

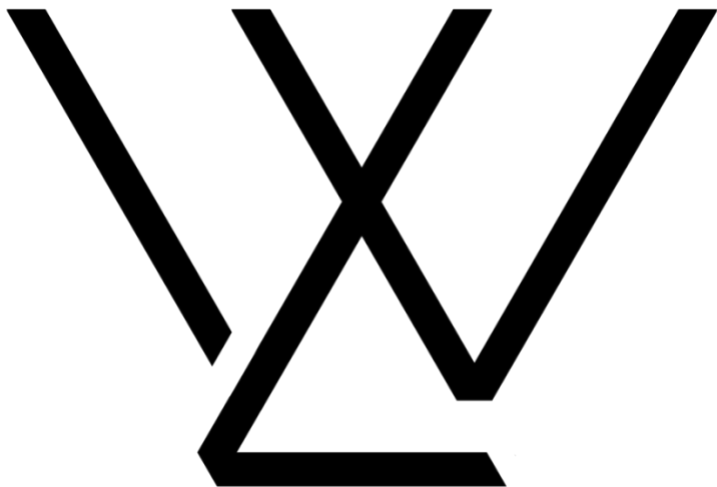


WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 1-4



MATTHEW 13:1-52



Word to Life studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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WORD TO LIFE

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Week 1: Matthew 13:1-23

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 13:1-23

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

Activity: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

Question: How would you define what a parable is in your own words?

Activity and Question: Read Matthew 11:20, 12:2, 12:10, 12:14, 12:24, 12:38.

- Do you think the opposition Jesus recently faced was connected to the parables He now began to teach? Why or why not?

Question: In Matthew 13:14-17, Jesus connected the ministry of the Prophets with His own message and ministry. What was Jesus' point in referencing the Prophets?

Question: Why do you think it might be significant that Jesus said the parable, listened to the confusion of His disciples, and then chose to explain it?

Activity: What are the different types of soil and the corresponding description?

Soil	Description

Question: Do you reflect the good soil personally? If so, what would you point to in your heart and life that give “good soil” evidence?

Question: What do you think is Jesus’ point by referencing some yields that are 100-fold, 60-fold, and 30-fold?

Optional Activity: Where else does Jesus talk about “understanding” and how does that help you “understand” verse 23.

Week 1: Matthew 13:1-23

Day 2: The Fourth Soil

READ: Matthew 13:1-23; John 15:2; Matthew 10:21-22

EXPLORE:

When is the hardest time to follow Christ and why? Think briefly about times in your life when you have had doubts and hardships... When do you think it was the hardest for your faith? To one degree or another we all experience our faith wavering. According to Matthew 13:1-23, the hardest time to follow Christ is upon the initial curiosity and engagement with the faith. The passage for this week is broadly referred to as *The Parable of the Sower*. In this parable, Jesus speaks of four soils that receive *the seed* which He later explains are four types of people who hear the gospel. There are some who believe that two or three of the soils/people are saved, but I (Brayden) am convinced there is not sufficient evidence in Jesus' teaching to warrant that belief. The context of the passage, the context of the book of Matthew, and the context of the rest of Scripture suggest that only the good soil that bears fruit will indeed be saved.

It is always most important to examine the immediate context of a verse when trying to decipher its meaning. What does the immediate context say about the differences amongst the soils? A major difference is that the last soil is said to be good. This observation alone gives a strong indication that this seed is the only one considered saved. Another difference is that the last soil is the only one who both hears the word *and* understands the word. This is significant because it identifies the importance of not just hearing or even receiving (like the second soil) but truly understanding. When a person genuinely understands the gospel, they know that it is worth giving up everything and not holding on

to anything that takes them from God. The last major difference is that the last soil produces fruit. The variety of the saved are not seen amongst the different soils but amongst the one good soil that produces different amounts of fruit.

In the search for the correct interpretation the immediate context is the most important, but another context to look at is the rest of the book. The most relevant verse in Matthew with respect to this passage is Matthew 10:22, “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” The good soil is the only soil that endured, therefore it is the only one that is for certain saved.

The last major factor on interpreting an unclear passage is to look at the entire Biblical data for an answer. Since the Bible does not contradict itself, it is valid to search outside of the book for interpretive help. In John 15:2, Jesus says that “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.” This again confirms that only the good soil represents the one who is saved.

With all of this support we can conclude that only the last soil that bears fruit is saved. This is not to say that the fruit is what saves the soil, rather the fruit shows that the soil has been saved. The soil was originally saved because it both heard *and* understood the word. We must truly understand the significance of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross to have confidence in Him. He paid for all of our sin and only by His grace can we be made right with Him.

BIG IDEA: A Believer Hears and Understands

APPLY:

- **Question:** Can you think of other ways to help you interpret the Bible than the ones mentioned?

Week 1: Matthew 13:1-23

Day 3: The Purpose of Parables

READ: Matthew 13:10-17; Isaiah 6:8-13; 1 Peter 2:4-10

EXPLORE:

It is a common misconception that Jesus taught in parables for the same reason a modern preacher might use stories or illustrations throughout a sermon — to better engage his audience, clarifying and simplifying Biblical truths to make them easier to understand. It therefore may come as a surprise that when the disciples ask Jesus for the purpose behind his teaching in parables, he essentially gives the opposite response. No doubt Jesus intends his parables to be engaging, but rather than using them to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding, Jesus says he speaks to the crowd in parables *“because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand”* (Matt 13:13). He then quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 where God commissions the prophet to preach a message that will *“make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes”* (Isaiah 6:10). Mark’s parallel account of this same lesson (see Mark 4:10-13) further clarifies Jesus’ intent, as he tells the disciples that he uses parables, *“so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven”* (Mark 4:12, emphasis added).

