

# Observe: Figurative Language (Part 1)

## FOCUS STATEMENT

**Figurative language in the Bible communicates spiritual truth powerfully to our hearts, but it must be handled carefully.**

## MEMORY VERSE

I cling to your testimonies, O LORD; let me not be put to shame!—Psalm 119:31

## MAIN IDEAS

- > Bible writers used both literal and figurative language to communicate their message.
- > Comparisons are meant to be limited in meaning.
- > Bible writers used figurative language to make their points more forceful, to communicate spiritual truth in a known context, and to create an emotional response.
- > The Bible is not just to be studied in the mind, but also embraced in the heart.
- > Rules regarding figurative language must be followed for correct interpretation.

## SCRIPTURE

- |                 |                 |                        |                         |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1) Isaiah 55:12 | 6) Psalm 100:3  | 11) 1 Peter 3:12       | 16) Amos 4:4            |
| 2) Exodus 20:15 | 7) 1 Peter 2:2  | 12) 2 Chronicles 16:9a | 17) 1 Kings 18:26-27    |
| 3) Isaiah 53:6  | 8) Psalm 18:2   | 13) Psalm 63:7         | 18) Matthew 5:29        |
| 4) Psalm 42:1   | 9) Isaiah 55:12 | 14) Psalm 91:4         | 19) (Isaiah 55:12, 6-7) |
| 5) John 10:9    | 10) Luke 19:40  | 15) Job 38:19-21       |                         |

## VISUALS, ETC.

- > Bible (English Standard Version)
- > **Eagle Poem (15A)**
- > **Words Paint Pictures (15B, save for use in future lessons)**
- > Carving knife and a jack knife (or substitute one item that is simple and uncomplicated, and one that is fancy and elaborate, or two similar items that have different purposes such as a work boot and a tennis shoe)
- > Pitcher of water
- > Paper cup with a hole in the bottom
- > Towel to mop up the water that spills
- > Whiteboard and markers

### Optional Activity

- > What Could This Mean? (CH-15)
- > Pencils (for each student)

## PREPARATION:

Ask a student to help you with the “irony” illustration. Coach the student in what to do and say during the demonstration.

Optional: If you choose to do the optional activity, print the worksheet (CH-15) (one per student).

Study the Scripture passages carefully and prayerfully. Ask God to make them real in your own heart. Be open to what God may be teaching you in this lesson. Study the lesson well. Pray for the students in your class.

## Introduction

### Illustration

2 OBJECTS

(Display the carving knife and the jackknife, or your substituted items and adjust the illustration to fit your items.)

**? Which of these knives is better?** (Explain that both items are useful, but different situations may require different items, depending on how they will be used. )

*A plain, simple carving knife is better if you are trying to slice a turkey. But if you are camping and need a variety of tools, a multi-tool, elaborate jackknife is more useful.*

*Different situations call for different tools.*

## Large Group Lesson

*Language works the same way—different kinds of language are for different situations, and we fit our style of wording to the situation or the idea we are trying to convey.*

### Illustration

(Display the **Eagle Poem** visual.)

This poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson is a beautiful, creative way of stating a thought:

*The Eagle*

*He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.*

*The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.<sup>1</sup>*

*But if your house is on fire, you are not going to say, “The dancing flames are jumping upward, licking the wallpaper-clad kitchen walls.” You are going to yell, “Fire!” Simple, direct, to the point communication is best when the house is on fire. It gets your point across quickly and clearly.*

### Teaching Point

- Just as we choose different kinds of language to best convey what we want to communicate, so God has chosen different styles of communication to best convey the truths He wants us to understand. (See Notebook.)
- Sometimes picturesque language is used, like this:

1. Alfred, Lord Tennyson. “The Eagle.” Poetry Foundation. Poetry Foundation, n.d. Web. 09 Apr. 2014.

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*Isaiah 55:12—For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

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And sometimes direct, straightforward language is used, like...

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*Exodus 20:15—You shall not steal.*

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- Different styles of communicating serve different purposes. **Literal language** says what it means—it is straightforward, like “Fire!” (See Notebook.)
- **Figurative language** is language that doesn’t mean exactly what it says—eagles don’t have hands, and the sea is not wrinkled. But the figurative writing in *The Eagle* creates a word picture that helps us see what Tennyson saw and feel some of the majesty of an eagle. (See Notebook.)



(Display the **Words Paint Pictures** visual.)

- Some words paint pictures of truth!

