

## WEEK 3 TEACHING GUIDE



### BIG IDEA

God's words invite a response.

### BIBLE

Matthew 13:1-23; Psalm 119:105-112;  
John 6:60-61 & 66

**WHAT?** *What are we talking about today?*

#### QUESTION | Riddle of the Week

- Welcome back to *Please Explain*, where we're talking about some things that are a little hard to understand. Ready for another riddle?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to guess the answer to the riddle below.
  - **RIDDLE:** I'm tall when I'm young, and I'm short when I'm old. What am I?
  - **ANSWER:** A candle!

#### ACTIVITY | Simile Shuffle

- You're getting pretty good at these word games, so let's see how good you are at similes. Similes are those things that compare two ideas using the word "like" or "as."
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, you'll need [oversized index cards](#), [velcro strips](#), a large marker, [washi tape](#), and a large board or blank wall. Before your teaching time, use washi tape to create a fill-in-the-blank template on the wall or board, which students will race to complete with common similes. On your board or wall, use the washi tape to create at least five rows of fill-in-the-blank similes in two columns, so two teams can compete at the same time. Each fill-in-the-blank should read "\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_." Identify at least five similes you want students to guess, write the key words on the index cards (twice, so each team can have a copy – plus some extra words to throw them off) and shuffle the cards. When you're ready to play, divide your students into two teams, give each team a stack of cards, and give them one minute to put as many cards in the right place as possible. At the end of one minute, the team with the most completed similes is the winner. Here are a few to get you started:
  - **Busy as a bee.**
  - **Awkward as a cow on roller skates.**
  - **Clean as a whistle.**
  - **Cute as a button.**
  - **Easy as apple pie.**

- Words are pretty amazing things, aren't they? We can use them for so much. We use them to share how we feel, make each other laugh, make complicated ideas clear, give instructions, and so much more. Where would we be without them?

## DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
  - **What's the weirdest word you've ever heard?**
  - **If we didn't have words, what's one way your week would have been way worse?**

## VIDEO | A Clip of a Dad Making a Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich

- Take instructions, for example. When we're reading a set of instructions, we really need them to make sense. But when we're given a set of instructions . . .
  - Some of us skip them entirely and try to figure out the task ourselves.
  - Some of us read every little detail and try to follow them perfectly.
  - So when those instructions are a little off, well, things can get kind of weird.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (2:30-5:04) of a dad following his kids' instructions on how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- Instructions can be hard to decipher at times. Take the instructions we find in the Bible for example. We might read or hear them and wonder . . .
  - But how do I actually do what God is asking?
  - Is that instruction even meant for me?
  - What if I tried doing that already and it didn't work out the way I thought it would?
- Or maybe if we're honest, like the dad in this video, we're not really trying that hard to understand the instructions God gives us. Maybe we hear what God is asking us to do and think . . .
  - Well, that doesn't sound like a very good idea.
  - That seems like too much work.
  - That doesn't sound very fun.
  - I'd rather do it my way.
- Whichever category you fall into (or maybe you fall into both, depending on the day), I get it. Trying to understand what God is trying to communicate can already be a challenge, but actually following God's instructions can be even more difficult.

## SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

## DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
  - ✪ **What are some reasons people struggle to understand God's words? Can you relate to any of those reasons?**
  - ✪ **What are some reasons people are hesitant to follow God's instructions? Can you relate to any of those reasons?**

### STORY | Talk about a time you struggled to follow God's instructions.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you struggled to follow God's instructions. This might be because you didn't understand what God wanted you to do, or because you were struggling to do it, or because you didn't want to do it, or a little bit of everything. Share why you were struggling and what held you back from doing what God said.
- When Jesus was here on earth, he understood people (like me) struggled to understand and follow God's instructions.
  - When he knew people had misunderstood what God was trying to say, Jesus cleared things up.
  - When he saw people were struggling to follow God's instructions, even though they wanted to, Jesus gave them help and encouragement.
  - And when he saw people simply didn't want to follow God's instructions, Jesus invited them to see things differently.
- One of the ways Jesus did all of this was by telling stories. These stories make people think, challenged how they lived, communicated new ideas, and connected with people's hearts (as well as their minds).

### SCRIPTURE | Matthew 13:1-9

- The stories Jesus told are often "parables," which aren't factual stories that actually happened. They're stories that communicate a message.
  - But when some people heard the parables Jesus shared, they didn't always understand what message he was trying to communicate at first. And that was actually okay with Jesus!
  - See, the stories Jesus told were meant to get people thinking. They weren't meant to confuse his followers, but get them curious about how they (and the world) could be different.
- As you listen to this story, here are a few questions to think about:
  - **What do you think this parable is about?**
  - **What is confusing about this parable?**
  - **What do you think the spiritual lesson in this story could be?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Matthew 13:1-9. If you'd like, have a few students share their answers to the questions above.