From Jesus’ own words, and the context of Isaiah’s commissioning, is it possible that the purpose of parables is more to conceal truth than it is to reveal truth? This is a hard teaching to wrestle with because the thought of Jesus withholding something that could lead to one’s repentance and forgiveness makes us a bit uncomfortable. The truth, however, is that there will always be some that respond to God’s word and others that don’t. The broader context of the Parable of the Sower and the four types of soil in Matthew 13:1-23 makes this clear. While the same seed is cast in all cases, understanding and coming to believe this preached word is contingent on the spiritual state of the soil. Thus, parables function not just as teaching tools, but even more so as diagnostic tools — they are a winnowing fork that delineates those who have *“ears to hear”* from those that do not. And in so doing, parables

reveal the spiritual state of the listener more than they determine it via the truth they impart.

At the outset of his ministry, the prophet Isaiah received what surely felt like a disheartening commission in Isaiah 6:8-13. He was called to preach a message that would harden the people's hearts, that would lead not to understanding or healing, but to rejection. Of course, Isaiah was called to preach Biblical truth, it's just that God knew the spiritual state of his audience and the reception that truth would receive. And in looking back at Isaiah's commissioning, Jesus declares that his own ministry is a fulfillment of what Isaiah experienced. As foretold, the people "indeed hear but never understand." Their heart "has grown dull." Their eyes "have closed." As described elsewhere in scripture, Jesus is acutely aware that while he is the cornerstone, he will also be rejected, and he and his teaching will be "*a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense*" (1 Peter 2:8). The purpose of parables, it seems, is to highlight these differing responses by concealing truth from some. Of course, this is all part of God's sovereign plan because it is precisely the people's rejection of Jesus that leads to the cross. God's purpose of salvation is accomplished not in spite of, but through, the people's spiritual blindness.

But although parables serve to conceal, God doesn't leave us all blind. In fact, Jesus teaches that, "*to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance* (Matthew 13:12)." So when we read the parables, we must ask ourselves: What is it that we see? Easily understood sermon illustrations or surprising descriptions of God's grace that challenges our thinking? Let us pray for ears to hear all the more, for God to continue to grow us in our understanding, and let us praise God for blessing us, by his Spirit, with that divine grace.

BIG IDEA: Parables conceal and reveal truth, diagnose the spiritual condition of the audience, and challenge people.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What does this understanding of parables show you about God?

Week 1: Matthew 13:1-23

Day 4: Understanding the Gospel

READ: Matthew 13:1-23

EXPLORE:

Think of a time when you sat through a class or a presentation that you did not understand. What were the reasons as to why you didn't understand? Was it that you had no practical knowledge of the subject? Was the teaching boring? Were you distracted or tired? Did you not care about the subject? I recall my senior year in high school sitting in Trigonometry class next to my best friend. We were sitting at the very back of the class and the teacher called on my friend to answer a question about what she'd written on the board. His response was quite shocking. He said bluntly, "I can't even see what you're writing. I don't have my glasses on." The teacher was quite upset that my friend was willing to sit through her class without having a clue about what she was teaching. Clearly, he didn't care to understand what was being taught.

Have you ever thought about the gospel in that way? That perhaps, some people don't care enough to look into the truth of the gospel in order to understand it. Sadly, this is exactly where the evil one wants us to be. So let's not be in that place and instead let's look at a proper understanding of the gospel and what it means to hear the word of the kingdom and understand it.

Let's first look at what it means to "hear the word." The word "hear" in Matthew 13:19, does not just refer to sound entering the ear. It means *to understand* and *to respond*. Romans 10:17 says "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ." So if hearing comes through the Word of Christ, what is the Word of Christ? It is the gospel or the "Good News." Let's look at four truths that do a good job of communicating the gospel message. They are:

- 1) **God's Plan** - to have a full and abundant life. Jesus said exactly that in John 10:10. However, the first half of that verse says that "the thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy." We see the evidence of

the thief's work all around us and even in our own lives as we struggle with sin. That brings us to 2) **Man's Problem** – we are separated from God by sin. We all struggle with sin. Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” And Romans 6:23 says that there is a “wage” to be paid for our sin and that wage is death (eternal separation from God). However, Romans 6:23 also brings some great news – “but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” That brings us to 3) **God's Solution** – God loves you so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus, to be the sacrifice for your sin. Romans 5:8 says, “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Remember that sin must be atoned for. Jesus' death is that atonement. Salvation came at a very high price, which brings us to 4) **Man's Response** - every person must choose to either believe (put their trust in) Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection as their means to be forgiven and have a relationship with God or choose to reject this and face God's judgement without Jesus.

You must choose to place your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. To not choose is to choose. Even more, to not choose is to “allow the evil one to come and snatch away what has been sown.” If you have never truly called upon Jesus to come into your life, forgive you of your sin and to be your Savior, today is that day. Call on Him now in a simple prayer and then reach out to a Christian friend or a pastor to let them know of your decision. If you are a believer, pray and ask God to lead you to share this Good News with those around you. We'll discuss that more in tomorrow's WTL.

BIG IDEA: Place your faith in Jesus.

Apply:

- **Challenge:** Write out the gospel message in your own words using 50 words or less.

Week 1: Matthew 13:1-23

Day 5: Evangelism Mythbusting

READ: Matthew 13:1-23

EXPLORE:

Ryan Denton wrote a book called *Ten Modern Evangelism Myths*. This book is aimed at those who have grown cold to evangelism. As he explores the reasons for this apathy, he makes a bold observation and a sad accusation. He writes, "Evangelism, or the preaching of the good news of Christ to the lost, should be the desire of everyone Jesus has saved. Sadly, this is not always the case" (Denton, ix). What a biting reflection for many of us. Our desires are often bound up in the fear of man rather than a love for man. We often fear embarrassment and rejection if we share the gospel. This mindset hinders our passion for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Our passage for this week is another swipe at the religious elites that feared Jesus. This is not a godly fear we would want people to have when they encounter the Son of God. They feared their loss of power and prestige. What's interesting is Jesus' use of Isaiah 6:9-10 to show the dullness of their hearts. Their hardened hearts were deaf and blind to the reality of who Jesus was and is and the good news he brought to the broken-hearted. It is the broken-hearted who receive the word of the kingdom of heaven. They understand that the kingdom—the rule and reign of Jesus Christ—is here and is standing before them.