**? Can anyone tell us what a simile is?**

- A **simile** compares two unlike things using the words “like” or “as.” (See Notebook.) For example:

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*Isaiah 53:6—All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

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*Psalms 42:1—As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.*

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**? What is a metaphor?**

- A **metaphor** compares two unlike things using a form of the verb “to be,” rather than the words “like” or “as.” (See Notebook.) For example:

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*John 10:9—I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*

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*Psalms 100:3—Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

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## Small Group Discussion

### Discussion 15A

Read these verses and answer the questions:

*1 Peter 2:2—Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation—*

#### Questions

1. *What is a possible wording for this passage if it were written in literal language?*
2. *Why do you think Peter compares us to “newborn infants”? What is the effect of using this simile?*

*Psalm 18:2—The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

#### Questions

3. *What metaphors does the psalmist use in this passage? (See Notebook.)*
4. *Why do you think he uses them? What is he saying? (See Notebook.)*
5. *What emotional sense does this language give you? (See Notebook.)*

**? Can anyone tell us what personification is?** [giving human qualities to non-human things or ideas; giving something a human quality] (See Notebook.)

**? Can anyone think of any instances where personification occurs in the Bible?**  
[Possible answers may include:]

*Isaiah 55:12—For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands*

*Luke 19:40—He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”*

**Anthropomorphism** is when God is described using human attributes. (See Notebook.)

**? Can anyone think of instances where human or animal-like qualities are attributed to God in the Bible?**<sup>2</sup>

*1 Peter 3:12—For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*

*2 Chronicles 16:9a—For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.*

*Psalm 63:7—for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.*

2. This poetic usage is like personification, though different. God already is a person, and therefore not personified in Scripture. When human attributes are attributed to Him, this would technically be labeled an instance of anthropomorphism (when physical characteristics are attributed to God) or anthropopathism (when non-physical characteristics, such as human passions or feelings, are attributed to God).

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*Psalm 91:4—He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*

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**? Does God literally have eyes? Does God literally have wings?**

### Teaching Point

- Comparisons are meant to be limited in meaning. Not all characteristics of the comparison are applicable to what is being described. (See Notebook.)
- The author is generally making one main point. For example, when the psalmist says that we are “sheep” in Psalm 100, he is not necessarily saying that we are dumb like sheep, that we flock together like sheep, or that we panic like sheep do when there is danger. He is saying that the children of God belong to God, we are His, and He cares for us with patience and affection, just as sheep belong to and are cared for by their shepherd.

### Illustration

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PITCHER OF  
WATER, PAPER  
CUP WITH A  
HOLE, AND A  
TOWEL

[Name] *is going to demonstrate another figure of speech—irony.*

The student should pour a small amount of water into the glass, pick it up to drink it, and say,

*“Great! There’s a hole in the cup!”*

*Do you think he really means that it is great that there is a hole in the cup?*

### Teaching Point

- Irony is when a person says one thing but means another. (See Notebook.) He says the opposite of what he really means. *It’s as if the teacher were calling on students to give a speech, and she calls on you first, and you say, “Wonderful. I get to go first.”*

*God makes His point about His supremacy and Job’s limitations through irony when He says in Job 38:*

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*Job 38:19-21—Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, <sup>20</sup>that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? <sup>21</sup>You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!*

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**? Is Job old compared to God? Was Job around at the creation of the world?**

**? What is God doing in Job 38:19-21 through the use of irony?** [God is showing the utter folly of presumption before Him—Job’s meager knowledge is nothing compared to that of the eternal God and Creator of the universe. God is showing His greatness and the absolute inadequacy of man—God is showing His supremacy and the folly of questioning His wisdom.]

## Small Group Discussion

### Discussion 15B

Read these verses and answer the questions:

*Amos 4:4—Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days.*

#### Questions

1. *Is Amos telling Israel to sin? Explain.* [No, he is using irony.]
2. *What clues from the context of Amos 4:1-5 tell you Amos is using irony?* [He calls the people of Israel “cows” in 4:1—Amos is angry because of Israel’s oppression of the poor and their lavish lifestyle, so he compares them to well-fed cows—his tone is sarcastic; 4:5—he says they love to offer sacrifices and give offerings—they are not doing this because they are sincerely worshipping—if their hearts were for the Lord, they would not be continuing in their sin]
3. *What is Amos actually saying?* [Amos is indignantly pointing their sin in order to call them to repentance; Amos is showing them the absurdity of multiplying their sins and thinking that multiple sacrifices and tithes will clear them of their deliberate sin; it is ironic because they are going to offer sacrifices but they are actually sinning—the opposite is taking place.]  
(See Notebook.)

*1 Kings 18:26-27—And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. <sup>27</sup>And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”*

#### Questions

4. *What is the context of this passage?* [the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal—both call upon their god/God to send fire to consume the sacrifice]
5. *What do you think Elijah’s tone was?* [mocking]
6. *Explain Elijah’s use of irony in this passage.* [Elijah wasn’t sincere in his concern that they call Baal a little louder because Baal was sleeping; Elijah was insulting their god—he was showing the powerlessness of Baal and their foolishness for believing in Baal.]

(Also, see related question in the Notebook.)

