

LESSON 3: KINGDOM GROWTH

This includes:

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

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

We like big, fast, and efficient things. We detest process and recoil at the idea of needing to wait for growth. But as Jesus explains it, slow and gradual growth is essential to God's kingdom. In the parables for today's lesson, we see how Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed and yeast. While both things are small and their growth process is painstakingly slow, they're also unstoppable. This lesson will help teenagers understand the process of God's kingdom and help them identify what it takes to live for God's kingdom.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** God's kingdom operates differently from the way the world might think, and he graciously invites us into his way of kingdom life.
- 2. WHY:** While God's kingdom grows slowly, it is unstoppable and is the place where true hope is found.
- 3. HOW:** Students will be encouraged to live out God's kingdom and live under Jesus' reign—in the here and now.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 13:31-35

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

Psalm 1:1-3

TEACHING PREP

**LEADER
TIP**

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

Read Matthew 13:31-35.

This passage includes one of Jesus' most well-known parables: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed." As with the other parables we're studying in our series, this parable is part of a chapter filled with teachings on the kingdom of God, and Jesus was using parables to do the teaching. In the previous lesson, we learned how the kingdom of God is like a field awaiting harvest; this time we hear that it's like a mustard seed or yeast.

The similarities may be obvious: Both involve growth and require patience. But there are also subtle differences—nuances Jesus doesn't want us to miss. Mustard seeds were one of the smallest seeds in the ancient Near Eastern world. Yeast, too, is also very small. But both can affect things in powerful ways.

Interestingly enough, mustard plants were outlawed at times in Jerusalem because they were unstoppable weeds—they weren't like a noble oak or a valuable cedar. Mustard plants spread everywhere and provided shade for birds, as Jesus mentioned in his parable. These plants were invasive and could grow nearly anywhere. Similarly, yeast works its way throughout the loaf of dough and causes it to rise. It takes time, but the whole loaf is affected by the leavening effect of yeast.

God's kingdom is similar. It may seem small and insignificant to the naked eye. It may not often be found in the "halls of power," but its growth is unstoppable. Like a mustard plant, it provides shelter from the scorching heat of this world. Like yeast, it affects everything.

The image of birds resting in the branches is significant. When people or organizations grow, we often see them become increasingly self-interested—not so with God's kingdom. With God's kingdom, growth is connected to providing shelter and being a blessing.

The kingdom of God is not fully here, but the yeast is beginning to leaven the dough—and the seed has broken and the shoots of life are springing up.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

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

- Are you ready to partner with Jesus in his unstoppable mission? Prepare yourself for a great time of conversation this week!
- Have you ever felt small or insignificant? Ever been overlooked? Come tonight—you won't regret it.

PARENT EMAIL

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

Dear parents,

We've just completed the third lesson in our "The Kingdom of God Is Like..." series. Throughout these lessons, we're focusing on parables Jesus taught in Matthew 13 about the kingdom of God. Each week we're growing in our understanding of what it means to do life as God intends—as part of his kingdom.

In this week's lesson, we spent our time examining Matthew 13:31-35. In this passage Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed and to yeast that leavens dough. Both mustard seeds and yeast look to be insignificant, but their growth—while slow—is persistent and steady. God calls us into his kingdom, where hope and belonging are available to all—even to those who often feel brushed aside.

This week, I encourage you to spend a few minutes talking with your teenager about our lesson. Consider building your conversation around these questions:

- How is God's kingdom different from some "kingdoms" of this world?
- What did you find most refreshing or encouraging from your group's conversation about the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast?
- How can you—in a real and practical way—live for God's kingdom this next week? Be as specific as possible.

Have an awesome week!

LESSON 3: KINGDOM GROWTH**2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER
TIP**

For this opening activity you'll need a small container of mustard seeds and a space that won't receive much foot traffic. The size of the space will depend on how big your group is. Designate an area of your group space and scatter some mustard seeds on the ground, on shelves, and on other things. Don't place all of the seeds in obvious places.

Also consider letting some bread dough rise during your group's gathering to give your students a visual example of yeast working through the dough to make it rise.

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

Explain to students that they are tasked with gathering all the mustard seeds in your meeting area. Set a timer for one minute and see how many seeds your teenagers can find. If you know exactly how many seeds you dispersed, see if your students are able to discover them all.

