

LESSON 3: I AM BURIED TREASURE

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

In Jesus' twin parables from Matthew 13—the pearl of great price and the treasure buried in the field—Jesus uses metaphors to describe himself, and to invite us to appreciate his true beauty. Embedded in the message of these tiny parables is a profound yet simple truth: We'll naturally sacrifice everything we own to gain a priceless treasure, as long as we've discovered and believed the true value of that treasure. Without knowing it, we often try to convince teenagers to love and follow Jesus in a secondhand way—we want them to *take our word for it* that Jesus is worth “losing your life” for. But our calling is not to *convince* others of Jesus' value; it's to help them “*taste and see*” it, through his own words.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** Jesus is the way into the kingdom of heaven, he's the truth that it revolves around, and he's the life that springs from it—he's hidden treasure.
- 2. WHY:** When students discover what a costly treasure Jesus really is, they'll be magnetically drawn to him.
- 3. HOW:** When teenagers slow down to understand two short parables Jesus told, they can learn how to find the buried treasure in him.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 13:44-46

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

John 6:41-58

TEACHING PREP

**LEADER
TIP**

Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you'll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.

Read Matthew 13:44-46.

In Jesus' twin parables in this passage—the pearl of great price and the treasure buried in the field—the “formula” is simple: If you understand the value and beauty of the pearl and the buried treasure, you'll give up everything to get it. You don't have to plead or prod or pander to get someone to pursue something that's universally understood to be both priceless and attainable. Once the superseding value of the treasure is determined, expect a Pamplona-like stampede.

Because Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life,” he’s the way into the kingdom of heaven, the truth that governs it, and the life that springs forth from it. Jesus is the orbital center of the kingdom of God—that means it’s a culture dominated by the mission and values and convictions that Jesus revealed through his life on earth. But, simply, most people have not gone “all-in” with Jesus because they’ve merely been told by others that this “pearl” is a treasure—they haven’t arrived at that assessment themselves. Put another way, we spend a lot of time doing something Jesus did only rarely: trying to *convince* others of his value instead of helping them “*taste and see*” it.

Our primary calling as ministry leaders is to reveal the “Pearl,” who is Jesus, in such a way that young people “taste and see that he is very good.” Once they see him for who he is, the rest is just human nature. We talk and talk and talk about Jesus, but we typically spend a tiny fraction of our time helping students experience him. In Edwin’s Friedman’s bestselling book *A Failure of Nerve*, he describes a catalytic leadership style that invests only in those who are already drawn to the leader’s vision and momentum, while spending little time investing in those who need “convincing.” There is a connection between that “Friedman-ism” and Jesus: Jesus calls people, but he spends little time “selling” them on the value of following him. Instead, he invites them to “taste and see.”

This is why, in John 6, Jesus repeatedly describes himself as “bread” we must “eat” to “have any part of him”—but the fickle masses who’d gathered for a show, and had stayed in the safe posture of a discriminating consumer, wanted nothing to do with cannibalism. They rejected him on the basis of his *words*, while his inner circle recommitted to follow him solely on the basis of their *taste*. Just before this volatile interchange on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus revealed a startling truth: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me” (John 6:44). Those who “come” are “drawn” because, somehow, they know a priceless pearl when they stumble upon one.

So when Jesus tells these tiny little parables of the buried treasure and the pearl, he is describing himself and he is inviting us to appreciate his beauty and value. In this lesson, we’ll explore surprising, unexpected, and overlooked ways to introduce and reintroduce the “Pearl” to teenagers who have, in so many ways, not noticed or appreciated its value. We will reveal what has been hiding in plain sight.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Tonight we’ll go diving for pearls and digging for buried treasure—are you ready? Don’t miss out!
- Ever been on a treasure hunt? Don’t miss this week’s amazing “expedition.”

PARENT EMAIL

Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We've now finished the third of four lessons that dig deep into how Jesus described himself in Scripture, in our series called "In His Own Words." We're discovering the ways Jesus "framed" who he is—his purpose, motivation, and intentions.

In this third lesson, we slowed down to chew on two very short parables Jesus told—the pearl of great price and the treasure buried in the field—that Jesus uses to describe himself. The idea behind each of these parables is simple: Once you understand what an incredibly valuable treasure Jesus is, it's a no-brainer to give everything you have to gain him.

This week, I encourage you to spend a few minutes talking with your teenager about our lesson. Here are a few questions to consider asking:

- What's the most valuable thing you own, and what makes it valuable to you?
- In some countries it's illegal to follow and worship Jesus publicly—if you lived in such a country, but the government said you could buy a "license" to follow Jesus publicly, what would you be willing to pay for it, if anything? Explain.
- What aspects of who Jesus is make him a "treasure"?

Thanks for praying for our students and our ministry. Have an awesome week!

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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

LEADER
TIP

Hide a \$1 bill somewhere in your meeting area—make sure it's hidden well enough that no one could find it if they didn't know it was there.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead students in this opening activity.

