Jesus undermine in these chapters?
2. What do we learn about the kingdom of God in these chapters?

#### ***Focus on Luke 13:18 – 21***

3. **D\*** What do you make of Jesus' question in verse 18?
4. **E\*** What is the Kingdom of God?  
+ The word translated *Kingdom* has broader meaning including *reign, rule, and domain*.
5. **D\*** What might the objects in the mustard seed represent (sower, mustard seed, garden, birds, tree)?

**6. D\*** What do we learn about God's domain from this parable?  
The verb translated *grew* means *grow, spread, increase; become more important, reach full growth*. The form of the verb seems to indicate a one-time type past action, as opposed to a continuous action. The same is true for the verb form of *became* and also *took* and *threw/cast/planted* and *nested* which also means *lived, dwelt, took up residence*.

**\*TOOL\* - Comparison** - Comparing a story in one gospel to the same story in another gospel can help us better imagine an event. It

can also help us more clearly understand the authors' purposes and perspectives. Note the similarities and differences and ask what significance these might have.

7. **S\*** What do we gather by comparing with this parable in the other gospels?

+ See Matt 13: 31-32, Mark 4:31,32 (Remember Matthew and Luke used Mark's gospel in writing theirs)

8. **D\*** What might the objects in the leaven parable represent (woman, yeast, flour, dough)?

9. **D\*** What do we learn about God's domain from this parable?

+ Three measures of flour is about 128 cups

+ As in the mustard seed parable, all the verbs are written in the form that tends to suggest a one-time, "done deal" type of aspect.

+ The word translated *mixed/hid* means *to conceal in something or to mingle one thing with another*

+ The word translated *all* means *whole, complete, entire, altogether, wholly*. The English cognate of the Greek word, 'holon' is 'whole.'

10. **S\*** Are these metaphors about the 'kingdom,' royal or elite as one might expect? What do you make of that?

11. **D\*** What do these metaphors have in common?

12. **S\*** What is the kingdom of God?

The phrase, *kingdom of God*, and its sister in Matthew, *kingdom of Heaven*, are used over 90 times in the New Testament.

+ See also Matthew 19:24, Mark 1:15, Mark 10:14,15 Mark 14:25, Luke 4:43, Luke 6:20, Luke 9:2, Luke 13:29,30, Luke 17:20,21, John 3:3-5, 1 Corinthians 4:20.

13. How is the kingdom different from what you previously thought? From how the church acts? Why does it matter?

14. What do we have to do with the kingdom of God and what does the kingdom of God have to do with us?

### **INTEGRATIVE CONNECTION ACTIVITY**

During your group time, spread out in the area and, using your imaginations, each make a collage depicting the reign of God. Include yourself in the piece. In pairs, share as much about your experience as you wish.

*Note: Leaders, be sure to allow plenty of time for this activity.*

## Session 7

### *The Forgiving Father*

**Can you think of a time of surprising forgiveness – either of yourself or someone else?**

Read Luke 15 - 17

1. **D\*E\*S\* Which of these many parables troubles you the most. Why?**

2. **E\*S\* What do we learn about the ‘end times?’ How is this different from what you always thought?**

Focus on 15:11 - 32

3. **D\*** What moved Jesus to tell this parable? (See verses 1-3)

**\*TOOL\* - Narrative Reflection** - Considering the Bible or parts of the Bible with the methods one would use to approach any other narrative can bring tremendous insight. In order to do so, simply ask the common narrative questions about characters, plot, conflict, climax, resolution. This tool is particularly appropriate since the Bible itself is a story.

4. **D\*** Consider this story using narrative reflection. Who are the characters? What is the plot? The conflict? The climax? The resolution? What insights does this bring?

5. **D\*** What situation sets the stage in the parable?

+ In first century Mediterranean culture, the pivotal value was honor. Absolutely nothing was important as honor and everything revolved around this. In Jesus' day, property was not honorably distributed until a father died. A son who would ask for and then dispose of the wealth was making a sharp break with his family and the community. It meant he was wishing his father dead. It was very dishonorable. (see also I Sam 8:6-9, 19-22)

6. **D\* Why might the father have agreed to the request?**

+ Modern day Middle Eastern peasants have reported that it is virtually impossible for such a request to be granted. Rather, the father would most likely beat the ungrateful, dishonorable, foolish son.

7. **D\* What happened after the son left home? In what ways do you see yourself here?**

+ *Squander* means *scatter* or *waste*

+ The verb translated *set off* means literally, *he traveled away from his own people*.

+ Leaving home is another unthinkable decision for a Middle Eastern peasant – Family was everything, including one's security and future. This is as precious as life itself.

8. **S\* What is the significance of the job with the pigs?**

+ Pork was considered unclean by all Jews.

