



## Your Kingdom Come March 9 | Group Guide (Men)

### Opening questions (for mixed groups beginning their time together)

1. What did God's Word from the sermon this past week challenge you with? What resonated? What did it stir in you?
2. (For men to answer) What can you share that would be helpful for the women in your group to hear from your *Fighting Shadows* reading this week?

*Pray for your time together. Invite one of the men to pray for the women's discussion and one of the women to pray for the men's discussion. Then, dismiss to your separate discussion locations.*

### Fighting Shadows Introduction

Welcome to Week 4! Our topic? *Shame*. As you circle up with each other, may you remember how deep the gift of friendship is and may you experience the rich blessing of walking in step with your brothers.

### Guiding Principles

1. *Grace – We receive one another with a heavy dose of grace. We embody Jesus' words: "Neither do I condemn you." Allow that to set the tone here. This is a space where honesty and vulnerability are essential. There is no hiding here.*
2. *Brevity – No one should dominate the space. Keep your sharing honest, deep and succinct so everyone has time to share.*



3. *Questions, Not Advice – Focus more on listening and asking one another questions. Ask, “Is there anything more you’d like to say about this? What do you need from us right now? How can we pray for you?”*

4. *High Calling – Call one another to holiness (cheer each other on and hold one another to a high standard. This emulates Christ’s encouragement to “Go and sin no more!”)*

**Pray together to begin your discussion.**

**Ask someone in your group to read Genesis 3:1-10 and Romans 8:1-4.**

**Genesis 3:1-10**, “1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” 4 “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” 10 He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

**Romans 8:1-4**, “1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his



*own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

### Questions for reflection:

Shame is primal. It has been embedded in our souls ever since the garden of Eden. It's the sense that there is fundamentally something wrong with me.

- How does the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden illustrate the origins of shame? What does it cause Adam and Eve to do?
- In what ways has this primal emotion affected or manifested itself in your life over the years? How is it manifesting itself in your life today?

Here's the truth: If we let shame win, our true self, the image of God in us being formed into Jesus' likeness, slowly begins to corrode, to dissipate, to crumble.

- How has shame resulted in corrosion, dissipation, or a crumbling of your sense of self, your relationship with God, or your relationships? Explain.
- Similarly, in what ways has the lie "I need to do everything possible to prevent people from seeing my failures and weaknesses" impacted your sense of self, your relationship with God, or your relationships?

If shame brings corrosion, what happens if we defiantly stay in the light? **Glory.** The lie shame tells us is that if we're vulnerable, the world will fall apart. In fact, the opposite is true: moments of sharing are when we tend to find mending and healing. God invites us not to religiously modify or medicate our shame. He offers to heal our shame. And for that to happen, we need to drag our shame into God's presence, where he speaks not just about us but to us, telling us the truth about who we are and how he sees us.



- In what ways have you experienced God's delight in you, even in your imperfections? How can embracing this truth change your perspective on shame?

Hiding is easy. It destroys us in the end, but it's easy in the moment. But living in the light? Fighting the shadows? That's where life is.

- How might practicing vulnerability in our group help combat the shadow of shame, and what steps can the group take to create a safe environment for sharing our struggles?
- Read **1 John 1:9**. Is there anything in your life (a hurt, a stronghold, a sin, etc.) you need to share with this group? Something you'd like prayer for that you're keeping hidden?

*Spend time praying over individuals who share.*

**Take Away:** This week, work to commit BOTH Romans 8:1 and 1 John 1:9 to memory.

**Pray to end your time together.**

### **Your Kingdom Come March 9 | Leader Guide (Women)**

*For the weeks of February 16 – April 6, life group content will be different for men and women. The men will spend time discussing the book Fighting Shadows while the women will continue a study of Matthew, with a special emphasis on prayer.*

In this guide, you will find **leader's notes** with helpful information to explain the rhythm of the evening. We encourage you to read these notes *before* group starts.

You will also find **specific instructions** for how to guide members of your life group through each experience *during* your meeting in *italics*.



Anything that you need to say/read to the group during your meeting time will be in regular type. You may of course put these thoughts in your own words.

Encourage each member of your group to print or download this week's participant's guide; if possible, you may wish to provide a copy for each person.