After your students are settled, tell them you've hidden a treasure somewhere in the room, and in just a moment, they'll be given an opportunity to find it, if they want to put in the effort. But first, ask them to raise their hand if they'd like to know how much the treasure is worth before they decide to search for it. Note how many raise their hands. Then tell them that you *will* reveal how much the treasure is worth, but first ask them to raise their hand to indicate they'd search for the treasure if it was worth a penny... a quarter... a dollar... a \$5 bill... a \$20 bill. (Ask about these amounts one at a time, noting how many hands are raised each time.)

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *If you raised your hand to indicate you'd search for the treasure if it was worth a dollar or less, you're free to search for it right now—go! The rest of you should stay seated.*

After the treasure hunt, ASK:

- *In a treasure-hunt situation, how important is it to know the value of the treasure?*
- *How and why did the prospect of this treasure hunt change for you as the possible value of the treasure got higher?*
- *If you wanted others to find buried treasure, what's the best way to get them motivated to do it? Explain.*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *It makes sense that the more valuable a treasure is, the more motivated we are to sacrifice to find it. But all of us have a different "threshold" for what will motivate us to go after a hidden treasure that will require us to "spend something to get something." Jesus boldly compared himself to a priceless treasure when he told two short parables, about the costly pearl and the hidden treasure.*

TEACHING POINTS

LEADER
TIP

Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Matthew 13:44-46 together as a group. Ask one student to read the first parable, and a different one to read the second. And because this passage is so brief, consider having other students read the parables from different translations of the Bible

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let's slow down and really dig into these tiny little stories Jesus told.*

1. CONSIDER THE HIDDEN TREASURE

ASK:

- How would you describe “the kingdom of heaven”—what do you think it’s like, and why?
- What is Jesus’ role in the kingdom of heaven?
- How do we “find” the kingdom of heaven?
- If the kingdom of heaven is a culture that exactly reflects Jesus’ mission, values, and convictions, what are some aspects of that culture that could lead to such a powerful reaction of joy?
- What would it mean to “sell all we have” to “buy” Jesus—and what would keep you from doing that?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Simply put, most people who’ve not gone “all-in” with Jesus haven’t yet figured out what a priceless treasure he is. Maybe others have told them how incredibly valuable the “buried treasure” is, but they haven’t arrived at that assessment themselves. Put another way, we can’t be convinced by others that Jesus is worth sacrificing everything for—we have to experience his value ourselves. So our primary pursuit in life is to comprehend who Jesus really is, and then the joy of knowing him will naturally motivate us to give ourselves to him.*

2. CONSIDER THE COSTLY PEARL

ASK:

- “A merchant seeking fine pearls” is a metaphor for something—in the context of finding meaning and purpose for our life, what does it mean to be a “merchant seeking fine pearls”?
- To understand the true value of a pearl, you have to know the difference between a priceless example and a cheap imitation—what does this metaphor tell you about your own search for meaning and purpose in life?
- What’s one way you’ve experienced Jesus as a “costly pearl” in your life?
- How do you react to the idea that committing your life to Jesus is like “selling all you have” to “buy” him?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *In Edwin’s Friedman’s bestselling book A Failure of Nerve, he says great leaders invest only in those who are already drawn to the leader’s vision and momentum—they spend little time investing in those who need “convincing.” There is a connection here to Jesus—Jesus calls people, but he spends little time “selling” them on the value of following him. Instead, he invites them to “taste and see” that he’s a “costly pearl,” and when we embrace that truth we can’t help but follow him.*

3. CONSIDER HOW TO “EAT AND DRINK” JESUS



Have several students take turns reading aloud John 6:41-58, each one taking a few verses until they finish.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Here in John 6, Jesus repeatedly described himself as “bread” we must “eat” and “blood” we must drink to “have any part of him”—but the fickle crowds who’d gathered to see him put on a show, not necessarily to go all-in with him, wanted nothing to do with cannibalism or whatever he was talking about. They rejected him on the basis of his words, while his inner circle later recommitted to follow him solely on the basis of their taste. Just before this volatile interchange on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus revealed a startling truth: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me” (John 6:44). Like Friedman says, those who “come” are “drawn” because, somehow, they know a priceless pearl when they stumble upon one.*

ASK:

- *Put yourself in the shoes of the people who were listening to Jesus say these things—if you could’ve asked Jesus a question, what would you have asked, and why?*
- *Obviously, Jesus wasn’t saying he wanted people to literally eat his flesh and drink his blood—so, what was he trying to say?*
- *As we get to know Jesus, how do we get past merely knowing facts about him and actually “taste and see” him instead?*
- *Eating is actually quite intimate—we’re putting something inside our body! So why is it so important to Jesus that we “eat” and “drink” him?*

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three to discuss these questions.



ASK:

- *If you’ve grown up in the church, or have spent much time in it, you’ve probably been told that you should love Jesus just because you should—what’s wrong with that message?*
- *Think of something in your life that you treasure—what creates that response in you, and how does that compare to your feelings about Jesus?*

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

LIVING IT OUT

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *This week let’s go on a treasure hunt—discover one new thing about Jesus that you legitimately “treasure” about him, and then be ready to share your discovery at our next gathering.*

SUMMARY



LEADER
TIP

Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46).