

Adult Learning Opportunity
Next Steps with the Bible: Going Deeper and Growing Stronger

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November 6: Understanding Jesus' Parables: "God's kingdom is like . . ."

1. Review of Week 7: Biblical Poetry

- Prose and poetry: *Vive la différence!*
 - Imaginative use of metaphor (comparison)
- Pairing/parallelism not rhyme: ". . . what's more . . ."
- What do you **think**/how do you **feel** when you read . . .
 - *Every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.* (Ps 6:6 ESV)
 - *Does anyone know where the love of God goes when the waves turn the minutes to hours?
The searchers all say she'd have made Whitefish Bay if she's put 15 more miles behind her.* (Lightfoot)

2. What is a parable?

- A parable is an extended or narrative simile
 - *The kingdom of heaven is like . . .* (Matt 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 20:1; 25:1 etc.)
- *A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.*
- Jesus' parables are drawn from the real world of first century Palestine, but with occasional hyperbolic elements.

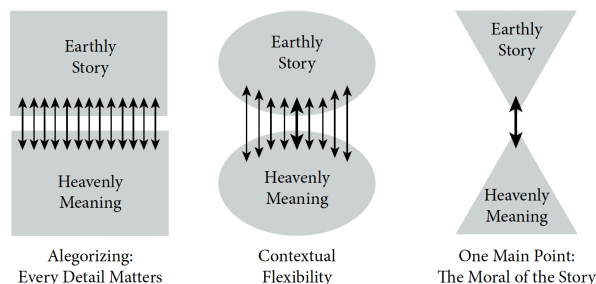
3. Where do we find parables in the Bible?

- Matthew, Mark, Luke [<https://www.jesuschristssavior.net/Parable.html>] Also John 10:1-5; 15:1-4?
- Occasionally in the Old Testament (Jdg 9:7-15; 2 Sam 12:1-4; Isa 5:1-7; Ezek 17)

4. How do we interpret parables?

- Historical context: ancient culture and customs
- Literary context: how does the parable contribute to the episode in which it occurs?
- Parables have their own plot, characters, point of view, suspense, crisis, resolution.
- To what extent do we press the details?

Three Ways of Interpreting Parables



5. Re-telling Jesus' parables with current language and culture (Luke 15:11-32)?

"Lovesick Father" Philip Yancey, from *What's So Amazing about Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), pp. 49-51.

A young girl grows up on a cherry orchard just above Traverse City, Michigan. Her parents, a bit old-fashioned, tend to overreact to her nose ring, the music she listens to, and the length of her skirts. They ground her a few times, and she seethes inside. "I hate you!" she screams at her father when he knocks on the door of her room after an argument, and that night she acts on a plan she has mentally rehearsed scores of times. She runs away. She has visited Detroit only once before, on a bus trip with her church youth group to watch the Tigers play. Because newspapers in Traverse City report in lurid detail the gangs, the drugs, and the violence in downtown Detroit, she concludes that is probably the last place her parents will look for her. California, maybe, or Florida, but not Detroit. [L1] [SEP] [SEP] [SEP]

Her second day there she meets a man who drives the biggest car she's ever seen. He offers her a ride, buys her lunch, arranges a place for her to stay. He gives her some pills that make her better than she's ever felt before. She was right all along, she decides: her parents were keeping her from all the fun. The good life continues for a month, two months, a year. The man with the big car-she calls him "Boss"- teaches her a few things that men like. Since she's underage, men pay a premium for her. She lives in a penthouse, and orders room service whenever she wants. Occasionally she thinks about the folks back home, but their lives seem so boring and provincial that she can hardly believe she grew up there. She has a brief scare when she sees her picture printed on the back of a milk carton with the headline "Have you seen this child?" But by now she has blond hair, and with all the makeup and body-piercing jewelry she wears, nobody would mistake her for a child. Besides, most of her friends are runaways, and nobody squeals in Detroit. [L1] [SEP] [SEP] [SEP]

