

The Growing Seed. The Two Debtors. The Lamp under a Bushel. The Good Samaritan. The Friend at Night. The Rich Fool. The Wise and Foolish Builders. New Wine into Old Wine Skins. The Strong Man. The Sower. The Tares. The Fig Tree. The Mustard Seed. The Leaven. The Pearl. The Hidden Treasure. The Lost Sheep. The Unforgiving Servant. The Lost Coin.

Stories Jesus Told

EXPLORING THE HEART OF THE PARABLES

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DANIEL FUSCO

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DANIEL FUSCO

Lifeway Press®
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Production Team

Susan Hill
Writer

Morgan Hawk
Production Editor

Kyle Wiltshire
Content Editor

Jon Rodda
Art Director

Ben Borman
Cover Design

Karen Daniel
Editorial Team Leader

John Paul Basham
Manager, Student Ministry Publishing

Ben Trueblood
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Ben Mandrell
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ in 1998 while I was in my last year at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. After graduating and spending a few years touring as a professional upright and electric bass player, I felt called to pastoral ministry. My spiritual mentors confirmed God's calling, and soon after I was brought on staff of Calvary Chapel Marin under the direction of Pastor John Henry Corcoran.

After being ordained in 2002, God led me back to the East Coast to plant Calvary Chapel New Brunswick. In November of 2006, I turned over the church to a pastor who I had helped raise up, so I could move back to the San Francisco Bay area and plant more churches.

While I was there, I planted Calvary North Bay in Mill Valley, California and in 2010 while continuing to pastor Calvary North Bay, I planted Calvary San Francisco. Both churches grew and I helped raise up leadership teams in each of them. I founded the Calvary Church Planting Network, which helps facilitate and support church planters.

In 2012, God blew my mind when he led me to turn over both of those churches and move to the beautiful Pacific Northwest, where I became the Lead Pastor of Crossroads Community Church. Crossroads was one of the first megachurches in the Northwest, founded in 1975, and God is still doing an amazing work in the Vancouver and Portland areas through the Crossroads family of faith.



I use what some describe as a unique style of teaching. I like to take the timeless truths of Scripture and make them easily accessible and applicable for men and women of all ages, backgrounds, and cultures. You can find my teachings at my website, DanielFusco.com, or on iTunes, YouTube, and at Crossroadschurch.net. Many people start their day with my #2MinuteMessage on my Facebook page. I also get to host the Real. with Daniel Fusco TV show and the Jesus is Real Radio Ministry on TV and radio stations across the country. My podcast "Crazy Happy" can be found on the Edifi Podcast Network, or wherever you subscribe to your favorite podcasts.

I love to write. I have written four books, *Ahead of the Curve* (self-published), *Honestly: Getting Real About Jesus and Our Messy Lives* (NavPress), *Upward, Inward, and Outward: Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others* (NavPress), and *Crazy Happy: Nine Surprising Ways to Live the Truly Beautiful Life* (Waterbrook Multnomah). I'm also a featured contributor to "Preaching Today," and I have published articles with Leadership Journal, pastors.com, and Calvarychapel.com.

I have taught at churches, retreats, youth rallies, leadership seminars, college campuses, and pastor's conferences both in the US and abroad.

I am blessed to be married to Lynn. We live with our three children in Southwest Washington.



Stories Jesus Told

EXPLORING THE HEART OF THE PARABLES

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Stories Jesus Told: Exploring the Heart of the Parables provides a guided process for individuals and small groups to walk through the parables of Jesus. This Bible study book includes six weeks of content, each divided into two major sections: Group Time and Personal Time. A leader guide is also provided to prepare those who are leading groups through this journey.

GROUP TIME

Regardless of the day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with Group Time. This group session is designed to last sixty minutes, with approximately fifteen minutes dedicated to video teaching and another forty-five minutes for group discussion. Meeting even longer than sixty minutes will allow more time for students to interact with one another. Each group time uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among students, with God's Word, and with the video teaching.

Start

This section includes an icebreaker, questions to get the conversation started, and an introduction to the new content for the current week.

Watch

This section includes key Scripture and fill-in-the-blank notes for students to follow along as they watch. Videos are available to rent or purchase at lifeway.com/storiesjesustold.

Discuss

This section includes discussion questions that guide the group to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages. The second page has a Scripture reading plan for students to follow and deepen their understanding.

PERSONAL TIME

Three personal studies are provided each week to take students deeper into Scripture and to supplement the content introduced in group time. With biblical teaching and interactive questions, these sections challenge students to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to make practical applications to their lives. Each week is also accompanied with a suggested Bible reading plan to enhance the week's learning.