This passage should certainly encourage us. It tells us about Jesus, the promised Messiah. This passage should also challenge us. Implied in this passage is an essential truth about the good news, and it comes from another passage in Isaiah. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who

publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns' (Isaiah 52:7)." We need to be the sower who sows the seeds of the gospel. Romans 10:14 says, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"

Another myth Ryan Denton could have included in his book is the idea that simply living a good Christian life is enough to count as evangelism. Lifestyle evangelism is not evangelism. Yes, we should live holy lives, but that is not sharing the gospel. We need to clearly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the broken-hearted, to the stubborn-hearted, and to the hard-hearted. We need to evangelize every lost sinner and point them to the entrance of the kingdom of God. We need to point them to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

BIG IDEA: The Responsibility of Evangelism Rests with Every Follower of Jesus Christ

APPLY:

- **Question:** Have you asked God to give you the desire and passion to share the gospel of Jesus with those around you?
- **Question:** Have you asked God to give you opportunities to share the gospel with those around you?

Week 2: Matthew 13:24-43

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 13:24-43

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Activity:** Summarize the parable of the weeds in your own words from verses 24-30. Additionally, summarize the explanation Jesus gave about that parable in verses 36-43.

- **Question:** This might be a tricky question, but that is not my (Stephen's) intent. Why do you think Jesus taught about the mustard seed and the leaven before explaining the weed parable starting in verse 36?

- **Question:** What, if any, similarities do you see between the mustard seed and the leaven?

- **Question:** Why do you think it is important for God's Word to continually remind us that Jesus was fulfilling prophecy like in verses 34-35?
- **Question:** If you were asked to turn the reference to "sleeping workers" in verse 25 into a warning and application for Christians and church leaders today, what would you be your Scripture-directed exhortation?
- **Question:** Why do you think the master instructed the workers to wait until the harvest time to gather the weeds and store the wheat?
- **Questions:** When you read Jesus' explanation in verses 37-43, what impression are you left with? How does this specific passage move you to pray and act specifically?

Week 2: Matthew 13:24-43

Day 2: Parable of the Weeds

READ: Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 3:7-10

EXPLORE:

Some of Jesus' parables might leave us puzzled, searching for a meaning. Thankfully, the Parable of the Weeds is not one of them. After Jesus told the parable to the crowd, he and the disciples withdrew to a house where he unraveled its meaning for them.

Jesus explains to the disciples that the one sowing the good seed is the Son of Man –himself. The field represents the world, the good seed is those who belong to the kingdom, and the weeds are those who belong to the evil one. The enemy who sows the weeds is the devil, the harvesters are the angels, and the harvest is the end of the age –the final judgement.

When the servants notice the weeds growing among the wheat and ask the master if they should remove them, he explains that it will be best to wait until the harvest. At that time he will direct the reapers to separate the good from the bad. This parable speaks of an impending judgement, but it also highlights delayed judgment.

Peter writes about the delay in the Lord's judgment. He explains that the Lord is not slow in fulfilling his promise but is patient with us. He delays judgment not because he is reluctant to act, but because he desires for sinners to turn to him. Though he is a just Judge and will punish sin, his greater desire is that none should perish, but that all would repent.

Sometimes it can feel like the world will go on as it always has, as if God is sitting idly by while history moves on. But just as surely as he spoke all of creation into existence, he will return to separate the weeds from the wheat.

Although Jesus said the field represents the world, it is also reasonable to apply this parable to the local church. The local church is the visible church, the one we see with our eyes. It's a mixture of true followers of Jesus, as well as false believers who outwardly show signs of a life submitted to God but inwardly live for themselves. It's a blend of weeds and wheat. Although it may be difficult for us to tell the difference, God has no problem distinguishing between the two.

From false believers, the enemy raises up false teachers. Peter warns about such people and their destructive heresies. Though he speaks of their future judgement, for now they remain mixed with the visible church. That's why we must test everything against the Word of God. We have God's revelation to us in the Scriptures, which Jude tells us is the faith delivered once for all (Jude 3). John urges us to abide in the teachings of the New Testament apostles, warning that if anyone goes beyond those teachings, we should avoid them so that we don't take part in their "wicked works" (2 John 9-11).

As we await the harvest, we must hold fast to the Scriptures and guard our hearts from deception, for the wheat will remain mixed with the weeds until the end.

BIG IDEA: Though delayed, God's judgement is certain.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does one know if they are a son of the kingdom, or a son of the evil one?
- **Question:** Are you a discerning Christian? Do you compare what you are taught with God's written word?

Week 2: Matthew 13:24-43

Day 3: Planting Seeds

READ: Matthew 13:31-32

EXPLORE:

I (Michael) have mentioned in prior WTL writings that I am a backyard gardener, and so I naturally gravitate towards opportunities to explore Jesus's parables involving agriculture. I think I've experienced the literal and figurative version of all of them at this point. Parables about weeds choking out plants. *Don't I know it.* Promising young sprouts scorched by the heat. *Preach it.* Pretty plants with no fruit. *I curse them too.*

I remember the first time I purchased kale seeds I thought there must have been some sort of mistake at the seed company. It felt like I had just paid \$2 for a small envelope of dust. The seeds are miniscule. Then when it comes time to plant, it feels like the soil and water are just going to swallow them up along with my \$2. It seems impossible that a seed so small could become such a large and hearty plant in such a short amount of time.