### Teaching Point

- A common manner of speaking among the ancient Hebrews was to speak in hyperbole—exaggerating to make a point. (See Notebook.) We make them, too—“I’m so hungry I could eat a horse!” or “I’m starving to death!” or “I was so embarrassed that I thought I would die!”
- *No one takes these statements literally. They know you couldn’t really eat a horse, that you are not at the point of starvation, and that you were not literally dying because you were embarrassed.*
- Biblical writers also use hyperbole—exaggeration—to get their point across.

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*Matthew 5:29—If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.*

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**? Does Jesus actually mean that we should tear out our eyes?**

**? What does He mean?** [It is better to be maimed but enter heaven than to be whole but end up in hell.]

**? Why does Jesus use hyperbole in this statement?**

**? Why do writers use figurative language?** [Answers should include the following:] (See Notebook.)

- to make a statement more forceful
- to use the known to teach us about the unknown; to use things from the physical world in which we live to help us understand spiritual truth
- to create an emotional response—the Bible is not just to be studied with the mind but embraced in the heart; figurative language helps us identify with the truth in our hearts
- to use something familiar to us to explain what is unfamiliar (use physical realities to explain spiritual realities)

### **Focus Statement**

**Figurative language in the Bible communicates spiritual truth powerfully to our hearts, but it must be handled carefully.**

*We will learn more about these principles in the next class.*

(End by sharing a passage using figurative language, or praying some of the figurative language of the Bible.)

**...continued**

## Small Group Application

Read Isaiah 55:12, answer the questions, and see the application section of the Notebook.

*Isaiah 55:12—For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

1. *Isaiah 55:12 is at the end of a passage inviting Israel and the nations to receive God’s grace. Imagine what mountains and hills breaking forth into singing and trees clapping their hands would look like. What kind of feeling does that stir in you?*
2. *What is Isaiah trying to convey by using such figurative language?*
3. *What picture of grace does this passage give you?*

Read the invitation in verses 6 and 7:

*Isaiah 55:6-7—Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup>let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

### Questions

4. *What picture does this passage give you of God?*
5. *What do you think that Isaiah means by “while he may be found”?*
6. *What is the relevance of this passage for you?*

## Optional Activity

» Have students work in pairs or alone on the **What Could This Mean?** handout and see which team or individual has the most correct answers. (See answer key below.)

<b>1. He is a piece of bread.</b>	This is a Cuban expression meaning, “He is a nice guy.” Before you think this is strange, think of the English expression, “He’s a good egg.”
<b>2. Like white on rice.</b>	This is a southern expression for “very close.” For example, “She stuck to her mama like white on rice.”
<b>3. Every bird likes its nest.</b>	This is a Spanish expression meaning everyone has his own preferences. It’s similar to our expression, “To each his own.”
<b>4. Go around my elbow to get to my thumb.</b>	This is a southern expression meaning “to do something the hard way.”
<b>5. Sail in deep water.</b>	This means to spend too much money. For example, “His girlfriend sails in deep water.”
<b>6. Pneumonia hole.</b>	This is a southern expression for “window.” You better just close that pneumonia hole!
<b>7. Throw the house out the window.</b>	This is a Spanish expression meaning “to go out of your way to welcome someone.” Similar to our expression, “roll out the red carpet.”
<b>8. Raise sand.</b>	This is a southern expression meaning “to raise a fit.” <i>Iffen yo don’t git home right now, yore mammy’s gon raise sand.</i>
<b>9. Frog strangler.</b>	This means lots of rain. “It’s lookin’ to be a real frog strangler!”

## Send Home

» Student At-Home Journal page for Lesson 15



# Observe: Figurative Language (Part 1)

**FOCUS STATEMENT:**

**Figurative language in the Bible communicates spiritual truth powerfully to our hearts, but it must be handled carefully.**

**MEMORY VERSE:**

I cling to your testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame!—Psalm 119:31

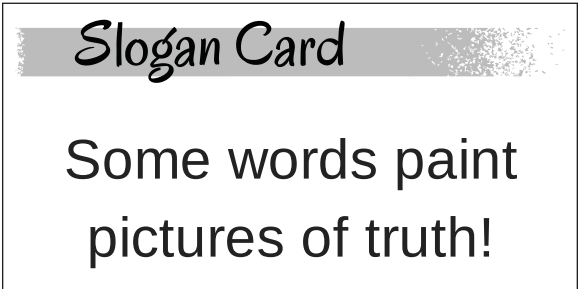
**SCRIPTURE:**

- |                 |                 |                        |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) Isaiah 55:12 | 6) Psalm 100:3  | 11) 1 Peter 3:12       | 16) Amos 4:4          |
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| 4) Psalm 42:1   | 9) Isaiah 55:12 | 14) Psalm 91:4         | 19) Isaiah 55:12, 6-7 |
| 5) John 10:9    | 10) Luke 19:40  | 15) Job 38:19-21       |                       |

Just as we chose different \_\_\_\_\_ of communication to \_\_\_\_\_ convey the truths we want to communicate, God has chosen different styles of \_\_\_\_\_ to best convey the truths He wants us to understand.

