

THE STORIES OF JESUS

Find YOUR story in Jesus' stories

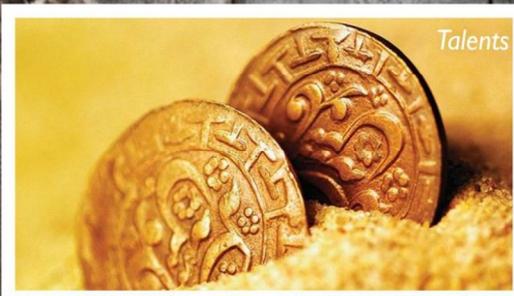
PART 1



Labourers in the Vineyard



Pearl of great value



Talents



Sower

Small Group Booklet
May - June 2017

THE STORIES OF JESUS # 1



Find your story in Jesus' stories

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The Bible is a collection of stories that describe the relationship between God and our world. The Bible contains poetry, parables, history, laws and symbolism. All of this culminates in the life and teachings of Jesus. This study invites us to listen to the stories that Jesus told. When we open our ears and hearts to listen and apply them in our lives today, we find our stories in Jesus' stories. In this way our lives become part of the history of God at work in our world!

We will read four stories told by Jesus and reframe them into our context today. The small group questions and weekly challenges should allow you to apply the spiritual truths they reveal. In addition, we invite each person in the group to share their own story. To really listen to someone is one of the greatest gifts you can give to another person. Our stories connect us with each other and we find fellowship, understanding and healing when we share or listen to the stories of others. (Remember, people will only share their stories when they are sure about the group's confidentiality, safety and support).

Jesus loved telling stories. In keeping with his tradition as a rabbi, he would tell a short allegorical story that was designed to teach us lessons as Jesus reveals himself and his values through them. We can engage with these stories in multiple ways at different times of our lives. We need to prayerfully ask God for insight that the stories told over the next few weeks, will speak directly into our story.

Please note that you will limit your learning if you think that you know everything about these parables. Parables mostly have hidden truths. We therefore need to study them, to listen to the teachings of Biblical scholars, to hear the parables through the experience of the group – and to ask the Holy Spirit to help us to see and interpret these truths. We have suggested ways in which the followers of Jesus could have understood the parables, followed by subsequent ways of reading and understanding these stories. We have also attempted a South African reading of the parable as we attempt to ground the story in our own context. You are challenged to spend the next 4 weeks re-listening to the stories with an open heart. In this way you will be able to gain a new perspective on your story as part of God's story!



**God Bless
Pete & Nadja**

Week I

The Parable of the Sower



Jesus used the illustration of a farmer to explain the “secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt 13:11). This was familiar to just about everyone in Jesus’ world because, except for the very wealthy, everyone had a family field where they grew food for the family. Between November and January, farmers would sow grain crops such as wheat or barley by taking seed out of a bag and scattering it over the soil. In this way they hoped to get an even distribution covering a large area, but seeds sometimes fell on the pathways or other areas. Fields in Israel were unfenced, long, narrow strips of land, with well-trodden footpaths in between the fields.

Jesus explained to those listening that the soil represents the condition of the human heart and suggests that people respond to the message of Jesus in different ways. This parable can be a challenge for those who hear the message of Jesus to reflect and ask what “type” of soil they are.



This parable, when retold to first Century Christians by Luke, urges Christ-followers to go out and spread the Good News to all people – irrespective of whether they are receptive or not! At this time in history Christians were persecuted, and many disciples had become

selective about where they spoke about Jesus. The first century readers of this parable would have preferred to hear Jesus say that they should only go to places that would be receptive to their message. Jesus does not allow this. He tells them to spread the Gospel to all – irrespective of where the message might fall. This resonates with the “Great Commandment” (Matt 22:36-40) and the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:16-20).

In South Africa today:



This parable, when retold in South Africa, can offer us fresh insights. We are a country known for its diversity of people and cultural variety. These different kinds of soil can either be an invitation to mission, or prove to be a stumbling block to our passion for Jesus.

