

Journey Through the Parables of Christ

Tending the Garden of Our Hearts

This Fall, we're taking a *Journey Through the Parables* together! We'll be releasing our usual, weekly podcast on Ancient Faith Radio, but now we're adding written versions of the lesson and activity sheets so that you can expand each episode into a more complete lesson for your family or Sunday School class.

We invite you to help your children put together a *Journey Through the Parables: Expedition Log Book*. Take a simple, standard-sized binder and ask them to decorate the cover. With each Parables lesson, you'll print the coordinating Log Book page on our website. At the end of the year, each child will have created a book covering all of Christ's Parables, along with their notes on what interests them in each one.

Every week, we'll be releasing:

- A short read-aloud lesson
- A podcast recording of the lesson (in case you'd like to learn in the car!)
- Three comprehension questions
- A deeper discussion prompt
- Two printable activity sheets
- One log book page, featuring the text of the week's parable

For more information, please visit our website: tending-the-garden.com/virtualsundayschool

Introduction to the Parables

A parable is a simple story that reveals a deeper spiritual truth, like a metaphor. The Hebrew and Aramaic words for parable also mean "allegory," "riddle," or "proverb", and we find them throughout the Holy Scriptures.

We can easily imagine two ways to teach (though there are many more ways). We can teach by simply stating the facts, or we can teach with a story or parable.

For example, a teacher could tell us to *forgive others because God forgives us*. We see what he means, and we understand what he is saying. But what if instead, he teaches us in a parable? When we hear a story about a man who begs his master to forgive him, we feel terrible for him, and we are so glad when God forgives him! But then when that man turns around and refuses to forgive his poor servant, we are outraged! Our emotions get involved. We weren't just told that forgiveness is good, we felt the goodness of it in our hearts! And we weren't just told that we should be forgiving, but we felt the joy of forgiveness and really understood why being unforgiving is no good.

A lesson can be taught in a simple intellectual way, delivering a set of facts into the brain. But when the same lesson is taught through a parable, something more than simple intellectual understanding happens: the truth we are given takes root not just in our heads, but in our hearts. We begin to imagine the characters and to inhabit the story; we enter into the story, and come to understand the message through our imaginative experience. We make connections and understand things from various perspectives. A really good parable takes root in our hearts.

“Just as the thought of fire does not warm the body, so faith without love does not actualize the light of spiritual knowledge in the soul.” -- St. Maximos the Confessor

Jesus is aiming for us to simply learn about Him; He wants us to know Him. God is not an idea, but a person! The idea of God, the idea of faith, will not keep us warm -- but really loving and knowing God will transform us!

Jesus teaches in parables to reach our hearts. He offers simple stories with familiar scenes from practical experience, to communicate more profound ideas and lessons. Through parables, He teaches the truth of the Kingdom of God -- and He doesn't just tell us what the Kingdom is, but He invites us to enter into it and to participate in it!

Parables always have this deeper meaning, but not everyone gets it. Jesus often says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” The ones with ‘ears to hear’ are those who are open and want to encounter the Kingdom of God. People who are ready to receive Christ’s meaning, will understand -- but those who are closed off to the Kingdom and refuse to understand, will not.

Parables challenge us; we must respond with faith and with a willingness to enter into the story and into the Kingdom, if we wish to understand the mysteries Christ teaches. This year, we'll explore some of the parables Christ uses to open up the Kingdom to our understanding. May we all have ears to hear!