

Stories Jesus Told

EXPLORING THE HEART OF THE PARABLES

DANIEL FUSCO

Lifeway Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

Production Team

Susan Hill
Writer

Jennifer Siao
Production Editor

Reid Patton
Content Editor

Jon Rodda
Art Director

Ben Borman
Cover Design

Joel Polk
Manager, Short-Term Discipleship

Brian Daniel
Director, Lifeway Adult Ministry

Published by Lifeway Press® • © 2021 Daniel Fusco

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to Lifeway Press®, One Lifeway Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234.

ISBN 978-1-0877-3727-0 • Item 005830387

Dewey decimal classification: 226.8

Subject headings: BIBLE—PARABLES / JESUS CHRIST—PARABLES / JESUS CHRIST—TEACHINGS

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

To order additional copies of this resource, write to Lifeway Resources Customer Service; One Lifeway Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234; fax 615-251-5933; phone toll free 800-458-2772; order online at Lifeway.com; or email orderentry@lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing • Lifeway Resources
One Lifeway Plaza • Nashville, TN 37234

Contents

About the Author	4
From the Author	5
How to Use This Study	6

SESSION 1

Why Parables?	8
-------------------------	---

SESSION 2

The Parable of the Soils.	22
-----------------------------------	----

SESSION 3

The Parable of Lost Things	36
--------------------------------------	----

SESSION 4

The Parable of the Wheat and Weeds . . .	50
--	----

SESSION 5

The Parable of the Prodigal Son	64
---	----

SESSION 6

The Parable of the Talents	78
--------------------------------------	----

Leader Guide	92
------------------------	----

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, NJ. After spending a few years touring as a professional upright and electric bass player, I felt called to pastoral ministry. My spiritual leaders confirmed this call, and I was taken on staff at Calvary Chapel Marin under the direction of Pastor John Henry Corcoran in January of 2000.

After being ordained in 2002, I was sent 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, CA 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.

I employ 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 channels, 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, featuring messages on TV and radio stations across the country.

I love to write. I'm a featured contributor to "Preaching Today," and I have published articles with Leadership Journal, pastors.com, and Calvarychapel.com. 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). All books are available at Amazon.com.

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

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

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 mega-churches in the Northwest, founded in 1975, and God is still doing an amazing work in Vancouver/Portland area through the Crossroads family of faith.





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 Study," and "Personal Study." A leader guide is also provided to prepare those who are leading groups through this journey.

GROUP STUDY

Regardless of the day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with a group session. 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 participants to interact with one another.

Each group study uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God’s Word, and with the video teaching.

Start

This section includes questions to get the conversation started, a review of the previous week’s study to reinforce the content, and an introduction to the new content for the current week.

Watch

This section includes key points from the video teaching, along with space for taking notes as participants watch the video.

Discuss

This section includes discussion questions that guide the group to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages. A second page has been provided to take notes and write down prayer requests.

PERSONAL STUDY

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

LEADER GUIDE

On pages 92-108 at the back of this book, you’ll find a leader guide that will help you prepare each week. Use this guide to gain a broad understanding of the content for each week and to learn ways you can engage with members at different levels of life-changing discussion.



The image features a grayscale cityscape of New York City, including the Empire State Building, set against a solid yellow background. A hot air balloon is visible in the lower right corner. The text "SESSION 1" is centered in the middle of the image.

SESSION 1

Why Parables?

GROUP STUDY

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 and how they got connected to this group study.*

What kind of stories do you like? Fiction, non-fiction, dramas, comedy?

Share a book or movie that had an impact on you.

Human beings love stories. As children, our parents and teachers read stories to us as we listened attentively. As we get older, our taste in stories matures, but we never outgrow our love for them. We wait with anticipation for new movies and new releases from our favorite authors—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 sessions, 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

*Use the space below to take notes
while you watch video session 1.*

To access the teaching sessions,
use the instructions in the back
of your Bible study book.



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 our Bibles. 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 those in your group to complete the personal studies 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.

