

Small Group Discussion Guide

Stories with Intent – The Parables of Jesus

The Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1–16

Big Idea

When God’s goodness looks unfair, check your eyes.

1. Warm-Up (10 minutes)

(Goal: Surface the emotional tension of comparison before entering the text.)

1. Have you ever been genuinely happy for someone — and disappointed at the same time? What made it complicated?
2. Why do you think someone else’s blessing can sometimes feel like your loss?
3. Where do you see “invisible ladders” in our culture — ways people measure who’s ahead or behind?

Transition: Jesus tells this parable because His disciples were thinking in terms of ladders, rewards, and rankings (see Matthew 19). Let’s look carefully at what He says.

2. Inductive Bible Study (20–25 minutes)

Observation – What Does the Text Say?

1. Read Matthew 20:1–16 aloud. What details stand out?
2. Who is the focus at the end of the parable — the late workers, the landowner, or the early workers?
3. What agreement did the first workers make with the landowner?
4. What exact question does the landowner ask in verse 15?

Key phrase: “Or are you envious because I am generous?”
(Literally: “Is your eye evil because I am good?”)

Interpretation – What Does It Mean?

5. Why do you think Jesus ends the parable with the grumbling of the first workers instead of celebration?
6. What does the phrase “evil eye” reveal about the real issue?
7. How were the first workers seeing God’s goodness incorrectly?
8. How does this connect to the context:
 - The rich young man
 - Peter’s question (“What then will there be for us?”)
 - “The first will be last and the last will be first”

Key Insight:

The problem is not the landowner’s generosity. The problem is the workers’ eyes.

3. Application & Discussion (20 minutes)

A. How the Evil Eye Sees

1. The evil eye compares.

9. Where are you most tempted to compare your life to others?
10. How does comparison affect your joy and gratitude?

(You may reference the Olympic medal study: silver compares upward, bronze compares downward. Same podium. Different comparison point.)

2. The evil eye calculates.

11. Do you ever find yourself quietly calculating what you believe you deserve from God?
 12. What assumptions about God are revealed when we think He “owes” us?
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3. The evil eye complains.

13. When something feels unfair in your life, what is your instinctive response — trust or complaint?

B. How the Kingdom Eye Sees

1. The Kingdom eye celebrates.

14. What would it look like to genuinely celebrate someone else's blessing this week?
15. Who in your life might need your encouragement instead of your quiet comparison?
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2. The Kingdom eye confesses who God is.

Read verses 13–15 again.

16. What do these verses teach us about God's character?
- Generous
 - Just
 - Free
17. How does remembering that "the earth is the Lord's" reshape how you respond to His decisions?
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3. The Kingdom eye coalesces around God's goodness.

18. Where do status distinctions subtly show up in the church?
19. What practical steps can we take to resist favoritism and cultivate oneness?
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4. Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

Ask everyone to reflect quietly:

- When God's goodness looks unfair in your life right now, what are your eyes focused on?
- Are you looking at someone else's ladder — or at the cross?

Remind the group:

Jesus tells this parable, and then immediately predicts His death.
The cross is the ultimate example of goodness that looks unfair.
Grace is never earned. It is given.

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to pray:

- Confessing comparison and envy.
- Thanking God for His generosity and justice.
- Asking for Kingdom eyes.
- Asking the Spirit to redirect their focus to the cross.