

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-23 Methods: Using Bible Parables

In your last lesson you learned about the power of your personal story. Sharing how you came into an intimate relationship with Christ can be useful in bringing others into the same relationship. In this lesson you will learn the importance of the application of Bible stories to the felt need of our audience. Such short stories can be used to help people understand the truth of the gospel and their right relationship with God.

So, what is a parable? A parable is a brief story that compares two things. They are used for teaching—going from the known to the unknown—using everyday events. They combine the qualities of descriptive narrative, symbolism, and brevity. A parable tells a short story with a double meaning. One meaning will be quite clear and easy to understand in simple terms. Another deeper meaning or spiritual truth lies hidden within the details of the story. The parable challenges or provokes the hearer to discover what the common story is really teaching.

The key to using such stories to share the gospel is to first understand your listener. What is it about him or her that needs to be linked to God's greater purpose for all humankind? Your hearer's need is not unique or beyond God. Therefore, when you share a Bible parable, the listener can apply the truths embedded in the story to their own life.

Once you understand their particular circumstances, you can determine what parable from the Bible would best apply to their situation. Then, share the most relevant details of the parable and show the listener how relevant the Bible can be to their life.

There are four ways that parables from the Bible apply to real life today. First, telling parables calls forth curiosity. Second, they usually have a literal meaning and a more hidden purpose in the telling. Third, this kind of story challenges the hearer to interpret its meaning in the light of their own circumstances. Fourth, parables are quite common in many cultures.

Also, there are many reasons we should use parables to share the gospel. They illustrate that the Bible is a reliable source for truths that apply to everyday life. They answer potential questions in a way that does not offend. They allow hearers to discover truth for themselves.

Let's look at an example of how this could be done. The Bible says in the Gospel of Luke: "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them'" (Luke 15: 1-2). In response to the religious leaders, Jesus tells a story about a lost son. This story applies to those who are self-righteous and religious. It also relates to those who have forsaken their family and traditional beliefs. They are lost in the depths of despair.

Jesus began, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living." Soon the country suffered a famine. With no more money, the young man went to work for a farmer. One of his jobs was to feed the farmer's pigs. He himself had nothing to eat (Luke 15:11-16).

The story that Jesus tells shocks his hearers on a number of levels. For the younger to demand his estate before his father dies is a shameful act. To go off and waste it in wild living is to pile further insult upon insult. And finally, the idea of a Jew working among unclean pigs was repulsive to the hearers on both social and religious levels. So, the setting that Jesus describes was disgusting to his audience.

The story continues: “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So, he got up and went to his father.”

The phrase “he came to his senses,” speaks of the point of reality awareness where we suddenly realize our sinful condition. People in extreme poverty of both body and soul, especially those who are addicted and perhaps homeless beggars, can relate to the condition of the lost son. Often such people seem unaware of just how desperate their situation really is. Yet, because of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, they are shocked into awareness. They see their need of deliverance and take the necessary steps to come to faith. Perhaps some of the sinners listening to Jesus knew what the lost son in the story was feeling.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” The son gave his speech, repenting of his sin, but the father called for a clean robe and sandals for his younger son. They had to celebrate, for the son whom they had thought was dead had come home. Because of his repentance and the great love of the father, the prodigal son was restored. The father’s eagerness to forgive and restore his son is a picture of the love of the heavenly Father toward his earthly prodigal children.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. One of the servants told him about the party. The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. “My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:17-31).

The story ends with a lesson for the religious and the self-righteous that Jesus is speaking to in the passage. Human reaction to the restoration of prodigals is likely to be one of jealousy and anger. Yet God’s love is without condition towards all people. Regardless of our actions, the heavenly Father will always rejoice in our repentance and obedience. He wants our relationship with him to be restored.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that the Bible has many parables that you can share with unbelievers. They illustrate the truths of the gospel. You can apply them to the lives of your hearers.

This lesson is **important** because it shows how we can help people to appreciate the Word of God in its ability to speak to every area of our lives. Even a simple parable can be a powerful tool to share the good news of the gospel.

Review Questions

1. What is a Bible parable? [Pause 5 seconds.]
 - A. If you answered, “A parable is a brief story using everyday events that compares two things to teach a central truth,” you answered correctly.
2. What is the key to using biblical parables to share the gospel with unbelievers? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, “The key to using Bible parables is to first understand your listener,” you are correct.
3. What are some of the ways that parables from the Bible apply to real life today? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, “They call forth curiosity, they usually have a literal meaning and a more hidden one, they challenge the hearers to interpret the meaning, and they are common in many cultures,” you are right.
4. What are some of the reasons we should use Bible parables to share the gospel? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, “They illustrate that the Bible is a reliable source for truth, they answer questions in a way that does not offend, and they allow hearers to discover truth for themselves,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to listen to the lesson a few times to be able to tell the story of the lost son in your own words. As you consider this lesson, think about why it’s so important that you first listen to the hearer’s story to know which parable will be relevant to them. Also, think through the importance of memorizing the content of the Scriptures so you can share them with your listeners. Finally, ask yourself how you might link the main point of the parable to the listener’s circumstances, so that it would encourage them to make a commitment to Christ.