

Story 8: The Workers in the Vineyard

This Bible study focuses on a passage from the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. Stories that Make You Think:

Matthew 20:1-16

Objective:

To understand the principle that God is kinder to us than we deserve, lavishly showering his gifts upon us with great generosity. We should be thankful for his gracious treatment of us and never begrudge the similar kindness he bestows on others.

Introductory Questions:

1. Jesus told many stories to describe what the kingdom of heaven is like. What do you think he might mean by the term “kingdom of heaven?”
2. Who would be the ruler in heaven?
3. Who would be the subjects?
4. How could someone know what the kingdom is like?

Introduction:

Jesus told the story we are going to read just after an encounter with a rich man. Jesus said the rich man needed to sell his possessions, give them to the poor, and come and follow Jesus. The rich man went away when he heard this. Jesus then commented to his followers that it was very hard for a rich man to enter God’s kingdom. His followers were shocked when they heard this because they believed wealth to be a sign of God’s blessing. But Jesus ended the conversation with the following cryptic though, which he also used several other times in other contexts. The thought was: “Many that are first shall be last, and many that are first shall be last.” Then he proceeded to tell the following story.

Reading the Passage:

Have the group read the passage has a role play. Assign the following parts:

- Narrator (Jesus)
- Landowner
- Worker hired at the end of the day
- Worker hired early in the morning

Have the group read the passage silently to find out their lines. Then have the group read the passage aloud.

Questions:

1. Jesus started and ended the story with the phrase, "Many who are now first will be last, and the last first." How is this idea illustrated in this story?
2. What is your reaction to the story? Are you indifferent? Angry? Why?
3. Imagine you were one of the early risers. How did you feel at first when the latecomers were given a day's wage?
4. How did you feel later on when you were paid the same thing?
5. Suppose you were one of the latecomers? How did you feel about the situation?
6. What if you were one of those who had been hired at midday?
7. What do you think about the owner of the vineyard? Is he just? Generous? A good business man?
8. Would this be a practical way to run a business every day?
9. Is Jesus trying to teach us how to run a business?
10. Who do you think the owner of the vineyard represents, if this story is like the kingdom of heaven?
11. Whom do the workers represent?
12. What do you think is the main point Jesus was trying to make?
13. What do you think he meant by the phrase, "Many that are last shall be first, and the first last?"
14. How does this relate to the kingdom of heaven?
15. Is it better to be an early riser or a late comer in the kingdom of heaven?
16. Who do you identify with in the story - the early risers? the late comers? Why?

17. What type of person needs to hear this story the most?

18. What do you think Jesus' intent was in telling it?

19. How would you apply this story to your life?

20. How do you think Jesus wants you to live?

Closing:

Ask if anyone has any thoughts or questions related to Jesus' story. Close with a prayer thanking God for his kindness.