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The Fresh Life Series

“I’m touched and blessed by Lenya and Penny’s heart for His kingdom.”

Kay Arthur, Bible teacher and
author of many best-selling Bible studies

“What a great way for women to learn to study the Bible: interesting stories, thought-provoking questions, and a life-changing approach to applying Scripture. Lenya and Penny provide a great method so women can succeed and grow spiritually in a short period of time. Kudos!”

Franklin Graham, president and CEO of Billy Graham
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“Skip and Lenya Heitzig have been friends of my wife, Cathe, and I for more than twenty years. Lenya loves to study God’s Word and teach it to women in a way that is both exciting and accessible. I trust her latest book will be a blessing to you.”

Greg Laurie, pastor and evangelist of Harvest Ministries

“Lenya and Penny’s love for the Lord and knowledge of His Word uniquely equips them to help other women discover the pathway to God through these in-depth Bible studies.”

Kay Smith, wife of Chuck Smith (Calvary Chapel)

“The Fresh Life Series is an insightful and in-depth look at God’s Word. Through these Bible studies Lenya Heitzig and Penny Rose lead women to deeper intimacy with God.”

K. P. Yohannan, president of Gospel for Asia

“Lenya and Penny have created another wonderful Bible study series that invites participants to spend time in God’s Word and then see the Word come to fruition in their lives. What a blessing! These studies are perfect for small groups or personal daily devotions.”

Robin Lee Hatcher, women’s event speaker
and award-winning author

Live Deeply

The Fresh Life Series

Live Deeply: A Study in the Parables of Jesus

Live Fearlessly: A Study in the Book of Joshua

Live Intimately: Lessons from the Upper Room

Live Relationally: Lessons from the Women of Genesis



A 20-MINUTES-A-DAY STUDY

Live Deeply

A Study in the Parables of Jesus

Lenya Heitzig & Penny Rose

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With Gratitude

One of our favorite parables is that of the Pearl of Great Price. Pearls are created when translucent, concentric layers develop around a small object. Jewelers will tell you that a pearl's iridescence grows when fine and frequent layers of nacre cause light to dance across the gem's surface.

The authors recognize that their contribution to this Bible study called *Live Deeply: A Study in the Parables of Jesus* is but a small grain of sand. We have been surrounded by radiant women who have enhanced this study, making it shine brighter. Like a string of pearls, each has added their priceless gift.

Thanks to Helen Davidson, Kristi DuBay, Cheryl Fowler, Anna Jones, Colette Lutz, Dianne Sanborn, Patti Snodgrass, and Christy Willis for their literary contributions.

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Introduction

LIVE DEEPLY

From an early age children beg, “Tell me a story.” Most of the time we respond by telling them a story that teaches a lesson. If a child is prone to fibbing, we might tell the story of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. If a young adolescent is going through that “awkward” stage, we might recount the story of the ugly duckling that turned into a lovely swan. The parables are the stories that Jesus told. Filled with encouragement, rebuke, or exhortation, they challenged His followers to understand that they were not of this world. He was the King of another kingdom, a spiritual kingdom, and therefore they must *Live Deeply*.

THE SETTINGS

The parables of Jesus depict various settings. Some deal with the agricultural world, as in the Sower; others, like the Prodigal Son, involve human relationships. Most are kingdom parables, often beginning with the phrase “the kingdom of heaven is like,” and teach the reader how heavenly citizens must behave. The original setting is important because it holds the key to the interpretation of the parable.

The parables of Jesus focus largely on one central point. Therefore, the primary question a Bible student must ask is, “What is the main lesson being taught?” Too often we attempt to discover what each object represents, but not every detail in the parables contains deep meaning. For instance, the predominant principle in the Good Samaritan reveals who our neighbors are and that we must show them compassion. Our neighbor? Anyone in need. The reader would expect that the priest and Levite, devout religious men, would have treated the wounded outcast with compassion. Instead, a despised foreigner cared for the victim, a man not of his own nationality, race, or religion. The moral of the story? We are exhorted to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). As you study the parables, be sure to carefully note the setting and context of the story.



THE STORIES

Biblical parables are not simply stories. They are divinely inspired, living words from the mouth of God. Jesus used metaphors and similes, making comparisons from the natural world to relate truths about the spiritual world. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* tells us that *parable* literally means to lay by the side or place one thing beside another in order to compare. Thus, in a parable one thing is placed beside another to bring a truth to life. Jesus was a keen observer of human life and the natural world, so His parables truly hit home in the hearts of His followers.

He did not exaggerate as in myths, make up imaginary creatures as in fairy tales, or use unnatural imagery like the talking animals in fables. By using realistic images and characters from everyday life, Christ's earthly illustrations offer divine lessons that resonate to this day. Madeleine L'Engle said, "Jesus was God who told stories." Lay the stories beside your own life, and see what truth Jesus has in store for you.

