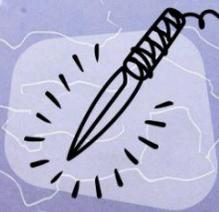


CASE STUDIES
OF THE NEW KINGDOM

The Parables of Jesus



SERIES COMPANION / HIGHROCK 2026

INTRODUCTION

What does it look like to live in a kingdom where the last are first, the mourning are comforted, and the peacemakers are called children of God?

In His most famous teaching, Jesus didn't just give us a list of moral suggestions; he created the foundation for an entirely new kingdom. Sermon on the Mount serves as the "Constitution" for a new kind of kingdom, a radical blueprint for a way of life that turns the values of our world upside down.

In this series, we will explore the heart of Jesus' message as He calls us to move beyond surface-level religion and into a deep, transformative relationship with Him. From the grace-filled promises of the Beatitudes to the challenging call to love our enemies, we will discover how these ancient words provide the foundation upon which we are called to build our entire lives.

RESOURCE OVERVIEW

Here we provide space to take notes on the sermon and Scripture text and answer reflection questions that you can discuss with others. When considering the reflection questions, remember that the goal is not to have all the "right" answers—instead, let these questions serve as a starting point for curiosity in your conversation with God and others. See the Appendix of this guide for more resources and opportunities to engage with this study.

Please note this discussion guide is created before the series begins. Discussion questions are prepared before the sermons are written and based on the theme and text for the week. Thank you for your understanding that the topic and focus of the sermon as the pastor writes it may differ from what is written in the discussion questions.

APPENDIX (page 16)

Offers a deeper dive into the topic as well as resources for Bible study, leading small groups, and links for further support.

- Additional Resources
- Online Bibles
- Prayer Tools
- "Icebreaker" Questions
- Tips for Guiding Conversations
- General Resources for Individual Support

SERMON SCHEDULE & SCRIPTURE READING

**Subject to change at the discretion of the pastors.*

Sermon	Topics
Week 1	The Unforgiving Servant: Matthew 18:23-35

Week 2	The Purpose of the Parables (Parable of the Sower): Matthew 13:1-23
Week 3	The Parable of the Tenants: Matthew 21:33-46
Week 4	The Parable of the 10 Bridesmaids: Matthew 25:1-13
Week 5	The Parable of the Talents: Matthew 25:14-30

WEEKLY FORMAT

SERMON DISCUSSION

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT: Listen to the sermon, read weekly selections/view video links (if provided), read scripture passages (used in the sermon), and answer reflection questions. (30-40 mins)

RELATE: Discuss reflection questions with your small group. (50 mins)

PRAY: Use the suggested prayer prompt to conclude your time (5-10 mins)

CONVERSATION COVENANT

We hope all small group discussions are lively and enriching, but sometimes tough topics will be discussed. The Conversation Covenant* is an agreement to hold respect and grace toward all participants within a small group, no matter the conversation. Please adhere to the Conversation Covenant or consider creating one that fits your context.

*Adapted from <https://conversational-leadership.net/conversation-covenant/>

I pledge:

To act in good faith, with curiosity. I will assume the best about my conversation partners when entering into our groups. I will give the benefit of the doubt, recognizing that they may know something I don't.

To show respect. I will show respect. I will be polite and give due regard to the feelings and traditions of others. I understand that I do not have to agree with someone to show them respect.

To speak the truth. I won't use rhetorical tricks to try to win an argument. I will speak what I genuinely believe is the nuanced truth.

To aim to discover the truth. I will not enter into a conversation with the purpose of changing the mind of anyone to my way of thinking.

To focus on what we can change. I will focus on what we can do differently in the future since we cannot change what we did in the past.

To take responsibility for the conversation. I will take responsibility for the quality of the conversation and the abidance of the rules both in principle and in spirit.

To follow the covenant even when others fail to do so. I will abide by the rules regardless of whether another person breaks them.

To respect the confidentiality of the group. I will not share the stories of group members verbally or in written form (including on social media and online outlets).

To lighten up and approach the conversation in good humor. I recognize that humor is a hallmark of a constructive, generative conversation and take the conversation in good humor.

PREPARE

The following questions are jumping-off points for personal reflection. Engage with them to awaken your awareness of themes in this sermon series. Pay attention to the questions that stand out to you and look back on them throughout the series to see how God might be speaking to you.

CONSIDER

- We recently finished a sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount in the gospel of Matthew. This series will also focus on Matthew's gospel. Before we begin with it, reflect on the following: What are you bringing into this sermon series? What are some of the concerns, questions, and joys in your life right now?
- What are you bringing with you from the Sermon on the Mount series? What challenged you and/or encouraged you from that series?
- Go back to the first question: reflecting on these concerns, questions, and joys, how might you begin to bring them to God – in prayer, worship, and your devotional life and practices? Is there something you feel nudged to bring up in the group conversations for this series?
- In the spirit of being a follower of Jesus, what do you hope to learn from the 'case studies' we are exploring in Matthew's gospel? What are you excited about? What are you particularly open to right now? What might be challenging?

