

[D O W N L O A D]
HIDDEN
TREASURE



MODERN PARABLES™ | **VOLUME 1** LESSONS 1 & 2
LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD | Based on Matthew 13:44

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*“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like,
or what parable shall we use to describe it?”*

MARK 4 : 30

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Modern Parables provides free downloads of additional teaching and study materials on its website. In particular, overviews of Understanding the Parables and Living the Parables are available at

MODERNPARABLE.COM

Introduction

A New Kind of Study

Modern Parables is a new kind of Bible study. From one perspective, it's a study that uses short films of the parables to teach the Bible.

But from another perspective, it's something unique. *Modern Parables* employs a new method of understanding the Bible through films that explain the biblical text. It uses modern stories that recreate in the viewer the same responses that the original audiences of Jesus' parables might have experienced. In other words, *just watching the films* begins to explain the historical, grammatical, contextual and interpretive elements of Jesus' parables. The films help people grasp the parables at an immediate, gut level. This emotional immediacy enables them to engage the Bible in a powerful and compelling new way.

At its heart, *Modern Parables* uses film to drive people deeper into Scripture. To borrow a phrase from the poet Horace, it seeks "to please and instruct." The films are intended to be

both entertaining and educational at the same time.

Most people – churchgoing people, at least – would agree that Jesus’ parables are important. Yet, if asked further, most would say that His parables are nice stories intended to teach universal moral lessons. If you understand the moral of the story, you’ve gotten the parable.

There’s a problem with that explanation: it doesn’t square with what Jesus Himself said about His parables. Rather than trying to create a set of nice stories for the world, Jesus bluntly said that He taught in parables so that His hearers *wouldn’t immediately understand* His teaching (Matt 13:13).

But the problem goes beyond that. When you start looking at His parables, a lot of them aren’t nice stories at all: a king destroys an entire city for speaking out against him; a manager cheats his master out of money and is praised by Jesus for it; a fig tree is cursed for not bearing fruit.

When taken at face value, the parables can be confusing and hard to understand. In fact, to get a nice moral out of some of them requires a good bit of twisting. Parables are not simple moral stories that teach a lesson.

So what are parables?

The Bible explains that Jesus had specific purposes for teaching in parables. Matthew tells us that in at least one instance He spoke to the crowd *only* in parables and said nothing without a parable (Matt 13:34). Why is this?

As Jesus said in Mark, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?” (Mk 4:30) It is important to understand that the parables cannot be separated from Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God. If detached from His larger teaching ministry, they don’t make sense. Rather, the parables are like different

lenses used to view different aspects of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Himself often started His parables with, “The Kingdom of God is like...”

To Jesus, parables are comparisons between the natural and spiritual realms that teach His followers different aspects of the Kingdom of God. In this sense, parables are keys to understanding the things Jesus wanted His followers to know about His Kingdom. On the one hand, they are like little instruction manuals explaining what God is like and how He acts, as well as how people in His Kingdom *ought* to live. On the other hand, they describe how people inside or outside the Kingdom *actually do* live.

The reason Jesus spoke in parables was that He knew they were the best method for teaching about the Kingdom He was inaugurating with His life, death, and resurrection.

How the Study Works

Modern Parables, Vol I explores six different parables. In this study, *Hidden Treasure* is covered in two lessons. The first lesson is called “Understanding the Parable.” In this lesson you’ll be watching the film, then doing some basic study on the parable itself. The second lesson is called “Living the Parable.” In this lesson you’ll be watching an application video taught by Dr. Daniel Doriani, then discussing how to apply the teaching of the parable in your day-to-day life.

Modern Parables seeks to recreate the immediacy of the gut-level reaction of the first-century audience hearing Jesus’ parables. The parable films are simply teaching tools that, after being used, will fall away to leave the Biblical text for people to understand and apply. In the long run, the only thing that matters is the Bible, so it is important to keep the parable

films in their proper context as tools and not the purpose of the study.

There are three levels that the study moves through:

LEVEL 1 - THE DRAMATIC STORY

A parable is a story. The reader (or viewer) must understand a parable at the level of plot and character before he or she can understand anything else about it. This first level refers to the essential story line of a parable.

LEVEL 2 - THE BIBLICAL PARALLEL

Once you understands the story, you will be able to step back and look at the parable film side-by-side with the original parable of Jesus. We designed each film to parallel the original parable as closely as possible in a modern re-telling of the story. The hope is that the parallels make it much easier for a modern person to bridge the 2,000-year gap from when the parables were originally told.

LEVEL 3 - THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The part of the study known as “Living the Parable” is dedicated to the practical application of the parables. In general, it is necessary to understand a Biblical text before applying it. Going back to the days of the Apostles, pastors have had a responsibility to teach and apply the Bible to the church. *Modern Parables* recognizes pastors’ foundational role in guiding people into the truth, and has incorporated their teaching into a key aspect of the study: the Application Video. The parable film has a related Application Video that explains what it means to live out the parable in daily life.

Bonus Lesson: Cinematic Theology

For those who are interested, we have provided an additional lesson that explores the world of cinema and theology in greater detail. The lesson on *Hidden Treasure* is found on page 40 of this guide. The lesson consists of watching the Director's Commentary for the film, then talking through the questions provided.

* * *

In closing, thank you for purchasing *Modern Parables*. We hope that this study is a helpful tool for expanding your understanding of these parables as they relate to the broader Kingdom of God.