The mustard seeds referenced in the passage are tiny too, and unlike my kale seed references for my audience today, were quite commonly known to be so at the time Jesus told this parable. Mustard seeds were used as a spice and well known prolific growers so most would have been familiar with the tiny little seeds and the massive tree-sized plants.

Sometimes the gospel message is introduced alongside life events that hit people like an 18-wheeler and instantly leaves them with faith in the Lord. More often though, people are introduced to the gospel message in a more subtle way. Many people go along with their everyday lives generally content and disconnected from God. But to those people, God calls us to plant tiny mustard seed sized gospel messages in ways that may not even be obvious to

them at the time. In his book *Tactics*, Gregory Koukl says that “*all he wants to do is put a stone in someone’s shoe.*” Just a little conversation or question that makes their passive existence just a little more uncomfortable.

Every evangelical conversation you have is not going to end in a conversion harvest. Sometimes you are there when they surrender their lives to Christ, but more often we are just placed in that person’s path to plant that tiny little seed of faith on God’s behalf. And yes, sometimes tiny little seeds sink too deep or get washed away in a huge garden full of soil and never take root. That’s why it takes all of us obeying the Holy Spirit to be planting lots of tiny seeds of faith and leaving a lot of conversational pebbles in shoes so that one day their faith will take root and proliferate.

BIG IDEA: Faithfully follow the Holy Spirit to plant lots of tiny seeds of faith.

APPLY:

- Pray that the Holy Spirit will identify people to which you can plant seeds of faith towards. Pray that you will have a heart for the lost. Make it a point to be constantly placing small pebbles of the gospel truth, both in the shoes of people you know and even complete strangers.

Week 2: Matthew 13:24-43

Day 4: Connecting Jesus Through the Old Testament

READ: Matthew 13:24-43

EXPLORE:

Sally Lloyd Jones starts her book, *The Jesus Story Book Bible* with a prologue,

“No, the Bible isn’t a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a story. It’s an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It’s a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne – everything – to rescue the ones he loves. It’s like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life! It takes the whole Bible to tell this story. And at the center of the story, there is a baby. Every story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in the puzzle – the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.”

One of the most beautiful parts of the Bible is how, even in the Old Testament, Jesus is everywhere. You can see how God always had a plan to send His Son. You can see Him in everything. A common question asked about the Old Testament is how it is relevant or applicable to us today. One way it is relevant is that it shows the power of God and the prophecies predicting the coming of Jesus. Seeing how everything connects and echoes His name is so vital to the story of Jesus. One example of the connection between the Old Testament and Jesus is verse 35 of today’s reading and Psalm 78:2.

The parable of the mustard seed in verses 31 and 32 is a great reminder of the growth of something so seemingly small. Think of a story, a moment, something that just happened that you were dying to tell someone. Maybe you knew that a specific person would just love hearing it, or they would die laughing at a specific part of your life changing story. You just could. Not. Wait. The way we feel having to wait to share a story with a friend, is the way we should feel having to wait to share the gospel with someone who has never heard it! We

should feel an excitement and hope and a desire for that person to hear this thing that will change their life.

Verse 35 says, “So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.’”

Seeing God work in the Old Testament and how He changed the lives of so many people before us is integral to our faith. Seeing the connection between prophesies in Isaiah or Psalms to the gospel of Matthew and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is so cool.

Telling future generations of the glory of God is so important. Sharing how God has worked in your life is a good encouragement to your kids or grandkids. One of the primary responsibilities of parents is to share the gospel with their kids and disciple them. Verses 31 and 32 state, “He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

Today’s passage is a great reminder to examine the Old Testament with a new lens and to examine your own testimony and think about who you can share it with. Maybe that is your family, your kids, your neighbors, or your friends. Reflect on the moments you’ve seen the Lord move in your life and how they connect to each other.

BIG IDEA: His name echoes throughout the Old Testament.

Activity:

- Look for the connections between Psalms 78 and Matthew 13.

Week 2: Matthew 13:24-43

Day 5: The Simplicity of the Kingdom of God

READ: Matthew 13:3-9; 24-30; 31-34; 44-50

EXPLORE:

Jesus was a carpenter. To most of us who have been Christians for a bit, that is not new information. But do we really know what a first-century carpenter did? For starters, the word that is often translated carpenter in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 is the Greek word “tekton” (from which we get the English word ‘tectonic’, as in a tectonic plate) which was rendered ‘mason’ or ‘builder.’ First-century carpenters worked with stone as much as wood. The “tekton” had to be a versatile person. They would make and/or mend agricultural implements, domestic furniture, boats and other large constructions, and they were frequently employed for contract work for public buildings. They would generally have a village base and workshop but also travel around with their tools of the trade, seeking employment on farms, fishing fleets, and in cities and villages. Joseph was a carpenter who taught his eldest son, Jesus, the “tekton” trade, and Jesus took his father’s vocation, at least for the first 30 years of his life. He was likely the only village carpenter and was well known for his skills. Thus, he almost certainly would have travelled throughout the agrarian Galilean countryside, all the way to Capernaum in order to earn a living for his family. In so doing he would have been to vineyards, worked on fishing boats, been around farms at the time of harvest (when the farm implements were more likely to have broken down) and spent time with shepherds and sheep, repairing gates and stone walls. So, he was intimately familiar with every aspect of everyday life that emerged in his parables. Jesus knew what he was talking about, from vineyards and vineyard owners, to harvesting, to cornerstones, to fishing nets, to the lives of sheep and shepherds.

In the parables we are studying this week, Jesus' intimate knowledge of the agrarian life is apparent. He knew first-hand how farmers would sow, how farmhands would harvest the grain in the midst of weeds as well as how the fishermen deal with their catch of fish. He had seen first-hand the size of a mustard seed and how it grew into a massive tree. Whereas in rabbinic circles, the mustard seed was proverbial for smallness, Jesus used this as a vivid metaphor for the kingdom's tiny beginnings. Jesus thought deeply about these things before he wove these life-experiences into parables that illustrate the kingdom of God so as to impact the heart of his listeners and make them nod their heads in understanding, if not agreement.