THE SECRETS

Parables, because they drew from everyday life, had huge impact on the audience. However, not everyone understood their hidden meaning, including the disciples. Once, they asked Jesus to explain what the parable of the Wheat and the Tares meant. The Lord went on to interpret the story's true intent. We discover that the parables had the uncanny ability to reveal God's truth to one person while concealing it from another.

Jesus Himself explained why He spoke in parables by quoting from Isaiah 6:9–10: "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.'" *Nelson's Bible Dictionary* says, "Like a double-edged

Author: Jesus

Audience: Christ's followers

Theme: The kingdom of heaven

Timeline: Probably between AD 28 and 30

Setting: Various places from the Sea of Galilee to the region of Capernaum to the city of Jerusalem

Scripture: "And He said to them, 'To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables'" (Mark 4:11).

sword, they cut two ways—enlightening those who sought the truth and blinding those who were disobedient.” Parables are a litmus test! They reveal whether ears are opened or closed; whether your heart is soft or hard; whether you are a friend or foe, disciple or deceiver.

THE SAVIOR

The famous expositor G. Campbell Morgan said, “In a sense Jesus Himself is a parable through whom God has revealed Himself supremely through His Son. The Son therefore becomes the picture, the parable, which being known and investigated, God Himself is found!”¹

What’s more important than the parables? The Person who told them! A statement’s impact doesn’t merely come from what is said but *who* has said it. During the 1980s, financial investors believed that “when E. F. Hutton talks ... people listen.” Of course we’d take these stories more seriously than any others because Jesus is the truth. These stories aren’t by Tolkien or Twain, Dr. Seuss or Dr. Spock, Aesop or Aristotle. They are God telling His stories.

May you live deeply,
Lenya Heitzig and Penny Rose

How to Get the Most Out of This Study

Would you describe your life as abundant or redundant? The secret to truly living rather than merely languishing is found in God’s Word. We know that God reveals Himself through His Word. That’s why doing a Bible study like this is so vital—because God’s Word has the power to do His work in our lives. It is the catalyst that revives your heart, renews your mind, and restores your soul. That helps make life worth living!

This particular Bible study focuses on the parables of Jesus. We’ll listen to the very words of Jesus, the Master Storyteller. He told short, simple stories based on true-to-life experiences to communicate spiritual truths. He wanted His followers to know who God is, what His kingdom is like, and how His subjects should live. The simplest definition of a parable is “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” Since it’s our Savior telling us these stories, we must take them to heart. Each parable demands a response on our part. They’re a call to action, a solicitation to change, a lesson to be applied. The King of the kingdom demands allegiance. The Master of the household expects obedience. The Shepherd of our souls bids us follow. If you’re ready, let’s get started ...

Each week of the study is divided into five days for your personal time with God. There are five elements to each day’s lesson. They are designed to help you fully “live” as you apply the truths you learn to your life:

1. Lift up ... Here we ask you to “Lift up” prayers to God, asking Him to give you spiritual insight for the day.
2. Look at ... This portion of the study asks you to “Look at” the Scripture text, using inductive questions. These questions help you to discover *What are the facts?* You’ll learn the basic who-what-when-where-how aspects of the passage as well as some of the important background material.
3. Learn about ... The “Learn about” sidebars correlate to specific questions in order to help you understand *What does this text mean?* These sidebar elements offer cultural insight, linguistic definitions, and biblical commentary.

4. Live out ... These questions and exercises are designed to help you investigate *How should this change my life?* Here you are challenged to personally apply the lessons you have learned as you “Live out” God’s principles in a practical way. We encourage you to write out all of the answers to the questions in this study. You may want to write the answers to the personal application questions in a journal to ensure privacy. By writing your insights from God day by day, you’ll have a record of your relationship with Him that you can look back on when you need a faith boost.
5. Listen to ... We finish with inspiring quotes from authors, speakers, and writers. You’ll be able to “Listen to” the wisdom they’ve gleaned in their lives and relate it to your own.

Live Deeply is ideal for discussion in a small-group setting as well as for individual study. The following suggestions will help you and your group get the most out of your study time:

PERSONAL CHECKLIST

- Be determined. Examine your daily schedule; then set aside a consistent time for this study.
- Be prepared. Gather the materials you’ll need: a Bible, this workbook, a journal in which to write your thoughts, and a pen.
- Be inspired. Begin each day with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and to illuminate your mind.
- Be complete. Read the suggested Bible passage, and finish the homework each day.
- Be persistent. Answer each question as fully as possible. If you’re unable to answer a question, move forward to the next question or read the explanation in the “Learn about ...” section, which may offer further insight.