Matthew 13:44

STUDY MATERIAL

Lesson One

UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLE

The kingdom of heaven 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. MATT 13:44

Introduction

There is a story about a major oil company that drilled some test wells in a largely agricultural and rural area of Florida in the 1970's. After the results came in, they announced that the wells were non-productive. The company then had agents go around inconspicuously and buy up land and oil rights from the farmers for very little money. One farmer, thought to be a bit crazy because of his eccentric ways, decided there really was oil under his land and decided to keep his farm and oil rights. He tried to convince others to do the same, but no one would listen to him.

After the oil company had bought up most of the rights for pennies on the dollar, they returned to the area and started extracting barrels upon barrels of oil from the land. The "crazy" farmer then sold his land and rights for a fortune and became a millionaire.¹

Stories about an underdog thinking quickly and making a fortune as a result are exciting to hear. Throughout history and across cultures, there are similar accounts of average people suddenly happening on a priceless find, having to act quickly and cleverly to secure the treasure, then changing their lives forever because of it.

Jesus understood this delight. In telling the parable of the Hidden Treasure, He played on the universal desire to see one's life suddenly transformed into something wonderful.

The Background of Hidden Treasure

The parable of the Hidden Treasure is one Jesus' shortest parables. Matthew records it for us in chapter 13 along with the other great parables explaining the Kingdom of God (e.g., the sower, the wheat and the tares, and the mustard seed, among others).

In providing the historical setting of the parable, Matthew tells us that "Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore." (Matt 13:1-2) Jesus would have been speaking to a crowd made up of some Pharisees (with whom he had argued earlier in the day) as well as many local peasants from the surrounding countryside. All of them had traveled to hear what this new teacher (or rabbi) had to say.

It was not unusual for Jewish rabbis to speak in parables. In fact, the Hebrew prophets and teachers of old had developed this particular form through their unique understanding of the way God had created the world. They recognized that some truths can best be explained in stories.² It's not hard to understand why: parables work in the familiar world of the everyday, taking abstract concepts such as loving God and loving one's neighbor, then putting flesh on them. This recognition that

there *must* be a relationship between theology and reality is an important aspect of true, Biblical religion.

But if it wasn't unusual to hear rabbis speak in parables, it *was* unusual for a rabbi not to explain exactly what the parable meant after telling it. There were a few exceptions, but Jesus typically didn't explain Himself. In fact, during this particular preaching time, Matthew tells us that He spoke to this crowd only in parables and "did not say anything without using a parable." (Matt 13:34) Jesus' method concerned his disciples, so they asked Him why it was that He spoke to the people in parables (Matt 13:10).

His answer was a bit surprising.

Why Did Jesus Teach in Parables?

As we saw in the Introduction, the central theme of Jesus' teaching ministry was to explain the Kingdom of God. Although His teaching method was one with which His first-century listeners were familiar, there was more to the method than they realized. Jesus knew that the parable form perfectly emphasized what He wanted to teach: that is, how *the spiritual Kingdom of God is pressing into and transforming the natural world of the here and now*.³

To Jesus, the Kingdom of God was about how His redemptive action was going to affect the daily, individual lives of His followers both in the present and the future. The parables have that as their central concern.

Yet Jesus understood that spiritual things are often difficult to comprehend. What is the Kingdom really worth? What does it mean to receive God's grace? How does repentance work? What is love? By using the parables as comparisons between the natural and spiritual realms, Jesus was creating a series of doors through which His listeners could step and actually *enter*

into a new understanding about His Kingdom. As one writer has put it, the parables are nothing less than “spiritual discoveries” about the way God’s creation truly works.⁴

But Jesus’ parables had a catch to them.

In answering their question, Jesus explained to His disciples that, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’” (Mark 4:10-12)

In other words, Jesus was saying, “I’m speaking in parables so they won’t easily understand.”

Why did Jesus want the truth veiled from so many of His hearers? And what was the “secret” He was referring to?

It’s important to recognize that Jesus’ first-century Jewish audience already had strong opinions about the Kingdom of God. Just as Christians today hold very strong opinions about the second coming of Christ, so too did the first-century Jews about the coming of the Messiah. From their interpretation of the Old Testament, everyone expected a powerful Messiah to come suddenly, wipe out the Roman oppressors, then quickly set up a magnificent, visible kingdom here on earth. Luke reveals this popular mentality when he writes: “[Jesus] went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.” (Luke 19:11)

The primary problem with this popular interpretation was that it was wrong. In complete disregard of everyone’s assumptions and expectations, God sent a suffering servant to establish a spiritual kingdom that would slowly grow to fill “the entire earth.” (Dan 2:35) This true kingdom would certainly have physical manifestations – but not those assumed by Jesus’ audience.

That was the secret. *Unless one understood that Jesus and His unique ministry were what the parables were talking about, then one could not understand His parables.*⁵ The secret that had been revealed to the disciples was Jesus Himself and His unexpected method of redemption. As God prophesied in Isaiah (and was quoted by Paul in Romans), “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” (Romans 9:33/Isaiah 8:14) Many people of Jesus’ day stumbled and fell over what Jesus appeared to be: a gentle man, a humble man, a powerless man. Because so many people rejected Jesus as the Son of God, they were “ever seeing, but never understanding.”

This brings us to a final reason why Jesus taught in parables. Parables are the perfect method for sneaking past prejudices and misconceptions concerning the Kingdom of God. By creating a world that listeners willingly entered into, they checked their preconceived notions at the door. Of course, once inside the world, they found themselves interested and often convicted by the actions of the fictional characters. This would make hearers angry and push them to reject Jesus’ message entirely (as many Pharisees often did); it would leave people scratching their heads (as many peasants often did); or it would drive people to true change.

