

CORE STUDY #5

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE?

PASSAGE: Mark 4: 1-34

LEADER PREPARATION

Read the passage over at least three times, noting what you feel might be the main points of the passage. Using your **Summit Training Guide** (section 2 “Engaging the Word” and section 3 “Responding to the Word”), ask observation and interpretation questions of the passage.

You will also find it very helpful to read the parallel passages in the other 3 gospels. By reading all three gospels you will have a fuller picture of what happened and what was said.

- For the Parable of the Sower read Mt. 13:1-15; 18-23; and Lk. 8:4-15
- For the Parable of the Mustard Seed read Mt. 13:31,32; and Lk. 13:18,19

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION

1. Why do you think Jesus used parables?

FOUNDATIONS STUDY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (selection to choose from)

1. Pretend that you are a first century Jew, listening to Jesus teach for the first time. What would this first parable mean to you (4:1-20)?
2. In verses 11-12, it sounds like Jesus tells parables in order to intentionally exclude “those on the outside” from understanding the message of the Kingdom of God. At the same time we also know that Jesus came announcing the Kingdom of God so that all would repent and believe (1:15). How then do we understand these verses (look at the context of verses 21-25)?
3. Describe your interpretation of each parable in your own words by finishing this sentence: The Kingdom of God is like _____. If you have a large CORE, try splitting into three groups and have each tackle a separate parable. Then return to the larger group and share the sentence they came up with.
4. What are some similarities between these three parables?

RESPONSE QUESTIONS (selection to choose from)

1. What have you learned about these parables?
2. In light of this study, how would you answer the question: what is the “secret of the Kingdom of God” (v. 11)?
3. What kind of soil would you describe yourself being this past week?

GOING DEEPER STUDY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (selection to choose from)

1. Write out in your own words the four types of responses Jesus describes of those who have heard him proclaim the Kingdom of God.

2. Compare and contrast each parable in this section.

Although it might seem like Jesus is saying in verse 11-12 that he tells parables to keep people from understanding his message, notice that the following parable teaches that the reason for announcing the kingdom (for bringing God's light into the world) is so that everyone will see it. It seems here that Jesus is trying to express what happens when he speaks in parables, rather than the reason he speaks in parables. Jesus speaks in parables because his message is not exactly what they were expecting. The arrival of the Messiah was going to be a great exploding moment of renewal, but not in the way they were expecting. Like a farmer sowing seed, it is coming in a slow and subversive way.

3. What are some of the keys to understanding the parable of the sower that Jesus explains to his disciples? How might this help them to understand his other parables?

Jesus locates the roles of those listening, to whom the Kingdom of God has been proclaimed. Jesus also points to what aspect of the parable is being used as an analogy for the "word" or the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus describes reasons why his listeners fail to accept the word. Finally, Jesus names the antagonist in the parable as Satan (the deceiving one).

4. Mark tells us that Jesus taught many things by parables. Why do you think he uses this form of teaching?

Parables were Jesus' preferred teaching form. Jesus came announcing the kingdom of God, and intentionally choose to use subversive riddles to get the message out. Part of the reason is that Jesus was avoiding immediate political and religious reaction to his challenging message. Jesus' stories portrayed his vision of God's Kingdom as something that was happening, not just a timeless truth, and enabled his hearers to step inside the story and make it their own. As well, what was intrinsic to Jesus' message was that God's reign on earth is not exactly like what many of the first century Jews were expecting. Jesus desired that to understand the message one would need to wrestle with it.

5. Jesus interprets the first parable for his disciples. Does that interpretation help you to understand the following parables?

Notice the question is asked by the disciples concerning "the parables" although only one parable has been mentioned. Perhaps this is an indication that Jesus is giving insight into understanding the Kingdom parables in general.

6. What do you think Jesus means by "with the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more"?

In our culture people often say: "what you put into something, that's what you'll get out of it." But Jesus is saying much more than this. Jesus is saying that if they grasp what he's saying and go deeper into it, they will get more and more from it. But if they remain at the superficial level, like the uncomprehending crowds, they will lose even that sense of God doing something new in their midst ... which they have at present in Jesus.

7. Often Jesus would echo the Torah (the Old Testament) in his storytelling. Look up these passages for some help to hear these echoes:

- Joel 3:13, Genesis: 1:4-13; 8:22, Isaiah 40:18, Ezekiah 17:23, 31:6, Daniel 4:12, 21.