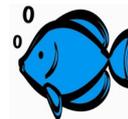


Faith Matters

Leaders Guide and Suggestions

Five Introductory Bible Studies on Jesus' Parables from Hopefish



What Jesus Really Said

Exploring the relevance of faith for us today

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater,

so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

Isaiah 55:8-11



Practicalities

It is common to start with tea, coffee and biscuits (homemade?) in a warm and comfortable setting. You may select to open with ‘ice breaker activities’, such as the discussion of ‘What are my images of God?’ in Week 1; asking for responses to questions such as, ‘Can you think of something good that has happened today?’; or you could select a soundtrack of some music or a poem so that people can settle, focus and relax. For good advice on how to run bible studies you could read the guidelines given by any of the standard bible study series (such as the Lifebuilder or Cover to Cover Series). It helps if each member of the group has a Bible and you can provide the page reference numbers.

Above all, it will only work, and people will only return, if they feel able to speak out and to be honest - without well intentioned members of the group jumping in with the ‘correct’ answer. We all learn more when we discover things for ourselves. Just occasionally it may be important to explain or give answers where there is confusion but nobody should have to fear being corrected.

The group as a whole may hold quite different opinions - some may not be convinced there is a God, many may have a pluralist view of faith (all faiths are equally good routes to God). If you are running the group don't forget what it was like for you to be new to learning about the Christian faith; we all have different things to hear from God and our contributions to the group are valid for us at that stage of our lives. Even Christians may not always see things quite the same way. Give *every* person space to be heard and respected. God's Holy Spirit is ultimately the One who opens our eyes and hearts to the Gospel, His Word needs no defending - ‘it is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.’ (Hebrews 4:11-13)

These files can be made available in Microsoft Publisher format if you wish to rework them for your purposes: such as amending the questions or the stories on the reverse. Just email your needs to us through the ‘Contact us’ page of the Hopefish website or to Amanda@hopefish.co.uk.

Personal Reflection

Watch your life and doctrine closely.

Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1Timothy 4:16

Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain.

Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.

Psalms 127:1

Outline To Five Downloadable Introductory Bible Studies on Jesus' Parables

Available from [Hopefish.co.uk](http://www.hopefish.co.uk)

(<http://www.hopefish.co.uk/articles/downloadable-bible-studies/introductory-bible-studies-on-jesus-parables.html>)

<p>Faith Matters 1</p> <p>What Jesus really said - To the Pharisees</p> <p>Luke 15:1-32</p>	<p>Bible Study on the Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son. This study provides an introductory glimpse at what Jesus said about how much God seeks out His people and wants them to return to Him. It includes an activity 'What are my images of God?' to help the group to focus. Each person could have a piece of paper and pencil and be given time to consider their personal view of God; which could be followed by an open discussion where people contribute their thoughts, if they feel they wish to.</p> <p>The discussion can be followed with the Bible study: read Luke 15:1-32 and discuss together the questions given on the front page or questions of your choosing. There is a summing up section to finish.</p> <p>The reverse page presents a modern day retelling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, by Philip Yancy.</p>
<p>Faith Matters 2</p> <p>What Jesus really said - When asked probing questions?</p> <p>Matthew 18:21-35 and Luke 10:25-37</p>	<p>Bible Study on the Parables of the Good Samaritan and the Unforgiving Servant. The Lord's Prayer is reproduced for discussion as an ice breaker and could be introduced with a question such as, 'what speaks most to you?' or 'what does this prayer mean to you?' The study provides two illustrations describing how Jesus expects his followers to live: loving others as He loves us and forgiving others as we, in Christ, have been forgiven.</p> <p>The summing up touches on what is meant by God's grace and the reverse page presents a story, again by Philip Yancy, on the nature of full forgiveness.</p>
<p>Faith Matters 3</p> <p>What Jesus really said - To the crowds following him?</p> <p>Matthew 7:7-29 and Luke 8:4-8</p>	<p>Bible Study on several Parables that describe how to seek and find God. It includes the Parable of the Sower alongside Jesus' descriptions (parables) of the Two Ways: paths, trees, responses and builders.</p> <p>Jesus first describes how we can approach the Father: ask, seek, knock; how we should live (The Golden Rule plus); the choice to be made and how we should not be deflected.</p> <p>The group could consider how seeking God fits with how He seeks us as discovered earlier in Faith Matters 1 and as described in Revelation 3:20.</p> <p>The reverse page presents a Victorian fairytale parable to illustrate Rev. 3:20.</p>
<p>Faith Matters 4</p> <p>What Jesus really said - To those who hated Him?</p> <p>Matthew 21:33-46 and Matthew 21:28-32</p>	<p>Bible Study on the Parables of the Vineyard and The Two Sons.</p> <p>This study, on two very challenging parables, steps up a bit on the previous weeks. It introduces Christ's purpose as being preordained and predicted. The parable of the vineyard workers was to become a clear indictment of the religious leaders of the day. The parable of the two sons expands on the teaching from Faith Matters 3 of the two ways. They together point to the question: do you want 'religion', paying lip service to God, or are you willing to submit to Him?</p> <p>The reverse page displays the story (testimony) of how Rich Ganz came to faith through reading Old Testament scriptures.</p> <p>You might accompany this session with a handout (to take home) of prophecies from the Old Testament that were fulfilled in Christ. (These are widely available on the internet or in the extra pages of Study Bibles such as The Life Application Study Bible)</p>
<p>Faith Matters 5</p> <p>What Jesus really said - to His closest friends?</p> <p>Luke 18:1-8 and the Kingdom of God</p>	<p>Bible Study on the Parable of the Widow and the Judge and a series of parables describing the Kingdom of God.</p> <p>This study reminds us that we are encouraged to be persistent in approaching God (reinforcing Faith Matters 1). If an unrighteous judge delivers a fair verdict, how much more will a righteous, loving, Father God deliver answers to prayer? The study continues with pictures of the Kingdom of Heaven. (It could make the study easier if a handout is prepared in advance with the relevant Bible references or the page numbers of the references are noted).</p> <p>The reverse page gives a snapshot of William Wilberforce's spiritual growth through his contact with John Newton. (The former was the politician who battled to abolish slavery in the UK and British Commonwealth and the latter was a slave trader who, on becoming a Christian, wrote 'Amazing Grace' and other hymns.)</p>

All God's plans have the mark of the cross on them, and all His plans have death to self in them.

E. M Bounds

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