In sum, Jesus taught in parables because they:

- 1 Were familiar to His audience,
- 2 Could communicate the truth quickly and effectively,
- 3 Used the relationship between the natural and spiritual realms to make complex ideas easy to understand,
- 4 Veiled the truth from those who did not recognize His unique ministry, and

- 5 Created a fictional world that slipped past prejudices and misconceptions concerning the Kingdom of God.

We see all this happening perfectly in the parable of the Hidden Treasure.

Exploring Hidden Treasure

The kingdom of heaven 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. MATT 13:44

Names of the Kingdom

The kingdom of heaven...

We stated earlier that Jesus used the parables to teach about the Kingdom of God. But Matthew quotes Jesus as saying “kingdom of heaven,” not “kingdom of God.” There is only one Kingdom, but the gospel writers do not always use the same phrase when referring to it. Matthew primarily uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven” (although he does use “kingdom of God” four times), whereas Mark and Luke always use the phrase “kingdom of God.” Why is this?

Since the gospels were all written in Greek, we can be sure that Jesus – who spoke Aramaic – used neither of these phrases exactly. Rather the writers of the gospels were interpreting the Aramaic phrase that Jesus used and translating it into Greek. Matthew was writing to a more Jewish audience who, in accordance with their religious history, avoided using

the actual name of God. It was therefore more reverent to say “kingdom of heaven” with “heaven” indirectly referring to God Himself. Since Mark and Luke were writing to predominantly non-Jewish audiences, they used the phrase that would be least confusing. For the sake of simplicity, this study will quote Matthew accurately but will always refer to God’s Kingdom as the Kingdom of God.

Comparing the Kingdom

...is like...

Jesus spent a lot of His ministry talking about the Kingdom. But at no time in any of the gospels did He define exactly what He meant by the Kingdom of God. Instead, He just took the well-used phrase and applied new comparisons and teachings to it. He clearly expected His followers to be able to figure out what He was talking about.

We said in the Introduction that parables *are comparisons between the natural and spiritual realms that Jesus uses to teach His followers different aspects of the Kingdom of God*. But how exactly do these comparisons work?

That’s not easy to answer. In the only recorded instances when Jesus explained parables to His disciples (just three times), His method of comparison follows the lines of a simple allegory. An allegory is a type of story where the different characters and elements stand for things outside the world of the story. The most famous Christian allegory is John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which includes characters named “Christian,” “Mr. Worldly Wiseman,” “Mr. Legality” and places named “Hill Difficulty” or “Doubting Castle.” Bunyan did not leave much to the imagination to figure out what the characters and places were supposed to represent.

In the three recorded instances, Jesus is just as detailed about the parallels between the parable and the spiritual world. For instance, in explaining the parable of the Tares and the Weeds (Matt 13:24-30) He said, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels." (Matt 13:37-39)

This is pretty detailed. It's also straightforward allegory. Does this mean that Jesus used allegory this detailed in all His parables? Again, that's hard to say. There is a long history of allegorical interpretation of the parables stretching back to the earliest centuries of the Christian era. The problem with most of the interpretations is that on many details few people can seem to agree. For thousands of years the church has created complex comparisons that don't always last beyond that period of church history.

What does that mean for us? It's clear that Jesus was making comparisons with the parables and that they were simple comparisons. Keeping comparisons simple usually results in general agreement *and* seems to make better interpretational sense. But how do we find simplicity in stories that are so famously *not* straightforward? Thankfully the Gospel writers were usually straightforward in depicting the context in which Jesus told His parables—*where, to whom, why*. The context frequently yields important clues as to what Jesus meant to communicate.

For instance, the parable of the Prodigal Son was told to a group of tax collectors and sinners together with a group of Pharisees. It makes sense that the points of comparison would be between the younger son as a sinner and the older

son as a self-righteous law-abider. Often the gospel writers or Jesus will make hints as to how we should be interpreting the parables. Understanding the context is therefore most valuable to seeing how the comparisons work out.

Of course “getting” the comparison does not mean that we understand the parable. In fact, linking the dots and then stopping there could be one of the worst things we could do. Rather, Jesus wants us to enter into and engage the story itself. In most cases, one of the points of comparison should be to ourselves.

A Question of Value

...treasure hidden in a field.

Today, most people would consider a bank the safest place to store something valuable. But that was not the case two thousand years ago. In the Middle East – where war was normally just over the horizon and invaders as regular as the spring rain – it was necessary to store one’s treasures in places that were virtually impossible for others to locate. Even today there’s nothing quite as unassuming and (at least before the advent of metal detectors) as inscrutable as a big field.

Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, tells us in his *Antiquities* that the people of his day often used fields to hide their treasures before invaders arrived. But it was also possible for those same people to be killed in warfare and their secret to die with them. In fact, although it was probably rare, finding treasure in a field would have happened from time to time – at least often enough for Jesus’ listeners to nod with understanding at His plot. After all, if the owner in the story didn’t know about the treasure (and he would never have sold

his property had he known about it), then the land had clearly changed hands a few times before coming into his possession.

But what was this treasure? Jesus didn't say but we can surmise it would have been precious metals and jewels, the things in that day and age that represented the best way to consolidate wealth as well as the easiest to hide. Whatever it was, it was something that the finder knew instantly was of inestimable worth and that he had to have it.

