

Session One · The Kingdom Has Come

The Sower · The Growing Seed · The Mustard Seed · The Leaven

WHAT WE FOUND

Jesus never defined the Kingdom the way a textbook would. He said, “The kingdom of heaven is like ...” and told a story. Tonight four of them landed the same truth from four angles: the Kingdom comes the way a seed comes, hidden, patient, and unstoppable.

The Sower showed that the same Word falls on every kind of soil, and the harvest varies with the soil’s readiness, not the Sower’s generosity; and even that readiness is itself a work of grace, which is why this week’s prayer is “Lord, make me good soil.” The Growing Seed showed that the Kingdom grows by a power we do not produce, even while we sleep. The Mustard Seed and the Leaven showed that it begins imperceptibly small and ends up everywhere. The question the night left with us: what kind of soil am I, and what are the thorns?

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) No soil is permanently fixed. The heart that has been a hard footpath can be plowed open by grace and become fruitful, as his own conversion proved.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407) In his Homilies on Matthew (Homily 44), the seed and the Sower are the same in every case; only the soil varies. Do not blame the preacher or the Scripture for the unfruitfulness of your own heart, and take hope that the Sower scatters even on hard ground.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) He taught that grace is God’s work in us, growing by a power we do not supply (cf. Summa Theologiae I-II, qq. 109-114). Applied to tonight’s parables: smallness of origin is no measure of greatness of destiny, and the seed grows whether the sower wakes or sleeps.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Before you open Scripture or sit down to pray this week, say one sentence aloud: “Lord, make me good soil today.” Then read or pray slowly, paying attention to what you hear.
2. Name the one “thorn” that most chokes the Word in you, a worry, a distraction, a competing love. Write it down and bring it to prayer or to confession.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Matthew 13:23**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43 (the Weeds), and Luke 13:6-9 (the Barren Fig Tree).

Catechism: CCC 541, 543, 546

Session Two · The Kingdom and Its Enemies

The Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43) · The Dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50) · The Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)

WHAT WE FOUND

If the Kingdom has come, why is there still so much evil, and why does the Church contain hypocrites? Jesus does not dodge the question. His answer holds three truths in tension: the evil is real, a sorting is coming, and the waiting has a purpose.

The Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43) warned against trying to uproot evil by our own hands. Jesus says the field is the world (13:38), and the Church, following Augustine, has long applied the warning to her own mixed membership: our uprooting tears out wheat along with weeds, and the sorting belongs to God at the harvest. The Dragnet refused to soften the seriousness of that final separation. And the Barren Fig Tree revealed the mercy inside the delay: the vinedresser digs, waits, and pleads for one more year. God's patience is real, and it is not without end.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) The Church on earth is a *corpus permixtum*, a mixed body of saints and sinners; the weed can still become wheat, and the Lord's forbearance is the very time of conversion.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407) "Let both grow together until the harvest" is the gift of time for repentance, not indifference; yet the furnace is Jesus' own language, and the preacher who softens it is unfaithful.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) The Church cannot identify with final certainty who is outside grace; in God, mercy and justice are perfectly one, and his patience with a still-living sinner is not a debt but a mercy, time graciously given to turn back (cf. ST I, q. 21, a. 4; I-II, q. 112, a. 5; II-II, q. 60, a. 4).

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Take the person you have privately sorted as a "weed" and pray for them by name every day this week. Pray as if grace can still reach them; do not assume their final state.
2. Examine your own fig tree: where has God been patient with you, waiting for fruit? Take that one area and respond to his patience this week, in confession, in prayer, or in a concrete change. Do not wait for a more convenient season.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **2 Peter 3:9**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Matthew 13:44-46 (the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl) and Matthew 21:28-32 (the Two Sons).

Catechism: CCC 827, 1030, and the Catechism on the Last Judgment (1038-1041)

Session Three · The Kingdom's Surpassing Worth

The Hidden Treasure · The Pearl of Great Price · The Two Sons

WHAT WE FOUND

Having seen what the Kingdom is, tonight we asked what it is worth. The answer in three parables: everything, and gladly.