WEEK 1: The Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:23-35

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- Read Matthew 18:23-35

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. At different points, Pastor John highlights some of the challenging parts of this Scripture passage. Do any of these parts stand out to you? Does the context mentioned in the sermon or some of the explanations of them help you engage with these passages? Share with the group.
3. Pastor John made a distinction between forgiveness (letting go in the sense that someone no longer owes you something) – which we are obliged to do – and reconciliation – which, in this passage, we are not commanded to do. How do you understand that difference? How do you see it applying to people and different relationships?
4. Reflect on this personally and, only as you're comfortable, share with the group: is there forgiveness you'd like to grant to someone in your life? Is there forgiveness you're holding back? What does that look like for you right now, and how you are thinking about it in light of the message of this sermon?
5. Pastor John shared some principles related to forgiveness. Spend some time looking at them and discussing what they mean to you as a group:
 - Realize the debt God has forgiven
 - Refuse to keep a ledger
 - Pray for God to bless
 - Set wise boundaries
6. Is there an invitation you sense God making through your conversation or reflections this week? Is there a next step you could take in how you engage, act, or relate to others?

PRAY | God, your mercy towards us is great. You readily forgive, again and again. We thank you for being gracious toward us. Our prayer is simple but challenging: may that same grace extended to us be reflected in our lives. Help us know when and how to forgive, and to do that with the wisdom, discernment and grace that we need to do this in our lives. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Matthew 18:23-35

23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

WEEK 2: The Purpose of the Parables - The Parable of the Sower: Matthew 13:1-23

Matthew 13:1-23

* The sermon topics for this series will alternate locations (Arlington/MetroWest) for weeks 1 and 2 . Check to see which theme/passage was covered in the sermon from your Highrock congregation on Sunday. The other theme/passage will be covered in the following week.

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- Read Matthew 13:1-23

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. Pastor Taylor described how worry and fear can be just as much of a challenge to faith as suffering. Have you experienced this before? If so, what did it look like and what insights, if any, did you take away from it?
3. In reflecting on the four soils, which one resonates with you the most? What's helpful or challenging about that realization? Also, what might it look like for you to move closer to the final (rich) soil, with a slight change in the posture of your heart? (If you cover this final question, be sure to look at question 4 as well.)
4. P. Taylor said, "The soil doesn't work to grow seed. It simply yields to it because it wants to be fruitful." In reflecting on a change of heart, what does God's gracious help and strength mean to you?
5. This passage can make it seem like Jesus is intentionally vague with his listeners. P. Taylor shared a story about his work with the denomination (the Covenant church) and gave a reason for this: Jesus isn't obfuscating but sharing enough with us that we can respond *if* we are authentically searching for what he has to say. Share your responses and reflections to this idea with another.
6. Is there an invitation you sense God making through your conversation or reflections this week? Is there a next step you could take in how you engage, act, or relate to others?

PRAY | God, help us to understand better the meaning of Jesus's parables, and in so doing be changed to more like the people of your kingdom that you desire us to be. Ready the soil of our lives to hear your word, everyday this week, and to respond faithfully. As we have heard, we trust that this is your work, and we open ourselves up to you in order to love you more and our neighbors as ourselves. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.

Matthew 13:1-23

1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not

have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

10 The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

11 He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15 For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.’

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

18 “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. 23 But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

WEEK 3: The Parable of the Tenants

Matthew 21:33-46

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- Read Matthew 21:33-46

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. Pastor John said that the Landowner's in the Scripture passage had three false assumptions:
 - What's mine is mine;
 - time creates ownership;
 - accountability is oppression;
 - if I resist authority, I maintain control.

Do you see any of these assumptions in your life or relationship with God at the moment? What does that look like for you?

3. Is there an invitation you sense God making through your conversation or reflections this week? Is there a next step you could take in how you engage, act, or relate to others?
4. John also shared how this story is for us (which is something the workers of the vineyard didn't see) in these ways:
 - it confronts our obsession with control;
 - it challenges our consumer mindset;
 - it centers Jesus

Likewise, which of these points resonates most with you? Is there one that you can concentrate on this week to help keep you connected to Jesus (keeping Jesus at the center of our stories)? Or, similarly, consider one of the encouragements P. John mentioned, like taking a stewardship mentality (pray with the words "you" and "yours" over "mine"), or to "welcome correction."

5. Do you see ways where we might experience more freedom and better relationships in the posture of service and love, not ownership, that P. John talks about in this sermon? Have you experienced this before?
6. Is there an invitation you sense God making through your conversation or reflections this week? Is there a next step you could take in how you engage, act, or relate to others?

PRAY | Holy God,
all that we have comes from You.

As this parable is proclaimed,
guard us from the pride
that hardens our hearts.

Soften our pride,
humble our spirits,
and form us into a people
who honor Your Son
and bear lasting fruit
for the sake of Your Kingdom.

Amen.