### OBJECT LESSON | Seeds & Similes

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this object lesson, prepare a board or blank wall like you did for the activity Simile Shuffle. But this time, you'll need only one column of fill-in-the-blanks. Ask students to help you identify all the similes in the parable and make guesses about what they represent. Write their answers down and add them to the board. You'll want to include:
  - **The farmer is like \_\_\_\_.**
  - **The seeds are like \_\_\_\_.**
  - **The birds are like \_\_\_\_.**
  - **The path is like \_\_\_\_.**
  - **The rocky ground is like \_\_\_\_.**
  - **The thorns are like \_\_\_\_.**
  - **The good soil is like \_\_\_\_.**
  - **The crop is like \_\_\_\_.**

### SCRIPTURE | Matthew 13:18-23

- We aren't the only ones who get confused when Jesus tells parables. Even the disciples who lived and learned directly from Jesus didn't always understand what was going on. But fortunately, Jesus took the time to explain.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Matthew 13:18-23. Adjust your similes from the previous activity with Jesus' explanation as you read.
- In this story, Jesus says God's words are like seeds, and people who hear them are like different kinds of soil.
  - First, Jesus addresses people who heard him teach, but had a hard time understanding what he meant. **Anyone ever felt that way?**
  - Next, Jesus mentions people who got excited about Jesus' message at first, but when life's challenges came, they got discouraged. **Anyone ever felt like that?**
  - Then Jesus talks about people who hear his words, but prioritize other interests, pursuits, and distractions over following Jesus. **Can anyone relate to that one?**
  - And finally, Jesus talks about people who hear his teachings, understand them, and then let his words change their lives. **Has anyone ever experienced that?**
- I'm guessing we've all been all of these people from time to time — or if you haven't, you will! That's to be expected!
- Jesus' point is that, when God speaks, we always have an opportunity to do something about what God has said. Will we let those words take root and change us . . . or not?

### DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
  - **Retell me Jesus' parable as though I've never heard it before. Then explain it to me!**
  - **Jesus talked about four different kinds of soil — how many of them can you relate to? How?**
  - ☆ **Do you think we have any control over which kind of soil we are? If so, how can we become more like the "good" soil Jesus talked about?**

### SCRIPTURE | Psalm 119:105-112

- There's a passage of Scripture in the Old Testament that can help us understand the importance of hearing the words of God and living them out. Psalm 119 is an ancient song of worship and love for the things God has said.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Psalm 119:105-112.
- Like the seed that fell on good soil, the psalmist has clearly found joy in what God says and lets those words guide them, despite the challenges they've faced.
  - For the psalmist, what God says isn't just for enjoyment or encouragement. God's words are truths they follow and act on!
  - The psalmist asks God to do something that would be helpful for us to do as well: ask for God to guide them — to give them clear instructions to follow.
- This psalm, as well as Jesus' parable, reveal that when God speaks, we're invited not just to hear the words, but to do something about them. Because **God's words invite a response.**

**NOW WHAT?** *What does God want us to do about it?*

**OBJECT LESSON | Adopt a Succulent**

- So who do you identify yourself with in Jesus' story?
  - Is it the person who struggled to understand what God was saying?
  - Or the person who has faced difficulties that have made it hard for you to believe or follow what God says?
  - Or the person who was once excited about what God had to say, but has now gotten distracted by other things?
  - Or do you feel like the person who's growing and letting God's words transform and grow you?
- No matter which type of "soil" you feel like you are today, let me tell you something. God's words aren't fragile little things. They're not easy to uproot. God's words are more like succulents — those plants that are almost impossible to kill, even if you forget to water it and your soil isn't perfect.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, purchase plenty of small succulents, [small terracotta planters](#), and [paint markers](#). Plant one succulent in each planter and arrange them on a table, along with the markers. Invite students to take a planter and some markers and decorate the planter with a Bible verse, the Big Idea, or whatever they'd like!*
- Take home one of these plants, put it somewhere you'll see it often, and see for yourself. Like this succulent . . .
  - God's words are taking root in your life already, even if you feel like you haven't done a great job responding to them in the past.
  - God's words are tough. They can withstand so much of our forgetfulness, distractions, and discouragement.
  - But when we decide to take care of the seeds God's words have planted in our hearts and minds, we'll see them grow and flourish. So how can we do that?
- **READ.** Reading God's words in the Bible is the place to start. Scripture . . .
  - Teaches us by helping us understand who God is, what Jesus wants for us, and what it means to follow Jesus in our everyday lives.
  - Encourages us by giving us promises from God to hold onto during times of complications and difficulty.
  - Inspires us by giving us examples of real people who have responded to God's words in their own ways.
- **REFLECT.** When we've heard what God has to say, there's usually some reflecting we need to do. We need to considering what God's words mean for us, what they reveal about us, and how they're inviting us to respond. So in addition to setting apart daily time to get into the Bible, what if we also . . .
  - Dedicated time to privately think about, write about, and think more deeply about what God's words say?
  - Talked to God about what we've read while we we sit quietly, or walk, or hike, or ride our bikes, or sing songs?
  - Did more research about the things we read to better understand what God is saying?
- **RESPOND.** Throughout Scripture, we have both specific instructions from God and the example Jesus gave us through his life. Through them both, we're invited to do something about what God has said by . . .
  - Loving God.
  - Loving others.
  - Serving and caring for others with our words and actions.

