STUDY GUIDE

The study guide which begins on the following page includes group discussion questions, personal reflection questions, and/or a worksheet for each chapter.
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Parables of Jesus

Discussion Questions

1. Which are your favorite parables—and why?
2. Which parables do you find the most difficult to interpret? Why do you think this is so?
3. Why do you think Jesus often answered direct questions through stories?
4. How can we bridge the cultural gap between the time when Jesus told the parable and today’s 21st-century world?
5. What are some ways the parables challenge you to see your own life and actions differently?
Studying the Parables

The parable title: _____________________________________________________________

Where this parable is found in the Bible: ________________________________

**Step 1:** Read the parable.

**Step 2:** Examine the structure. How many parts does the parable have? Draw a simple outline of the parable.

**Step 3:** Note the context.
To whom is Jesus telling this parable?
________________________________________________________

What is the setting?
________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Did some event or question prompt Jesus to tell this parable?
________________________________________________________

**Step 4:** Look up cultural and historical questions. When you read the parable, what questions about biblical culture or historical setting came to mind? Write down your questions and look for answers using Bible dictionaries and commentaries.
________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

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Step 5: Find the main point. What is the lesson to be learned for Jesus’ audience? If a question or challenge prompted Jesus to tell the parable, how does this parable address that?

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Step 6: Consider how the parable can strengthen your faith and knowledge of God. Do you see similarities between the events or characters described in the parable and today’s society or your own life?

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__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

What does this parable teach you about God?

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__________________________________________________________________________

What does it motivate you to do?

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Life of Joseph

Discussion Questions

1. God gave Abraham some specific promises. What are some promises in the Bible that God gives to everyone who believes in him?

2. Perhaps Joseph’s brothers felt they had gotten away with a clever deception. But the Bible tells us that God is the LORD of Justice. Can you think of another story from the Bible that illustrates God’s eventual triumph over wicked actions?

3. In the end, Joseph forgives his brothers. What are the benefits of forgiving someone who has hurt you? Why is forgiveness often so difficult?

4. Even when Joseph did what was right, he still received punishment as though he were guilty! Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10). How do you understand Joseph’s story in light of these words?

5. Joseph probably had no idea that God was working in the lives of his family members while he was away, but God knew what he was doing. What is an example from your own experience in which God was working in a way that was hidden from you at the time?

Personal Reflection

1. Even in prison, Joseph used his gifts to bless others. Are there any difficult circumstances in which you can use your gifts to bless others?

2. What are some common reactions and emotions people have when they suffer injustice? How can you avoid becoming bitter when treated unfairly?

3. It is easy to become overly confident and start taking credit for the good that happens in our lives. In what ways can you give credit to God when you achieve success?

4. Who in your life do you need to forgive? Ask God to help you learn how to forgive that person.

5. How do you understand your own story in light of the story of Joseph?
Esther

Discussion Questions

1. As you read this story, what stood out to you most? What questions arose as you read the book?
2. Power is a noticeable theme in the book of Esther. How have you seen people use and abuse their power?
3. Esther was faithful and courageous in dangerous times. Why do you think God allows people to feel afraid and face danger?
4. The book of Esther contains many reversals of fortune and power. What do the reversals in the book of Esther teach about hope?

Personal Reflection

1. Think of the last time you felt afraid. What did you do in response to your fear?
2. Read Isaiah 41:13 and Psalm 27:11. What does God promise us when we are afraid?
3. What kinds of power do you have in your life? What can you do to make sure you are using your power wisely and not harmfully?
4. What reversals have you experienced in your own life? In what ways was God working through those changes?
Proverbs

Discussion Questions

1. Which are your favorite proverbs—and why?
2. Which proverbs do you find the most difficult to interpret? Why do you think this is so?
3. In your own words, how would you explain the “fear of the Lord”?
4. What does it mean to read Proverbs in the context of other biblical wisdom literature?
5. In a few sentences, summarize what kind of people does Proverbs challenge us to become.
Studying the Proverbs

Choose at least three proverbs on a specific topic. (See the Weekly Bible Reading schedule for suggestions.) Write the Scripture references below.