This is the first point of comparison for the parable. As the context of Matthew 13 would show us, Jesus was making a direct comparison between the attributes of the Kingdom and those of a treasure, just as earlier He made exact comparisons between the Kingdom and yeast, a net, a field, etc. Following that comparison through, we can say that the Kingdom is valuable and priceless. But what is even more important is that because the Kingdom is so valuable, *it can transform the lives of those possessing it.*

This is where we pick up our film's main character, Jeff Smith. Jeff is just an average guy going about his business when he stumbles across oil bubbling up from the ground on the property he is showing. Just like the field in the parable, the ugly piece of property appears to be devoid of any special value. It's the kind of property you'd pass by and think in your mind how worthless it appears. Although the original parable does not say the field appeared to be worthless, in that day and age fields were literally everywhere. Yes, they were valuable – but only as valuable as what they could be used for. No field was going to change anyone's life.

That is, unless there was treasure buried under it. And for our point of comparison, there are few things worth more money in our day than large supplies of crude oil. Everyone knows that oil fields have made countless millionaires – and Jeff, though it takes him a moment to figure it out, is

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not slow to realize what it means to him. In Jesus' day there was a big gap between the rich and the poor. Treasure to a peasant would mean a radical change of lifestyle, a complete transformation into something previously impossible, a new world unexpectedly opening up to him.

But the treasure is not obvious, not there for all to see. In fact, nearly everyone would overlook it. What is Jesus telling us about the Kingdom with this? That it is not out in plain view for all to comprehend? That it could be missed by thousands? That it is somehow invisible? (Luke 17:20) And what does that mean for those not in the Kingdom?

Finders Keepers

When a man found it...

The first-century listener would immediately know the kind of man who spent time in fields. Not being an owner himself, the man was likely a simple laborer who had been hired to work in that field. He would not have been a rich man; rich men didn't work in fields. And it would have been understood by the listeners that he was working since he *uncovers* the treasure. The kind of worker who uncovers things in a field is likely either plowing or digging: tough work by any measure. Moreover, it's work done by a man closer to the bottom of the economic scale.

This is where we find Jeff Smith. He's not a particularly successful real estate agent, but he works hard. He would be considered on the lower side of middle class: he has a family, a mortgage, and a car payment – with one job to support it all. When he's out trying to sell this piece of land, he's not expecting to get rich doing it.

And this is what is so interesting about this parable: it is

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seemingly accidental that the man stumbles upon the treasure. It almost reveals itself to him – he is doing nothing to look for it other than going about his daily routine.

Again, what is Jesus telling us about the Kingdom? Although it is hidden from many, it somehow reveals itself to certain people in their course of daily life. It appears that the Kingdom presents itself suddenly in front of unsuspecting eyes – and then requires an immediate, life-changing decision.

Quick Thinking

...he hid it again...

Here begins the crux of the parable. The man could potentially do any number of things after finding the treasure: he could tell the owner, he could ignore it, he could leave it uncovered. But he realizes what it means to him and hatches a plan to acquire it for himself. By choosing to hide it, he begins to take action to possess the treasure.

This is what the parable of the Hidden Treasure is all about: when an extraordinary treasure presents itself to someone, that person must choose to act to acquire the treasure. Passivity is useless here. According to Jesus, the Kingdom often reveals itself to people unexpectedly in their daily lives. And unless they take immediate action to acquire it for themselves, they cannot have it.

Of course a number of modern readers will think that the man is being unethical. Shouldn't he inform the owner of the field? Yet here again we see an important difference between our culture and theirs: to the first-century Middle-Easterner, shrewdness was equated to wisdom. The man was doing nothing illegal. It was the owner's responsibility to know what was his.

Even more, it is expected that when the Kingdom reveals itself to someone, he will have the wisdom to recognize it and know what to do about it. The Bible consistently teaches that shrewdness is a valuable trait – not shrewdness that is outright deceptive, but a shrewdness that understands how to work a situation to one’s advantage. After all, it is Jesus himself who tells us to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” (Matt 10:16) If this seems unusual to us, perhaps it’s because we don’t truly understand how Jesus wants us to act in the world. In the case of the hidden treasure, He clearly wants us to emulate the man who does everything in his power to lawfully take hold of the treasure in front of him.

The Right Reaction

...then in his joy...

The man’s reaction shows us how we should react to the Kingdom. Think of Jeff’s bursting elation at realizing what owning the field could mean to him. This joy – an exuberance that overflows boundaries – is what the Kingdom is really about. Most people remember watching Ed McMahan showing up on someone’s doorstep and announcing that they just won the Publisher’s Clearinghouse Sweepstakes. People would scream, faint, jump up and down, hug Ed – they were bursting with joy at the prospect.

Why?

Because they immediately knew that lives were going to be changed forever. This is the strong dynamic at the heart of the parable that we cannot overlook. Possessing the Kingdom is not like having a priceless ring or watch that we show off with pride. Rather, *possessing the kingdom is about radical life-change.*

The emotions that accompany it spring from the knowledge that everything is go-

ing to be better because of what the Kingdom makes possible. The joy is not simply about the treasure, but about what the treasure represents: a completely new life.

Selling Everything

...went and sold all he had...

The man continues to act aggressively. It seems as if Jesus is implying that the Kingdom does not sit idly by and wait: rather, it must be taken aggressively and by forceful action. He says as much when He tells us that “forceful men lay hold of it.” (Matt 11:12) The Kingdom pushes people to make a decision; yet for those to whom the Kingdom has been revealed, it is an easy choice. In fact, they realize they would be foolish to do anything else.