With this in mind, and with a better understanding of the way in which Jesus used his first-hand knowledge of the lives of his intended audience to reach their hearts, we have an example of the power of being familiar with your surroundings. It is important for us to develop a knowledge of the work environment and the community into which God has placed us. We ought to use categories and language that make the gospel more accessible and understandable.

BIG IDEA: Show Christ to your friends and neighbors using categories that those around you can readily grasp.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How are you growing in your ability to share the gospel of the kingdom of heaven to those around you? Instead of using terms only Christians know, how are you growing in your use of everyday language and life experiences to impact your friends and neighbors?

Week 3: Matthew 13:44-46

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 13:44-46

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity**: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question and Activity**: What two things is the kingdom of heaven compared to in this chapter? List as many points of similarity in verse 44 and verses 45-46 as you can.

- **Question**: Would your life reflect the fact that the kingdom of heaven is your treasure? Why or why not?

- **Question**: How often are you joyful/when was the last time you were overjoyed because of the treasured realities revealed in God's kingdom?

- **Question:** Both parables allude to a “seeking” before a “finding.” The treasure hunter digs and the merchant searches. Would you say that your life reflects a posture of God-honoring pursuits? Why or why not?
- **Question:** Suppose the person found the pearl or the treasure and did not sell what they had to attain it, what might you naturally assume about that person?
- **Question and Activity:** What infringes upon your ability to treasure the things of God rightly? Be specific by listing them below and spend time in prayer about what you write.
- **Application:** Get specific about one way you’re going to intentionally demonstrate that you value God above all else this week.

Week 3: Matthew 13:44-46

Day 2: Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

READ: Matthew 13:44-46; Luke 10:38-42

EXPLORE:

Trip you *really* want to go on? New car you just *have* to have? Membership you are *super* excited about? There are many things in life we are willing to make pretty big financial and practical sacrifices for because of how badly we want them or how valuable they seem to us. Life is a constant evaluation of what seems most important to us. Keep this job or switch? Move locations or stay? Change friends/communities or fight for these? Put the kids in this sport or have more family time? Workout or sleep? We are constantly evaluating what seems most important to us in our current state. We either blindly live by our subconscious priorities or we fiercely fight to keep biblical priorities regardless of what we feel we want. Our actions prove where our priorities lie. Everything we do reveals what is most important to us. No one can say that God is their top priority every moment of every day, but that is our aim as believers (Matthew 5:48) and we must fight to keep our priorities and our selfish desires in check.

These two parables reveal the great joy and life-change that takes place when we identify something we see as *the* most important thing. The individuals in Jesus' parables were not just willing to sell all they had, but were eager, delighted, and immediately compelled to change their entire lives due to the immense value of what they found. This passage ought to stir up conviction within us. How often do we make decisions based on self-preservation, desire for comfort, avoiding conflict, or sheer selfishness? God has made it clear that He is the purpose of our lives and our greatest prize. Seeking after anything else leads to emptiness and destruction (Matthew 6:19-21, James 1:15). This begs the question then, what are we living for? What is most important to us? What is the one thing, if we were truly honest, that we put first in our lives? Are we willing to remove everything – our comfort, family, friends, environment, stability,

careers – from our lives for the sake of clinging to what is best – Jesus Himself?

Most likely, you have at least one thing that you often put above the Lord and His plan for your life. The only way to treasure Jesus as number one is to know Him, see Him, and believe that He is worth it. This comes by spending time with Him. If we never understand the value of something by studying it, spending time with it, and understanding it, we won't sacrifice for it. Luke 10:38-42 reveals to us the story of how Mary realizes that intimacy with Jesus is more important than anything else we can do and becomes the fuel, purpose, and guide for all that we do. If we claim to know and love God, we should ask ourselves: have I allowed Him to transform my priorities? Am I investing in deepening my knowledge of and relationship to God so that He remains the main thing I eagerly sacrifice everything else for?

BIG IDEA: Actions reveal priorities; we must intentionally devote time to build intimacy with the Lord if we truly want Him to be the thing we sacrifice everything else for.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What normally takes precedence in your decisions (comfort, happiness, reputation, image, financial security, family, etc.)?
- **Question:** Do you have immense joy in putting everything else aside for the sake of Christ? If not, why is that? What can you do to deepen your joy and reaffirm your priorities?

Week 3: Matthew 13:44-46

Day 3: The Pursuit of Happiness

READ: Matthew 13:44-46; Hebrews 12:1-2

EXPLORE:

What do you think that people seek more than anything else in this life? I think it is safe to say that different people pursue different things. Some chase after money, others seek to accumulate many possessions, others seek deep relationships, some desire power, some even pursue accolades that give them a profound sense of achievement and pride. I would argue the underlying theme of all of these is the motivation of happiness. Blaise Pascal a brilliant philosopher and mathematician (most famous for Paschal's Wager) once said "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end... This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those hanging themselves." I agree that this quote is true of every man apart from Christ, but Christ Himself offers something greater than happiness. Christ offers joy.

The writer of Hebrews said this about Jesus. "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross." According to this verse Jesus had a joy that was worth the pain and suffering that He would experience on the cross. He would have to endure a punishment more severe than anyone in existence. He not only had to endure the physical pain of dying on the cross and all that led up to it, but He also had to endure the cosmic forces of sin, death, and Satan. This verse in Hebrews tells us that He did it all for the joy that was set before Him. What was that joy? Some think that it was for His own glory and future ascension, but He was already at the God's right hand before creation. No, it makes

more sense that the joy Christ was wanting was us, His Church. Christ poured Himself out for us. We were His joy.