"I want the whole Christ for my Saviour, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my mission field." - John Wesley

Invitation to mission: We have a history that separated us as a nation into different kinds of soil. This Apartheid ideology tried to persuade us that we could look down on some as ‘inferior’ soil, and see our own cultural grouping as ‘superior’ soil. And on the basis of this, we could therefore choose to share the Gospel with some groups, and ignore other groups as a waste of time. This parable reminds us that the Gospel is to be scattered on all soil.

In particular for Methodist people, the month of May is Mission month. This is the month when we focus on our call to go to all people everywhere. John Wesley’s remark that “the world is my parish” challenges us to see every part of our world as part of our mission field.

Our sole purpose is to spread seeds of love to all we meet. When we label people and judge their receptivity, we take away the opportunity for them to change. What if someone didn’t share Christ with you because you were a stranger, looked different, was poor or they didn’t have the time? So, as we ask ourselves about the condition of our hearts, let us reminded ourselves that we should be spreading the love of God to all - even those we don’t feel like talking too!

For reflection: *If I had the opportunity of the Grace of God to change my heart, shouldn’t everyone else?*

**YOUR
STORY**

Small Group Questions:

I. Reflect on the explanations of the Parable of the Sower:

- Discuss the interpretations. Which one of the explanations attracts you more than the others?
- Can you add another meaning to this parable? Think of the “sower” as the preacher at church last Sunday. Or think of “the soil” as members of your family.

Share your ideas with the group.



2. Your life story

Most groups have 8 members (on average). The “Stories of Jesus” series will have 8 weeks of parables in total – two sets of 4 weeks each. Allow one person per week a chance to share something of their life story with the group.

Guidelines when listening to other’s stories:

- Start the conversation by asking them about their life. Ask questions like: “I am curious about...”, “Tell me more about...”, “I am interested in...”.
- Do not interrupt them, give advice or judge their story.
- Ask questions like: “How? What? When? Where?” Why? to show your interest.

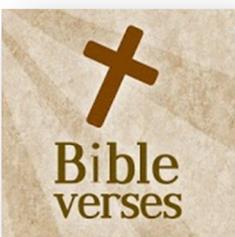
3. Affirmation Exercise (making time to affirm others):

Cut an A4 piece of paper into 4 strips (long side); make enough strips for each member of the group. Hand them out and ask members to write their names at the top of the strip of paper. Once done, pass the paper to the person immediately to your right. You now have someone else’s paper in front of you. Write one or 2 words of affirmation (i.e. warm smile, kind natured, brave soul) about that person and pass it on again. Pass it on until you end up with the paper with your name on it with your affirmations. This is what your group thinks of you. Know and see that you are God’s beloved.



Become aware of the affirming and or mission opportunities around you this week:

- Be interested in the people in your life. Ask probing questions.
- Join our Lazarus team on a Tuesday morning to feed the homeless.
- Join the team on a Thursday morning to prepare a meal for the homeless, or distribute the food prepared on a Thursday night. Contact David at: davidh@bmc.org.za to take part in any of the above.
- Find out more about Missions – speak to Maabo at: maabom@bmc.org.za.



DAY 1: Jeremiah 19:15 (ESV) “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words.”

Proverbs 1:7 (ESV) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

DAY 2: Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Psalm 51:10 (ESV) Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