Selling everything may seem foolhardy on the surface. Jeff runs up against this with his wife and his friends. We are assuming that the family and relations of the man in the parable thought he was crazy, perhaps even after they understood exactly what he was gaining. To those who haven’t actually seen the treasure, it might seem very risky.

Please note that the original parable does not go into these details. Rather, they have been added into the film as reflections on the story based on things Jesus tells us in other places about the influences of family and possessions on the decision to pursue the Kingdom. (Luke 9:59-61; Mark 10:29-30)

After all, what is “all he had” a comparison to? In numerous places Jesus tells us that our worldly attachments have to be given up for us to acquire the Kingdom. Furthermore He says that if we do not give them up, they will actually keep us from entering the Kingdom: “How hard it is for the rich to enter the

kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:24-25) And “any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33)

To press this further, it may superficially appear that the man is sacrificing everything to gain the Kingdom. And in one sense, that is true – but is it really a sacrifice? Or is he merely giving up what little he has to gain so much more? Although it may appear to the outside world that a disciple is giving up everything for a foolish dream, yet the disciple understands that what he is gaining is worth infinitely more than he is giving up.

This is an important point since some commentators debate whether this parable is about the value of the kingdom or the cost of discipleship. In our opinion, these categories do not completely capture the thrust of the parable, which is: *the disciple must take immediate action to sell everything to gain the Kingdom for himself, both in light of its value and in spite of its cost.* It is the action of the man that must be the center of our thinking.

The Kingdom may be of infinite value, and it may cost us all that we have, *but unless we take action to acquire it then its worth is irrelevant to us.* Everything pivots on gaining the Kingdom.

The Buy of a Lifetime

...and bought that field.

Once he has enough money in hand, he immediately moves to close the transaction. After all, until he owns the field the treasure is not his. It is interesting to think that while he knows about the treasure, he does not possess it. Knowledge is not enough for possession. Had Jeff not taken the decisive actions

of convincing his wife, of selling everything, and of purchasing the field in spite of the advice of his friends, his life would have remained unchanged.

Everything comes down to the purchase: we acquire the Kingdom by transaction, an act of choosing and taking hold. Without that action the Kingdom will elude us.

Summary

We have seen that the parable of the Hidden Treasure is primarily about the immediate action of the person who finds the Kingdom to gain it for himself, both in light of its value and in spite of its cost. Although it may appear to be an unwise decision from the world's eyes, it is the utmost wisdom to give up what is nearly worthless for something absolutely priceless. Such a situation demands quick thinking and even quicker action on the part of the potential disciple. After all, unless action is taken, it is possible that the treasure might be lost forever.

P A R A L L E L S

ORIGINAL PARABLE	PARABLE FILM
Treasure is riches and wealth in the form of gold, jewels or precious objects.	Treasure is riches and wealth in the form of a large oil reserve.
Treasure is hidden in a field so not easily seen by people passing by.	Oil is underground and hidden so not easily seen by people passing by.
The field is a common, not particularly noteworthy, place.	The old property is a common, not particularly noteworthy, place.
The man was likely a laborer and not wealthy.	Jeff is an unsuccessful real estate agent and not wealthy.

The man is not looking for treasure, and it surprises him to find it.	Jeff is not looking for oil, and it surprises him to find it.
The man hides it again so no one else will find it.	Jeff covers up his tracks so no one else will find it.
The man is joyful over his find because he understands how the treasure could change his life.	Jeff is thrilled over his find because he understands how the oil could change his life.
The man returns to his home to prepare to sell his things.	Jeff returns to his home to prepare to sell his things.
The man sells everything he owns to gather enough money to buy the field.	Jeff sells everything he owns to gather enough money to buy the field.
The man purchases the field.	Jeff purchases the field.

Endnotes

- 1 As recounted by Andrew Ivestor from stories his uncle told after having lived near that area of Florida.
- 2 Brad Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Hendrickson, 1998), 4.
- 3 Geerhadus Vos, *The Kingdom and the Church* (Eerdmans, 1958), 45.
- 4 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Banner of Truth, 1992), 355. This is what Matthew means when he says Psalm 72:2 was fulfilled in Jesus (Matt 13:35). Jesus understood that there is a direct relationship between the natural and spiritual realms. After all, He created the natural realm and all that is in it. Certain aspects of the world we live in (for instance: sheep, marriage, seeds) were created so that they would mirror certain aspects of the spiritual realm (respectively: believers, the relationship between Christ and the Church, spiritual growth). This is not a coincidence. Jesus knew that He could go to this ready-made set of images and use them to guide his listeners easily through profound - and potentially complex - teachings about God, and man's relationship to Him.
- 5 Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (P&R, 1962), 123.

Matthew 13:44

STUDY MATERIAL

Lesson Two

LIVING THE PARABLE

The kingdom of heaven 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. MATT 13:44

Introduction

This lesson on Living the Parable will help you think through what you've learned in order to apply it to your daily life.

Everyone is at a different place in his or her walk with the Lord. It is our belief that praying for guidance from the Holy Spirit, studying the Word of God, and then considering how it applies to our specific circumstances are some of the best ways to grow in grace as we live out the life of the Kingdom.

TRANSCRIPT OF APPLICATION VIDEO

Living out Hidden Treasure – Dr. Daniel Doriani

Dr. Daniel Doriani is Senior Pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri.

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Introduction

When I saw this property on screen I thought to myself, “That’s one ugly piece of land.” And now that I’m standing here, I have to tell you this is urban blight at its worst. This is one ugly piece of property. And that set me thinking. It’s very different to watch something on a screen compared to experiencing it in person. It’s one thing to live, it’s another thing simply to watch.