The man who finds the treasure and the merchant who finds the pearl both sell all they have, and Jesus notes the man sells all he has “in his joy” (Matthew 13:44). The cost is not a loss but an exchange, trading everything lesser for the one thing that is worth it. The Two Sons then pressed the point home: the son who says “I will not” but goes does the father’s will, while the son who says “I go, sir” but stays does not. Worth is proven by going, not by saying.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (Confessions I.1). The treasure and the pearl name what that restlessness was always seeking: the one thing worth selling everything for, because nothing less finally satisfies.

St. Gregory the Great (540–604) In his Forty Gospel Homilies (Homily 11, on Matthew 13:44-52), the one who finds the treasure sells all he has “with joy,” because what he gains so far outweighs what he gives that the selling feels like gain.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) Charity is the form of faith: faith without charity is dead, while faith formed by charity is living and issues in action (cf. Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 4, a. 3). The second son’s “I go, sir” is faith unformed; the first son’s going is faith made living.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Name one concrete thing that represents both the “selling” and the “going” at once, a single act that puts the Kingdom above a lesser good you have been holding. Do it this week.
2. Tell one trusted person what you are doing, and ask them to check in with you next week. The Two Sons is not a thought experiment; it is an invitation to move.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Matthew 13:44**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Luke 15, the whole chapter: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son.

Catechism: CCC 546, 1814, 2014

Session Four · The Father Who Runs

The Lost Sheep · The Lost Coin · The Prodigal Son

WHAT WE FOUND

Three parables of things lost and found, rising to the greatest short story ever told. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine, the woman sweeps the whole house for one coin, and heaven throws a party over one sinner who repents. God does not wait passively for the lost; he searches.

Then the father, seeing his son “while he was yet at a distance,” runs, in that culture a shocking indignity for the patriarch of a household, and restores him before the boy can finish his rehearsed speech. The mercy is scandalous, and it is offered to both sons. The elder brother’s danger is quieter than the younger’s: to serve in the father’s house for years without ever receiving the father’s love.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) This is the justification of the ungodly: God seeks and restores the sinner who could not restore himself, and the initiative is entirely his.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407) The father’s running is scandalous mercy; he does not wait for the full apology but cuts it short with an embrace, a robe, a ring, and a feast.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897) Her “little way” is exactly this confidence: we come to the Father not as hired servants earning wages but as small children sure of a love we did not deserve.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) Penance is the whole person turning back to God (Summa Theologiae III, q. 85), and charity is nothing less than friendship with God (II-II, q. 23, a. 1). Read in that light, the elder son’s peril is service without friendship: duty that never becomes love.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. If you have been the prodigal in any area, name it specifically and consider going to confession before our next session. The walk home is what the parable describes; do not stay in the far country.
2. If the elder son’s portrait fit you anywhere, pray one sentence this week: “Father, all that is yours is mine. Help me receive it.” Say it not as a request but as a fact, and let your heart catch up.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Luke 15:20**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Luke 18:9-14 (the Pharisee and the Tax Collector) and Matthew 18:21-35 (the Unforgiving Servant).

Catechism: CCC 545, 1439, 1846

Session Five · Grace, Debt, and Forgiveness

Pharisee & Tax Collector · Two Debtors · Unforgiving Servant · Laborers in the Vineyard

WHAT WE FOUND

Four parables about how grace actually works, and how it refuses to be earned or hoarded. The tax collector goes home justified, not the Pharisee, because he came with empty hands and seven honest words. The one forgiven much loves much.