9. **D\*** What did it take for the son to consider returning home? Why?

10. **D\*** What do you think it means that he *came to his senses*? Have you ever had an experience like this?

11. **D\*** What plan does the son make about going home? What is significant about this?

12. **D\*** What happens when he gets near home? Describe the possible feelings of this scene, including, the returning son, the father, the watching servants and, especially, yourself.

+ Cultural information:

+ A father in the situation of the return of a son who has decimated the family honor would be expected to be very angry and aloof, dealing out fit punishment after making the son wait outside the gate for an indeterminate amount of time.

+ A Patriarch of a Middle Eastern family could be identified by his slow, dignified gait. It was an indication of his stature and position.

+ Slaves went barefoot, sons wore shoes.

+ The verb translated *ran* means *exert oneself, speed on or rush*. It is the technical word used for footraces in the stadium

13. **D\*** Describe the older brothers reaction. In your opinion, is his reaction understandable and appropriate? Why or why not?

+ At a banquet or celebration, it was the father's duty to sit with the guests. It was the eldest son's duty to help serve the guests, especially the guest of honor.

+The verb translated *go in* in verse 28 carries the meaning *come or go (in or into), enter; have part in, share in; fall into*.

14. **D\*** Which son does the father love?

15. **D\*** What do you notice about the older son's complaints against the father? In what ways does this sound familiar?

16. **D\*** Is the treatment of the younger son fair? What do you make of this?

17. **S\*** Evaluate the father's final response. What is going on here? How does this relate to the Pharisees to whom Jesus is telling the story? How does it relate to us?

+The verb translated *we had to* in verse 32 means *it is fitting, it is proper, it is necessary, should, must, it behooves us*.

18. **D\*** What is the resolution of the story?

19. **D\*** In what ways does this story touch you? How is God different than what you previously thought? What difference might that make in your life?

## Session 8

### *The Pharisee and the Tax Collector*

**What sorts of people do we tend to consider ourselves better than?**

#### **Read Luke 18 – 21**

1. What crucial event is coming soon? How is that related to what happens in these chapters? How might that be related to Jesus' mood?

2. What is something in these chapters that you never noticed before?

#### **Focus on Luke 18: 9 – 14**

3. **D\*** Who is this parable aimed at?

+ The word translated *confident* or *trusted* in verse 9 means *persuade, convince, win over; conciliate, satisfy, seek favor or approval from, reassure, trust, rely on; have confidence, be confident; be certain or sure.*

+*Righteous* means *conforming to the standard, will, or character of God; upright, righteous, good; just, right; proper; in a right relationship with God; fair, honest; innocent*

+*Looked down on* carries the meaning *despise, treat with contempt; look down on, count as nothing; reject*

+See also **Luke 10:29, Luke 16:15, Luke 15:29, Proverbs 30:12**

4. **E\*** How do we try to convince ourselves we are righteous? How do we evaluate righteousness?

5. **D\*** Who do we despise?

+See also **Luke 15:2, Romans 14:10**

**\*TOOL\* - Visualizing** - The meaning of a story will be more accessible to us if we can see the scene before us in our mind's eye. When we become observers we may see things that escape us on the written page alone. Visualization can happen through imagination, role-playing, drawing, story telling, etc

6. **D\*** In the group, act out the parable. What strikes you when you see it?

**\*TOOL\* - Historical Insights** – Knowing something about the historical events surrounding a certain passage of Scripture can help us understand the significance of events in the Bible. Historical information can be gleaned both from the Bible itself and from extra-biblical literature.

7. **D\*** What is the contrast between the two people involved in the story?

+ Cultural information:

+ Pharisees – The Jewish sect most concerned about following God's laws and living holy lives. They were the leaders of the religion.

+ Tax Collector - In Palestine, local people, including Jews, were hired to collect money from the people to pay the taxes the Romans required. Many of these collectors were unscrupulous, collecting far more than what they were required to turn in. Besides the fact that they were defrauding the people, they were viewed as collaborators with the Romans, who were occupying Israel. Collaboration was viewed as betrayal of Jewish race and religion. Thus, tax collectors were doubly hated.

+ Historical information: At this particular time, the nationalistic forces of Jews in Judea and Galilee were approaching the ignition point of revolt against the imperialism of Rome. Thus 'collaborators' were hated even more intensely.

8. **D\*** What do you notice about the Pharisees prayer? Do you remember a time when you prayed a prayer like this? What were the circumstances?

+ Leviticus 27:30, Psalm 17:2-5, Luke 11:42

+ The verbs used by the Pharisee indicate continuousness. (Continually thankful, continually fasting, continually tithing)

9. **D\*** What do you make of the tax-collectors prayer? Do you remember a time when you prayed a prayer like this? What were the circumstances?