For example, it’s very different to watch a picture of a waterfall as opposed to feeling the spray in your face and the roar in your ears. Seeing versus experiencing—they’re different things.

Why Jesus Taught in Parables

That difference between experiencing something and simply watching it is one of the main reasons why Jesus taught in parables. He didn’t want to teach things that would enter our minds and then be filed away as some fact that we knew. He wanted to tell us stories that would enter our imaginations, that would enter our bones. We feel ourselves getting into the story, not just to live the story, but to hear what He said, to understand His teachings about the Kingdom of God and to act on them.

At first blush, Jesus’ parables are just interesting little stories—relatively simple at first reading. But then you notice something strange happens in the parable, something that teases your mind into thought. You wonder, “Why did Jesus put that in the story? What does it mean? What does it mean to me?”

After a while you begin to realize why Jesus taught in parables. He told these stories so they would force you to think—so they would be like a small pebble in your shoe. Even the last thought before you go to bed at night is one more reflection on that parable. Then you realize that was His pur-
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pose in the first place: to make you think, to make you enter, to make you live—really live—what’s in the parable.

Explaining Parables

So what exactly are parables?

They’re simply comparisons that Jesus used that teach important truths about the Kingdom of God. This particular parable teaches us four different things about the Kingdom of God. The first is that the Kingdom is priceless. The second is that the Kingdom reveals itself to us often unexpectedly. Third, when it does, we should take radical, decisive action to acquire the Kingdom. Finally, when we do acquire the Kingdom—or maybe we could say it acquires us—it transforms everything.

When it comes down to it, the parable of the Hidden Treasure is about a very simple question: once we realize the supreme value of the Kingdom, will we enter it? Will we live faithfully before the King?

The Four Questions

As we apply the parables to the Kingdom of God and life in the Kingdom, there are four aspects of application of our studies. I’d like to phrase them as “the four questions people ask.” They are four questions people have asked throughout the ages—philosophers, ethicists—and they certainly also appear in the Bible. In fact, the Bible teaches us to ask these questions, and it gives us abundant answers to them.

The first question is “What is my duty?” What should I do? What does God require of me? What behavior is specified in the Law of God? What do the Ten Commandments require? What does Jesus require in His teachings? What does God require as a bare minimum for our actions? That’s

the first question: What's my duty? What should I do?

The second question is "What should I be?" or the question of character. The question of character—who should I be—touches on our ability to do what God requires us to do. In other words, we all know that we can't simply resolve to do whatever we wish. All of us have experienced those times when we want to do something, but we find that we can't. Or we do it for a little while, but then we peter out—we don't persevere. How can I actually have the capacity to persevere in the obedience that God wants of me? How can I achieve virtue? How can I be a loving and kind and gracious and generous person? That's the question of character.

The third question is the question of goals, or the question, "Where should I go?" The first and second questions are answered the same way for everybody. Everybody has the same duties, everyone should pursue the same godly character. But then, when it comes to our goals, they are unique for each one of us. God has given each one of us particular gifts, experiences, skills, teachers, even failures, that uniquely prepare us for what He wants us to do.

How do I figure out what my gifts, what my experiences, what my passions are, what's unique in the way God has made me? What will lead me into the projects and the kinds of things that I'll invest my life's energy in?

The fourth question is that of vision or discernment: "How can I learn to see the world God's way?" Now we know that the Lord gives His absolute truth in the Bible, but His truth is challenged in so many ways in our culture. There are other religions such as Islam or Buddhism. Beyond that there are agnostics and atheists and naturalists. And they're all putting forward their claims.

Even people who aren't philosophers are simply say-

ing, “Hey, enjoy the good life. Live for pleasure. Live for achievement. Live for recognition.” How can I understand yet disregard and screen out those false voices? How can I hear the truth and see the world God’s way? How can I discern His voice among all the others?

Those are the four basic questions the Bible teaches us to ask in so many ways. We will consistently apply those four questions to the parables as pathways to application.

Purchasing the Kingdom

So what does the parable of the Hidden Treasure require in regard to our duty? It’s very clear: the parable requires that we use decisive action to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom and God’s righteousness.” This parable requires us to be willing to take the radical action of selling everything—giving up everything, paying any price—to enter the Kingdom of God.

The second question concerns our character: who should we be? This parable answers that we should be men and women who have the kind of character that is able to take decisive action to enter the Kingdom of God. We need to see an opportunity and take advantage of it quickly. Even further, we need to be willing to give up what is most precious to us in order to acquire the Kingdom.

Third, we have to think about our goals. The parable of the Hidden Treasure really makes one simple point: until we actually do enter the Kingdom of Heaven, the main goal we have in life is to enter the Kingdom. We have to be willing to do whatever it takes, make any sacrifice, endure the ridicule, even the scorn, of friends and relatives. We should be willing to pay any price to finish the race in order to win the prize.

Finally, let's talk about wisdom or discernment. Let's not do it through a series of statements, but rather through questions. The first question this parable teaches us to ask is, "What is of true worth? What is of supreme value?" And beyond that, once we as Christians accept the supreme value of the Kingdom, do we sometimes reacquire those things that we once sacrificed for the Kingdom? How, in short, can we forget what the Kingdom of God is worth?

If you're watching this story today, it's possible that you aren't sure that you're a member of the Kingdom of God. Now is the time to ask if you're not sure. Ask your teacher, ask your pastor, ask a friend. This study may be God Himself revealing His Kingdom to you at this hour. It could be time for you to act—to act decisively so that you can live in the Kingdom of God.

