

July 2025 – Stories Jesus told

Please note Bible stories and themes may occasionally differ from this overview.

During July we explore four parables which Jesus told. *The lost sheep* helps us reflect on **patience** and how God longs for all of us to be close to him. *The sheep and the goats* helps us consider **faithfulness**, as we discover what it is to know God and follow his way. *The rich fool* helps us reflect on **self-control**, as we think about putting God first; and *The great banquet* reminds us of **joy** and **kindness**, and the important of sharing the good news of God's goodness with everyone who will listen.

Sessions can be swapped around so that Session Four, *The great banquet*, can take place at the end of the school term.

Session 1

5/6 July

Aim: To better understand the reason for Jesus' parables, and to know that God wants a relationship with everyone

Bible ref: **Luke 15:1-7**

Today's fruit

God demonstrates **patience** with us as he waits for us to come close to him.

The lost sheep

Jesus is surrounded once again by a crowd, including some religious leaders. Jesus asked a question of the crowd: imagine if you owned 100 sheep, wouldn't you leave the 99 to find the lost one? The parable continues as Jesus describes the joyful celebrations which take place when the lost sheep returns to the fold. He compares it to the rejoicing in Heaven when someone asks for forgiveness, compared to the 99 'righteous' people who do not think they need forgiveness.

At that time, the religious laws were held in such high regard that anyone seen to be ignoring or breaking them would have been disgraced. Rather than seeking to understand and exercising forgiveness, people thought that the law-breaker must suffer and be condemned.

Knowing that Jesus had already been 'eating with sinners' and mixing with society's outcasts, the religious leaders were already filled with contempt for him, leaning into their well-formed prejudices.

Then Jesus shares this parable illustrating God's love for everyone. The story illustrates that, unlike the expectations of the Pharisees which would see the lost sheep shunned from the flock, the shepherd would go out of his way to rescue and return the lost sheep. Jesus is explaining to the religious leaders that those who have walked away from God's care are the ones we should be going after and looking for, because they need to know God's love more than the ones who have never suffered living without God's fullness of life.

Jesus was saying that God doesn't want anyone to be apart from him. In fact, he continues to love those who 'turn their back' on him. It also teaches us how we should care for others no matter what they look like or the things they do. God wants us to love and look after the lost.

Think about

Have you heard the word 'parable' before? Can you explain what it is? A parable is a story used to teach a great truth or to challenge the hearers to change their own behaviour.

Have you ever lost something? Did you find it again? If yes, how did you find it? How did you feel when you found it again?

Jesus once told a story about a lost sheep. There were all sorts of people listening, from people who collected taxes, to religious leaders. The teachers of the Law were angry with Jesus because he was spending time with people they didn't think were good or special enough. Their laws told them they shouldn't spend time with people like that.

I wonder, what do you think about Jesus spending time with people who weren't making good choices?

Look at verses 3-6 (the parable). How might the person who owned the sheep have felt when their sheep went missing? Can you remember what he did when he found the sheep? What words describe how he was feeling?

Look at verse 7. This is when Jesus uses the parable to tell people about God. It's saying that the Kingdom of God is for everyone! When someone chooses to live their life away from God, how might that make God feel?

On the other hand, when someone chooses to live their life with God, how do you think that might make God feel? The story uses the word 'rejoice'. What does rejoicing look like?

Today's fruit is **patience**. The shepherd in the parable shows patience and persistence as he looks for the lost sheep. What are some examples of when we show patience in our lives?

6 July: Farewell Sunday

This weekend is 'Farewell Sunday' within The Salvation Army, when some officers depart for new appointments. We pray for all the adults and children who will be moving to a new place, that they would know God is always with them.

Session 2

12/13 July

Aim: To better understand the reason for Jesus' parables and think about how we love God and others

Bible ref: Matthew 25:31-46

Today's fruit

We can live out the fruit of **faithfulness** by loving God and loving others.

The sheep and the goats

In this parable Jesus speaks about the time to come when he will be on the throne and the people will be separated. What separates them will be the way in which they glorified God, if they cared for others – and therefore Jesus – or not. Jesus speaks about those who are hungry, thirsty, lonely, unclothed, sick and imprisoned. All these people need love and care, just as if each of them was Jesus himself. 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' (v40).

