



# Parable Training Outline

## OVERVIEW

"A figure of Speech in which there is a brief or extended comparison."

Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981], 22.

"A Parable is not merely a story. "Parable" in its broadest sense refers to an expanded analogy... Such analogies first and foremost are comparisons or contrasts used to explain or convince. Parables by their very nature seek to make a rhetorical point." *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 2

"A parable starts off as a picture that is familiar to the listeners, but as you carefully consider the picture, it becomes a mirror in which you see yourself. If you continue to look by faith, the mirror becomes a window through which you see God and His truth." Warren Wiersbe

### Purpose

"Jesus... used parables to convey specific, definable truths."

40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 269

They are not to be allegorized. They are to be heard—heard as calls to respond to Jesus and his mission.

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, p.160

Jesus often employed parables to teach about the Kingdom of God – the graciousness of God, the demands of discipleship, and the dangers of disobedience.

40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 271

The story parables function as a means of calling forth a response on the part of the hearer. In a sense, the parable itself is the message. It is told to address and capture the hearers, to bring them up short about their own actions, or to cause them to respond in some way to Jesus and His ministry.

*How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*, p.152

### Intent / Meaning

The intent of the teller—Jesus himself—with all the power and creativity of his teaching must be the goal of our interpretive work. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 2



# Tools

## Literary Context

The authors of the gospels often clue us to the meaning of a parable by including information about why Jesus uttered that parable or by grouping together parables on similar topics. (P.276)

Ex. "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."  
Luke 18:1

## Historical Context

Sometimes a knowledge of history, or cultural backgrounds aids in the interpretation of a parable.

*40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 276

Ex. The parable of the Good Samaritan. The reader should know that the Jews of Jesus' day discriminated against Samaritans. *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 276

## Comparison

"The most fundamental component of a parable is that there must be a comparison."

Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*

## Characters

Who are the characters and who receives the most attention?

Each central parable figure generally convey only one main point of comparison.

*40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 274

## Dialogue/Conversation

Direct quotations draw the readers' or listeners' attention to the parable's emphasized point.

*40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 273

## Most Space

To whom or what are the most verses devoted?

Simply by giving the most literary space to a certain person or item in the parable, Jesus showed us where His emphasis lay. *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 273

## Striking or Unexpected Details

Jesus' parables are filled with striking details, unexpected twists, shocking statements and surprise outcomes. When such attention-getting components occur, we need to pay attention because an important point is being made. *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 274

## Do not press all details for meaning

Not all details in a parable have significance. Rather, many details simply make the story interesting, memorable, or true to life for the hearers. *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 274

## Ending

Jesus often stresses His most important point at the end of a parable.

*40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* by Robert L. Plummer, pg. 273



# Categories of Parables

## Similitudes

If a simile is an explicit comparison using “like” or “as,” similitudes are extended similes. The marker of a similitude is that it is an extended analogy which lacks plot development. It is more than a simple comparison and may involve several actions and a period of time. For example, the kingdom is like a woman who took leaven and hid it in three measures of dough until the whole was leavened. There is action but no plot, and no problem needing resolution or development of the situation so that one has a story. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 12

## Interrogative Parables

Even though these parables are like similitudes in that they do not have plot development and may logically function the same way, their form is different. The category of interrogative parables concerns more than introductory and internal questions; rather it groups those parables that are presented entirely as questions. Obvious examples include the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Friend at Midnight. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 13

## Double Indirect Narrative Parables

Narrative parables, parables in the restricted sense, are metaphors extended into narrative analogies with plots. If a metaphor is an implied comparison not using “like” or “as,” a parable is a fictitious story which narrates a particular event, is usually told in past tense, and is intended to convey a moral or spiritual truth. Something happens in the narrative that creates a problem or possibility, and then other acts happen that bring, or potentially bring, resolution or closure. The parable of the Banquet (Luke 14:15-24) is an obvious example. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 13

## Juridical Parables

As a subset of double indirect parables these are among the best known and most forceful parables. By hiding their referent, juridical parables elicit a self-condemnation from the hearer(s) through the aid of an image. The hearer is forced to judge the circumstances of the parable, and then the lens drops and one realizes that he or she has judged him or herself. The best known juridical parable is Nathan’s parable of the Ewe Lamb told to David. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 13

## Single Indirect Parables

Most of these parables have traditionally been called example stories. The usual explanation is that the primary purpose of these parables is to present a positive or negative character (or both) who serves as an example to be imitated or whose traits and actions are to be avoided. Either explicitly or implicitly the example story says, “Go and do [or do not do] likewise.” Typically only four Gospel parables, all in Luke, are identified as example stories