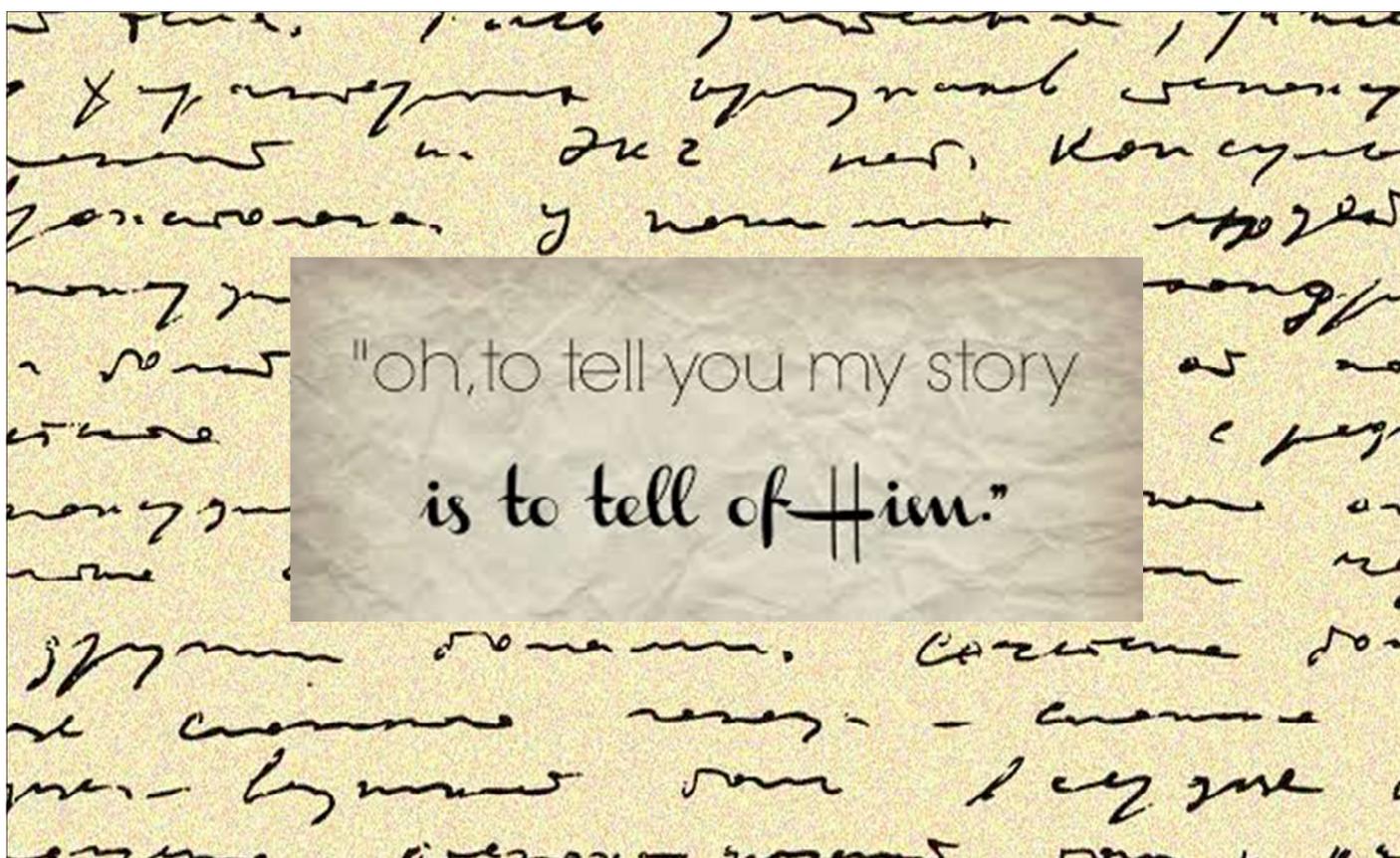
DAY 3: I Corinthians 2:7-8 (ESV) But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

DAY 4: Hebrews 3:14 (ESV) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

DAY 5: Luke 8:14 (ESV) And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

DAY 6: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

DAY 7: Romans 8:11 (ESV) If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.



Week 2

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value



Matthew tells us that Jesus sits in a boat teaching the crowds spiritual truths through parables. He realized that they had preconceived ideas about the Kingdom of God. The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price is one of five parables he told to explain God's rule: the Sower, the Weeds, the Yeast, the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl and the Wedding Banquet.

A pearl was highly prized in the time of Jesus. It was a scarce commodity and as such became a symbol of wealth and status. Pearls are formed when an irritant works its way into an oyster, mussel or clam. As a defense mechanism, a fluid coats the irritant until these layers form a pearl. Before the advent of the modern pearl farms, pearls were extremely difficult to find – which gave them their value.