__________________________________________________________________________

**Step 1:** Read the proverbs in at least three different Bible translations. What differences between the translations do you notice?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

**Step 2:** Identify any metaphors, parallelism, or other literary devices in these proverbs.
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

**Step 3:** Write down any cultural or literary questions you have. Use two or more commentaries to help you answer these questions.
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

**Step 4:** How do the proverbs fit in the larger context of the book of proverbs? Find other proverbs in the book that are related to the same topic.
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

**Step 6:** Identify the situations in which each of the proverbs is applicable. (Remember, not all proverbs are applicable to all occasions.)
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

**Step 7:** Think of one or more individuals you know who live out the wisdom described in these proverbs. How can you learn from their wise advice and example?
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Life of David

Discussion Questions
1. In your own words, how would you describe David’s personality and character?
2. What led to King Saul’s downfall?
3. Why did David continue to honor and respect Saul even though Saul was on a quest to kill David?
4. How did David’s life foreshadow the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ?
5. What led to David’s decline—both in his family and his kingdom?
6. Why is David considered “a man after God’s own heart”?

Personal Reflection
1. How have you witnessed acts of sin lead to decline or ruin? (Think of instances in business, families, churches, etc.)
2. What does God’s forgiveness of David reveal about God’s forgiveness to you?
3. What does it mean for you to be a person after God’s own heart?
4. How do you understand your own story in light of David’s story?
1 Corinthians 13

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, explain what it means to “rejoice in the truth”?
2. Why is perseverance worth it? Share a story about a time when persevering paid off.
3. Love always protects. How do you protect the people in your life? When can protection become “over-protection,” and thus not be the loving thing to do in the situation?
4. Give some examples of self-seeking (selfishness) in today’s society. How does selfishness destroy relationships—personal, professional, and family?
5. What is the difference between appropriate self-esteem and harmful pride?
6. Give some examples from the Bible of people delighting in evil. What was the outcome of their delight?
7. With so many good reasons to forgive others, why is forgiveness often so difficult?

Personal Reflection

1. When do you find it easy to be patient, and when is it most difficult? Why do you think this is so?
2. Anger can be all-consuming and overwhelming. If you struggle with anger, what can you do to deal with your anger in God-honoring ways?
3. How do you balance the need for your protection and for trusting others in your life?
4. What—or whom—is your hope grounded in?
The Practice of Love

See “The Practice of Love” section on page 89. Using that model, write down in your own words specific things. What should love look like in your life? Think of specific people at work, in your family, at church, school—or particular situations and issues that you often face.

Love as Patient: ________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Love as Kindness: _____________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Love as Happy with the Truth: _________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Love as Protective: ___________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Love as Trusting: _____________________________________________________________
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__________________________________________________________________________

Love as Hopeful: _____________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Love as Persevering: ___________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
Psalm 23

Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you about the sheep and shepherd relationship? How does that mirror our relationship with God?
2. How do we show other people that we have the “mark of Christ” on us?
3. How do you experience God’s care in your life?
4. How has God restored our souls?
5. Have you walked through “the valley of the shadow of death” in your life? Share how you have felt God’s comforting presence with you in any way.

Personal Reflection

1. In what ways has God led you?
2. How does God give you rest?
3. What does it mean for you to “lie down in green pastures”?
4. Are there any paths in your journey that you need to leave?
5. How have you seen God acting to favor you even when the odds were against you?
6. If you make a list of the many things you have, can you see God’s hand providing for your needs, and more?
Prayer
In the space below, write a prayer to God in your own words based on Psalm 23. Then pray it to your LORD and Shepherd.

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__________________________________________________________________________
1. What did you learn through this study that deepened your relationship with God and/or helped you understand biblical teachings better?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

2. What was your favorite thing about this study, and why?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

3. How could the meeting location, setting, length, or time be improved?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

4. Did you think the material covered was too difficult, too easy, or just right?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

5. What would you like to see different about the group discussions?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

6. What would you like to see different about the activities?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

7. What topic would you like to learn more about?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________