Define **literal language**: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Define **figurative language**: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



Define **simile**: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Define **metaphor**: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Small Group Discussion 15A**

Read Psalm 18:2. *What metaphors does the psalmist use in this passage?*

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*Why do you think he uses them? What emotional sense does this language give you?*

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**Small Group Discussion 15B**

Read Amos 4:4. *What is Amos actually saying?*

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*What point is Elijah making in 1 Kings 18:26-27?*

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Define **hyperbole**: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Why do writers use figurative language?*

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**Application**

*What is grace?* \_\_\_\_\_

*What are some ways grace has been manifested in my life?*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Prayer Requests** (for you and your small group):

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Define **personification**: \_\_\_\_\_

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Define **anthropomorphism**: \_\_\_\_\_

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Comparisons are meant to be \_\_\_\_\_ in meaning.

Define **irony**: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Focus Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_ language in the Bible communicates spiritual truth \_\_\_\_\_ to our hearts, but must be handled \_\_\_\_\_.

**REVIEW OF MAIN IDEAS**

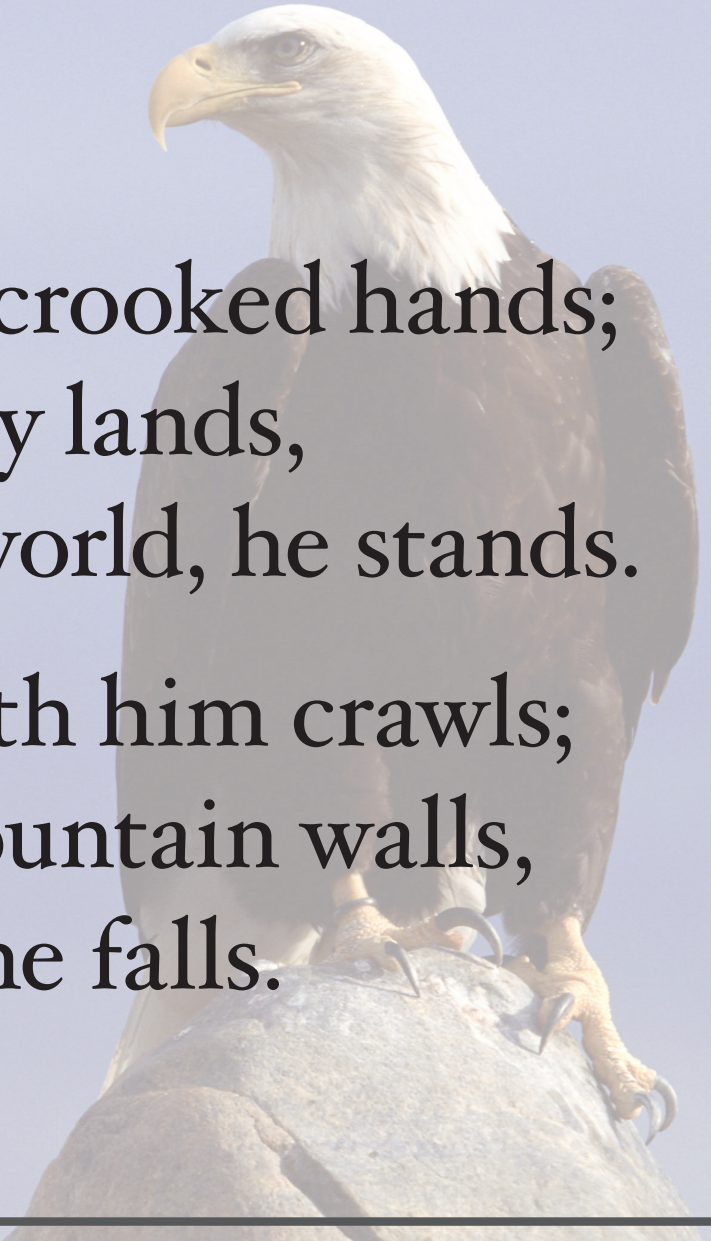
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- > Comparisons are meant to be limited in meaning.
- > Bible writers used figurative language to make their points more forceful, to communicate spiritual truth in a known context, and to create an emotional response.
- > The Bible is not just to be studied in the mind, but also embraced in the heart.