LEADER GUIDE

On pages 80-95 at the back of this book, you'll find a leader guide that will help you prepare each week. Use this guide to gain an understanding of the content for each week and to learn ways you can engage with students at different levels of life-changing discussion.





SESSION 1

Why Parables?

GROUP TIME

Start

*Welcome everyone to Session 1.
Use this page to begin the group session.*

*Begin by taking a few minutes to get to know one another.
Ask members of the group to introduce themselves by
sharing their names, grade, where they go to school,
and how they got connected to this Bible study.*

What is your favorite movie or book of all time? (You don't have to say the Bible.) What about this story made an impact on you?

Why do you think we are so drawn to stories?

Human beings love stories. As preschoolers, our parents and teachers read stories to us that fascinated and captured our attention. As we get older, our taste in stories might change, but we never outgrow our love for them. We wait with anticipation for new movies and new seasons of our favorite shows to come out—all because we love great stories. Jesus was a master teacher. He knew the power of a story, so it's not surprising Jesus used stories to communicate spiritual truths. For the next six weeks, we'll be studying parables—the Stories Jesus Told.

*Pray and ask God to use your time together.
After praying, watch the video teaching.*

Watch

Fill in the blanks while you watch the video for Session 1.

We all want God to speak to us _____, but God actually speaks to us through His _____.

A _____ is something that is thrown alongside something else.

_____ are one of the primary ways we understand our own lives and that we express the _____ that we believe to other people.

As we study God's Word, our hope is that He reveals Himself _____ and speaks to us _____.

Jesus wanted to make the truths that God wants us to know _____ so that anyone could hear.

"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."

MATTHEW 13:11-13

Jesus told parables to divide between those whose hearts were _____ and wanted to learn and those whose hearts were _____ and didn't want to learn.

Discuss

Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the video.

Jesus was a master teacher, who made the truths of God simple enough for anyone to understand. To encounter the stories Jesus told, we must read the Bible. The Bible is the primary way God speaks to His people and so getting the most out of our Bible reading is an important aspect of hearing from God.

Read Matthew 13:10-13 together.

1. We all want God to speak to us personally, but God has spoken to us through His Word. How would you describe your experience reading God's Word? How would you like to grow as a student of God's Word?
2. Read Psalm 19:7-9. How does the psalmist describe God's Word? Why should this make us want to read it?
3. Jesus used parables to keep people with closed hearts from understanding His message. What does this teach us about our posture as we approach God's Word?
4. Why should prayer and Bible reading go hand in hand? How has prayer shaped your Bible reading?
5. If you haven't yet, what steps can you take to make Bible reading a part of your daily routine?
6. What do you hope to learn through the next six weeks of Bible study?

Close your discussion with prayer. Remind students to complete the personal time and Bible reading over the next week.

Reading Plan

Over the next week, read the following passages to further reflect upon the truths from this session.

Day 1: Deuteronomy 6

Day 2: Joshua 1

Day 3: Psalm 119:1-56

Day 4: Psalm 119:57-104

Day 5: Psalm 119:105-176

What insight do these passages reveal about the Word of God?

Personal Time 1

THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

All people want to hear God speak to them. The good news is, we serve a God who does communicate with His people. From the opening chapters of Genesis through the book of Revelation, we see evidence that God is committed to speaking to those who want to hear. As modern-day believers, the primary way we hear from God is through His Word. The Bible itself has a lot to say about the role Scripture plays in the life of a believer.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Genesis 2:7.

Some Bibles translate *inspired* literally, explaining that Scripture was “breathed” by God. What connections does this have with Genesis 2:7?

According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, what is Scripture able to do?

God breathed life into Adam and He did the same thing to Scripture. The Bible is not just words on a page; it's alive and active. That is why it can do the things described in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. When it was written, God inspired more than 40 authors over a period of 1,500 years to write His Word. As you read the Scriptures, you'll notice the individual styles and personalities of the authors are apparent in the text, but God inspired the words Himself. Because Scripture originated with God, it's vital for us to interact with it regularly. Reading the Bible is necessary for us to know God and to know how we are supposed to live.

Living and Powerful

Read Hebrews 4:12.

How does the author of Hebrews describe the Word of God?

What does it mean when the author explained that God's Word is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of our hearts?

In the same way a surgeon's knife can cut deep inside a person's body, the Word of God gets into our innermost thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. God's Word delivers both bad and good news. The bad news is that because of our sin all human beings have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). The good news is that because of His grace, God has provided a way for us to be made right with Him through what Jesus did for us on the cross. In other words, God's Word serves to convict us of our sins and also offers us a path to forgiveness, resurrection, and life for those who believe in Jesus.

When was the first time you realized you had a sin problem that separated you from God? What brought you to that conclusion?