Deuteronomy 6

Joshua 1

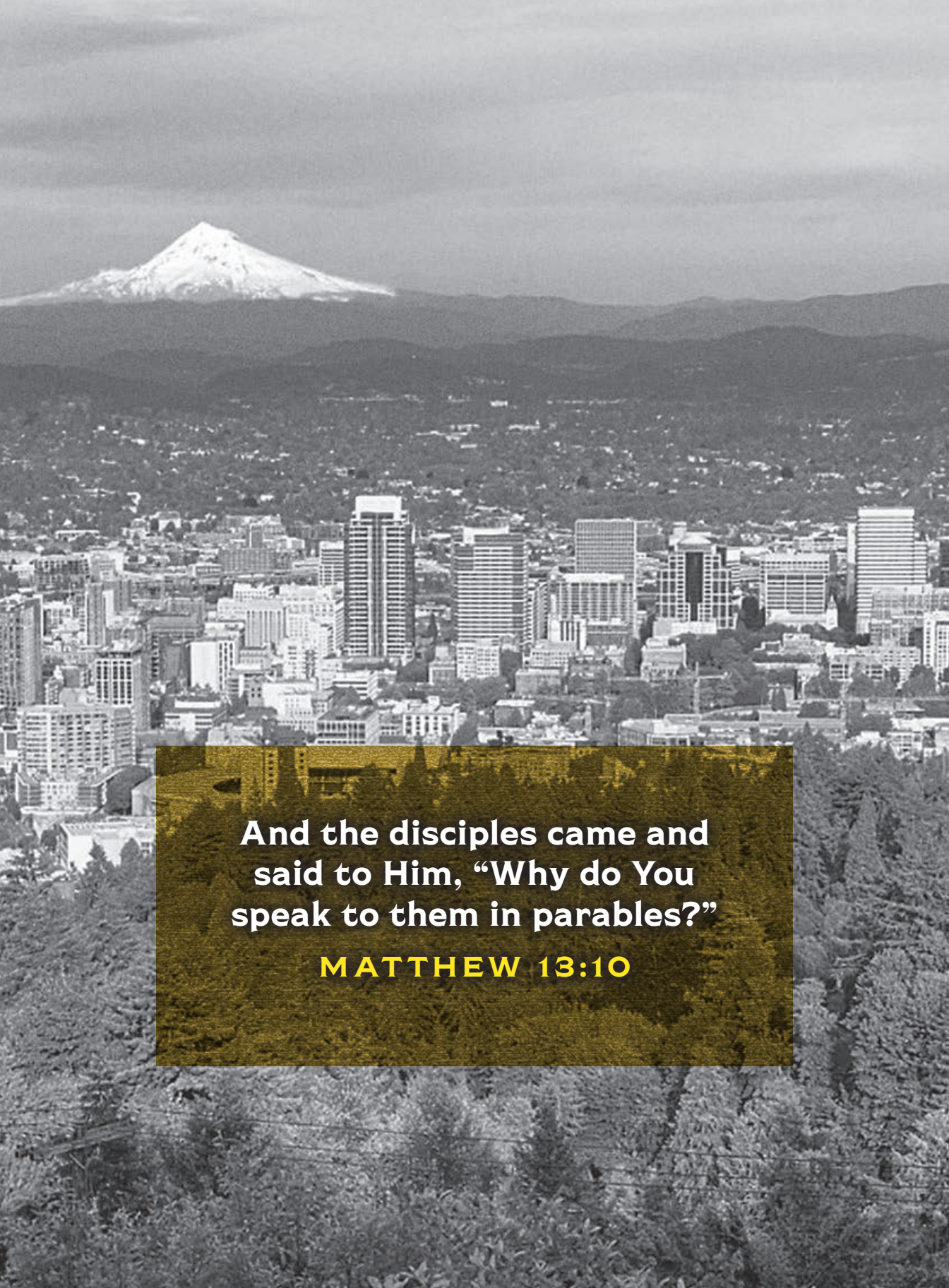
Psalm 119:1-56

Psalm 119:57-104

Psalm 119:105-176

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





**And the disciples came and
said to Him, “Why do You
speak to them in parables?”**

MATTHEW 13:10

Personal Study 1

THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

In this session, Pastor Daniel discussed how all people want to hear God speak to them. The good news is, we serve a God who communicates 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 the Scriptures should play in the life of a believer.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

List everything these verses say about the Scriptures.

What does it mean when Paul writes Scripture is inspired by God?

According to these verses, what is Scripture able to do?

In Paul's letter to Timothy, he revealed that the Scriptures were "inspired" by God—which means "breathed out by God." When Paul referred to the Scriptures he was referring to the Old Testament, but by implication, he was referring to the New Testament as well. When the Bible was written, God spoke through more than 40 authors over a period of 1500 years. 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 profitable for us to interact with it regularly. It is necessary for us to know God and 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 reveals that God's Word "pierces even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow?"

In the same way a surgeon's knife pierces into the deepest parts of a person's body, the Word of God probes 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 reconciled to Him through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. In other words, God's Word serves to convict us of our sins and also offers us a pardon, resurrection, and life for those who believe in Jesus.

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

What role do the 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 in this study of the parables, spend time thinking about the truths you are learning and how to apply them to your life.

Personal Study 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 Epistles. Within the Gospels, Jesus used a method of storytelling we know as the 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' words were visually stimulating. 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), the "yeast" of the Pharisees (Mark 8:15), and people attempting to remove "specks" from other's eyes when there were planks in their own (Matt. 7:5). Undoubtedly, Jesus' 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 to them in parables?" (13:10).

How did Jesus answer their question?

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

Jesus spoke in parables so that those who God wants to know His truth, will know. Now, doesn't that sound kind of strange? I mean, think about that for a second. Jesus spoke these stories, these thrown alongside tales so that

the people who God wants to understand will understand and subsequently 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?" Initially, Jesus' response might seem harsh, but in reality it was an act of mercy. A greater exposure to the truth increases one's accountability toward God in judgment (Matt. 11:20-24), so concealing the truth may have been an act of grace to those who He knew would be unresponsive. But take another look at Jesus' 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 Him (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

At this point, how would you describe your level of confidence in learning new things in Scripture?

Jesus' disciples were ordinary men. They were not scribes, experts in Old Testament law, Rabbis, or theologians. They were common people with ordinary jobs and 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, 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 understand the truths of His Word.

Personal Study 3

FULFILLING PROPHECY

In the previous personal study session, 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 truth from those who He knew would reject it. In today's study, we'll look at another reason why Jesus taught in parables.

Read the passage below.

*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 in parables?

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

Everything about Jesus' life and ministry was in alignment with Scripture. 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 communicating 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 you're one of those people He wants to know and He wants to reveal Himself to you.

Read the passage below.

*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 might it be tempting merely to take God's Word in as information, but not a Word from God that can and should change our lives?

How should we respond when we're tempted to not obey God's Word?

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 place, because don't miss the fact Jesus was talking about some very religious people who took their religion practice very seriously. Ultimately this was the same group of people who would crucify Him. They knew about Jesus but they didn't know Him as their Lord. Have you ever seen a Christian who's acting nothing like a Christian but thinks that they are? We want to avoid that at all costs. But asking God for revelation is asking God to orient all of your human faculties to be able to understand and perceive who God is and what He's done and what He's doing.