Jesus tells a story where a Merchant has been searching for fine pearls and was overjoyed when he found the “deal of a lifetime”. He went and sold everything he had to acquire it.

The idea of sacrificing what we have for something we desire is not uncommon; this can range from sacrificing sleep and leisure time to study for a prized qualification, through to placing one's life-savings as a deposit on a bond for a desired home. Jesus thus draws on a familiar idea to teach that the Kingdom of God demands such a sacrifice.



Again, as with all parables, there are a number of ways of interpreting this story. One suggestion is that this story speaks to the things we value in our lives. Those who heard Jesus are asked whether they would be willing to be like Peter, James and John, who left everything to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11; Matt 19:27). The rich young ruler found it hard to follow Jesus because he was asked to sacrifice everything in order to

do so (Matt 19:16-22). Meeting Jesus changes everything, and following him asks us to sacrifice every other goal in our lives.

There is another reading of this story: Jesus is the man who is searching for fine pearls. He sees humanity as the “pearl of great price” and so he sacrifices everything to save humankind from sin (Philippians 2:5-8). The Gospel of John reminds us that God loved us so much that he sacrificed that which was most precious in order to save humanity (John 3:16). St Paul reminds us that we were bought at a great price – read I Corinthians 6:20 and I Corinthians 7:23.



In South Africa today:

The story of great sacrifice for an even greater goal resonates deeply in our South African soul. There are many people who sacrificed everything – even their lives – for the liberation of South Africa from its oppressive history. People such as Nxele Makana, Lilian Ngoyi and Solomon Mahlangu are examples of people who gave up everything in pursuit of a greater prize. They inspire us to be willing to give up the selfish things we cling to in order to contribute to the greater good of the community. Jesus says that true leadership is when someone chooses to give up their treasures to save other people – read John 15:13.

"Oh that God would give me the thing which I long for! That before I go hence and am no more seen, I may see a people wholly devoted to God, crucified to the world, and the world crucified to them. A people truly given up to God in body, soul and substance! How cheerfully would I then say, 'Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.'" - John Wesley

This speaks very sharply into our national dilemma today: we see many people who sacrifice treasure in order to gain the greater prize – but this prize is self-serving. People will spend time and resources on attaining a greater goal, making excessive sacrifices, but in the process, attain their goal by trampling on the poor and the weak. Such achievement is hollow and fails to match the self-sacrificial example of Jesus.

It is true that there are moments when achieving a particular goal takes precedence over everything else – even family, friendships and health: completing a course of study, or finishing a project can demand everything. But this is short-term and so ought to be temporary. When it becomes a lifestyle, or a consistent way of living, our worldview gets skewed. When a wealthy family is not satisfied with what they already have – and even seek control of a country’s politicians and resources – then something has gone terribly wrong. This obsessive pursuit of wealth becomes a consuming need at the cost of other things – especially a relationship with God. This is like clinging to fake pearls, sometimes not even knowing what the real thing looks like (Matthew 7:6).

For reflection: *What fake pearls am I clinging to? And at what price?*

When we focus on Jesus we gain a different perspective. Life is now viewed through the perspective of Jesus, who will help us identify the true “pearl of great price” in our life.

We do not lose every sinful tendency or gain victory over old habit battles immediately, but we repudiate sin and gain a love for righteousness. God doesn’t want to ruin our lives and take the things that we enjoy away; God wants to enrich our lives (Matthew 6:33).



Your life matters – it is part of the bigger story - identify what value your relationship with God has and you will be able to string on other pearls to make “your necklace” that will represent your story.

YOUR STORY

Small Group Questions:

1. List the three things you value most in life.

1.1.....

1.2.....

1.3.....

2. Share your list with your group – and listen to the responses of others?

What are the priorities common to the group?

.....

.....

Ask the group to pray for you as you keep on trying to put your relationship with God first in your life.

3. Have you ever experienced God adding back the things you value once you focused on him (please share your story).



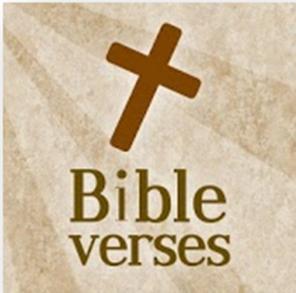
Allow another person an opportunity to share a part of, or a summary of, their story with the group.