# The Eagle

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

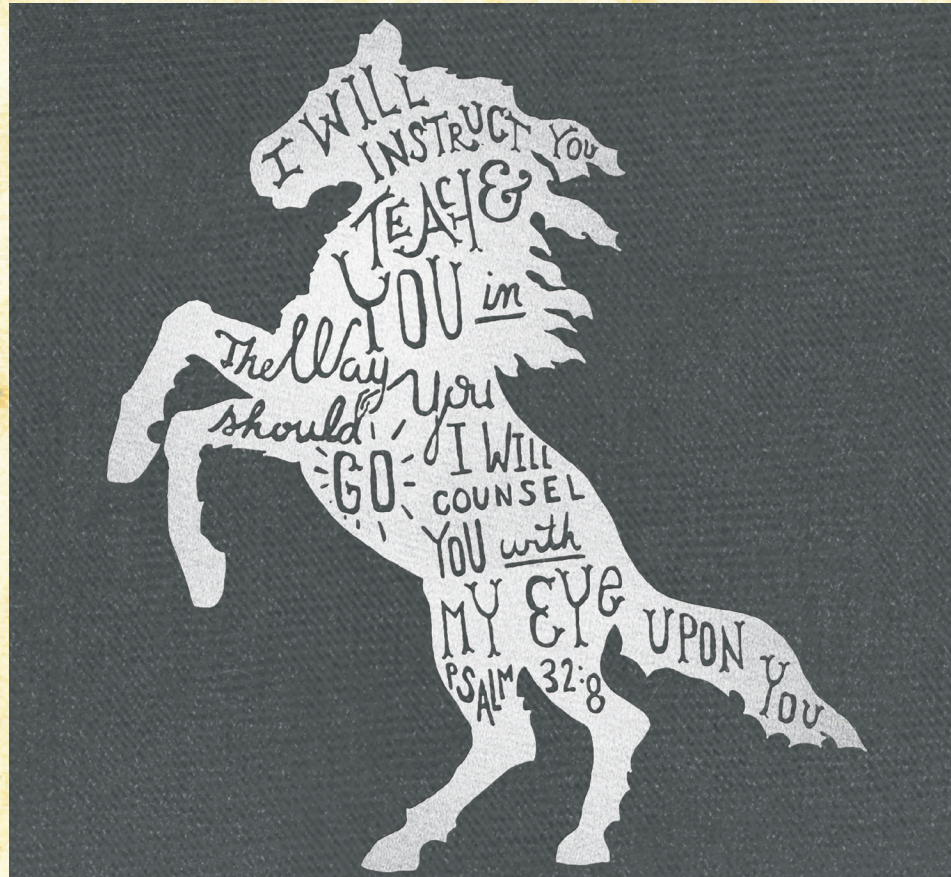
He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.





# Some words paint pictures of truth!



# Observe: Figurative Language (Part 1)

**FOCUS STATEMENT**

**Figurative language in the Bible communicates spiritual truth powerfully to our hearts, but it must be handled carefully.**

**MEMORY VERSE**

I cling to your testimonies, O LORD; let me not be put to shame!—Psalm 119:31

**SCRIPTURE**

- |                 |                 |                        |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) Isaiah 55:12 | 6) Psalm 100:3  | 11) 1 Peter 3:12       | 16) Amos 4:4          |
| 2) Exodus 20:15 | 7) 1 Peter 2:2  | 12) 2 Chronicles 16:9a | 17) 1 Kings 18:26-27  |
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| 4) Psalm 42:1   | 9) Isaiah 55:12 | 14) Psalm 91:4         | 19) Isaiah 55:12, 6-7 |
| 5) John 10:9    | 10) Luke 19:40  | 15) Job 38:19-21       |                       |

## Figurative Language

Look up the passages below. Identify simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and irony:

- 1 Peter 1:24-25
- Psalm 119:105
- 1 Thessalonians 5:2
- Psalm 40:12
- 2 Corinthians 12:12
- Proverbs 21:1

**Literal or Figurative**

Read James 4:1-5. Does John really mean that we are “adulterous”?

Using the "Process for Understanding Scripture" section in the Inductive Bible Study Handbook, try to determine what James is saying. Also, check the "When Studying a Passage" section for information on figurative language (also in the Inductive Bible Study Handbook) for help. *Why would James use the term “adulterous”? Write your observations below:*

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**After you have done your study, read Isaiah 54:5. Think about this text in relation to James 4:4.**



**Observe: Figurative Language (Part 1)**

**Similes, Metaphors, and Personification**

Read Psalm 19:1-6. What are the human actions that are attributed to the “heavens” in this passage?

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What picture do these types of terms paint for the reader?

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What do you think is the main point that the psalmist wants to get across by using this type of language?

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What metaphor is used to describe the sun?

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What qualities of the sun is the author trying to emphasize?

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**Mark the figurative language in Philippians 3:8-14 with a parenthesis.**

**Work on memorizing Psalm 119:24-31.**

*Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors.*

<sup>25</sup>*My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!*

<sup>26</sup>*When I told of my ways, you answered me; teach me your statutes!* <sup>27</sup>*Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works.* <sup>28</sup>*My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!*

<sup>29</sup>*Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law!*

<sup>30</sup>*I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me.* <sup>31</sup>*I cling to your testimonies, O LORD; let me not be put to shame!*—Psalm 119:24-31

*Have you not known?  
Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends  
of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding  
is unsearchable.  
<sup>29</sup>He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he  
increases strength. <sup>30</sup>Even youths  
shall faint and be weary, and  
young men shall fall exhausted;  
<sup>31</sup>but they who wait for the LORD  
shall renew their strength; they  
shall mount up with wings like  
eagles; they shall run and not be  
weary; they shall walk  
and not faint.  
—Isaiah 40:28-31*

**REVIEW OF MAIN IDEAS**

- > Bible writers used both literal and figurative language to communicate their message.
- > Comparisons are meant to be limited in meaning.
- > Bible writers used figurative language to make their points more forceful, to communicate spiritual truth in a known context, and to create an emotional response.
- > The Bible is not just to be studied in the mind, but also embraced in the heart.
- > Rules regarding figurative language must be followed for correct interpretation.