The Good Samaritan, the Rich Fool, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Pharisee and the Toll Collector. I would add a fifth, the parable of the Unjust Steward. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 13, 14

## “How Much More” Parables

This category is not determined by form but by function, and “How Much More” parables—for lack of a better term—will also belong to another classification as well. Some are interrogative parables without plot development, and some are narrative parables with plot development. Most of them explicitly or implicitly contrast human action with God’s action. “How Much More” parables function to say that God’s action far exceeds or is not at all like the person depicted in the parable. An obvious example is the parable of the Unjust Judge, who is not like God at all. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 15



# Characteristics of Jesus' Parables

1. Jesus' parables are first of all brief. Their brevity excludes unnecessary details—usually.
2. Parables are marked by simplicity and symmetry. Never are more than two persons or groups together in the same scene. The descriptions of the characters and actions in parables often make use of balanced structures, contrasts, repetitions, and parallels so that patterns of symmetry are obvious.
3. Jesus' parables focus mostly on humans. They are “narratives of normalcy” and mirror the commonness of first-century Palestinian human life, the life of farmers, shepherds, servants and masters, women, fathers and sons, and occasionally kings. The humanness makes them interesting in their own right, but by mirroring they to change behavior and create disciples. Their main purpose is to goad people into response.
4. The parables are fictional descriptions taken from everyday life, but they do not necessarily portray everyday events. Quite the contrary. While some are realistic, some are not. Because of hyperbole and elements of surprise or improbability, parables often are pseudo-realistic and have an element that shock.
5. Parables are engaging; they were told to create interest, and various schemes are used to draw hearers in and compel dealing with the issues at hand. Shock and surprising elements have already been mentioned. Parables also use soliloquy (especially in Luke), dialogue, exaggeration, and concrete details. Parables elicit thought and require decision. Even when explicit questions are not present, parables are intended to answer questions. Finding the implied question a parable addresses is key in interpretation.
6. Since they frequently seek to reorient thought and behavior, in keeping with Jesus' teaching elsewhere, parables often contain elements of reversal. Not all parables implement reversal, but when they do, they are among the most powerful instruments for change that Jesus used. When parables cause reversal, they force unexpected decisions and associations.
7. With their intent to bring about response and elements like reversal, the crucial matter of parables is usually at the end, which functions something like the punch line of a joke. Interpreters legitimately invoke “the rule of end stress” which requires that interpretations focus on the end of the parables.
8. Parables are told into a context. At least partly they are framed on the reality they seek to show, or they cannot make their point. They are addressed to quite specific contexts in the ministry of Jesus.
9. Jesus' parables are theocentric. I have already indicated that parables seek to change behavior and create disciples, but they do so by telling about God and His kingdom, the new reality God seeks to establish on earth.
10. Parables frequently allude to Old Testament (OT) texts. While Jesus' parables are not exegetical in the way rabbinic parables are, some of them adapt OT themes, and, more than is recognized, a number of them address specific OT texts and ideas.
11. Most parables appear in larger collections of parables. In addition, they are sometimes arranged as doublets (e.g., the Mustard Seed and the Leaven) or triplets (the parables of lostness in Luke 15 or the parables about Israel in Matt 21:28—22:14). Doublets and longer combinations strengthen and explore a theme by using two or more images to make the same or related points.



# Interpreting Parables

The intent of the teller—Jesus himself—with all the power and creativity of his teaching must be the goal of our interpretive work. These are stories with intent, the communicative intent of Jesus... I seek to hear the intent of Jesus to his contemporaries—his disciples and his fellow Jews. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 2-3

The question for each parable is: How did Jesus seek to change attitudes and behaviors with this parable? *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 3

One of the keys to understanding the parables lies in discovering the original audience to whom they were spoken. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, p.151

Analyze each parable thoroughly. To state the obvious, if it appears in more than one gospel, do a comparative analysis of the various accounts. Pay particular attention to the structure of the parable and the development of its thought. Pay close attention to symmetry or parallelism between various components. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 25

Listen to the parable without presupposition as to its form or meaning. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 25

Remember that Jesus' parables were oral instruments in a largely oral culture. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 25

If we are after the intent of Jesus, we must seek to hear a parable as Jesus' Palestinian hearers would have heard it. Any interpretation that does not breath the air of the first century cannot be correct. That requires listening in a context not our own and presumes some familiarity with that context. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 5

Remember to interpret the parable in line with the thematic statement of the particular gospel.