Remember: Do not interrupt them, give advice or judge their story.

When they are done you might want to ask them how it felt to share with the group.



- Give away something that you treasure to someone in need.
- Replace an obsessive activity with a God activity.
- Celebrate what you have by sharing it with others.



DAY 1: Luke 9:23 (ESV) Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus. And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up his cross daily and follow me.

DAY 2: Psalm 49:6-8 (ESV) Those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches? Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice,

DAY 3: Mark 10:24-27 (ESV) And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.” And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With people it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

DAY 4: Isaiah 55:1 (ESV) The Compassion of the LORD “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and them who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

DAY 5: Luke 9:57-62 (ESV) The Cost of Following Jesus As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.” Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

DAY 6: Matthew 10:37-39 (ESV) Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

DAY 7: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Week 3

The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard



Matthew 20:1-15

Jesus tells a story about workers in a vineyard that was both familiar to his hearers....and shocking to them. Vineyards were established on the sides of mountains terraces that had to be supported by stones and filled with topsoil. All this was done by hand. To complicate matters, the harvest season was short and the crop had to be harvested before the rainy season started. Day labourers were therefore hired to repair the terraces and harvest the crops. Competition for temporary work was fierce as work was scarce. People would stay at the market place all day in the hope of getting a job, even if just for a few hours. These workers were poor and only had work during the season. The employer in the story paid his part-time workers the same amount as the full-time workers – something that was unheard of! Then the employer went even further: he also paid those that only worked a few hours the same as those that worked the whole day!



Jesus told this parable to an incredulous audience. This was not their understanding of how the world works. It was normal that each gets rewarded according to the effort that they had put into the work. Jesus was not leading a revolution in labour relations. Instead he was pointing out that the way his hearers understood labour practices was affecting the way they understood themselves as servants of the most high God. Just as people assumed that those who

had worked longer deserved more reward, so the religious thought that those who served God with a life-time's diligence deserved greater reward than those who only came to serve God late in life.

Let us note that no one was treated unfairly in this story – the first workers agreed to the day's wage and received it. In a time where work was scarce, they had an opportunity to earn a day's wage to feed their families. What a blessing! They were spared the humiliation of standing in the market place desperate and hopeless, like the others, seeing others get work before them.

The focus of this story, however, is not the workers; it is instead about God and the reign of God. This story is about God's goodness, patience, forgiveness, generosity, compassion and unmerited Grace. God loves bestowing mercy, especially to those that don't expect it or feel like they don't deserve it. Even you and I benefit from God's grace. This story teaches that there is no sin too big that cannot be forgiven. We can come as we are, even at the 11th hour, and be welcomed with open arms into God's Kingdom! Praise to God for his Grace and mercy.

In South Africa today:

South Africa is a country of great inequality: some people in South Africa have the advantage of a good education, parents who pay attention to their social



development, and family and friends who can network them into employment or sustain them with family wealth. However, most South Africans are like the hired workers in the parable – hoping to find a job (any job) just to survive. In such a context we can re-read this parable to discover the deep compassion of an owner of the vineyard who values human life so much that he is willing to share his resources with the poorest of the poor. He even rescues the dignity of someone who has waited all day for a job without

success, and employs him at a rate that allows this person to take home something for his family. And we can allow this parable to challenge us to find ways of restoring dignity – and employment – to those who struggle for survival. We can dispense the Grace of God.

For this reason, a parable that challenges us to adopt a perspective that we are working for God in our South African corner of God's Vineyard profoundly disturbs the expectation that we should all be equally rewarded. The fact is that the only real reward a Christian ought to anticipate is the words of our Creator at the end of our days: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21).

"The gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness." - John Wesley

Grace is not about us – it is about God. It is about how much God loves us. God loves us not because we have earned it, but because God is love! Everybody is loved by God and receives Grace no matter how long they have believed or what their circumstances are (a reminder of the thief on the cross next to Jesus – Luke 23:40-43). This is actually the best news ever! Even if you come to love God at the last minute – God will accept you with open arms!