Matthew 21:33-46

33 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

35 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

41 "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

WEEK 4: Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

Matthew 25:1-13

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- Read Matthew 25:1-13

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. P. Dave shared a personal story about a family member's passing and his gratitude that he and his family member were both relationally and spiritually ready for that moment. Did this story speak to you? Share with the group.
3. Pastor Dave offered some advice for 'refueling' our faith (the fat and fuel that went into the fire of the sacrifice of the altar in the Old Testament): regular Bible reading and making a sacrifice, like performing a service for God in secret. The next question touches on Bible reading. Have you experienced the power of a subtle or secret way of serving God? What was it like? Do you think it could be helpful for you to consider now?
4. Have you had a Scripture or Bible passage that you read before resurface in your life, shedding new meaning on it or how it might apply to your own life? What was that like? Has it impacted your relationship with the Bible at all?
5. What might the invitation to "readiness" mean to you right now? Where is there a need, or where would it be helpful, to think about doing something in your life that would allow you to be more ready to encounter God?
6. Is there an invitation you sense God making through your conversation or reflections this week? Is there a next step you could take in how you engage, act, or relate to others?

PRAY |

Faithful God,
Bridegroom of Your people,
as this parable is proclaimed,
awaken our hearts.

When we grow spiritually drowsy, stir us.
When we grow distracted, refocus us.
When we grow complacent, renew us.

By Your Spirit,
teach us to wait with hope
and to live with readiness.
Shape us into a people
who remain faithful and prepared
for the joy of Your appearing.

Amen.

Matthew 25:1-13

Questions? smallgroups@highrock.org

Highrock Online 13

1 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!'

12 "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'

13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

WEEK 5: The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- Read Matthew 25:14-30

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. These questions will be updated the Sunday that the sermon is preached in order to connect them directly to the message.
3. Is there an invitation you sense God making through your conversation or reflections this week? Is there a next step you could take in how you engage, act, or relate to others?

PRAY |

Matthew 25:14-30

14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. 15 To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. 17 So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. 18 But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

22 "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

24 "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

28 "'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

APPENDIX

Below are resources to look into if you are interested in diving deeper into some of the topics covered in this series. If you need resources that more specifically address your own experience, demographic, or faith journey, please reach out to a Highrock pastor or to smallgroups@highrock.org and we will be happy to help!

ONLINE BIBLES

- [Blue Letter Bible](#)
- [Bible Gateway](#)

PRAYER TOOLS

- [The Prayer of Examen: Tracking Our Moods](#)
- [Breath Prayer/Prayer of the Heart](#)
- [Divine/Fixed Hour Prayer](#)
- [SoulCare guide to Imaginative Prayer Spiritual Practice](#)
- [Imaginative Prayer/Ignatian Contemplation](#)
- [SoulCare guide to Recall & Paraphrase Spiritual Practice](#)
- [Lament](#)
- [Laughter and Prayer](#)
- [Palms Up, Palms Down](#)
- [Pray a Psalm in a Nature Setting](#)
- [Praying with your Body](#)
- [Welcoming Prayer](#)

“ICEBREAKER” QUESTIONS

- What was a small win from your week?
- Share a High/Low from your day or week.
- On a scale of 1-10, how are you doing coming into this meeting?
- If you were to describe yourself as a weather forecast today, what would you be? Example: sunny, partly cloudy, rainy with a chance of snow, etc.
- What song would be the theme track for the day you had?

GENERAL RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

- [Spiritual Practices](#)
- [Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Parenting & Kids—Understanding each other through Milestones](#)

TIPS FOR GUIDING CONVERSATION

- Allow everyone space to share. It's ok to ask what people are thinking even if they don't volunteer to share right away. But always give people the option to decline to share. Example: "Hey, Fred, you've been a little quiet and I'm curious to know what you think. Would you like to share anything?"
- Remember there aren't necessarily "right" answers. Encourage participants to simply be curious about what came up for them or others without the pressure of feeling like they "should" have thought or felt anything in particular. Example: Instead of asking "What is this story supposed to be communicating?" ask "What did you notice?"
- Embrace the differences. Affirm that different people can come to different conclusions regarding the same thing. Example: "Interestingly, the text reminded Susie of ABC, while it reminded José of XYZ. Both can be present and true."

- Adapt to suit your group's needs. Sometimes conversation is free-flowing and sometimes it's easier to move through discussion questions one at a time. Do what feels suitable for your group, but don't feel pressured to answer/discuss every single question.
- Encourage curiosity by modeling curiosity. Asking someone "Tell me more about XYZ" can be a really simple but effective tool to go deeper in conversation.
- Don't be afraid of silence. It's natural to want to fill silences or pauses in a conversation. But don't be afraid to sit in silence with your group members. Sometimes thoughts just need time to percolate, so don't feel like you have to rush to another question if no one shares immediately.
- Refer back to the Conversation Covenant. This is the posture that we as Highrock hold as we gather in groups. When the conversation gets tough, you can always refer back to the Conversation Covenant to remind the group that everyone has agreed to abide by this covenant in small group meetings.