What role does Scriptures play in your relationship with God?

Bible reading is one of the most important habits we can engage in because it puts us in a posture to grow in our faith. As we continue to study the parables, spend time thinking about the truths you are learning and how to apply them to your life.

Close in prayer and ask God that His Word would breathe life into you.

Personal Time 2

UNDERSTANDING PARABLES

The Bible is filled with writings from many different genres. The Bible contains narratives, prophecy, poetry, major and minor prophets, wisdom literature, the Gospels, and letters. Within the Gospels, Jesus used a method of storytelling we know as parables. In the parables, Jesus often used a familiar subject to teach an unfamiliar spiritual truth.

Read Matthew 13:10-17,34-35.

Glance back at verse 10. What did the disciples ask Jesus?

Jesus's words painted interesting pictures. For example, He spoke of a camel attempting to go through the eye of a needle (Matt. 19:24). He warned against a "divided house" (Mark 3:25), building your house on the sand (Matt. 7:26-27), and people attempting to remove "specks" from other's eyes when there were planks in their own (Matt. 7:5). Undoubtedly, Jesus's disciples were aware of His vibrant communication style, but after He told them the parable of the sower (a parable we will study next week), His disciples asked Him, "Why do you speak in parables?" (13:10).

In your own words, how would you explain Jesus's answer?

Does Jesus's response seem shocking to you? Why or why not?

Jesus spoke in parables so that those whom God wants to know His truth will know. Doesn't that sound kind of strange? Think about that for a second. Jesus told these stories so that the people whom God wants to understand will

understand, but on the other hand, the people who don't want to understand won't. Now doesn't that surprise you? It surprises me. I remember the first time I read this, I thought to myself, "Wait a second. So, God doesn't want everyone to know?" It's not that God doesn't want them to understand; it's that they are choosing not to understand. They have "closed their eyes" to the truth (Matt. 13:15). It's like trying to have a discussion with someone who refuses to see anyone else's point of view. If someone refuses to listen, they will never understand what is being explained.

But take another look at Jesus's words about those who believe:

But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

MATTHEW 13:16-17

When people hear and believe the Word of God and trust in God's grace to save them, God imparts more and more truth to them in which they can live by. All believers have the ability to understand even the deep things of God because the Holy Spirit is faithful to impart truth to those who belong to God (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

At this point, how would you describe your willingness to listen to what God is telling you in Scripture?

Jesus's disciples were ordinary men. They were not scribes, experts in Old Testament law, rabbis, or theologians. They were common people with ordinary jobs, yet they understood the spiritual truths Jesus taught them. In the same way, modern-day believers don't need special skills or advanced degrees to understand the truths of God's Word. The Bible is for everyone, and if you will commit to studying it, the Holy Spirit will be faithful to teach you.

Close your time today praying that God would work through the Spirit to enable you to understanding the truths of His Word.

Personal Time 3

FULFILLING PROPHECY

In the previous personal time, we unpacked a couple of the reasons Jesus taught in parables. We learned that Jesus spoke in parables so those who were willing would hear and believe. Secondly, He spoke in parables to conceal the meaning from those who “closed their eyes” (Matt. 13:15) to the truth. In today’s study, we’ll look at another reason why Jesus taught in parables.

*All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:
“I will open My mouth in parables;
I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.”*
MATTHEW 13:34-35

According to this passage, what’s the third reason Jesus spoke to people in parables?

Look up Psalm 78:2. How does this passage relate to Matthew 13:34-35?

Jesus spoke to reveal the mysteries of God to those who would receive it. Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture—even down to the words that came out of His mouth and the way He communicated spiritual truth to those who were willing to hear. Jesus is still revealing the mysteries of God through His Word today. If you want to understand Scripture, ask God to increase your understanding. If you’re one of His followers, He delights to increase your understanding because He wants to reveal Himself to you.

*And He said, "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."
ISAIAH 6:9-10*

What is the relationship between understanding God's Word and being willing to obey God's Word?

Why is it tempting to just take in God's Word as information, but not as a Word from God that can and should change our lives?

The people the prophet Isaiah described in the verses above were not impacted by the Word of God. They had an obedience problem. You and I have to make sure we're not in that same place. In Matthew 13, Jesus quoted these verses. The people Jesus was referring to (the Pharisees) were some very religious people who took their beliefs very, very seriously. Ultimately, these people were going to crucify Jesus. They knew about Him, but they didn't know Him as their Lord. Have you ever seen a Christian who acted nothing like a Christian but thought they were one? We want to avoid doing that at all costs. Asking God to reveal the truth of His Word to us is asking to understand and perceive who God is, what He's done, and what He's doing.

Close this final session for the week asking God to increase your ability to hear His Word and obey it.