It's also possible that you're watching this video and you are a child of God—you are living in the Kingdom. But as you think about the cost that the man in this story paid, you realize you haven't done anything radical or risky like that for a long time. You've been assuming — you've even been presuming — on God. It may be time for you to recommit yourself so that you'll live truly in the Kingdom of God.

ADDITIONAL VERSES FOR STUDY AND REFLECTION

MATTHEW 13:44-46

LUKE 18:18-30

PROVERBS 8:12-21

Endnotes

- 1 Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work* (P&R Publishing, 2001) 97.
- 2 Doriani, 98.
- 3 Doriani, 104.
- 4 Doriani, 105.
- 5 Klass Skilder, *Christ and Culture* (G. van Rongen and W. Helder, 1977) 72.
- 6 Doriani, 110.
- 7 Doriani, 114.

Matthew 13:44

TEACHING MATERIAL FOR A CLASS

Lesson One

UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLE

PREP BEFORE CLASS:

- **WATCH THE FILM *HIDDEN TREASURE*.**
(13 minutes)
- **REVIEW ALL OF LESSON 1 (THIS SECTION).**
(Approx 10 minutes)
- **READ ALL OF LESSON 1 IN THE STUDY MATERIAL (P.9).**
(Approx 20 minutes)

WHAT TO DO DURING CLASS:



STEP 1: WATCH THE PARABLE FILM *HIDDEN TREASURE*
(13 minutes)

Play parable movie.



STEP 2: ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILM
(5 minutes)

Often comments and discussion points will arise out of your audience naturally. However, if they do not, here are some questions that will help people to start thinking deeper about the film.

1. What does this film have to say about true value?
2. Can you see any comparisons in this story and the way we approach the Kingdom of God?



STEP 3: TEACH ABOUT THE PARABLE

(20 minutes)

1. Read the Biblical Text: Matthew 13:44

The kingdom of heaven 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. MATT 13:44

2. Teach about the Parable

This is an outline that corresponds to the material in the Study Material and Parable Overview chapters (available for free download in the Additional Materials section of modernparable.com).

1. Jesus' parables are about the Kingdom of God.

1.1. The phrase 'kingdom of heaven' is the same as 'kingdom of God.' Matthew prefers to use it since he had a primarily Jewish audience. Luke and Mark use the phrase kingdom of God.

1.2. Many people think the parables are just nice, moral stories that teach universal moral lessons, but that is not accurate.

1.3. To Jesus, parables are comparisons between the natural and spiritual realms that teach His followers different aspects of the Kingdom of God.

1.3.1. He often begins His parables with "The kingdom of God is like..."

1.3.2. The comparisons are parallels between things in the story and things in the Kingdom of God.

2. Some important points about the Kingdom of God

2.1. The Kingdom of God has both present and future aspects to it. Jesus liked to compare the kingdom to a seed that grows into a tree: it starts small but grows through different stages until it is a full-grown tree. We can see

this historically from the growth of the church in the 1st-century A.D. to the present day. It will continue to grow throughout the entire earth until the day of Jesus' return.

- 2.2. The Kingdom of God is now under the reign of Jesus Christ. Jesus started this reign when He ascended to heaven, and currently is extending His kingdom throughout the earth. His disciples are the ones who push the borders of His kingdom on a daily basis. In other words, Jesus is actively reigning through His church.
- 2.3. Members of the Kingdom of God are expected to play active, daily roles in His Kingdom. Entering Christ's Kingdom is not like buying a ticket to a cruise line. Rather, we are to be workers, servants, farmers, soldiers, and sons; in other words, those members of society from whom much work is expected.
3. What does the parable *Hidden Treasure* teach us about the kingdom? *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field...*
 - 3.1. Today people put their treasures in banks; in the first-century A.D., a field was much safer.
 - 3.2. Sometimes people would die in wars leaving their treasures hidden and unknown.
 - 3.3. Comparison: the Kingdom = treasure in a field. It is so valuable that it can transform the lives of those possessing it.
4. *When a man found it...*
 - 4.1. The kind of man who digs in fields in the first-century: a laborer working in a field.
 - 4.2. Treasure reveals itself suddenly and so requires an immediate, life-changing decision.
5. *He hid it again...*
 - 5.1. The key of the parable: the man chooses to act to acquire the treasure. It requires quick, smart thinking.
 - 5.2. It is the owner's responsibility to know what he owns. If he legally sells it, then the person buying is doing nothing wrong.
 - 5.3. The 1st-century audience valued shrewdness as a key quality.

6. *Then in his joy...*
 - 6.1. The man's reaction shows us how we should react to the Kingdom.
 - 6.2. Possessing the kingdom is about radical life-change. The emotions that accompany it spring from the knowledge that everything is going to be better because of what the Kingdom makes possible.
7. *Went and sold all he had and bought that field.*
 - 7.1. Kingdom must be taken by forceful action. The Kingdom pushes people to make a decision about it.
 - 7.2. Selling everything - is it foolhardy to give up what's worthless for something that is priceless? Rather, this is true wisdom.
 - 7.3. He completes the transaction, ensuring that the treasure will be his.
8. Summary
 - 8.1. We have seen that the parable of the hidden treasure is primarily about the immediate action of the person who finds the Kingdom to gain it for himself, both in light of its value and in spite of its cost.
 - 8.2. Although it may appear to be an unwise decision from the world's eyes, it is the utmost wisdom to give up what is nearly worthless for something absolutely priceless.
 - 8.3. Such a situation demands quick thinking and even quicker action on the part of the potential disciple. After all, unless action is taken, it is possible that the treasure might be lost forever.