- Be consistent. Don't get discouraged. If you miss a day, use the weekend to catch up.
- Be honest. When answering the "Live out ..." questions, allow the Lord to search your heart and transform your life. Take time to reflect honestly about your feelings, experiences, sins, goals, and responses to God.
- Be blessed. Enjoy your daily study time as God speaks to you through His Word.

SMALL-GROUP CHECKLIST

- Be prayerful. Pray before you begin your time together.
- Be biblical. Keep all answers in line with God's Word; avoid personal opinion.
- Be confidential. Keep all sharing within your small group confidential.
- Be respectful. Listen without interrupting. Keep comments on track and to the point so that all can share.
- Be discreet. In some cases, you need not share more than absolutely necessary. Some things are between you and the Lord.
- Be kind. Reply to the comments of others lovingly and courteously.
- Be mindful. Remember your group members in prayer throughout the week.

SMALL-GROUP LEADER CHECKLIST

- Be prayerful. Pray that the Holy Spirit will "guide you into truth" so that your leadership will guide others.
- Be faithful. Prepare by reading the Bible passage and studying the lesson ahead of time, highlighting truths and applying them personally.

- Be prompt. Begin and end the study on time.
- Be thorough. For optimum benefit, allot one hour for small-group discussion. This should allow plenty of time to cover all of the questions and exercises for each lesson.
- Be selective. If you have less than an hour, you should carefully choose which questions you will address and summarize the edited information for your group. In this way, you can focus on the more thought-provoking questions. Be sure to grant enough time to address pertinent “Live out ...” exercises, as this is where you and the other women will clearly see God at work in your lives.
- Be sensitive. Some of the “Live out ...” exercises are very personal and may not be appropriate to discuss in a small group. If you sense this is the case, feel free to move to another question.
- Be flexible. If the questions in the study seem unclear, reword them for your group. Feel free to add your own questions to bring out the meaning of a verse.
- Be inclusive. Encourage each member to participate in the discussion. You may have to draw some out or tone some down so that all have the opportunity to participate.
- Be honest. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't have all the answers! When in doubt, encourage group members to take difficult questions to their church leadership for clarification.
- Be focused. Keep the discussion on tempo and on target. Learn to pace your small group so that you complete a lesson on time. When participants get sidetracked, redirect the discussion to the passage at hand.
- Be patient. Realize that not all people are at the same place spiritually or socially. Wait for the members of your group to answer the questions rather than jumping in and answering them yourself.

LESSON ONE

Root Determines Fruit

Matthew 13:1–23

Lenya adored Mrs. Johnson, her elementary school teacher, because she had the ability to bring *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* to life. Lenya's sister would anxiously wait for her to arrive home to retell the story in every detail. Penny loved nothing more than spooky bedtime tales from her granddaddy. She'd lie awake at night, jumping at every sound, wondering whether the boogeyman was real. All our kids loved trips to the library for story hour.

Since ancient times, storytellers have enthralled audiences with tales both entertaining and instructive. In 300 BC, Aesop, the Greek storyteller, featured animals like the tortoise and the hare in his fables vividly illustrating how to solve problems. The Brothers Grimm gathered fairy tales like *Hansel and Gretel* in nineteenth-century Germany to teach children valuable moral lessons. Baby boomers were mesmerized when Walt Disney animated their favorite stories in amazing Technicolor.

However, throughout history no one has compared to Jesus Christ as a storyteller. Rather than telling fables or fairy tales, He told parables. A parable is a short, simple story designed to communicate a spiritual truth, religious principle, or moral lesson. It is a figure of speech in which truth is illustrated by a comparison or example drawn from everyday experiences. Warren Wiersbe simply says, "A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."¹ Throughout this study we'll learn from the stories Jesus told, comparing them to our lives and putting His eternal truths into practice.

Day 1: Matthew 13:1–3

Day 2: Matthew 13:3–9

Day 3: Matthew 13:10–13

Day 4: Matthew 13:14–17

Day 5: Matthew 13:18–23

FLOATING PULPIT

FERTILE PARABLE

FEW PERCEIVE

FULFILLED PROPHECY

FOUR POSSIBILITIES

DAY 1

Floating Pulpit

LIFT UP ...

Lord, I love to gather with Your people and listen to Your Word. Help me to be a faithful hearer, not only listening to what You say but obeying Your commands. Thank You for being in our midst. Amen.

LOOK AT ...

Jesus proved Himself to be the promised King—the Messiah of Israel—through His impeccable birthright, powerful words, and supernatural deeds. Despite His amazing miracles and the many ways He fulfilled prophecy, the religious leaders rejected His lordship. Knowing the religious leaders had turned on Him, Jesus directed His attention to the common people. Matthew 13 tells how Jesus stepped onto a floating pulpit on the Sea of Galilee and spoke in parables to explain how the gospel—the good news of salvation—would inaugurate the kingdom of heaven on earth.