God's Grace is for everyone! God loves us despite ourselves, even if we feel beyond loving. God loves us anyway – undeservedly. We celebrate this grace by loving others with the same Grace-filled measure that God has shown to us.

**YOUR
STORY**

Small Group Questions:

1. **Reflect on the following scenarios:** Ask if one resonates with you. Discuss this one with the group:

- You have just accepted Jesus – do you feel welcome in this church? Why? Please explain.
- You have been a lifetime member of church and have volunteered in various positions, you see new people arriving and taking up leadership positions, you are overlooked again, how do you feel?

OR

You have been very pro-active and productive in your organization but you have been overlooked for a promotion or not acknowledged for it, how do you feel?

- You see blatant bad behaviour, corruption or the misuse of resources in your church (or the organization you work for), but the “culture” of glossing over offences is too strong or the person committing it is too powerful in their position, there is no consequences. What do you do?

2. **Come up with your own definition of grace.**

Grace

3. Listen to: Big Daddy Weave - "My Story" (Official Music Video) on You Tube.



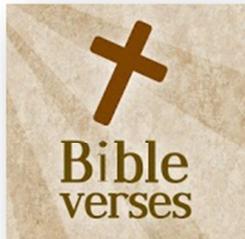
Allow another person a chance to share a part of, or a summary of, their story with the group if they are willing.

Remember: Do not interrupt them, give advice or judge their story.

When they are done you might want to ask them how it felt to share with the group.



Start a gratitude journal. Write down 5 things for which you are grateful for every morning!



DAY 1: Romans 9:11-15 (ESV) Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

DAY 2: 1 John 1:9 (ESV) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Ephesians 1:7 (ESV) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

DAY 3: Luke 12:32 (ESV) “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.

DAY 4: John 14:2 (ESV) In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

DAY 5: 1 Corinthians 3:15-20 (ESV) If anyone's work is burned up, they will suffer loss, though they will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Let no one deceive themselves. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let them become a fool that they may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”

DAY 6: Matthew 19:28-29 (ESV) Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left

houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

DAY 7: Acts 10:34 John 13:14-17 (ESV) If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his/her master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Week 4

The Parable of the Talents



It is clear that the man in this story knew his servants: he gave them money in accordance to their ability and he trusted the workers to know what to do with it. Even the servant that received only one talent got more than enough to meet the master's expectations. The talents that Jesus spoke of in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:21-35) and the Parable of the Talents referred to the largest unit of currency at the time. Some calculate the talent in the parables to be equivalent to 20 years of wages for the common worker. The two servants that invested the money got praised and given more. The one who got one talent was afraid to take a risk and was punished.

This parable speaks directly to the lives of the disciples of Jesus. Jesus shared this story with his disciples in Jerusalem shortly before he was crucified. He tells them that he will be leaving them soon, but that he will return. He wants them to understand the big responsibility they have as stewards of his world whilst he is gone. The disciples have come to know Jesus' heart of compassion and love for his people, so Jesus wants them to

understand that they will be his “hands and feet” in future. They will have to keep on loving his people whilst he is gone.

But as with all parables, this story has transcended time, and speaks to all of us who have heard the call of God on our lives. One day the Master will return and address his workers. What the Master says when he comes back is totally up to us. We have God-given resources, gifts, time and abilities. This asks the question: *What are we doing with our talents?*



The focus of the story is not on the different talents given to the servants. The fact is that we are not all created equal, and diversity is part of creation. The reality is that it takes just as much work for the one with the 5 talents to produce 5 more, as it does the one with the 2 talents to produce 2 more. The key to this lesson is that we will be held accountable for the way we have used that which we are given.

Sometimes we ‘get stuck’ and do not use our talents. This could be because our relationship with God is not right, or because we doubt ourselves and our abilities. Other times we fear the opinions of others. God will never abandon us to do his work alone, and we will never be asked to do more than we can handle. Again a question: *What is holding you back?*

The poet John Milton was fascinated by the parable and referred to it repeatedly, notably in the sonnet "*When I Consider How My Light is Spent*".

