

JESUS' STORY BOOK

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- survey the parables unique to Luke's gospel and find themes running through them
- understand what a parable is and is not
- discover the diverse methods Jesus employed to teach the crowds, those hostile to him, and his followers
- explore the ways that people learn today and develop a procedure for teaching and motivating through a particular lesson
- develop a profile of a faithful Christian disciple
- write a parable

[Process Objectives]

- work collaboratively to define a "parable"
- give equal time to each other for sharing their own parables

[Relational Objectives]

- be unafraid to share at a more personal level about disturbances or difficulties
- deepen their prayer for one another based on accumulated personal knowledge of each participant

A PARTICULARLY HELPFUL RESOURCE

Indispensable to a serious study of the parables of Jesus in Luke is the work of Kenneth E. Bailey, who lived in the Middle East for decades and compiled his biblical and cultural understanding into a detailed explanation of Jesus' stories. Still in print and available as a combined edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983):

Poet & Peasant, and

Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 54-57)

Continuing on the path of discovering Jesus' methods of teaching (as well as the content of what he taught), this lesson focuses on his use of parables.

Upon the advice of parable scholar Kenneth E. Bailey, we look at three basic elements: 1) the points of contact with the real world used in the story; 2) the response expected of the original listener when Jesus first told the parable; and 3) the beliefs that inform and motivate the listener to respond appropriately and whole-heartedly to Jesus' teaching.

2 — Understanding Jesus in the World of Luke

We are acting on some foundational assumptions in relation to these three elements:

1. Parables are not allegories. They are meant to teach one basic point rather than reveal a constellation of symbols with individual lessons attached. Each story has a “basic lesson,” beyond which the group is over-analyzing . . . so be careful!

Here’s one scholar’s definition of a parable:

“A parable is a literary creation in narrative form designed either

- to portray a type of character for warning or example or
- to embody a principle of God’s governance of the world and [people].”

—T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*. 2nd edition (Cambridge: University Press, 1935), 65.

2. Parables in particular were meant to be heard and applied to real life; a response is expected either in changed behavior / attitude or in the adoption of a different way of seeing God and the world.

3. Jesus often revealed a worldview that put his instruction into perspective, either in terms of rewards or implication. Somehow in each parable, Jesus identifies an intrinsically motivating factor he felt would make the difference between obedience and indifference to his teaching. [This is captured in the question, “According to Jesus, what motivates us to follow him in this particular matter?”] These are generally more long-term motivators, like “resurrection of the righteous” in Luke 14:1-14. So it is helpful also to put into our own words what might motivate us in the short-term to do what Jesus says. This question for each parable calls for honesty and perhaps creativity; but don’t expect the motivators always to be “benefits,” for there is a cost in this life to following Christ as a disciple. That is to say, sometimes what motivates us in the short-term is simply knowing we are doing the right thing despite the pain or discomfort it causes.

PAGE 54 & 55 NOTES:

Seven parables unique to Luke are listed here to practice our interpretive skills:

Luke 10:25-37 (The Good Samaritan): If someone needs help, and you’re there, you’ve got a new neighbor! Don’t let rules or dirt keep you from doing what is right.

Luke 14:14 (Humility Etiquette): Don’t promote yourself or expect honor. Look for ways to deflect honor to other people. Give to be generous, not to buy people’s loyalty or put them in debt.

Luke 14:15-24 (Great Banquet Excuses): Respond to Jesus’ invitation to “come to the banquet”—no excuses! On Christ’s behalf, invite those who want to come to respond to his gospel.

Luke 14:25-35 (Count the Cost): It’s going to cost you a lot to follow Jesus, but ultimately it’s worth it. Don’t be afraid of losing (or gaining) your reputation, relationships, or responsibilities—be Christ’s disciple because he is the Best One to learn from and live for!

Luke 15:8-10 (Lost Coin): God is out searching for the lost—we should, too. Help people appreciate that God has not lost sight of them.

Luke 15:11-32 (Prodigal Son, Resentful Brother): *Repent* of your sin. *Return* to the Father. *Receive* the grace that God offers, and be willing to give grace also. *Rejoice* in the transformation that comes with faith.

Luke 17:1-10 (Basic Instructions About the Christian Life): Don't cause others to sin, and forgive those who sin against you. Faith starts small, but accomplishes a lot. Do your Christian duty without expecting fanfares or rewards. Serving Christ is about living a quiet, faithful life without expectation of recognition.

Themes of these parables may relate to each other. For instance, I linked

- Humility Etiquette with Basic Instructions, because they both promote humility and deflecting honor.
- Good Samaritan links with Count the Cost. Go out of your way to help and make serving Christ your priority.
- Lost Coin links with Prodigal Son, both about the Seeker (God) looking out for the sought until they are found and reunited.
- Lost Coin and Great Banquet Excuses each urge that seeking out the lost and bringing them in as “found” is a picture of God's pursuing love of us, despite our backgrounds or significance.