STEP 4: END WITH DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS

(5-10 minutes)

For the final part of the class, you can cover any questions that might come up or discuss an aspect of the parable that you feel is important to stress. Feel free to use the parallels chart on pp.24-25 to assist in your discussion.

TEACHING MATERIAL FOR A FAMILY

INCLUDES :

Introduction

General Discussion/No Preparation Teaching Time

Biblical Study/Parental Preparation Teaching Time

INTRODUCTION

Modern Parables lessons can be used in a family setting in a variety of ways. We have been told by our customers that even young children (such as ages 4 and 5) have enjoyed some of the films and profited by them.

The application videos, on the other hand, are aimed at an older audience (such as Middle School students to adults) and would possibly bore or confuse young children - something that should be avoided when teaching anyone about the Bible.

We have therefore provided some possible scenarios for using Modern Parables in a variety of family settings. It will be up to you to determine how best to use the material in your particular situation.

(Please note: Additional teaching sequences for home school students and others are available online at modernparable.com under Additional Materials)

1. GENERAL DISCUSSION/NO-PREP TEACHING TIME

Pre-planning: not necessary



STEP 1 - WATCH THE *HIDDEN TREASURE* FILM



STEP 2 - READ THE ORIGINAL PARABLE FROM MATTHEW 13:44.



STEP 3 - DISCUSSION

- Did you like the movie? What did you like about it?
- Who was your favorite character and why?
- How does the movie compare to the original parable?
- What is the same about it? What is different?
- What would you have done if you found oil in a field?
- Would you have thought it was real? Would you have been skeptical? Would you have ignored it?
- What if a friend of yours was selling everything to buy something? What would you think about it? What would you do?
- How is the Kingdom of God like treasure hidden in a field?

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Depending on time, you can either move to the application section or wait for another time to do Step 4 and following.

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**STEP 4 - WATCH THE *HIDDEN TREASURE* APPLICATION VIDEO****STEP 5 - DISCUSSION:**

Note that you can consult the speaker's transcript starting on p. 26 for help in answering these questions as well as the Overview on Living the Parables (available for free download in the Additional Materials section of modernparable.com).

- Why do you think Jesus taught in parables?
- What was He teaching us in this parable of the Hidden Treasure?
- Do you think the Kingdom of God is priceless? Or do you possibly take its great value for granted?
- Dr. Doriani talks about four questions that help us understand how to apply what the Bible teaches. Did you understand what he meant about "our duty?" What is our duty?
- What is the difference between our duty and our character? Why is character important?
- What happens if we do our duty, but don't love God with our heart?
- What does Dr. Doriani say about goals? What are some of your personal goals in life?
- What are some actual goals of our local church? Are there some goals we should be doing, but are not?
- What is "wisdom or discernment?" Let's read Proverbs 8 to see what it says about this. Why is wisdom important? What can you do to gain wisdom?



STEP 6 - PRAY AS A FAMILY TO CLOSE OUT THE TEACHING TIME.

2. BIBLICAL STUDY/PARENTAL PREP TEACHING TIME

Lesson 1 – Understanding the Parable

Pre-planning: Watch the film, then read the Lesson 1 Study Material at the front of this booklet. Review the outline on p. 34 and following.



STEP 1 - WATCH THE *HIDDEN TREASURE* FILM



STEP 2 - READ THE ORIGINAL PARABLE FROM MATTHEW 13:44.



STEP 3 - GO TO P.34 AND TEACH AS MUCH OR AS LITTLE AS YOU DESIRE FROM THAT OUTLINE. FEEL FREE TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILDREN TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT ANYTHING AND FOLLOW THAT LINE OF DISCUSSION.



STEP 4 - REVIEW THE HIGHPOINTS OF THE OUTLINE AND ASK QUESTIONS FOR VARIOUS POINTS TO ENSURE UNDERSTANDING.



STEP 5 - PRAY AS A FAMILY TO CLOSE OUT THE TEACHING TIME.

Lesson 2 – Living the Parable

Pre-planning: Watch the Application Video, then review the

questions from p. 38 or those listed above. Choose the questions you'd like to ask.



STEP 1 - READ MATTHEW 13:44.



STEP 2 - WATCH THE APPLICATION VIDEO.



STEP 3 - ASK QUESTIONS YOU'VE SELECTED FROM P.38 OR FROM ABOVE AND DISCUSS THE ANSWERS.



STEP 4 - REVIEW WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED.

How can we apply this parable to our individual lives?

How can we apply it as a family?

How can we apply it at our church?



STEP 5 - PRAY AS A FAMILY TO CLOSE OUT THE TEACHING TIME.

Thank you for purchasing and using Modern Parables.

Please see the back of this booklet for additional products.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

Go to www.modernparable.com
to take advantage of online resources on the parables
as well as to purchase additional materials.

INDIVIDUAL DVD'S

STUDY BOOKS

LEADER'S GUIDES

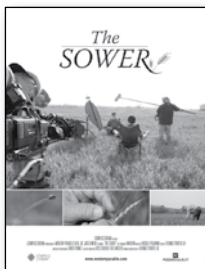
GROUP STUDY DVD BOX SET

DIGITAL DOWNLOADS

MOVIE POSTERS

(FOR USE IN ANNOUNCING THE CLASS)

BOOKS ON THE PARABLES



*Actual posters will include space at the bottom
for writing class information.*