

The purpose of this leader's guide is to be a tool for ABF and Life Group leaders to follow the sermon series with their group. Our hope is that this guide will give you a head start for your study and will allow your group to respond to what they've heard and apply it for life.

**Why Parables?.** In Definition the word parable comes the Greek word 'parabole,' which means "a placing beside" and therefore is a comparison or an illustration. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain about 30 of these stories while John's gospel contains no parables but does use figures of speech. A parable is a story taken from real life (or real life situation) from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn. They are not fables (talking animals/walking trees). They are not allegories where every detail has hidden meaning. They are basically an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

When Jesus began to teach in parables, it represented a new direction in His ministry. We are told that from when they were introduced, from this point forward, Jesus typically taught the multitudes in this form. He continued to teach his disciples in a plain manner, but the crowds primarily got parables (Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11). A common misunderstanding is that parables were given so that all people could easily understand, but upon further study this may not be the case. Although parables were more relatable because they were stories about real life situations, they often had hidden meanings needing further explanation. These hidden meanings challenged the sincerely interested to further inquiry, and taught truths that Jesus concealed from various groups/people (Matthew 11:25, Luke 8:10). The parables teach us about the Sovereignty of God (11-12), the responsibility of man (14-15), and the grace of the gospel (16-17).

### **Parable of the Weeds**

**Structure of Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.** In the first 7 verses the parable of the weeds is given to the crowds. In verses 36-43, Jesus explains the parable to the disciples.

**Parable of the Weeds.** This is also known as the parable of the wheat and tares. In this parable Jesus starts with 'the kingdom of heaven is like.' He begins the parable like the last, presenting to the multitudes. The seven parables of Matthew 13 were designed to answer any confusion about the kingdom (Israel was expecting an earthly, **immediate** kingdom with the coming Messiah who would establish righteousness and destroy wickedness). The first four parables in Matthew primarily are concerned with the theme of growth, the gradual growth of God's kingdom. In this parable Jesus makes a clear distinction between growth of the righteous (wheat, good seeds, sons of kingdom) and the evil (weeds/tares, evil seeds, sons of the evil one). This parable is different from the sower in the fact that there is a distinction made between the type of seeds that were sown and who they were sown by (Son of Man versus the devil). Jesus' audiences were eager for this separation as they wanted to see their pagan oppressors, the Romans, defeated. Jesus had a different plan. It was this impatience and limited view that the parable was primarily directed.

**Explanation of the parable:** Again Jesus spoke in parables to the large crowds but saved the explanation to the smaller crowds, His true followers (see also 13:34). The underlying question asked by the disciples and by us is "Why does evil still remain? Why does Jesus not terminate evil right now?" Notice that the disciples ask about the weeds (evil) in the field, not the wheat. The answer of the parables is, God's kingdom is established through gradual growth. This parable

demonstrates God's glory, His holiness and this will be displayed when he judges all things in the future. It also tells us of God's long suffering allowing time for people to repent.

**Growing. First, the kingdom of God is growing (vv. 24, 26, 37, 38a).** This agricultural metaphor is a growth metaphor; seed is being sown. It takes root and grows. The first Sower is Jesus, 'the Son of Man.' Verse 26 tells us that the good seed grew, the wheat 'sprang up or sprouted.' Eventually it is harvested. In Jesus' explanation, we see that when Jesus sows seed it is good seed and produces sons of the kingdom (vv. 37-38a). God is growing and establishing His kingdom or rule throughout the world (field). Likewise this is the ministry of the sons of the kingdom, His disciples, to sow seed for God's kingdom growth.

**Growing. Second, the weeds of the evil one are growing (vv. 25, 26b, 38b, 39a).** An enemy attacks the kingdom by sowing weeds/tares among the wheat. Sleeping is not a picture of negligence, but of the craftiness of the evil one. Context for sowing weeds: For Jesus' audience, to sow weeds in the middle of a wheat field was punishable by Roman law. Jesus identifies this enemy as 'the devil.' Standing behind the enemies of the church is the enemy, Satan. He is a roaring lion seeking those whom he might devour (1 Pet. 5:8). He seeks after our destruction and he and his dominions are opposed to the kingdom of God. His weeds are identified as 'the sons of the evil one (v. 38).' There is a hostile, personal, unseen evil that opposes and seeks to defeat and destroy the growth of Christ's kingdom.

**Mixture Growth, wheat and weeds (vv. 26-30, 38-43).** Initially the wheat and weeds cannot be distinguished. Most commentators associate the weeds with darnel; botanically close to wheat, difficult to distinguish from wheat, and not noticeable until they mature (v. 26). They appear to be the real thing. Their evil is hidden. They are like the seed upon the rocky soil that springs up receiving the word with joy (13:20). The church will always have both the true and false believer in its pews. Counterfeits will appear genuine at the beginning, with professions of faith. Their true nature will only become evident over time. Only by their maturity (fruit bearing) can the growth be distinguished as wheat or weeds. Matthew Henry says, "that Christ would rather permit weeds than endanger the wheat before the harvest is ready." This also explains the reality of evil things done in the name of Christ. People who claim to know Jesus (a weed), who appear to know Christ, do evil things and are not truly His.

**The Harvest (vv. 30, 39b-43).** Even if the wheat and weeds can be distinguished, they are not to be separated until the harvest (v. 30). The harvest is to establish God's rule, authority, and ultimate judgement. This is not the denial of any church discipline or speaking the truth in love, but points to the ultimate holiness and judgement of God. The 'harvest' at 'the end of the age' is the consummation of all things (vv. 40-41). This also establishes the truth of the judgement and the fiery furnace, the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15). We can scarcely imagine suffering more terrible than this; a fiery furnace (hotter yet) and 'weeping and gnashing of teeth.' The terrible reality that lies behind these words is almost too horrible to contemplate. At the end of the age, final separation occurs. The righteous will shine like the sun, but the enemy and those who do evil will be judged by God. There is still time, God is long suffering and desires that none perish (2 Peter 3:9). For the wheat, God is calling us to have compassion for those who do not know Him. For the weeds, God is long-suffering toward you and desires that you repent, turn to Him and ask Him to change your heart.

**General Reflection:**

- 1) What does this passage teach us about God?
- 2) What does this passage teach us about mankind?
- 3) What is a command to obey in this passage? What has God revealed in your life that needs changing? What truth can be applied to your life about the gospel?

**Personal Reflection/Application**

- 4) What question is this parable (and others) designed to answer (v. 24)? How God will grow His kingdom, etc.
- 5) According to this parable, what is the kingdom of God like? Find at least three characteristics. Why are these important? How does it change the way we live?
- 6) Why do you think the wheat and weeds cannot be separated? What are the implications of their inseparability for the church? What does it mean for us as believers to not separate the weeds, but yet speak the truth in love and stand for truth?
- 7) What encouragement can you take away from this parable? What ways are you challenged?

**Prayer**

God, help us as believers to see people as you see them, in need of a Savior. We are accountable to share with the lost knowing the judgment to come; give us compassion for those who do not know you. Help us to stand for truth, yet demonstrate humility and love for those who do not know you.