This is about two separate groups, described as sheep and goats. While there would have been cause in those days to separate the two types of animals, and therefore

an understanding of the foundation for a story, the parable's point is not to be focused on the attitudes or characteristics of the two separate groups. It's not really about sheep and goats: it's about separation. The focus is on the fact that there are some people who will inherit God's Kingdom and some that won't. Jesus is not insinuating that sheep are good and goats are bad, but rather that the sheep know the shepherd's (Jesus') voice so they are likely to follow the shepherd's words.

The parable emphasises the call for us to respond to those in need. It speaks into what's in people's hearts, their character, and their compassion. Jesus is making a point about what our actions mean in Kingdom terms – that if we live in the word and love of God, then we will already be taking care of the needy, because it reflects our faith. It's at the core of who we are.

Think about

Have you ever been put into a group for a game or an activity? How did they separate the groups? Was it by age, height or just random?

In this story there are two groups: there is a group of sheep and a group of goats. They were separated because they're different from one another.

Just by looking at someone, do you think you can tell what sort of a person they are? How might you really be able to tell what people are like? Can you think of any examples?

Often you can see what a person is like by the things they do. If you saw someone who was always helping other people, what sort of person might they be?

In this parable, Jesus was saying that there are two different types of people: people who are close to God and people who aren't. If you're someone who is close to God and loves God, what sort of things might people see you doing? What sort of a person might you be?

We know that our actions don't always match up with who we are. Sometimes people make mistakes or choose the unkind choice instead of the kind one that God would like. Living as God would want us to means that most often we will want to choose the kind and loving thing to do. That's what Jesus did. Can you think of times when Jesus showed kindness and love to people?

The fruit of the Spirit includes **faithfulness**. When we talk about God being faithful, it means he doesn't let us down – that he keeps his promises. It means we can trust him for what's best. When we show faithfulness to God, it means we trust what God says and try to follow what is right.

If we are faithful to God, what things might we do? Are there any clues in the parable we read? Sometimes we might need adults to help us with some of these things; what might they be able to help us do?

11-13 July: Together 2025

This weekend members of The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland gather for a conference in Birmingham. If you are there, listen out for stories about God's faithfulness and how people are being faithful to God!

14-20 July: Enabled Summer Extravaganza

This week is an important time in The Salvation Army calendar, when the Enabled Summer School makes sure that everybody is included and belongs. I wonder how they do this?

Session 3
19/20 July

Aim: To better understand the reason for Jesus' parables, and think about our priorities
Bible ref: Luke 12:13-21

Today's fruit

We show the fruit of **self-control** when we choose to put God above everything else.

The rich fool

In this parable Jesus describes a man whose crops grew well. He decided to spend time and money building big new barns for his next harvest, in order to keep all the grain for himself, ensuring an easier life for many years. The story goes on to say that God said the man was a fool, as that night the man's life would be taken from him, and who then would benefit from what he had prepared for himself? The parable ends with the warning that this is how it will be for anyone who stores up for themselves but is not rich towards God.

This parable, as with much of Jesus' teaching, is contextualised by the fact that he has already been speaking about money, wealth and greed. These things would have been seen and somewhat expected of religious leaders. They would have been wealthier than most, and that was socially acceptable.

Just before the parable was shared, Jesus had been asked to help someone with their financial affairs, an invitation which Jesus declined (vv13-15). The parable is a warning against things like greed and love of money and possessions.

After this parable, Jesus speaks to his disciples about not worrying and instead relying on God's provision.

The point Jesus is making is that our relationship with God should be prioritised over everything else, because eternity with him far outweighs anything that we could count as gain on earth. Being rich towards God means that not only can we be with God for ever, but we can also experience the fullness of life here on earth!

The rich man is described as intending to store up for himself for many years. There is no mention of him sharing with anyone. As followers of Jesus we are called to be the body of Christ, living in a way that reflects God's love for us.

We don't want to leave anyone worrying about having possessions, but rather remembering to keep our 'Love God, Love others' central to our faith. In this instance being rich is the example, but there are many things that can take our attention away from God and others.

Think about

Jesus spent time with lots of different people. Jesus wanted everyone to know what God was really like, because they had spent so long worrying about the laws that they weren't remembering that God loved his creation. This parable was meant to remind people that they should put God first, and stop spending their time on things that won't last for ever.