**Opening questions (for mixed groups beginning their time together) (10 minutes).**

1. What did God's Word from the sermon this past week challenge you with? What resonated? What did it stir in you?
2. (For men to answer) What can you share that would be helpful for the women in your group to hear from your *Fighting Shadows* reading this week?

*Pray for your time together. Invite one of the men to pray for the women's discussion and one of the women to pray for the men's discussion.*

*Dismiss to your separate discussion locations.*

**Experiencing God's Word.**

Matthew 13 contains multiple parables. In the midst of his teaching, Jesus' followers ask him about his use of this teaching method. Before we read the parables, let's read what Jesus had to say about them.

*Have someone read Matthew 13:10-17 and Matthew 13:34-35.*

- What explanation do these passages offer for why Jesus spoke in parables?
- What (if anything) is surprising to you about this explanation?

There seems to be a distinction between those who have ears to hear and hearts to receive the messages of the parables, and those who do not. Tonight, we will spend time contemplating several parables. Let's ask God to give us ears to hear and hearts to receive!

*Pray (or invite someone to pray) for the ability to hear the messages of Jesus' parables.*



## **Movement 1**

*Ask someone to read Matthew 13:1-9 and Matthew 13:18-23.*

Jesus' explanation of this parable is a helpful key to understanding many other parables. Here are a few principles to keep in mind:

- Parables are most often about some aspect of how things work in the kingdom of heaven
- Each parable generally hones in on one specific element of the kingdom. Watch where the focus is. For example, we could draw all kinds of inaccurate conclusions about God if we got too caught up in correlating him to the farmer in this parable, who seems, frankly, irresponsible (although generous in where he casts his seeds). The focus of this parable is on the "soil" – in other words, "anyone who hears the message about the kingdom" (verse 19) and not about the character of the farmer.
- Parables are a good illustration of how the Bible was written *for us* but not necessarily *to us*. Jesus, as the excellent teacher he is, uses illustrations that would have been familiar to his original audience; sometimes we need some context to understand what's happening in the parable itself before we begin to interpret it. But also, because he often uses illustrations about the natural world, farming, and human relationships, there is much that is consistent and easily graspable, even 2000 years later.

The Parable of the Sower helps us understand why people respond to hearing the message of the Gospel so differently. It's an explanation of the nature of reality.

- Which type of soil best describes the condition of your own heart?
- Are there people you care about who have responded to the Gospel in one of the first three ways?

Let's spend some time praying for the soil condition of our own hearts, and at least one other person whose heart "soil" is like the path, the rocky ground, or the thorns.

*Consider breaking into groups of two or three for this time of prayer.*



## Movement 2

Ask someone to read Matthew 13:24-30, someone to read Matthew 13:36-43, and someone to read Matthew 13:47-50.

Jesus moves from reflecting on how people receive the news of the kingdom to the consequences for those who don't "hear the word and understand it" (verse 23).

- What do the "weeds" and "net" parables have in common?
- What explanation do they offer for why evil people remain in the world?
- What questions or thoughts do you have as you reflect on these descriptions of the kingdom of heaven?

The images of the "weeds" being tied into bundles and burned, or the "bad fish" being disposed of, or the angels throwing the wicked "into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" aren't the parts of Jesus' teaching that some of us prefer to notice. But they are unquestionably a part of His message. (The phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" occurs six times in Matthew's Gospel.) Jesus is drawing our attention to the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous.

*Have someone read Romans 3:10-26.*

- How does the Romans passage shape your understanding of the Parables of the Weeds and the Net?

*If your group does not draw this conclusion themselves, consider pointing out that we are all "weeds" and "bad fish." It is the work of Christ, not our own righteousness, that saves us.*

**Leader's Note:** People are often startled by the words of Jesus that reveal God's judgment. Passages such as Matthew 12:47-50 may make us uncomfortable. It can be helpful to remind people that while God is a just judge who will give people the consequences of their sin (e.g. eternal separation from Him in hell), it ultimately His desire that none should ever suffer that fate (see 2 Peter 3:9). God's work throughout Scripture (and history) is toward redemption, which He offers freely to all. The parables of the weeds and the net need to be read in light of the actions of the farmer in Parable of the Sower, who spreads his seed everywhere. It is not the fault of the sower or the seed when the ground does not yield a crop, but of the soil.