- Sharing the good news of Jesus with our words and actions.
- Continuing to learn and discover more about the God who made us.
- And so much more!
- **READ AND RESPOND TOGETHER.** You don't have to figure it all out by yourself. The journey you are in has been walked by millions of other people around the globe for centuries. As you connect to others and learn alongside them, your faith will continue to flourish.
- Learning how to hear and respond to God's words is a lifelong journey. Sometimes we'll be better at it than we will be at other times. But if we walk this path together, we'll have a much better chance of being like that "good" soil — the soil where God's words can take root.

## DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
  - **Read John 6:60-61 & 66. When God's words leave us feeling confused or uncomfortable, what can we do (besides giving up on Jesus)?**
  - ★ **Are you hesitating to respond to any of God's words right now? If so, what's holding you back and how can we help?**
  - **This week, what's one way you're going to respond to God's words in a new (or more consistent) way?**

## REFLECTION | The Invitation

- So now that you know you're invited to respond to God's words, will you? And if so, how?
  - Is there something you know God has said, but you've been hesitant to listen? If so, how will you respond differently this week?
  - Do you need to respond to Jesus' invitation to know God for the very first time? If so, how will you do that?
  - Do you need to simply accept the invitation to read, reflect, and respond to God's words this week? If so, how will you do that?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, purchase [plant markers](#) for every student. Place one under each seat, along with a pen. Invite them to write one way they're going to respond to God's words this week and place it in their succulent planter. As they write, play a song like "Future/Past" (John Mark McMillan) but make sure you have purchased any licenses required to do so. For more information, [read this!](#) [Here's a link](#) to preview the song for your personal use.*
- The more you respond to God's words, the more you'll find yourself longing to follow them. So when God speaks this week, remember, **God's words invite a response.**



# WEEK 3

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



Some things are hard to understand – like chemistry, verb conjugations, the blockchain, or why your friend is mad at you. When we face a problem, situation, or idea we're struggling to understand, it always helps to know someone we trust can explain it to us. When Jesus was here on earth, he spent a lot of time helping his followers understand some pretty hard-to-understand ideas about God. One of the ways Jesus often made complicated ideas simpler was by explaining them through stories and metaphors, which we call parables. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll explore four of the parables Jesus told his followers to explain four important truths about God. These parables help us see that **God's words are a firm foundation, in God's kingdom, everyone belongs, God's words invite a response**, and that **God's kingdom is always growing**.

### THIS WEEK

#### BIG IDEA

God's words invite a response.

#### BIBLE

Matthew 13:1-23; Psalm 119:105-112;  
John 6:60-61 & 66

### QUESTIONS

- What's the weirdest word you've ever heard?
- If we didn't have words, what's one way your week would have been way worse?
- What are some reasons people struggle to understand God's words? Can you relate to any of those reasons?
- What are some reasons people are hesitant to follow God's instructions? Can you relate to any of those reasons?
- Retell me Jesus' parable as though I've never heard it before. Then explain it to me!
- Jesus talked about four different kinds of soil – how many of them can you relate to? How?
- Do you think we have any control over which kind of soil we are? If so, how can we become more like the "good" soil Jesus talked about?
- Read John 6:60-61 & 66. When God's words leave us feeling confused or uncomfortable, what can we do (besides giving up on Jesus)?
- Are you hesitating to respond to any of God's words right now? If so, what's holding you back and how can we help?
- This week, what's one way you're going to respond to God's words in a new (or more consistent) way?



Share your habit stacks with each other! See if anyone has identified a habit stack that would be helpful to someone else in the group.

# WEEK 3

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers



Some things are hard to understand – like chemistry, verb conjugations, the blockchain, or why your friend is mad at you. When we face a problem, situation, or idea we're struggling to understand, it always helps to know someone we trust can explain it to us. When Jesus was here on earth, he spent a lot of time helping his followers understand some pretty hard-to-understand ideas about God. One of the ways Jesus often made complicated ideas simpler was by explaining them through stories and metaphors, which we call parables. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll explore four of the parables Jesus told his followers to explain four important truths about God. These parables help us see that **God's words are a firm foundation, in God's kingdom, everyone belongs, God's words invite a response**, and that **God's kingdom is always growing**.

## THIS WEEK

### BIG IDEA

God's words invite a response.

### BIBLE

Matthew 13:1-23; Psalm 119:105-112;  
John 6:60-61 & 66

## QUESTIONS

- What's the weirdest word you've ever heard?
- If we didn't have words, what's one way your week would have been way worse?
- Retell me Jesus' parable as though I've never heard it before. Then explain it to me!
- Jesus talked about four different kinds of soil – how many of them can you relate to? How?
- Read John 6:60-61 & 66. When God's words leave us feeling confused or uncomfortable, what can we do (besides giving up on Jesus)?
- This week, what's one way you're going to respond to God's words in a new (or more consistent) way?



Share your habit stacks with each other! See if anyone has identified a habit stack that would be helpful to someone else in the group.