Determine specifically the function of the story in the teaching of Jesus. This is the crux of the matter... the context of the parables. If we cut the parables out of the context of Jesus' teaching, we can make them mean anything, which is precisely what has happened with a number of studies. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 26

We must interpret each parable as a whole to determine how the analogy works. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 29

Some parables make one point, and some make several points. One must discern from the context the intent of the analogy. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 29

Interpret what was given, not what is omitted. Any attempt to interpret a parable based on what is not there is almost certainly wrong. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 29

Do not impose real time on parable time. The narrative time of parables is not real time chronology, and the effort to make it so almost certainly distorts. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 29

Pay particular attention to the rule of end stress. For most parables what comes at the end is the clinching indicator of intent. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 30

Note where the teaching of the parables intersect with the teaching of Jesus elsewhere. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 30

Determine the theological intent and significance of the parable. They are told to teach and convince about another and more important reality. They are referential, and they are useless if we do not determine what they refer to, what they teach, and what we should do with such knowledge. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 30

The primary stance in interpreting is the willingness to hear and respond appropriately. *Stories With Intent*, Klyne R. Snodgrass, pg. 24



# Narrative Phases

## Setting

Includes location and time period. The author will set up the story by identifying the location or locations as well as the time period. A study Bible is helpful in providing the details of the location and time period.

## Characters

Normally, a story will include at least one believer and nonbeliever, or group. The author sometimes will develop the character by providing details about their moral character. Dialogue is helpful when determining character.

## Conflict

The author will introduce the problem and then develop the problem depending on the length of the story.

## Climax

The author will bring the reader to a point of tension. This is where the original readers would have been holding their breath. The reader is usually asking, "What is going to happen?"

Helpful Hint: It is usually right here, between Climax and Resolution that you find the main point of the story - the act of God. *Putting the Truth to Work* by Daniel Doriani, p.168

## Resolution

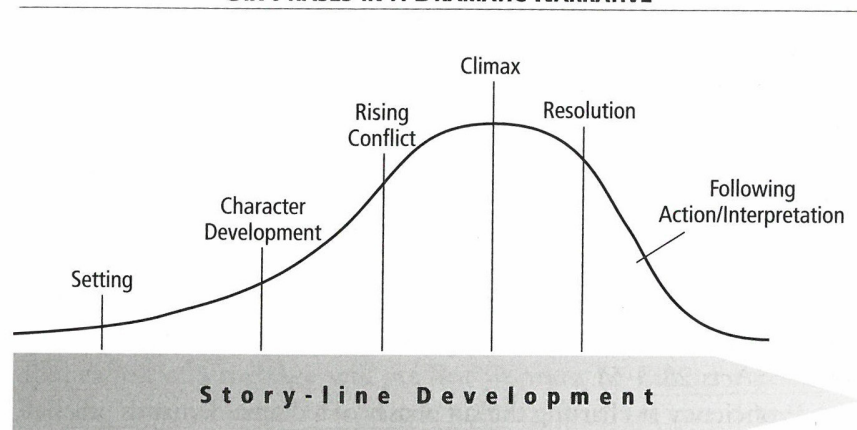
The author gives the answer to the problem! The reader finally knows what happened.

## Following Actions

"A following action or saying commonly interprets a biblical drama. It may indicate the main lesson or show how the event fits into redemptive history. The following episode can help explain the significance of a drama."

*Getting the Message* by Daniel Doriani, p. 65-69

FIG. 14.  
SIX PHASES IN A DRAMATIC NARRATIVE





# Gospel Thematic Verses and Statements

## Matthew

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 1:2

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." 28:18-20

Unique Portrait of Jesus Christ – "The Gospel of the Messiah"

"Jesus the Jewish Messiah brings salvation history to its climax, saving his people from their sins and offering that salvation to all the people everywhere." *Four Portraits, One Jesus*; p. 262

## Mark

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." 1:1

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many." 10:45

Unique Portrait of Jesus Christ – "Suffering Son of God"

"Jesus the mighty Messiah and Son of God obediently suffers as the servant of the Lord to pay the ransom price for sins, and as a model of suffering and sacrifice for his disciples to follow."

*Four Portraits, One Jesus*; p. 214

## Luke

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." 2:11

"For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." 19:10

Unique Portrait of Jesus the Christ – "Savior for All People"

"God's end-times salvation predicted by the prophets has arrived through the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and this salvation is now going out to the world."

*Four Portraits, One Jesus*; p. 314

## John

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." 3:16

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." 1:14

"...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." 20:30-31

Unique Portrait of Jesus the Christ – "Eternal Son who Reveals the Father"

"Jesus is the divine Son of God who reveals the Father, providing eternal life to all who believe in him." *Four Portraits, One Jesus*; p. 358