Conversations about final judgment can be particularly painful for people who have lost loved ones who were not believers. Be sensitive to the group but avoid the urge to downplay God's truth.

*Invite your group into a time of prayerful reflection on the reality of final judgment and the gift of salvation. Encourage people to express their questions, confusion, thankfulness, and fears to God. Remind them that life group and prayer should both be safe spaces where we can be authentic – nothing healthy happens hidden in the darkness.*

*Close this time of prayer with these words from Psalm 51: Have mercy on us, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion, blot out our transgressions. Wash away all our iniquity and cleanse us from our sin. (Psalm 51:1-2; pronouns changed from me/my to us/our.)*

### **Movement 3**

*Have someone read Matthew 13:31-35 and Matthew 13:44-46.*

In each of these passages, Jesus uses two images to convey a similar message.

- In verses 31-45, Jesus compares to the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed and to yeast. What characteristics of the kingdom of heaven does He invite us to notice with this comparison?
- In verses 44-46, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a hidden treasure and an expensive pearl. What do these comparisons teach us about what our attitude toward the kingdom of heaven should be?
- How is your attitude toward the kingdom of heaven similar to or different from the man who sold all he had to purchase a hidden treasure or a pearl?

Leader's Note: The "kingdom of heaven" (or elsewhere the "kingdom of God") is a confusing phrase for some people. Is it the place we go when we die? Is it the new heaven and earth Jesus will establish when He returns? Is it happening here and now?

The answer is "yes." Matthew begins his account of Jesus' ministry with these words: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (Matthew 4:17). Jesus' earthly ministry ushered in the beginning of the kingdom of heaven, but it will not reach its culmination until the events described at the end of Revelation,





where Jesus appears with “King of kings and Lord of lords” written on His robe and thigh (Revelation 19:16).

Theologian George Eldon Ladd describes the kingdom of heaven as a situation, not a physical place – in his terms, a “rule” not a “realm.” The kingdom of heaven is not currently found in a specific land with geographic boundaries, but wherever God’s will is being done. Ladd describes the kingdom of heaven as “already but not yet.” In the time between Christ’s first and second coming, there are pockets of the kingdom of heaven wherever faithful followers of Jesus serve Him (that’s the “already”). When Christ returns, the kingdom of heaven will come to its full fruition (that’s the “not yet”).

The Parables of the Weeds and the Net identify this tension. The Parables of the Mustard Seed, Yeast, Hidden Treasure, and Pearl show how we can engage with the “already” part of the kingdom while eagerly awaiting the “not yet.”

*Use the words below to lead into a time of prayerful reflection over our posture toward the kingdom of heaven.*

In Matthew 6:9-10 (the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer), Jesus teaches us to pray that God’s kingdom come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What are the places in your life where you are longing for God’s kingdom to come?

The full realization of kingdom of heaven will be a restored Eden – no more sorrow or death. Let’s pray our requests to God, telling Him about the places where our hearts are heavy. Where we feel the weight of the “not yet.”

*Invite group members to “pray their requests” and model how to pray for others by offering up prayers of agreement to the requests. If you have a larger group or are running short on time, you can pray in groups of 2-3.*

*Close your time of prayer with these words: Father, may your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And may we desire your kingdom more than anything else.”*



### **Prayer for Men's Study (10 minutes).**

This week, *Fighting Shadows* addresses the shadow of shame. Tyson and Bethke explain that shame is different from guilt. Guilt points to an action we have done and can lead us to repentance. Shame points to our worth as a person. When we feel shame, we believe that there is something fundamentally wrong with us, which makes it difficult to receive love or forgiveness. Shame makes us hide from others and from God – just as Adam and Eve did in the garden – and makes deep relationship with God or others impossible.

Psalm 34:5 tells that those who look to the Lord “are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.”