# And He Told Them a Parable: Parables

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## FOCUS STATEMENT

**Parables reveal one main spiritual truth to believers through the use of examples in the physical world.**

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## MEMORY VERSE

...“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’”—Luke 8:10

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## MAIN IDEAS

- > Parables impart truth to believers, but obscure the teaching of Jesus to unbelievers.
- > Parables use things in the physical world to help us understand spiritual truth.
- > Parables must be understood in their context.
- > Parables usually make one main point.

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## SCRIPTURE

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|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1) Luke 8:9-10 | 3) Luke 18:14b | 5) Luke 15:11-32 |
| 2) Luke 15:1-2 | 4) Luke 18:1   | 6) James 1:21b   |

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## VISUALS, ETC.

- > Bible (English Standard Version)
- > **Steps 1-5 (29A-29E)**
- > Whiteboard and markers
- > Colored pencils

### Optional Activity

- > Notecards, pens (for each student)

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## PREPARATION:

Optional: Write an encouraging message to your class using the method described in the Optional Activity.

Sometime during the lesson, ask the students to read the book of Jude in preparation for the next class.

Study the Scripture passages carefully and prayerfully. Ask God to make them real in your own heart. Be open to what God may be teaching you in this lesson. Study the lesson well. Pray for the students in your class.

## Introduction

### Illustration

One of Charles Dickens' greatest literary works is *A Tale of Two Cities*, a historical novel set around the time of the French Revolution.

One of the main characters in the book is **Madame Defarge**, a female revolutionary, who is pictured constantly knitting in her husband's wine shop. Though her activity seems innocent, in her needlework she is actually knitting a registry of names of people who must die in the revolution.

Only those whose eyes were opened to it—who knew the secret of the knitting—understood the message. Revolutionaries who visited the wine shop understood the subtle death warrants in the knitting. Others saw only the ordinary knitting of a rather harsh, forceful woman.

## Large Group Lesson

### Teaching Point

- The parables of Jesus served the same purpose as Madame Defarge's knitting—they were messages to those whose eyes were opened to them. (See Notebook.)
- But to those who were not spiritually inclined, they obscured the truth Jesus was teaching. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned. Discernment comes through the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer. (See Notebook.)

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*Luke 8:9-10—And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, <sup>10</sup>he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'"*

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### Teaching Point

- This incident occurred after Jesus told the parable of the sower and the seeds. Jesus was going from town to town preaching, and a large crowd of people from various towns gathered around Him. Jesus was not fooled by the largeness of the crowd. He knew that all of them did not receive His teaching—they heard with their ears, but they did not embrace Him in their hearts.
- By obscuring His teaching, Jesus was actually extending grace to the listeners. Better that they leave confused than that they once again reject Him and His message (see Matthew 13:10-17). (See Notebook.)
- For the believer, a parable is actually a means of understanding the truth in a clearer way. God has given us things in the physical world to help us understand spiritual truth.
- A parable is just a story in the real world—something that is familiar to us—that illustrates spiritual truth. (See Notebook.)



- Though parables are spiritually discerned, a good student of the Bible will diligently work to better understand the point of a parable. The desire to study a parable is motivated by the Holy Spirit and is an indication of spiritual interest.

*We will be looking at the steps to understanding a parable.* (Display and read the **Steps 1-5** visuals at the appropriate time. See Notebook.)



**Step 1:** Study the immediate context.

**? What is the truth taught in the parable of the prodigal son?** (Don't comment on the responses, just solicit them.)

*Studying the immediate context of the parable of the prodigal son will give you a clue to the main point of the parable.*

## Small Group Discussion

### Discussion 29A

Answer the questions about this verse:

*Luke 15:1-2—Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

### Questions

1. What was Jesus' response to tax collectors and sinners? [He interacted and ate with them.]
2. What was the heart attitude of the Pharisees and scribes toward tax collectors and sinners? [They were proud and did not associate with "low" people.]
3. What was their attitude toward Jesus? [They thought He was also below them because He associated with those kinds of people.]
4. Think about the parable of the prodigal son. How does the context provided in Luke 15:1-2 affect your understanding of the point of the parable? [Jesus associated with sinners because He was seeking the lost in order to save them.] (See Notebook.)



**Step 2:** Check for an explanation.

- Sometimes Jesus explains the parable like He did in the parable of the sower and the seed (Luke 8:11-15), or like He did in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14).