***When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent, which is death to hide,
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he, returning, chide.***

In South Africa today:

South Africa is “one of the most consistently unequal countries in the world”.¹ The gap between those who are blessed with many talents and those blessed with few is unbearably large. This has its roots in a colonial history of exploitation, followed by an apartheid system designed to keep some rich and the majority poor. The parable of the talents offers us a unique Jesus-way of healing our land.



The point made by Jesus is that of those who have much, much is expected. Therefore if someone has gained many “talents”, that person is expected to use them in a way that multiplies blessings for the Master. Put differently, those who are wealthy South Africans are to use their wealth for God’s purposes in our land. It is the responsibility of those who

¹ Haroon Borat, Professor of Economics and Director of the Development Policy Research Unit, University of Cape Town

have much to use their blessings for the benefit of all. This is difficult, because many wealthy people in our country will argue: “*I worked hard for my money, and deserve to enjoy its benefits*”. This ignores the fact that all of life is God’s gift, and therefore the strength to get up each day, to learn, to think and to work are given by God. It also ignores the fact that wealth is often rooted in the benefit of good education, well-connected families, and accidents of history that were beyond the control of the recipient. Often wealthy people become trapped in a cycle of acquisition that leaves little room for using wealth in a God-pleasing way. It is curious that someone who has made a fortune would want still more! Here we need to hear afresh the warning that the Master will return and ask for an account of the way that the talents were used. It is entirely possible that the Master might see the many talents, but still not say “Well done, good and faithful servant”, because that person refused to share their blessings.

Conversely, those with fewer talents are often tempted to spend their lives wishing that they had a better allocation of wealth. This leads to bitterness and resentment, as the person looks at others who have been blessed with more. This parable challenges those with less talents to use them for the glory of the Master. It is not the size of the wealth that impresses God, but rather the way the recipient has used it for the Kingdom of God. Instead of bitterly wishing for the property, the wealth or the education of another person – use your God-given talents for the glory of God and hear God’s words of approval at the end of your life.

We need to remember that every gift or talent comes with its own responsibilities and that we might not like, or be able to handle, the responsibilities given to another person. We only need to do the best with the opportunities that God gave us. God has a purpose for us right where we are today!

At times we look at all our talents and we get proud and self-righteous as if we deserve them. We see ourselves superior, better than others. We can begin to believe that our talents and blessings mean that we are special and favoured. We need to remember that God does not discriminate – he loves everybody the same. We receive by God’s grace and our talents are given to us to be a blessing to God and others, not ourselves.

"When a man becomes a Christian, he becomes industrious, trustworthy and prosperous. Now, if that man when he gets all he can and saves all he can does not give all he can, I have more hope for Judas Iscariot than for that man!" - John Wesley

For thought: Are you multiplying God’s love and blessings? Jesus is coming back and he will want to know what we did with the gifts he gave us. God gave us sufficient talent to do what we have to do – NOW. Identify what it is. Celebrate it. Use it. Invest in his Kingdom by putting

your treasures in heaven. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.” (Matthew 6:19 ESV) By putting God and his people first, you become the lead of your story and in so doing, in his!

Small Group Questions:

1. **How do you feel when you are given a lot of responsibilities?** Nervous, proud, overwhelmed, confident? Please elaborate.

2. **What do you need in order to use your talents?**

- a) Believe in yourself more
- b) Encouragement from others
- c) Trust in God more

Discuss your answer with the group.

3. **How do you see the final judgement?** Please discuss.

“For to everyone who has will more be given, and h/shee will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he/she has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”



Allow another person a chance to share a part of, or a summary of, their story with the group if they are willing.

Remember: Do not interrupt them, give advice or judge their story.

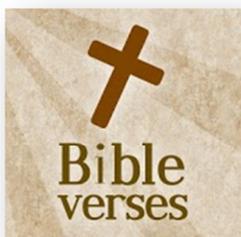
When they are done you might want to ask them how it felt to share with the group.