In today's passage, the man finding a treasure is said to have sold everything "in his joy." The man's joy was his ultimate motivation for the treasure. I believe this was true for both the man who found the treasure in the field as well as the man who found the pearl. Jesus said that the joy they experienced from what they found was worth all they had. This is what becoming a Christian should be like. When you see Christ for who He is, He is the treasure worth everything else. The treasure is worth everything because it brings us true joy, what all of us search for our whole lives. What's the difference between happiness and joy you might be thinking? Happiness is fleeting but joy is sustaining. Most of us think we want what makes us happy in the moment, but what we need is eternal joy. This eternal joy can only be found in Christ, and it gives something even greater than happiness. It gives meaning, value, and hope.

BIG IDEA: Find Your Joy in Christ

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do you turn to most often for your happiness apart from Christ? What does that tell you about your heart?
- **Question:** Can the pursuit of joy really lead to you enduring all trials?

Week 3: Matthew 13:44-46

Day 4: Our Singular Devotion and Utmost Priority

READ: Matthew 13:44-46

EXPLORE:

I (Cohen) love books, and there are some books I love so much I try and find special or unique editions of them. Once, a friend of mine came over, and I was excited to show him a special edition of a book series we both enjoyed. But because this book was so precious to me, I had to ask him a very serious and grave question. “You don’t moisturize your hands, right? Hand lotion could damage the cover!”

I now laugh at the ridiculousness of my question, but it demonstrates that as humans we will do very wild things for what we value. In the midst of Jesus’ parables, He puts forth two examples of people being far more intense than asking silly questions. They demonstrate by their singular devotion what life lived for the kingdom of heaven should look like.

The man, upon finding the hidden treasure, goes out and sells all that he has. All his possessions are sacrificed so that he might own the field the treasure lies in. The merchant, when he finds the pearl, again sells all that he owned, so he could have the treasure. That treasure is the kingdom of God.

This is what we are called to do. The kingdom of Heaven should be a singular focus. What these men did, was not an uncalled-for reaction. However, it was the only right response! Jesus has previously rebuked the Pharisees for their lackluster response to the announcement of God’s kingdom, and sometimes I wonder how He might react to our response. Jesus is not necessarily calling all of us to live on the street because we have sold all our possessions, but He is calling us to have His kingdom as our highest priority.

He calls us to ask ridiculous questions, to step out on a limb for His name, and to sacrifice our time and wealth. These verses should cut to our hearts. Because often times, our priorities are not aligned where they should be. How many of us upon finding the pearl go back to the garbage we so readily consume? How many of us have hesitated at buying the field? The treasures of God will outlast all the fleeting moments of happiness the world offers. It is well worth our devotion, and it is well worth our lives to live in service to the Kingdom of Heaven.

BIG IDEA: The Kingdom of Heaven should be our utmost priority and is worthy of our singular devotion.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Evaluate yourself and ask God if His kingdom is a priority in your life.
- **Question:** What are some areas of your life that you can better devote to the Kingdom of Heaven? Pray that God would open your eyes to areas you need to change.

Week 3: Matthew 13:44-46

Day 5: The Allusive Search

READ TOGETHER: Matthew 13:44-46; 2 Peter 3:18

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Gerhard and Hannelore Schmatz were a famous German mountaineer couple in the 1970s. Every year they would seek to climb a mountain together. They would make their climbs all around the world and were great climbers in terms of preparation, endurance, and resilience. In 1979, the mountaineers set their sights on the tallest mountain in the world, it was none other than Mount Everest. If they accomplish their task, Hannelore would be the fourth woman in history to reach the summit, and Gerhard would be the oldest at 50. Amazingly, both of them would reach the summit, but tragically only one of them would survive the trek back down the mountain. The couple had reached a high part of the mountain together, but a blizzard forced them back down to a lower altitude. They then decided to split up. Gerhard's group would make it to the top first but be forced down immediately due to weather conditions. Hannelore's group would go up during the harsh weather conditions despite the warnings of the experts. She made it to the top but was forced to camp in the most dangerous part of the mountain on her descent and ultimately froze to death. Her death was tragic and seemingly avoidable. What made her take the risk? What was she searching for on that mountain?

Everyone in this life searches for things. We search for jobs, family, friends, purpose, etc. Many people search for the elusive. Some ultimate thing that they think they want but never seem to find. This leads them to depression, hopelessness, and despair. In those states they turn to drugs, promiscuity, and/or anything else

to fill the void left by not finding what they are looking for. Even more devastating is that some people do find what they were searching for, and it is not what they expected. It does not give them what they want.

In Matthew 13:45, Jesus describes a merchant who searches for fine pearls. This merchant searches for something that he believes will satisfy him more than anything. Unbelievably, the merchant finds it. He finds it and is so enamored with it that he sells everything for it. Can it actually be possible to search for something of that magnitude, find it, and it live up to everything you expected? Jesus says yes. Yet, a pearl is not what can satisfy, only the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven when found does live up to the hype. It is worth what it claims to be worth. As Christians we are done searching in a sense. We have found our “one pearl of great value.” Yet our search for a further knowledge of God still awaits us. We can continue to learn more and more about who God is and how amazing He is and never know everything about Him because He is eternal. There is no depth to His glory. We have found *but* still we search unto eternity, guiding others to the only source that will not disappoint.

BIG IDEA: Point Others to the Only True Search that will Satisfy.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why do humans all gravitate towards finding something that they do not currently possess?
- **Question:** How can you learn more about God, and what practical steps can you take to learn more about Him?

Week 4: Matthew 13:47-52

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 13:47-52

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** Why do you think so many of Jesus' parables deal with agriculture?

- **Question:** Why do you think the kingdom of heaven was compared to a net that catches both the good and the bad?

- **Question:** What do you think is the popular perception of angels? How does that compare with what you read in verse 49?