The parable of the Sower is one of seven parables Jesus taught to describe what His kingdom would look like as a result of the religious establishment's rejecting Him. This parable was a precursor to the Great Commission that Jesus would give His disciples after His death, burial, and resurrection: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). There is no evidence that the religious leaders stayed to listen to Jesus' simple stories. Yet after this teaching session, the resentment of the religious leaders only deepened.

READ MATTHEW 13:1-3.

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. Matthew 13:1



LEARN ABOUT ...

1 The Sea

The sea here is the Sea of Galilee, located sixty miles north of Jerusalem. In this region of the Promised Land, Jesus offered the majority of His scriptural teachings and performed twenty-five of His thirty-three recorded miracles. Christ's life and ministry were largely set against the backdrop of the Galilean hills.

4 The Pulpit

The crowds had followed Jesus to the edge of the Sea of Galilee. A boat (probably Peter's) became His floating pulpit. The hills surrounding the sea formed a natural amphitheater, functioning even better than a public-address system, allowing Jesus' voice to carry to the multitudes on the shore.

5 The Multitudes

Multitude literally means a throng, rabble, or riot. Commentators believe thousands of people, Jew and Gentile, gathered to hear Jesus on the seashore. "When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).

1. Explain what Jesus did on this day in His ministry.
2. Matthew 13:1 is the continuation of a critical day in Jesus' ministry. Briefly scan Matthew 12; then answer the following questions to learn more about this "same day."
 - a. What day of the week is referred to here?
 - b. What miracles did Jesus perform on this day?
 - c. Describe Jesus' encounters with the religious leaders.
 - d. What did He teach about becoming a member of His family?
3. According to Mark 3:6, what did the Pharisees begin to do on this fateful day?

And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow."

Matthew 13:2–3

4. Explain why Jesus got into the boat.
5. How many people stayed to hear Jesus' message?
6. What method of teaching did Jesus use in speaking to the multitudes?
7. What types of things did He teach in parables?

LIVE OUT ...

8. Galilee was an important region to Jesus. Fill in the following table to learn more.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 4:18–21
 Matthew 17:22–23
 Matthew 26:31–32
 Luke 1:26–28
 Luke 2:39–40
 Acts 10:36–38

GALILEE'S SIGNIFICANCE

9. We've learned that many people came to know Jesus in Galilee. Journal about the place where you encountered Jesus and how meeting Him affected your feelings about that location.
10. Jesus was "moved with compassion" for the multitudes that followed Him. Check the boxes below to indicate how you respond to the many people who are lost and looking for a shepherd.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eager to share the gospel | <input type="checkbox"/> Impatient with their ignorance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious to get away | <input type="checkbox"/> Concerned for their eternity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frightened by their unruliness | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

11. Journal a prayer asking God to supernaturally fill you with compassion for the multitudes that don't know Him.



LEARN ABOUT ...

8 The Location

Galilee was important because Jesus was there. He walked its roads and sailed its seas. Eleven of His twelve disciples (Judas was the exception) hailed from Galilee. Capernaum of Galilee became His headquarters. Both Jews and Gentiles populated the area known as "Galilee of the Gentiles." From there, Jesus gladly spread His message to all.

10 The Motivation

While He felt contempt for religious hypocrites, Jesus felt only compassion and mercy for the multitudes. *Compassion* means sympathy or deep pity for another; the Greek term that Matthew uses literally means for your bowels to yearn. Compassion penetrates deep into one's inner being, prompting kindhearted actions. "The Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11).



The multitudes crowded around Jesus, so He turned a boat on the Sea of Galilee into a floating pulpit. In his book *Fully Human, Fully Alive*, John Powell tells about a friend vacationing in the Bahamas who was drawn to a noisy crowd gathered toward the end of a pier:

Upon investigation he discovered that the object of all the attention was a young man making the last-minute preparations for a solo journey around the world in a homemade boat. Without exception everyone on the pier was vocally pessimistic. All were actively volunteering to tell the ambitious sailor all the things that could possibly go wrong. “The sun will broil you! ... You won’t have enough food! ... That boat of yours won’t withstand the waves in a storm! ... You’ll never make it!”

When my friend heard all these discouraging warnings to the adventurous young man, he felt an irresistible desire to offer some optimism and encouragement. As the little craft began drifting away from the pier towards the horizon, my friend went to the end of the pier, waving both arms wildly like semaphores spelling confidence. He kept shouting: “Bon Voyage! You’re really something! We’re with you! We’re proud of you!”²

If you had been there as the boat was leaving, which group on the pier would you have been among: the optimists, or the pessimists? More importantly, if you had been in the crowds along the Sea of Galilee, would you have joined the Pharisees seeking to harm Jesus or the crowd eagerly listening to the stories Jesus told?

LISTEN TO ...

The best leaders ... almost without exception and at every level, are master users of stories and symbols.

—Tom Peters