*Luke 18:14b—For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*

- Sometimes the biblical writer will give a word of explanation about the parable like Luke did with the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8).

*Luke 18:1—And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*

**Teaching Point****STEP 3**

Discern the main point

**Step 3:** Discern the main point.

*A parable usually has one main point—one basic truth it is teaching. How do you discern the main point?*

- Look at the characters. Determine which ones are the main characters. Often, more space is devoted to the main characters, but that is not always true.
- Look at the dialogue. Dialogue often indicates the main point.
- Look at the end. The end often reveals the main point.

*In your small group, you will get to practice these steps with the parable of the prodigal son.*

**Small Group Discussion****Discussion 29B**

Read the parable of the prodigal son.

*Luke 15:11-32—And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. <sup>14</sup>And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ <sup>20</sup>And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have*

*sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup>Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup>And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup>But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup>but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ <sup>31</sup>And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”*

**Discussion 29B (continuation)**

Now answer the following questions, plus the additional question in the Notebook:

**Questions**

1. *Who are the main characters? Let the context of this parable help guide your determination.* [father, younger son, and older son]
2. *What clues to the main point do you get from direct dialogue?* [The father instructed the servants to make a feast because the son had passed from death
3. *What does the end of the story tell you about a possible main point?* [The contrast between the older son's attitude and the father's attitude parallels the contrast between the Pharisees' and scribes' attitude toward sinners and Jesus' attitude toward sinners.] (See Notebook.)

to life/lost to found (verses 22-23)—father had an attitude of rejoicing. The dialogue reveals that the older son was angry and self-righteous (verse 29).]

**Teaching Point****STEP 4**

Identify  
unimportant  
details

colored pencils

**Step 4:** Identify unimportant details.

(Ask the students to turn to Luke 15:11-32 in the Notebook. Then, with the students, cross out the details that likely have little to do with the main point. It is not necessary to cross out all the details, but only those that seem incidental. For example: “longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything,” “my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread.”)

**STEP 5**

Identify  
important  
details

**Step 5:** Identify important details.

(Now ask students to circle the important details in the Notebook: reckless living; “Father, I have sinned;” compassion; celebrate; angry; older son; never disobeyed; you never gave me; fitting to celebrate; dead and alive; lost and found.)

**? What is a likely main point of the parable of the prodigal son?** [The self-righteous reject sinners, but the humble celebrate when a sinner repents. The self-righteous condemn others, but the godly receive sinners. The proud in heart are judgmental, but the humble in heart forgive.]

Note other key points from the Redemptive-Historical perspective: God welcomes repentant Gentile sinners, even though it makes the favored Jews resentful; the forgiving nature of God.

**? In light of what you have discovered about the parable of the prodigal son, is the title usually given to this parable a good title for it? What title would better convey the meaning of this parable?**

*We have seen why Jesus spoke in parables to unbelievers—to obscure His teaching from the spiritually unresponsive.*

**? But what could be some reasons that He taught believers in parables?**

**And He Told Them a Parable: Parables**

[Possible answers might include the following:] (See place for responses in the Notebook.)

- Stories are easy to remember. Jesus was teaching an oral culture, and He wanted them to be able to remember His words so they could meditate on them and pass them on to others.
- Jesus wanted to encourage spiritual appetite by forcing believers to dig for meaning, rather than making the meaning plain and easy to grasp.
- Jesus wants believers to depend on the Holy Spirit to teach them—to ask for insight and to recognize their inadequacy.
- Stories touch the heart. Jesus does not just want us to hear the truth, but to respond to the truth. When the emotions are touched, we are often more inclined to respond.

**Focus Statement**

(Read the Focus Statement as a review of the main point of the lesson.)

**Parables usually reveal one main spiritual truth to believers through the use of examples in the physical world.**

**Review**

*The Word of God is meant to be **lived** not just understood. The Bible should change us, not just inform us. Jesus did not tell parables just to give us more information or more biblical understanding. He wants to touch our hearts and give us a love for the truths of His Kingdom.*

Note: If you have not already done so, ask the students to read the book of Jude at least once (preferably more than once) in preparation for the next class.

(End with prayer.)

**Small Group Application**

Discuss the following questions, and have the students respond to the application section of the Notebook.

1. Describe some modern day “Pharisee-like” behavior. How do you see this in your world? What would you say are the main heart issues beneath that behavior?
2. Can you share a personal experience where you saw someone act like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, or use one of your newly suggested titles? How did you feel about that? What did you think? Has it made a difference in your life?
3. What do you think Jesus is telling us in this parable?
4. James says that we should “...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21b). What does this mean? What does humble submission to the Word of God require? [regeneration, the help of the Holy Spirit, the will to obey, opportunities to obey]
5. Can we make ourselves compassionate? What can we do? (Be sure the group understands that we cannot give ourselves a compassionate heart, but we can, in obedience, act in compassionate ways and pray that God will change the heart. And we can put ourselves in situations that will help shape our hearts to become compassionate with the help of the Holy Spirit.)