Then the edge: the servant forgiven an unpayable debt seizes a fellow servant by the throat over a tiny one, and his own pardon is revoked. To receive mercy and refuse to give it is to nullify the mercy received. The Laborers close the set by exposing the elder-brother reflex again: grace given freely to the latecomers looks like unfairness only to those who thought they were owed.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) The tax collector’s prayer is nearly the whole gospel in seven words; and in the Our Father we ask to be forgiven “as we forgive,” binding the two together.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407), *Homilies on Matthew*, Homily 61 (on Matthew 18:21-35): The debts are incomparable: what we owe God dwarfs anything owed to us, so the forgiven who will not forgive contradict the pardon they have received.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) The tax collector descends in humility and is lifted; the Pharisee climbs in self-regard and falls. The way up in the Kingdom is down.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) Charity is the form of every virtue (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 23, a. 8), and it extends even to those who have wronged us (II-II, q. 25, aa. 8-9); mercy received obliges mercy given.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. When you pray this week, begin with the tax collector’s seven words: “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” Pray it slowly, and let it be the first sentence of your prayer for seven days.
2. Take the person you find hardest to forgive and pray for them by name once a day this week. Do not require yourself to feel anything yet. Forgiveness often begins as a decision and becomes a feeling later. Begin with the decision.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Matthew 18:33**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Luke 10:25-37 (the Good Samaritan) and Matthew 7:24-27 (the Wise and Foolish Builders).

Catechism: CCC 2009, 2839, 2840, 2843

Session Six · The Law of Love

The Good Samaritan · Salt & Lamp · The Tree & Its Fruits · Wise & Foolish Builders

WHAT WE FOUND

Tonight love of God and neighbor stopped being abstract. The Good Samaritan answers the lawyer's narrowing question, "Who is my neighbor?", by refusing it: do not ask who qualifies, become a neighbor to whoever is in front of you. And count the verbs, because mercy in the parable is a sequence of costly, concrete acts, not a feeling.

Three short companions pressed the same nerve. Salt and Lamp: the hidden interior life and the visible witness are one life. The Tree and Its Fruits: you are known by what you actually produce over time, not by what you claim. The Wise and Foolish Builders: the storm is the same for both, and the only difference is whether hearing became doing.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom (347–407) Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Then do not neglect him when he is naked; do not honor him in church with silk while outside he shivers in cold and nakedness (paraphrasing Homilies on Matthew, Homily 50). Mercy is concrete and costly, or it is not mercy.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) Read on a second level, we are the man in the ditch: Christ is the Samaritan who comes near, binds our wounds, and pays for our care (see Quaestiones Evangeliorum II.19). As Scripture says, we love because he first loved us (1 Jn 4:19).

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) A virtue is a settled habit that produces consistent action, so the fruit reveals the root (cf. Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 55); and faith formed by charity is living faith that bears fruit in works of love (cf. Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 4, a. 3; Gal 5:6), which is why the doer, not the mere hearer, is building on rock.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Take the specific wounded person in your life, the one you have been passing on the other side, and do one concrete thing for them. Not next month. This week.
2. Look honestly at the fruit of the past months in one area of your life, and identify the root that needs attention. Is prayer thin? Have you been away from confession? Give that root one act of care this week that you will keep doing.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Luke 10:36-37**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Luke 12:13-21 (the Rich Fool) and Luke 16:19-31 (Lazarus and the Rich Man).

Catechism: CCC 1265-1267, 1822, 1825, 2447

Session Seven · Wealth, Detachment, and Stewardship

The Rich Fool · The Unrighteous Steward · The Talents · Lazarus & the Rich Man

WHAT WE FOUND

Jesus told more parables about money than about prayer, and tonight four of them asked one question: to whom do my possessions actually belong? The Rich Fool built bigger barns and called his goods and his years his own; that very night his life was required of him, and everything he had stored up passed to another. The Unrighteous Steward, rightly read, commends not dishonesty but urgency: use temporary wealth now to make friends that outlast it.