Share God’s love with someone you do not know:

- Take a meal to a street beggar.
- Volunteer at a pet sanctuary.

Actively pursue what is right – go against the stream if you have to. Ask others to support and encourage you.



DAY 1: Galatians 6:5 (ESV) For each will have to bear his/her own load.

DAY 2: I Corinthians 9:14-19 (ESV) In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for

boasting. For if I preach the gospel that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to

make full use of my right in the gospel. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

DAY 3: I Peter 4:10-12 (ESV) As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

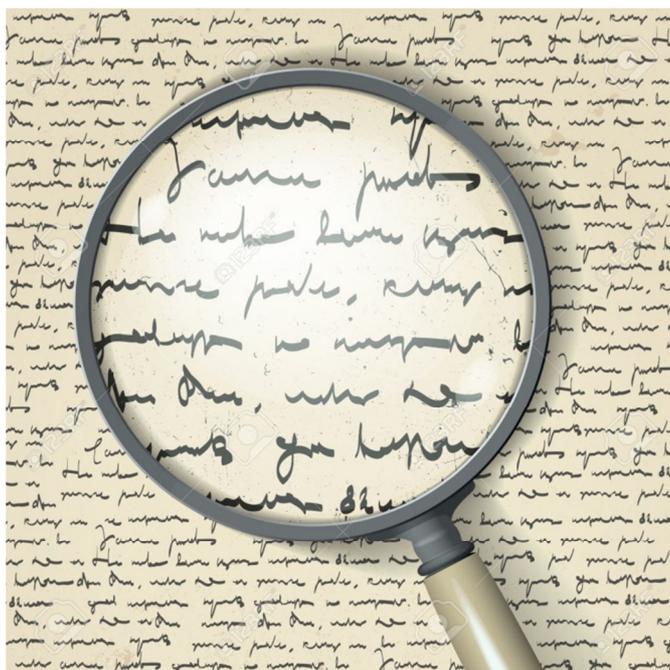
DAY 4: I Timothy 1:5 (ESV) The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

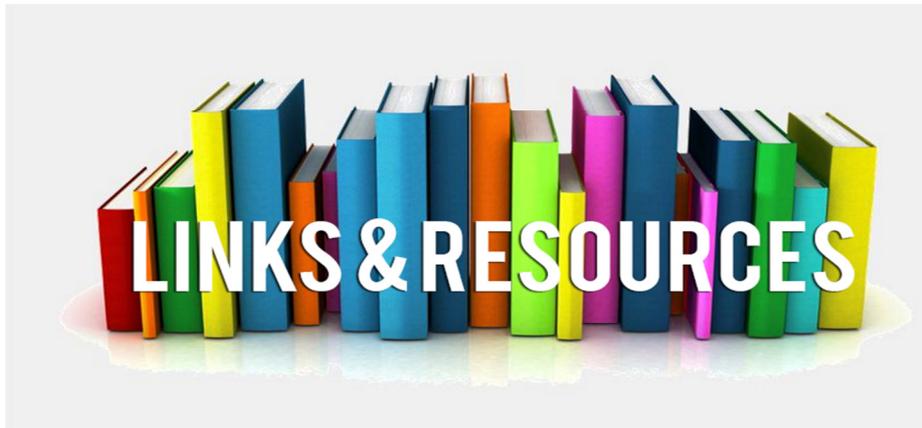
DAY 5: Titus 3:5-7 (ESV) He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

DAY 6: John 6:44 (ESV) No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him/her. And I will raise him/her up on the last day.

DAY 7: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We hope that these stories of Jesus grabbed your heart and mind, and that you were able to make the spiritual truths contained in them part of your story – thus ultimately becoming part of His story.





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This book was produced and printed by the Grace of God, and with contributions from: *Pete Grassow & Nadja Atkinson – Co-Writers, Kerry Wetton – Cover design, Carol Roodt – Proofreader and Bendi Jabulani Mashinini – Printer.*

**Bryanston Methodist Church
MAY - JUNE 2017**