The basic lesson Jesus seems to be teaching is to put Jesus Christ first and let wealth, reputation, convenience and societal norms be of less importance.

PAGE 56 & 57 NOTES:

The features of a parable can be determined by looking at our sample of seven. What they have in common are ordinary life situations and characters, a simple plot line, one lesson emphasized through its telling, and a reference to the bigger picture of faith or God's economy.

What makes parables an effective teaching method is that they draw you into the story and involve you in the choices of the characters. Involvement is always a positive thing when it comes to teaching and learning.

Everyone's answer is going to be different regarding ways they've learned important lessons. My list included: almost making a Big Mistake; parents' instruction; watching the good example of others; and accumulated experiences in a foreign country where all my assumptions were challenged on a daily basis.

Jesus demonstrated diverse teaching methods:

- lecture (Luke's equivalent to the Sermon on the Mount)
- parables

4 — *Understanding Jesus in the World of Luke*

- object lessons (e.g. 11:33ff, a lamp to be seen)
- questions (“Who do you say that I am?”)
- Modeling appropriate behavior (Luke 8:22-25, calm through a storm)
- Sending out on assignment (Luke 10, the two-by-two mission)
- negative example (the Pharisees in Luke 12:1-12)
- capitalizing on teachable moments (e.g. Luke 12:13f)

The reference in fine print (bottom of page 57) is to prophet Nathan’s truth-telling parable to King David in 2 Samuel 12. The point of this reference is to demonstrate that even the wealthy and privileged David could be reached *only* by use of a parable. It is not dumbed-down teaching, but a very effective tool for getting an important point across!

What Jesus taught—the content of his message—helps us profile the faithful disciple.

Character: selfless, humble, persevering, faithful

Attitude: reverence for God, compassion for the needy and outcast, deference toward others, optimistic (Kingdom and eternal mindset), doing “right” is more important than “rules”

Action: responsive to physical needs, believing in Jesus and responding to his invitation, hospitality toward all regardless of their social status, generosity, pursuit of the lost, celebration of spiritual progress.

The question about motivating a child to adopt a Jesus-like quality requires you to have in your mind’s eye a particular child who might need a particular lesson. For instance, I’m thinking of an eight-year-old boy who somehow missed the memo on “gratitude.” I would go about developing a “lesson” for this child by following these steps:

1. know what God means by “gratitude,” i.e. a recognition of what has been done for me and what that cost the giver, with an accompanying feeling of indebtedness and unworthiness

2. translate that knowledge into learning objectives (just like we’ve done with each lesson in this Luke study) appropriate to the child. So, for instance, when the child has learned the lesson about gratitude, he will actually notice when nice things have been done or given to him, he will regularly give verbal thanks when things are given or done for him, he will write thank-you notes when he receives gifts, and he will develop a general attitude of thanksgiving that supplants a sense of entitlement.

3. devise learning activities to help with the practice of this quality. In this case, practice saying thanks and writing notes, conduct “idle” chatter (à la Deut. 6:7) that notices the kind things people are doing around him, have a particularly grateful person come over for dinner and share his/her story . . . and make the most of your next Thanksgiving holiday!

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGE 58)

Open your meeting with prayer that you will all be open to the lessons Jesus has been trying to teach *you* lately.

PAGE 58 NOTES:

Help the participants brainstorm the features that are always present, and sometimes present, in the parables. This will enable you to come up with a definition. Then give them the chance to share their favorites and their most disturbing encounters in Jesus' stories. The texts are somewhat familiar to anyone who has spent time in the gospels, so this discussion affords your group the opportunity to go a little deeper. The idea is not to belabor your analysis of the parable, but to go deeper in its implications for personal and corporate life.

Some might have had trouble with the interpretation of the parables, so the next section gives an opportunity to explore that difficulty a bit more. The reasons for difficulty can relate to Bible study experience, spiritual readiness, or social support. Be the sort of group that can accept a person's reasons for having a hard time, without being judgmental about it.

Teachable moments are those occasions when an event or circumstance calls you up short, and a lesson must be learned in order to move on. Asking the participants to recall one such event in the previous week opens them to the possibility that Jesus is actively teaching them—a new thought for some. Sometimes identifying a teachable *moment* also identifies the *lesson*!

Welcome the sharing of parables written during the week, and affirm them and the story-teller with genuine gratitude and affection.

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

In preparation for your closing prayer time, you might ask each person to state what he or she wants to learn from Jesus this coming week (or month). Have each participant pray for the person on his or her right according to the requests that have been made.

Please remind the folks that the next (and last) lesson in the series requires them to read the entire gospel of Luke in one setting (or as close to that as possible). The idea here is to give them the experience of reading the whole story as a continuous narrative, which may bring to light some new perspective not possible by reading selected paragraphs.

Suggest to the folks that they read the questions for the entire lesson 9 before they begin reading the gospel. The questions on page 62 especially require the overview, and some brief note-taking as those elements appear in the gospel will help them process this question.