The Talents warned that the deepest failure is not theft but fear that buries the gift; what is entrusted, whether money, time, or ability, is meant to be invested. And Lazarus and the Rich Man revealed the eternal weight of a sin that looks like nothing: not cruelty, but simply never seeing the poor man at the gate. The neglect was the sin.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Basil the Great (c. 330–379) The bread you keep belongs to the hungry, the coat in your closet to the naked; ownership is stewardship, not absolute possession, and hoarded surplus is not safety but peril.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407) The rich man's sin was the failure to see Lazarus at his own gate; and the buried talent is the disciple who guards God's gifts instead of putting them to use.

St. Gregory the Great (540–604) In his Forty Gospel Homilies (Homily 9), the talents include every gift, intelligence, time, opportunity, and faith, and each of us gives an account proportional to what we were given.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) Private property is licit, but it exists for the universal destination of goods: what we hold beyond real need is, in the face of another's grave need, owed.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Identify one specific item or amount you currently treat as yours but could direct toward someone in need. Direct it this week. Do not wait.
2. Take one gift you have been burying out of fear, a talent, a resource, a willingness to lead or serve, and make one small investment with it this week.
3. Name the Lazarus at your gate and do one thing this week to recognize him by name: bring a meal, sit a while, send support.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Luke 16:13**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Luke 11:5-13 (the Friend at Midnight) and Luke 18:1-8 (the Persistent Widow).

Catechism: CCC 2401, 2402, 2404, 2447

Session Eight · Persistent Prayer

The Friend at Midnight · The Persistent Widow

WHAT WE FOUND

Two short parables for the most wearing experience in the life of faith: praying a long time without seeing the answer. Both reason from the lesser to the greater. If a reluctant friend will finally rise at midnight, and if even an unjust judge will finally grant justice, how much more will the Father, who is neither reluctant nor unjust, hear his children.

In Luke 11:9-13, the present-tense imperatives “ask, seek, knock” suggest continuing action; set beside the parable, Jesus is describing a pattern of life rather than a one-time petition. And the deepest gift named at the end is the Holy Spirit himself: beneath every request is God drawing us into his own life. The widow’s parable closes with the real question, aimed not at God’s reliability but at ours: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) In his letter to the widow Proba: God does not need our prayers to be informed. Persistent prayer enlarges the soul’s capacity to receive what he has wanted to give all along.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407) Do not be discouraged by apparent delay; a soul that keeps praying when nothing visible changes is being knit more deeply to God.

St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) Persistent prayer is not chiefly a technique for getting what we want but the path along which the soul is led into deeper communion with God.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) In the *Summa Theologiae* (II-II, q. 83, a. 2): Prayer does not change God, whose will is unchanging; rather, God has arranged from eternity to grant certain gifts precisely through our prayers, so that in praying we obtain what he has willed to give by means of our asking.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Take the one long petition you have been carrying and write it down. Place it where you will see it daily, and pray it deliberately every morning for ninety days, in any form: the Our Father with that intention, a Rosary, a single sentence offered.
2. Before you pray each morning, repeat this session’s memory verse as the orientation of your prayer. Persistent prayer is not first about results; it is about keeping the line open, remaining faithfully before God and entrusting the outcome to him.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Luke 18:1**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: John 10:1-18 (the Good Shepherd) and John 15:1-17 (the True Vine).

Catechism: CCC 2737, 2742, 2746

Session Nine · Christ and His Church

The Good Shepherd · The Sheepfold · The True Vine · The Bridegroom & the Bride

WHAT WE FOUND

Tonight Jesus taught about himself, and the images are his boldest claims. Shepherd and Bridegroom were images Israel's prophets used for God himself; the vine was Israel, and Israel had failed to bear fruit (Isaiah 5, Psalm 80). When Jesus says "I am the good shepherd," he takes up the identity Israel reserved for God alone; when he says "I am the true vine," he claims to be in his own person the true Israel who bears the fruit the old vine could not. And he seals the divine claim: "I and the Father are one."