*Invite one or two women to pray that the men of The Creek will “look to the Lord” and be free from the shadow of shame.*

### **Closing (5 minutes).**

Feel free to join the men for this closing time if that's a practical option for your group. *Invite someone to read Psalm 34 as a closing prayer over your group.*

## **Your Kingdom Come**

### **March 9 | Participant Guide (Women)**

#### **Opening questions (for mixed groups beginning their time together)**

1. What did God's Word from the sermon this past week challenge you with? What resonated? What did it stir in you?
2. (For men to answer) What can you share that would be helpful for the women in your group to hear from your *Fighting Shadows* reading this week?

*Pray for your time together. Invite one of the men to pray for the women's discussion and one of the women to pray for the men's discussion. Then dismiss to your separate discussion locations.*



## **Experiencing God's Word**

Read Matthew 13:10-17 and Matthew 13:34-35.

- What explanation do these passages offer for why Jesus spoke in parables?
- What (if anything) is surprising to you about this explanation?

### **Movement 1**

Read Matthew 13:1-9 and Matthew 13:18-23.

*Your leader will guide a time of prayer for the "soil" of our own and others' hearts.*

### **Movement 2**

Read Matthew 13:24-30, 13:36-43, and 13:47-50.

- What do the "weeds" and "net" parables have in common?
- What explanation do they offer for why evil people remain in the world?
- What questions or thoughts do you have as you reflect on these descriptions of the kingdom of heaven?

Read Romans 3:10-26.

- How does the Romans passage shape your understanding of the Parables of the Weeds and the Net?

### **Movement 3**

Read Matthew 13:31-35 and Matthew 13:44-46.

- In verses 31-45, Jesus compares to the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed and to yeast. What characteristics of the kingdom of heaven does he invite us to notice with this comparison?



- In verses 44-46, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a hidden treasure and an expensive pearl. What do these comparisons teach us about what our attitude toward the kingdom of heaven should be?
- How is your attitude toward the kingdom of heaven similar to or different from the man who sold all he had to purchase a hidden treasure or a pearl?

In Matthew 6:9-10, Jesus teaches us to pray that God's kingdom come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. What are the places in your life where you are longing for God's kingdom to come?

Let's pray our requests to God, sharing the places where our hearts are heavy.

### **Prayer for Men's Study**

This week, *Fighting Shadows* addresses the shadow of shame. Shame makes us hide from others and from God – just as Adam and Eve did in the garden – and makes deep relationship with God or others impossible. Psalm 34:5 tells that those who look to the Lord “are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.”

*Invite one or two women to pray that the men of The Creek will “look to the Lord” and be free from the shadow of shame.*

### **Closing**

Someone will read Psalm 34 as a closing prayer over your group.

### **Your Kingdom Come March 9 | Couple's Discussion**

To help us stay connected with our spouse during these weeks when Life Groups are separated by gender, we are providing a small conversation piece for couples. Our hope is that you will take a moment, whether it's brief or a night out to dinner, and check in with each other and see how our lessons may be connected, how we can pray for each other, and what Jesus is doing in our life.



Matthew 13 starts with a parable about seeds; something many people in Jesus' day would be familiar with. Jesus tells a story about seeds being scattered on the ground where they land on hard, rocky, thorny, and good soil. The seeds respond according to the type of soil they land on; hard – can't penetrate the ground so they **die**; rocky – they start to grow but can't establish roots, so they **die**; thorny – grow but are choked by all the weeds and **die**; good – the seeds take root and grow...they **LIVE!**

Later, Jesus explains the meaning of the story to his disciples. He says the soil represents people's hearts and the seed is God's Word...if our heart is hard, or shallow or distracted it will prevent his word from doing everything it is capable of...if our heart is healthy and seeking God, his word will do more for us than we can imagine.

Many times, it is **SHAME** that makes our heart hard, or shallow or distracted. God has forgiven us, accepted us, extended grace to us...but we have not forgiven ourselves, or accepted ourselves, or extended grace to ourselves. We have held on to things that God has seen through and loved us the same...if the behavior is sinful, he demands we stop it immediately...but that doesn't impact his love for us...but our love for ourselves impacts our acceptance of his grace.

1. Is shame creating a barrier between you and your wife/husband? a. If so, identify the shame, where it is coming from, and try to understand how it is impacting your marriage.
2. Identify a couple you and your spouse can invite to your house for a meal or can meet somewhere for coffee or a meal.
3. Pray together four times this week, asking Jesus to give you Godly friendships to do life with.