

# JESUS AT THE CENTER OF OUR STORY

## COMPASSION

April 14, 2024

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### DIGGING DEEPER

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This message series is based on parables in the New Testament.  
For further direction on interpreting parables, see page 2 of this guide.

Use the questions below by yourself or with friends as you seek to know God.  
To find a group, visit [brookwoodchurch.org/groups](http://brookwoodchurch.org/groups).

Words and phrases in this study guide are based on language from the New International Version (NIV).

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#### Read Matthew 18:10-14.

**Insight:** These *little ones* are described in previous passages as those who *become like little children* (18:3), who take a *lowly position* (18:4), and *those who believe in Me [Jesus]* (18:6). The small child Jesus held in His arms seems to be an illustration of God's children, who must come to Him with childlike faith.

1. What does it mean to *despise* someone (vs. 10)?
2. Why do you think that concerned Jesus?

**Insight:** Angels assigned to believers (vs. 10) are of the highest rank, indicating their special place before God. This reminds us that God highly values His children.

3. Even though the sheep was lost, the owner still considered it valuable. Describe a time you felt treasured by God.
4. Has there ever been a time you felt lost, worthless or far away from God? What was that like for you, and how did it affect your relationship with God?
5. In what ways have you experienced God's compassion? Spend time reflecting on Matthew 9:36.
6. Which of these describe how you usually feel toward those who are far away from God: judgmental, indifferent or compassionate? How is God's Spirit leading you to respond?
7. Who in your life has wandered away from God? What are ways you can *go look* for them?
8. When are you most tempted to wander from God? How have you sensed Him *looking for you*?
9. For further study and reflection:
  - a. Psalm 103:13 – God is like a father, tender and compassionate.
  - b. Ezekiel 34:6-11 – I will search for the lost and bring back the strays.
  - c. Luke 15:8-10 – Parable of the lost coin.
  - d. James 5:19-20 – Believers are called to help others come back to God.

*The gospel is full of endless hope.*

Jen Oshman

*...His compassions never fail.*

Lamentations 3:22b [NIV]



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# SIMPLE GUIDE TO INTERPRETING PARABLES

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A parable is literally something *cast or thrown alongside* something else. It's a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. A parable often compares two (usually seemingly unrelated) things, and is commonly understood as an *earthly story with a heavenly meaning*.

Jesus spoke in parables...

*Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. This is why I speak to them in parables:*

*“Though seeing, they do not see;  
though hearing, they do not hear or understand. Matthew 13:11,13 [NIV]*

1. **To reveal truth** to those seeking to understand the mysteries of the kingdom.
2. **To conceal truth** from those who remain blind or are unwilling to listen and learn.

## AS YOU SEEK TO UNDERSTAND...

**Consider the context.** Who is Jesus talking to in the story? What events happened before He told the parable? Are there introductory words that set up the story?

**Look for two things being compared or contrasted** (*e.g.*, righteousness and sin, good and evil, generosity and greed, forgiveness and love, etc.). How are these two related? What major themes emerge as you read?

**Don't get distracted by the details.** While it's important to take note of particular words and phrases, don't get so bogged down in the tiny details that you miss the point.

**Focus on Endings, Not Beginnings.** The end of the story often provides a clue or ties things up. The accent commonly falls on the last person mentioned, the last deed or the last saying.

**Seek to summarize the main point.** Boiling down the parable in a sentence or two might help reveal the central message.

**Look for parallels in Scripture.** Some concepts and imagery occur repeatedly. Look for those cues when reading parables, as they may offer insight in understanding what the parable is saying. For example, a master, king or judge in a parable usually signifies God. Sheep, servants or workers are usually used to illustrate the followers of God.

**Consider a practical application.** Parables usually provide a simple lesson for daily life.

Beyond study, the goal is to deepen intimacy with God.  
A central question to ask is, *God, what do you want to say to me?*  
Trust that He will direct your heart and mind as you seek Him.