+The verb translated *have mercy* means *bring about forgiveness for, take away, deal mercifully with, be merciful, have mercy*

10. **S\*** What is the great reversal in verse 14?

+*Justified* means *put into a right relationship (with God); acquit, declare and treat as righteous; show or prove to be right; set free.*

This verb is in the perfect tense, which means it refers to something happening in the past but having results continuing into the present.

+*Exalt* also means *lift up or raise*

+*Humble* also means *level*

+See also Psalm 138:6, Proverbs 15:33, Job 22:29, Isaiah 2:11-12 .

11. **E\*** How do you think the crowd felt about this reversal? How do you feel about it?

12. **D\*** What might be a modern day comparison to this parable? What difference might it make for your life?

## **INTEGRATIVE CONNECTION ACTIVITY**

In the group, the leader will read the following meditation through slowly, pausing after each phrase to leave time for the group to meditate. Then the group members are invited to share which phrases especially touched them and why.

### **Meditation**

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

"Two men went up into the temple into the temple to pray to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

"But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying,

'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

"I tell you, this man went to his house justified this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

This is the word of the Lord.

## Session 9

### *Jesus, the Living Parable*

**What is an incident in your life that was very difficult? Describe your feelings.**

#### **Read Luke 22– 24**

1. What is the tone of the Passover supper with the disciples and the emotions of the visit to the Mount of Olives?
2. What strikes you about the trials and the crucifixion? What is the mood surrounding the resurrection?
3. How is Jesus a living parable?

#### **Focus on Luke 24:13 – 35**

In the group be sure to read this stunning and pivotal story aloud. Take time to let it sink in.

**\*TOOL\* Style** – The purpose for which a work is written determines what style the work will be written in. For example, a science report is written with a different style than a poem or a biography. So, if we can determine the style of a particular portion of Scripture, we can better understand the purpose for which that portion was written.

4. **E\*** What is the style of this passage? How is this passage different from the others we have studied so far? What difference does that make? For what purpose do you suppose Luke included this story in his Gospel?
5. **D\*** Who are these people on the road? What do you think they were feeling? How do you think they were walking?

6. **D\*** How did Jesus approach the two? How does Jesus approach us?

7. **D\*** Why didn't they recognize Jesus?

+ The word in verse 16 translated *kept* means *hold, hold fast; take, take hold of; seize, arrest; hold back, restrain*.

It is a passive word, meaning the action of the verb is being done TO the subject.

+ The word *recognize* means *know, perceive, understand; recognize, acknowledge; find out, learn; know well*.

8. **S\*** Who did the two think they were inviting to dinner? What is significant about this?

+Cultural insights

- In Mediterranean culture, spur of the moment invitations to meals were (and are) common, but the invitation could be properly accepted only after repeated urging in the strongest terms.
- In Mediterranean culture (and throughout the Gospel of Luke), table fellowship is seen as the litmus test of social solidarity. Eating together meant that a bond ran deeply among all the participants.

+See also Hebrews 13:2, Genesis 18:1

9. **E\*** Recap Cleopas' summary of the Gospel (verses 18-24). What all is included? What can we learn from this?

10. **S\*** How did Jesus become known to them? What does this remind you of? How is this significant? How does Jesus become known to us?

+ The word translated *were opened* in verse 31 is another passive verb meaning the action was being done TO the subject

+ See also Luke 10:22, Matthew 16:17, 1 Corinthians 2:10, 1 Samuel 2:27, Daniel 2:20-22

+ See also Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 10:16, Luke 4:35

11. **E\*** What role does Jesus play at the meal? How does this relate to the Lord's Supper when we share it?

12. **D\*** Why did they turn right around and go back to Jerusalem? Would you? Why or why not? What do you think their conversation and emotions were on the way back? How were they walking now?

13. **D\*** What might it mean that their hearts were burning within them? Can you remember a time when your heart was burning?  
+ Remember that the word translated in English as *heart* has the broad meaning of *heart, inner self; mind; will, desire, intention;*  
+The verb translated *burning* also means *burning up or being lit*. It has a continuous implication and is also a passive verb (alternative translation – Were not our inner selves being continually lit up as he was speaking to us ...)  
+ The word *opening* is the same word used to refer to the opening of their eyes.

14. **E\*** How does the action of the two people on the road inform us about our own responsibility in regard to Jesus?

15. **D\*** What does Jesus' resurrection prove? Why does it matter for us?

16. **D\*** What happens immediately after this passage? In what way is this the capstone of the story?

**In conclusion:**

What are Jesus' parables?

What will you take from this study?

How is your life different because of the time you have spent in the parables?

**INTEGRATIVE CONNECTION ACTIVITY**

Each person writes or draws a parable illustrating what the Kingdom/domain of God is like in their experience. Those who are willing can then share their parables with the group.