And in each image he also names us. We are the flock the Shepherd knows by name and lays down his life for; the branches who can do nothing apart from the vine and who abide through his sacramental life, supremely the Eucharist; the bride he is coming for, loved both as a whole Church and as each particular soul. The Church, then, is not merely a human institution we choose to join. She is his body and his bride, the place his life flows.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) There is one flock and one Shepherd; the Church's unity flows from the unity of Christ himself, so that schism wounds the very body of the Good Shepherd.

St. Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444) We abide in the vine through the same life, the same sap, received sacramentally: our union with Christ is not a metaphor but real participation, supremely through the Eucharist (Commentary on the Gospel of John, Book 10, on John 15:1).

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) Christ is Bridegroom of the whole Church and, in a personal way, of each soul; the personal love is real, and it is received within the larger Bride.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) Christ is the Head of the Body that is the Church; abiding in him is the constant reception of grace from the Head into the members (cf. Summa Theologiae III, q. 8).

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. The next time you are at Mass, slow down at the moment of Communion. Receive the Eucharist aware that the union with the vine begun in your Baptism is being nourished and deepened, the sap of Christ's own life flowing into you afresh. Do not let it pass as routine.
2. Name one place you have been trying to bear fruit by your own effort, cut off from the vine, and make one concrete reconnection this week: fifteen minutes of Scripture daily, confession scheduled, one person to pray with, or Sunday Mass made the fixed center of your week.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **John 10:11**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Luke 14:15-24 (the Great Banquet) and Matthew 25:1-13 (the Ten Bridesmaids).

Catechism: CCC 754, 755, 796, 813-822, 1396

Session Ten · The Great Invitation

Great Banquet · Wedding Banquet · Ten Bridesmaids · Sheep & Goats · Wicked Tenants

WHAT WE FOUND

The series closes where the Kingdom is headed: a wedding feast. Ten weeks began with “the Kingdom is at hand” and end with the doors of the hall opening. The banquet parables press an uncomfortable point, that the invitation is refused not by people preferring evil but by people preferring good things, a field, oxen, a marriage, over the one thing that finally matters. And the wedding garment, as St. Augustine read it, is charity: one can be present at the feast without truly belonging.

The Ten Bridesmaids taught that readiness, the oil the Fathers pondered, cannot be borrowed at the last moment; it is a life cultivated now, during the delay. The Sheep and the Goats, a vision of the Last Judgment more than a parable, set the criterion at mercy to the least. And the Wicked Tenants ended not with the killing but with the cornerstone: even the rejected Son becomes the foundation. The end of the story God is telling is joy, and the warnings are serious because the joy is real.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) In his Sermon 90 on Matthew’s Gospel, the wedding garment is charity: to accept the invitation without putting on love is to be at the wedding without truly belonging there.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407) In his Homilies on Matthew (Homily 50), he warns against honoring Christ’s body at the altar while ignoring Christ in the hungry, the stranger, and the imprisoned. The works of mercy are not optional.

St. Gregory the Great (540–604) In his Forty Gospel Homilies (Homily 10), the oil is a life of love cultivated over time; the wise cannot share it because that kind of readiness is not transferable.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) In the Summa Theologiae (II-II, q. 32, a. 1), the works of mercy are acts of charity: not add-ons to the Christian life but the way faith’s charity becomes visible in deed.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Choose one specific work of mercy and make it a regular practice, with a time and a frequency: an hour at the food pantry, a monthly visit to a homebound parishioner, a weekly meal for a family in need. Begin it this week.
2. Take all ten sessions together and name the one parable the Lord has pressed into you most insistently over these weeks. Take it as the parable Christ is asking you to live this season. Pray it, carry it, become it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Matthew 25:40**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

CARRYING IT FORWARD

For the road: Keep your ten Take-Home sheets together as one guide to the parables. Return to the one that marked you most, and read it beside its Gospel text through the coming year.

Catechism: CCC 1027, 1038, 1040, 1042