- **Activity:** Verses 47-50 remind us of the seriousness of God's judgment. What other passages can you find that discuss the seriousness of God's judgment?

- **Questions:** What do you think Jesus meant when He said, *"Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old?"* What is the new and the old?

- **Activity:** Read Romans 8:1-8 and reflect upon the salvation made available through Christ.

- **Optional Activity:** The Bible uses imagery such as a "net." It also uses imagery such as a "snare." After reading the passages about snares below, what do you notice? What do you think is the difference between a snare and a net in the biblical text?
 - o Psalm 64:5
 - o Psalm 91:3
 - o Psalm 106:36
 - o Proverbs 6:1-2
 - o Proverbs 13:14
 - o Proverbs 14:27
 - o I Timothy 3:7
 - o I Timothy 6:9

Week 4: Matthew 13:47-52

Day 2: Fishing For Life

READ: Matthew 13:47-52

EXPLORE:

Fishing is a peculiar thing these days. In Texas, there are literally hundreds of restrictions and laws pertaining to it. Texas Parks and Wildlife regulates what kinds of fish are legal to catch, the size of the fish, the limit to the amount of fish, etc. One of the main reasons for the regulations is that people are not fishing for survival in Texas but for leisure. Imagine though you are in a country or a time period where starvation is a real possibility for you and your family. Regulations are not going to be a factor for you at that point. You are going to take whatever you can get, and even more significantly, you are going to do whatever it takes, in order to take whatever you can get.

Jesus alludes to fishing more than once in the Gospels. Why all the fishing illustrations in scripture? On one hand it seems natural considering that Jesus' disciples were fishermen and much of His first century audience would understand the common practice of fishing, but I think there is more to it than that. Fishing corresponds to much of how we understand the work of the ministry. Think about all the ways fishing can connect to ministry... Fishing requires patience after the initial release which corresponds to the patience one must have after sharing the gospel. Fishing requires effort and preparation which corresponds to the preparation Christians cultivate through God's Word, the Church, and godly wisdom. Fishing is also not up to the fisherman. The fishermen do not control if the fish bite, they do not control where the fish are and go, and they do not control the elements that factor into those things. Likewise, the one who preaches the gospel does not control the reaction of those they witness to, they do not control where the places are in which they find fish,

and they do not control the vast number of variabilities that God orchestrates in gospel encounters.

One amazing detail that Jesus mentions in the passage that adds to the fishing metaphor is that the fisherman that is a part of the kingdom of heaven will gather “fish of every kind.” This corresponds to the preacher who will preach the gospel indiscriminately. God does not just want Jews in His kingdom, not just Middle Eastern people, not just Black people or White people, not just the rich ones or poor ones, not just the athletic ones, or popular ones, or pretty ones. God does not just see the outward characteristics that we tend to focus on. God sees the heart. In Matthew 13:49, Jesus says that God will send the angels to sort out the wicked and the righteous.

The main job of a Christian is not to evaluate who will be ultimately saved and who will not be. The job of a Christian is to reach out to all people. To constantly cast the dragnet into the sea and trust that God will bring the fish. The Great Fisherman in heaven will determine the results but we must be faithful with each cast that He allows us to throw. To Him belong the spoils of the expedition.

BIG IDEA: Cast Your Net for All of the Fish

APPLY:

- **Question:** What kind of people are you less likely to share the gospel with and why?
- **Activity:** Write about the goodness of God: specifically the fact that His message of salvation goes out to the entire world.

Week 4: Matthew 13:47-52

Day 3: The Dragnet and the True Vine

READ: Matthew 13:47-52 and John 15:1-17

EXPLORE:

Today we will continue studying the parable of the dragnet found in Matthew 13:47-52 paying particular attention to the sorting that occurs. In Matthew 13:49 we are told at the end of the age the *"angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace."* We will look at John 15 to give us clarity on the basis for this sorting.

In John 15:1-2 Jesus says, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."* Here the image of bearing fruit is used to show what is taken away. This is similar to the fish which are cast aside. It is important to realize that Jewish fishermen would have sorted fish on multiple criteria. One would be based on Levitical Law. Fish with both fins and scales were clean, fish without both fins and scales were unclean. But clean fish could be inedible due to size, disease, or other reasons. These fish would also be cast aside from the net with the unclean fish. You can either be cut from the tree for not bearing fruit or pruned to better bear fruit in accordance with God's will.

In John 15:5 Jesus addresses who bears fruit saying, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* We must abide in Christ to bear fruit. As we have seen elsewhere in Matthew this means taking his yoke (Matthew 11:28-30) and taking up our cross and following Him (Matthew 10:38-39). The cost of this discipleship radically changes us. As it is Christ in us that allows us to bear much fruit. The people who bear fruit can be compared to the fish that are kept.

Jesus continues in John 15:6 *"If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are*

gathered and thrown into the fire, and burned.” Just as in the Parable of the Dragnet, Jesus tells us that the evil are to be thrown away and burned. This is a warning to those who reject or only nominally accept the Christian life. Jesus has outlined that there is a high cost of discipleship that must be taken to properly follow him (Matthew 8:18-22).

In Ephesians 2:8-10 Paul writes, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* This is what we are called to do as followers of Christ. Abide in Christ so that we bear fruit and walk in the good works that God has prepared for us. The Christian life properly lived bears much fruit. When asked which was the greatest commandment Jesus answered, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew 22:37-40).”

APPLY:

- **Question:** How can we focus on abiding in Jesus in our daily walk? What fruits do you see from your walk with Jesus?

- **Question:** What other parables or examples do you think of when you think of sorting the good from the bad in the bible? How do they help you understand the parable of the dragnet?

Week 4: Matthew 13:47-52

Day 4: Overview of Angels

READ: Matthew 13:49

EXPLORE:

The term angel appears over 300 times in the Bible, but sadly there is still great confusion over who they are and what they do.

