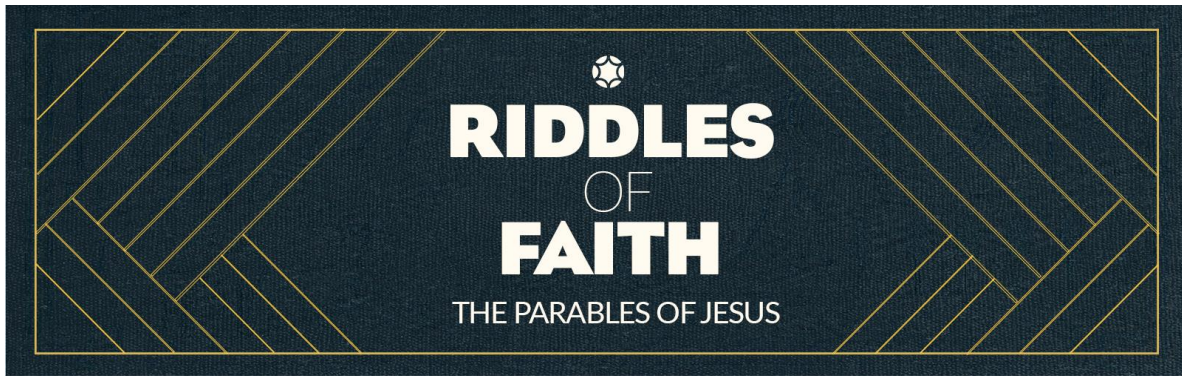




Group Guide

Week One // Speaking in Stories

Scripture Focus

Matthew 13:10–17, 34–35; Luke 13:6–9

Big Idea

Jesus used parables to reveal the truth of God’s kingdom and invite people to respond. In the parable of the barren fig tree, Jesus shows us that God is graciously patient, and He invites us into repentance and a fruitful life.

Read Together

Invite someone to read Matthew 13:10–17 and 34–35 aloud. Ask the group to listen for what Jesus says about why he teaches in parables. Then invite someone else to read Luke 13:6–9. As you listen, notice the tension between the owner’s desire for fruit and the gardener’s request for more time.

Setting the Scene

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus frequently taught through parables which are short, memorable stories drawn from ordinary life. He spoke about farmers, seeds, meals, money, family relationships, vineyards, and lost possessions. The settings were familiar, but the truths they revealed were often surprising. Jesus used familiar stories to help people see spiritual realities in a new way. His parables reveal what God and his kingdom are like, expose what is happening within the human heart, and call us to respond. Jesus also explained that not everyone would receive what the stories revealed, and those who approached him with receptive hearts were given deeper understanding. Those whose hearts had become resistant could hear the same story without recognizing its meaning.

Digging Deeper

Why Did Jesus Use Parables?

First, they reveal truth to those who are open to Jesus. The stories draw receptive listeners closer, inviting them to consider what God is doing and how they should respond. Second, they expose resistance in those who have closed their hearts. A person may hear Jesus' words without truly listening or see his works without recognizing who he is. Understanding begins with a willingness to hear, trust, and follow Jesus.

The Barren Fig Tree

The parable in Luke 13 follows Jesus' urgent call to repentance. A man planted a fig tree in his vineyard and repeatedly came looking for fruit, but found none. After three years, he was prepared to remove it. The gardener, however, asked for one more year to cultivate and fertilize the soil. The story holds together two important truths about God.

God is patient and gracious.

The tree is given additional time and attention. God does not delight in judgment; he graciously gives people opportunities to turn toward him.

God desires fruitfulness.

The additional time is not permission for the tree to remain unchanged. The gardener's patience has a purpose: that the tree would finally produce fruit. The parable warns us against confusing God's patience with his approval. Grace gives us room to repent, grow, and become fruitful, but it should never become an excuse to resist change.

Group Discussion

Getting Started

- What is a story, movie, or illustration that helped you understand an important truth in a memorable way?
- Why do you think stories can sometimes affect us more deeply than a direct explanation?
- When you think about the parables of Jesus, which one first comes to mind? Why?

Digging Into Scripture

- Read Matthew 13:10–17 again. What differences do you notice between those who understand Jesus and those who do not?
- How can familiarity with Scripture sometimes cause us to assume we already understand what Jesus is saying?
- What do you think it means to have “ears to hear” spiritually?
- In Luke 13:6–9, what does the owner expect from the fig tree? Why is that expectation reasonable?

Personal Reflection

Take a few moments for quiet reflection before discussing.

- How would you describe the present condition of your heart? Receptive, distracted, resistant, curious, or something else?
- What kind of fruit might God desire to produce in you during this season?
- Where might God be “cultivating the soil” of your life through a relationship, challenge, conviction, or new opportunity?

For those willing, invite group members to briefly share one area where they would appreciate prayer.

Looking Forward

The parables of Jesus can serve as invitations to slow down, listen carefully, and allow God’s truth to reach beneath the surface of our lives.

As we begin this series, adopt the posture of a receptive listener:

- Listen without assuming you already know the lesson.
- Notice what the story reveals about God and his kingdom.
- Examine what the story exposes within your own heart.
- Respond to what Jesus is inviting you to do.
- Trust that God’s patient work can produce lasting fruit.

Individual Application

Set aside a few quiet minutes each day this week to pray:

“Jesus, give me ears to hear. Show me what you want to reveal, what needs to change, and what fruit you desire to produce in my life.”

Use these questions for a daily self-check:

- What might Jesus be trying to show me today?
- Where am I resisting his voice?
- What evidence of spiritual fruit is growing in my life?
- What step of repentance or obedience can I take today?

Consider memorizing:

Matthew 13:16

“But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.”

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for speaking to us in ways that invite us to listen, reflect, and respond. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear what Jesus wants to reveal. Forgive us for the places where our hearts have become distracted, hardened, or resistant. Produce in us the fruit of repentance, faith, love, and obedience so that our lives reflect the reality of your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.