After a year the first sallow signs of illness appear, and it amazes her how fast the boss turns mean. "These days, we can't mess around," he growls, and before she knows it she's out on the street without a penny to her name. She still turns a couple of tricks a night, but they don't pay much, and all the money goes to support her habit. When winter blows in, she finds herself sleeping on metal grates outside the big department stores. "Sleeping" is the wrong word- a teenage girl at night in downtown Detroit can never relax her guard. Dark bands circle her eyes. Her cough worsens. One night as she lies awake listening for footsteps, all of a sudden everything about her life looks different. She no longer feels like a woman of the world. She feels like a little girl, lost in a cold and frightening city. She begins to whimper. Her pockets are empty and she's hungry. She needs a fix. She pulls her legs tight underneath her and shivers under the newspapers she's piled atop her cloak. Something jolts a synapse of memory and a single memory and a single image fills her mind: of May in Traverse City, when a million cherry trees bloom at once, with her golden retriever dashing through the rows and rows of blossomy trees in chase of a tennis ball. God, why did I leave, she says to herself, and pain stabs at her heart. My dog back home eats better than I do now. She's sobbing and she knows in a flash that more than anything else in the world she wants to go home. [L1] [SEP] [SEP] [SEP]

Three straight phone calls, three straight connections with the answering machine. She hangs up without leaving a message the first two times, but the third time she says, "Dad, Mom, it's me. I was wondering about maybe coming home. I'm catching a bus up your way, and it'll get there about midnight tomorrow. If you're not there, well, I guess I'll just stay on the bus until it hits Canada." [L1] [SEP] It takes about seven hours for a bus to make all the stops between Detroit and Traverse City, and during that time, she realizes the flaws in her plan. What if her parents are out of town and miss the message? Shouldn't she have waited another day or so until she could talk to them? And even if they are home, they probably wrote her off as dead long ago. She should have given them some time to overcome the shock. Her thoughts bounce back and forth between those worries and the speech she is preparing for her father. "Dad, I'm sorry. I know I was wrong. It's not your fault; it's all mine. Dad can you forgive me?" she says the words over and over. Her throat tightening even as she rehearses them. She hasn't apologized to anyone in years. The bus has been driving with lights on since Bay City. Tiny snowflakes hit the pavement rubbed worn by thousands of tires and the asphalt steams. She's forgotten how dark it gets at night out here. A deer darts across the road and the bus swerves. Every so often, a sign posting the mileage to Traverse City. Oh, God. When the bus finally rolls into the station, its air brakes hissing in protest, the driver announces in a crackly voice over the microphone, "fifteen minutes, folks. That's all we have here." Fifteen minutes to decide her life. She checks herself in a compact mirror, smooths her hair, and licks the lipstick off her teeth. She looks at the tobacco stains on her fingertips, and wonders if her parents will notice. If they're there. [L1] [SEP] [SEP] [SEP]

She walks into the terminal not knowing what to expect. Not one of the thousand scenes that have played out in her mind prepare her for what she sees. There, in the concrete-wall-and-plastic-chairs bus terminal in Traverse City, Michigan, stands a group of forty brothers and sisters and great-aunts and uncles and cousins and a grandmother to boot. They're all wearing goofy party hats and blowing noise-makers, and taped across the entire wall of the terminal is a computer-generated banner that reads "Welcome home!" Out of the crowd of well-wishers breaks her Dad. She stares out through the tears quivering in her eyes like hot mercury and begins the memorized speech, "Dad, I'm sorry. I know ..." [L1] [SEP] He interrupts her. "Hush, child. We've got no time for that. No time for apologies. You'll be late for the party. A banquet's waiting for you at home." [L1] [SEP]

6. Worksheet: Luke 18:9-14 (observations, interpretive questions, correlated Scriptures, and application)

Read the parable a few times. Literary context? Cultural setting? Plot, characters, tension? Correlate Luke 3:12; 5:27-30; 7:29; 34; ; 15:1; 19:2 on tax collectors and 1 Sam 2:7; Ezek 21:26; Matt 23:12; Luke 14:11; Jas 4:10; 1 Pet 5:6 on pride and humility. What's the main point?

ESV	NIV	NLT
<p>⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."</p>	<p>⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'</p> <p>¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'</p> <p>¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."</p>	<p>⁹ Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: ¹⁰ "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! ¹² I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'</p> <p>¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' ¹⁴ I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."</p>

Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)