Angels are spiritual beings who have intelligence, emotions, and will. This is true of both the heavenly and fallen angels. Since they are spiritual beings, they do not have a physical body (therefore no gender), but can take a body on from time to time (Gen 18-19; Jdg 13; Mk 16:5; Lk 2:9-15). Angels possess intelligence (Matt 8:29; 2 Cor 11:3; 1 Pet 1:12; Heb 1:14), show emotion (Lk 2:13; Jas 2:19; Rev 12:17), and exercise will (Lk 8:28-31; 2 Tim 2:26; Jude 6).

Angels are typically categorized into different ranks or orders, such as seraphim, cherubim, and archangels. This hierarchy is also seen in fallen angels with the various powers and principalities.

Seraphim – The term "seraphim" is derived from the Hebrew word "sarap," meaning "to burn," and they are often associated with fire and light. They are considered the highest order of angels because of their proximity to God and are described as having a fiery appearance, six wings, and are in constant worship around the throne of God (Isa 6).

Cherubim – Cherubim are depicted as powerful, winged celestial beings acting as guardians. We see them first appear guarding Eden after the fall (Gen 3:24). They serve to magnify God's holiness and are depicted in the design of the sacred things (tabernacle, temple, ark of the covenant). Ezekiel's vision describes them with four faces (man, lion, ox, eagle) and four wings (Ezk 1; 10; Rev 4:6-9).

Archangels – The term "archangel" signifies a high-ranking angel, a chief messenger of God. Michael and Gabriel are the only two archangels named in the Bible. Michael is depicted as a warrior angel and leader of God's armies (Dan 12, Rev 12). He is associated with protecting God's people and fighting against evil. Gabriel delivers important messages

from God (Dan 8) which includes the birth announcements of John the Baptist and Jesus (Lk 1). Lucifer (Satan) is not explicitly categorized, but he was once a high-ranking angel who rebelled against God (Isa 14:12-23; Ezk 28:12-19).

Other things we know:

- Angels' appearances are often accompanied by a sense of awe and fear, with their presence sometimes causing those they encounter to feel intimidated.
- Angels have various roles, including protecting believers which is where we get the idea of guardian angels (Ps 91:11; Mt 18:10).
- Angels minister to the saints (Heb 1:13-14). They are mighty ones who execute God's will (Ps 103:20-21). They obey His voice, delight to keep His commands, and accomplish His goal. They serve to call attention to the greatness of God.
- Angels are an entirely different order of being than humans. Human beings do NOT become angels after they die.
- God created the angels but not in His image and likeness.
- There are myriads and myriads of angels.
- Fallen angels are not offered redemption through Jesus.
- Angels are not all-knowing, all-powerful, or omnipresent.
- Angels are not chubby babies or people with wings.

BIG IDEA: Jesus is Superior to the angels. Worship Him!

APPLY:

- **Question:** Angels serve, protect, and minister with complete obedience to God. Do you?
- **Assignment:** Write out Colossians 1:16.

Week 4: Matthew 13:47-52

Day 5: The Discipled Scribe

Read: Matthew 13:51-52; 12:35; 28:19-20

EXPLORE:

Matthew 13:52 has been debated for the past 2000 years and it has various interpretations. Whereas this verse can be confusing, there are several observations that lead to a measure of clarification. First, verse 52 follows fast on the heels of verse 51 where Jesus asks his disciples whether they have understood 'these things', the parables and their meaning, to which they reply, 'Yes.' So, Jesus continues with 'therefore' or 'because you have said this' – with an eighth parable.

On balance, the first part of the verse is best rendered 'Every scribe who has been disciplined about the kingdom of heaven...'. The scribe, whoever he is, has become a disciple of the kingdom and therefore his allegiance has been transformed – he is now a disciplined scribe.

This disciplined scribe is like the 'owner of a house who brings out his treasure what is new and old'. Several observations are in order. First, the word 'treasure' or 'storehouse' (thesauros) regularly stands for what is in a person's heart (e.g. Matthew 12:35) so we must understand that this disciplined scribe is bringing things out of his understanding, personality and, yes, his very being. What he brings out are 'new things and old things' (not 'new things as well as old things'), a subtle touch that reminds the alert reader that in Matthew the gospel of the kingdom, while new, takes precedence over the old revelation and is its fulfillment. Thus, the OT promises of the Messiah and kingdom, as well as the OT laws and piety, have found their fulfillment in Jesus' person, teaching and kingdom, and the disciplined scribe of the kingdom now brings out of himself a deep understanding of these things and their transformed perspective affecting all of life.

The order is of great importance: this parable shows that a disciplined scribe has this understanding; it is not that understanding generates discipleship. Discipleship to Jesus ('therefore'), is a recognition of who He is and submission to the reign He inaugurates, and these are essential prerequisites to understanding and bringing out from oneself the rich treasures of the kingdom.

Finally, who are the 'scribes?' They are not those scribes normally affiliated with the Sadducees and Pharisees. Instead the disciplined scribe is one who has been a follower of Jesus (a disciple) who will eventually become teachers of others. This fits in admirably with how this book concludes when Jesus addressed the remaining Eleven: 'Go ... and make disciples ... teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you'. These disciplined scribes are to understand the antecedent Scriptures correctly and show others how they point to Jesus the Messiah and the dawning of the long-promised kingdom of heaven. Only Jesus' disciples can bring forth new things and old things; the Jewish teachers of the law could only bring forth old things!

BIG IDEA: Jesus is the fulfillment of the 'Old Things' and brings about the 'New Things'.

APPLY:

- How are you growing in your knowledge of how the whole Bible (New and Old Testaments) fits together – the new things and the old things? Are you only focused on the New Testament? Have you made any effort to understand how Jesus is found in the Old Testament?



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