**(continuation)**

6. *What kind of things deter you from being compassionate? [peer pressure; laziness; fear] What can you do about these things?*
7. *Does it make a difference that Jesus commands this kind of compassion from His followers? For the believer, snubbing another person is not an option. What does it say about our hearts when we do not welcome others?*
8. *Are there some real-life situations where you can receive another person as the father did? What do you think God could be asking you to do this week?*

**Optional Activity**

- » Before class, write a short encouraging message to your group in Spanish Pig Latin (*jerigonza*) according to the instructions below:
1. Divide each word into syllables.  
For example: “I love talk-ing a-bout Scrip-ture with you!”
  2. Repeat each syllable with the letter “p” in front of it each time. For example:  
*I-pi love-pove talk-palk—ing-ping a-pa—bout-pout Scrip-pip—ture-pure with-pith you-pou.*
  3. Practice your message so you can say it fluently.

Tell your group that you have a word of encouragement for them. Read the message to your group and see if they can figure it out.

Then, teach them how to do it themselves and ask them to compose messages for one another.

Remind the group that “hidden” meanings are worth working to understand.

- » Discuss some of the teaching methods that Jesus used from the exercise in Lesson 28 of the Student At-Home Journal.

**Send Home**

- » Student At-Home Journal for Lesson 29

# And He Told Them a Parable: Parables

**FOCUS STATEMENT**

**Parables reveal one main spiritual truth to believers through the use of examples in the physical world.**

**MEMORY VERSE**

...“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’”—Luke 8:10

**SCRIPTURE**

- 1) Luke 8:9-10
- 2) Luke 15:1-2

- 3) Luke 18:14b
- 4) Luke 18:1

- 5) Luke 15:11-32
- 6) James 1:21b

Parables are \_\_\_\_\_ to those whose eyes were opened to them. Spiritual truth is \_\_\_\_\_ discerned, which comes through the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Holy Spirit in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the believer.

Jesus spoke in parables to unbelievers to obscure His teaching. This was actually extending \_\_\_\_\_ to the listeners. It was better that they leave \_\_\_\_\_ than that they once again \_\_\_\_\_ Him and His message.

A parable is a story set in the \_\_\_\_\_ world, using things that are \_\_\_\_\_ to us to illustrate \_\_\_\_\_ truth.

**Understanding Parables**

**Step 1:** Study the immediate context.

**Step 2:** Check for an explanation.

**Step 3:** Discern the main point.

- **Look** at the characters
- **Look** at the dialogue
- **Look** at the ending

**Step 4:** Identify unimportant details.

**Step 5:** Identify important details.

**Small Group Discussion 29A**

Read Luke 15:1-2. *What does the context surrounding the parable of the prodigal son reveal about the point of the parable?*

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**And He Told Them a Parable: Parables**

**Cross out the details below that do not relate to the main point, and then circle the important details.**

**Luke 15:11-32**

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. <sup>14</sup>And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."<sup>20</sup>And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'<sup>22</sup>But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup>Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup>And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'<sup>28</sup>But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup>but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' <sup>31</sup>And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

**Small Group Discussion 29B**

A possible main point for this parable:

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A better title for this parable is:

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*What are some possible reasons that Jesus taught believers using parables?*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Application**

**My Response**—The Word of God is meant to be **lived** not just understood. The Bible should **change** us, not just inform us. *What are some ways the truth of Scripture is changing you?*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Prayer Requests** (for you and your small group):

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**REVIEW OF MAIN IDEAS**

- > Parables impart truth to believers, but obscure the teaching of Jesus to unbelievers.
- > Parables use things in the physical world to help us understand spiritual truth.
- > Parables must be understood in their context.
- > Parables usually make one main point.

# Understanding Parables: STEP 1

# Study the immediate context





# Understanding Parables: STEP 2

# Check for an explanation



# Understanding Parables: STEP 3

# Discern the main point



# Understanding Parables: STEP 4

**Identify  
unimportant  
details**



# Understanding Parables: STEP 5

**Identify  
important  
details**





Think about the following quote:

*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;  
and many people do not like to see themselves.*

*This explains why some of our Lord's listeners became angry  
when they heard His parables, and even tried to kill Him.*

*But if we see ourselves as needy sinners and ask for help,  
then the mirror becomes a window  
through which we see God and His grace.*

*To understand a parable and benefit from it  
demands honesty and humility on our part,  
and many of our Lord's hearers lacked both.*

*—Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary  
An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire BE Series, Luke 8:1  
(Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, copyright ©1996, 1989)*

Read the book of Jude several times in preparation for the next class.

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**REVIEW OF MAIN IDEAS**

- > Parables impart truth to believers, but obscure the teaching of Jesus to unbelievers.
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- > Parables usually make one main point.