The story Jesus told was about a man who had grown lots of food. He kept all of the food in big barns, just for himself. I wonder what you think about that? Is it OK that someone stores up all of the food for themselves? What might have been a better choice? What might have happened if they'd shared the food with others?

The man in the story was not a real person. It was Jesus telling a story to help people understand that when they care about and share with others, God sees and loves that! How does it make us feel when we share and care?

Do you know what it means to show self-control? Sometimes it means not doing something that we want to do; or it can mean being careful about what we do, thinking carefully about situations and what is right. This can feel like a difficult thing to do, but God can help us, and we can have the fruit of self-control.

In the story it talks about someone who spent lots of money making big buildings and keeping all their crops for themselves. Can you think of a word to describe how they might have been acting when they didn't share what they had?

The crops wouldn't last for ever, and neither would the person storing them up. How could the person in the story have shown God's love? How can we show God's love?

Summer: Residential camps

The Salvation Army has many residential camps taking place. Pray that children would be encouraged to spend time with God and put him first.

Session 4

26/27 July

Aim: To better understand the reason for Jesus' parables, and think about sharing and inclusion

Bible ref: Luke 14:15-24

Today's fruit

God shows us **kindness** in the way he provides for us, and by **joyfully** sharing what we have with others, we show **kindness** too.

The great banquet

This parable is told in response to a statement made as someone says, 'Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God' (v15).

The parable tells of a man who prepared a great banquet, but whose guests began making excuses so as not to attend.

When the man discovered that no one was going to attend the banquet, he sent his servant out into the streets to invite those on the margins of their community.

When there was still room for more, the man insisted the servant go out again and invite as many in as possible so that his house would be full, saying, 'I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet' (v24).

The likelihood is that each of the people who accepted the banquet host's invitation would have known the day it was to be held. They would have accepted the invitation and told the host they'd be there, all in advance of the day. It wasn't a spur of the moment decision to throw a banquet, and so there would have been food provision for everyone who had said they'd be attending. It was all ready.

What happened is that people made their excuses. Whether this reflects their own bad planning or their lack of care for the host or the banquet itself, it shows that their priority was never the banquet or its host. How important then is it, if we imagine God to be the host, that we make sure we are at the feast?

The host had been rejected, and the food could have been wasted, and the seats left empty. However, the host then threw out the invitation to anyone who would listen and accept. He sent people out to share the invitation, because the host didn't want empty seats and wasted food. He wanted everyone to have the opportunity to enjoy the goodness of what he had provided.

This parable was a way of Jesus telling the important Pharisee – whose house he was eating at (v1) – that he should be sharing what he had with those who wouldn't ever be able to repay him in the same way. Jesus wanted to show people that when you love others, your reward will be God-given.

Think about

Have you ever attended a big celebration or meal, like a wedding, a birthday party or a big meal at church? Who was there? How long do you think it took to organise it?

If you were planning a big meal and celebration, who would you invite? How would you feel if they decided they had other things to do and didn't come?

When God made humans, he wanted to be close to them. He wanted to love them, and for them to love him. God invites us to be part of his family, to get to know him and listen to him as he listens to us. Through the parable, Jesus is trying to explain what God is like and how he feels about us. You have to use your imagination, to imagine God is the host – he invites us to be a part of something special. Some people choose not to be with God and therefore they don't enjoy his goodness. They don't get to know how loving God is and how he cares for us, because they ignore his invitation.

How do you think God might feel when people choose not to know him?

In the story the host sends people out into the streets to invite whoever they can find to come to the feast instead! If that was your job, what do you think that would feel like? How would you invite people to the feast? What would you say?

I wonder if there are people in your school or other places that often get left out. I wonder what it would be like to include them in your games and conversations. Sometimes this can feel difficult, and God knows and understands that. God gave us the Holy Spirit to help us every day. Having the Holy Spirit in your life means that God can help you to have good things (fruit of the spirit), like kindness and joy. Kindness helps us to see other people and what they might need. It helps us to be brave and include people in the things we are doing.

27 July: Welcome Sunday

This weekend is Welcome Sunday in The Salvation Army, when some officers start new appointments. As many adults and children will become part of a new church family, we pray that they would experience joy and kindness in their new home.