

Simple Stories of Jesus

For each of these simple stories told by Jesus, imagine you are in a crowd gathered around Jesus as he is telling the story. Let yourself be drawn into the story, with whatever emotions it brings up in you as you listen.

The thoughts added at the end might help you to think deeper on the issues raised. It is also worth looking up the reference, especially as that often adds a bit of context to why Jesus is telling the story.

Choose a story whose theme heading matches your mood/curiosity of the day. Ponder that same story for at least a day or two before moving onto another one.

Note that in some cases you will find Jesus finishes the story with a line that we might find quite troubling. Consider that the shock-factor might have been deliberate: keep in mind that the original crowd of hearers included genuine inquirers but also religious leaders who needed jolting out of their blinkered (and incorrect) understanding of God!

Forgiving Others ...

The Kingdom of God is like a king settling accounts with his servants. One servant owed a huge amount and had no way of paying – technically he was doomed. Yet he pleaded with the king for mercy, and the king showed mercy by cancelling the whole debt!

That same servant went out a free man, yet he saw a fellow servant who owed him, though it was only a modest sum. He grabbed the other servant angrily and forcefully demanded repayment. The other servant begged for mercy, yet the first servant would have none of it. He claimed his rights and had the full force of the law bear down on the one who owed him.

Others saw what had happened, and realised the raw injustice of how things had played out – which they reported to the king. The king called the first servant back in and said, “What you have done is wicked: I cancelled your debt because you begged for mercy - shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?”. The king re-instated his debt and threw him into prison.

Based on Matthew 18:21 – 35

Thoughts: Consider all that God has done for you in Jesus dying on the cross. Now consider how you should respond to others ...

For sure others really have wronged you ... but in the great scheme of things how does that compare to what God has already done for you?

We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19)

The Lengths God Goes To ...

Suppose you have 100 sheep, but you realise one is lost. Would you not leave the 99 and go after that lost sheep, searching far and wide? And once found all your angst is suddenly replaced with joy – you get home and want to tell everyone about it. This is how it will be in heaven when even one person turns back to God.

Or suppose a woman has ten coins yet loses one. Doesn't she turn the house upside down searching everywhere until she finds it. And suddenly all her angst is replaced with joy – so she texts all her friends and can't stop talking about it. Again this is how it will be in heaven when even one person turns back to God.

Based on Luke 15:1 – 10

Thoughts: Consider your own emotions when something valuable is lost, but then after some considerable searching you then find it. Now realise that God feels the same way about you and about other lost people too ... only much much more!

Consider the lengths God went to in order for you to be 'found again'. Consider how much He wants to find others.

He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10)

Bad continues alongside Good ...

The Kingdom of God is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. In time the wheat appeared, but so did the weeds. The owner's servants came to him perplexed by the presence of the weeds, but the owner knew this was the work of the enemy.

The servants asked, "Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?". "No", he answered, "because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat into my barn".

Based on Matthew 13:24 – 30

Thoughts: It's easy for us to be frustrated that bad things are seemingly allowed to continue. And let's be honest - we all have people we would happily do away with right now!

Yet the delay allows the wheat (the good) to grow. It also gives time (and therefore chance) for others to turn to God and change their ways (can weeds be redeemed and counted as wheat?).

All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away (John 6:37)

Have Mercy on Me, a Sinner ...

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a 'prim & proper' religious leader, the other a common scoundrel. The leader stood proud and prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people – thieves, evil-doers, people who cheat on their spouses, or even like that scoundrel over there. I pray and I give to the church, just like I should."

The scoundrel stood at a distance, looking down and dejected, but mustered this desperate prayer: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner".

I tell you that this scoundrel, rather than the leader, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Based on Luke 18:19 – 14

Thoughts: Does God need you to orate a properly constructed and refined prayer, or would He rather you just be real and say it how it is?

Can we contribute anything to us being saved, or do we simply need to fall 100% on God and His mercy?

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)

Frustrated at Unanswered Prayer?

In a town there was a judge, but he didn't care about God or what people thought. There was a widow who kept bringing her case before the judge: "Grant me justice against my adversary".

The judge refused over and over, but eventually he caved, thinking, "I don't care about God or what people think of me, but I can't take this widow bothering me any more. I'll see that she gets justice."

Listen to what the unjust judge says. Will not God bring justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son comes, will he find faith on earth?

Based on Luke 18:1 – 8

Thoughts: Note the Old Testament (before-Jesus part of the Bible) is full of verses that demonstrate how God is a God of justice, and that He wants us to act justly in our lives.

How does the comparison between the unjust human judge and God strike you?

If God is ready and willing to play His part in acting justly, are we willing to play our part in faithfully calling on Him?

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God
(Philippians 4:6)*

Worth All You Have ...

The Kingdom of God is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Again, the Kingdom of God is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Based on Matthew 13:44 – 46

Thoughts: We all understand the basic concept of 'value' – we all know some things that have great financial value, and we all have things that have extraordinary sentimental value to us.

The question is, do we appreciate the value of God relating to us, adopting us to be a son or daughter in His Kingdom? What would we re-arrange in our lives so as to be sure to be included?

Seek first His Kingdom and Righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33)

Grace Economy ...

The Kingdom of God is like a landowner who went out early to hire day-workers for his vineyard. He agreed the regular wage and the workers set to work. Later he hired some more, offering to pay them accordingly.

At noon and mid-afternoon he hired yet more. Late in the afternoon he found others unemployed and asked, “Why have you been standing here all day long?”. They replied, “Because no one has hired us”. The owner sent them to work too.

In the evening the owner instructed the foreman to pay each worker, but specified that he starts with the last ones hired and work backwards – each to get a day's wage. The first workers saw this and expected more, but in fact received exactly the same.

They grumbled, “These tail-enders have barely worked, but you have made them equal to us even though we worked the whole day!”. The owner answered, “I am not unfair: I have paid you what we agreed – and it is my choice to be generous to the others”.

Based on Matthew 20:1 – 16

Thoughts: We all compare ourselves with others (what we do, our sense of 'being right' etc), and compute our own sense of relative value.

But God doesn't see us like that! He operates a 'grace economy' that operates on radically different principles.

It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – not from yourselves, but by gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8 - 9)

Patience Required ...

The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed – which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.

Again, the Kingdom of God is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into an industrial sized batch of dough, allowing it to work all through the whole mixture.

Based on Matthew 13:18 – 21

Thoughts: From the smallest of things great things can come ... but it takes time!

Yeast not only mixes, but in the bread-making 'proving' process it transforms the structure of the dough ... but it takes time!

Are we willing to have the faith and patience for the Kingdom outcomes that God can bring about: even from the small things we can do and from the influence we can make, however insignificant it seems to us at the time?

I (Paul) planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6)