If you prepared bread dough, draw students' attention to it and explain that it'll play an important role in today's conversation.

ASK:

- *What did you notice as you searched for the mustard seeds?*
- *What adjectives would you use to describe these seeds—and the yeast in the dough?*
- *Jesus compared his kingdom to mustard seeds and yeast—as you see actual seeds and yeast, why is his comparison so surprising?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *You've had a real encounter with how small a mustard seed is. In the Bible, Jesus said that his kingdom was like a mustard seed and yeast— isn't that crazy? While far-fetched, this concept can actually offer hope. The world celebrates celebrity and forgets the "small people," like you and me. But we are not absent from Jesus' heart. He sees potential in us and wants us to grow, just as his kingdom grows.*

TEACHING POINTS**LEADER
TIP**

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

Read Matthew 13:31-35 together as a group. Because this passage is so brief, consider having students read the verses several times, from different translations of the Bible.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let's dive into these parables that compare God's kingdom to small and seemingly insignificant things: mustard seeds and yeast.*

1. JESUS' WAYS ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD'S WAYS

ASK:

- *What are two or three things that our culture defines as valuable that might not be so valuable in Jesus' eyes?*
- *What do you think God sees as valuable? Think of examples from your life, from other people's lives, and from the Bible.*
- *What sticks out to you about the passage?*
- *What parts of these parables don't make sense to you?*
- *How might the kingdom of God be different from the kingdom of this world?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *God's kingdom and the kingdom of this world are set at odds. While God's kingdom serves, the kingdom of this world advocates for self-indulgence. While God's kingdom seeks the broken, the kingdom of this world seeks to break. The good news, however, is that God's kingdom has already defeated the misguided kingdom of this world—a victory that happened through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.*

2. JESUS SEES THE POTENTIAL IN SMALL THINGS

ASK:

- *If someone says you have a lot of "potential," what does that person mean?*
- *What similarities do the yeast and the mustard seed share, and why are those similarities significant?*
- *Why would Jesus choose a mustard seed to describe the kingdom?*
- *How do a mustard seed and yeast have unseen potential?*
- *If Jesus sees potential in small things, what potential do you think he sees in our group? What are our group's strengths—both hidden and visible?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *You have all kinds of potential. It's absolutely true. And as a group, we have tons of potential. But that potential only starts to come alive as we daily surrender our lives to Jesus and recognize that true change and power happen in and through him. Potential is unleashed when we live for his kingdom, not ours.*

3. JESUS-FUELED GROWTH IS UNSTOPPABLE

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Lots of things grow for a little while but then stop. It's true for our bodies: At a certain age, we just stop growing, and eventually—once we're old—we shrink. Not so with God's kingdom. It*

grows like a seed, like yeast—it keeps pressing outward, constantly expanding. We'll likely experience times of not seeing any visible growth, but we can rest assured that while God's kingdom isn't always in a hurry, its growth is unstoppable.

ASK:

- Think about a time you felt like you weren't growing spiritually. How did that season of life affect your perspective on being a follower of Jesus?
- As you read Jesus' description of the growth of the mustard seed and the yeast, what do you think that would look like in your own life?
- How can you find encouragement from this passage if you've ever wrestled with feeling insignificant or being overlooked?
- When have you experienced huge amounts of spiritual growth? How can those experiences help you endure the dry, slow seasons of life?

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

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



ASK:

- Share an example of a story that communicates a powerful truth—not a story from the Bible but from a book, a movie, a TV show, or somewhere else.
- Look at Matthew 13:34. Why would Jesus use parables and stories so often when talking to the crowds of people?
- Read Psalm 1:1-3. The person is compared to a growing tree—how does that person grow? What fuels the growth process?
- What do you think it means to never wither?

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

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- What do you think Jesus wants you to really, truly hear today?
- Have you found yourself pursuing the kingdom of this world recently? If so, how can you live differently? What will it take?
- How can you—in a real and practical way—live for God's kingdom this next week? Be as specific as possible.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *If you feel small at any point this next week, know that Jesus sees potential in you—to him you're not insignificant and he will never overlook you. He sees you as you truly are: significant, valued, and loved. For that potential to be unleashed, live under his reign. Live for him and his kingdom!*

SUMMARY



LEADER
TIP

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

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

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

"Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables" (Matthew 13:34).