

## **Study Guide for “Lesson on Jesus’ Parables”**

To be used along with the video of the same name on [www.ChristianfromMuslim.com](http://www.ChristianfromMuslim.com)

### **Summary and Notes:**

Quick Summary: Today we examine the colorful word pictures and stories that Jesus used to illustrate his teachings. We highlight popular ones, and mention which stories especially appeal to Muslim and Middle Eastern thinking.



Dr. C and Huda discuss several of the parables. Rev. Bob Siegel discusses his favorite parable – The Prodigal Son. We also show reality segments to illustrate parables in modern settings, and how to use real life situations to share parables with your contacts.

This is a companion lesson to the Study Guide and video *Lesson on Jesus’ Style of Teaching and Living*. It is best if these are viewed as a set, with this as the second.

### **Lessons from Picking Pomegranates**

It is early autumn in Northern California in this reality segment, and Dr. C and Huda are picking pomegranates. Expected and unexpected things happen during their small harvest. Huda has always loved pomegranates, and gets special pleasure from harvesting them every year. She says her father grew up on a farm, so the desire is probably in her blood.

The way Dr. C and Huda find lessons from the activities and nature around them, reminds us of how Jesus gave object lessons from everyday life, and told stories called **parables**. For example:

- Their seeking pomegranates reminds us of how Jesus came to “*seek and save the lost.*” (Luke 19:10)
- We also discover how pomegranates need light to ripen. This reminds us of how the light of Jesus and God’s Word enables us to mature as Christians. (John 8:12)

### **Why did Jesus Teach in Parables?**

In the *Lesson on Jesus’ Teaching Style* we mentioned that parables are one of several styles of teaching that Jesus used. Why? **Parables are illustrative stories**. Undoubtedly Jesus knew what studies in psychology have shown us: word pictures and stories help us **remember**, especially if they touch our emotions.

In ancient times, as in some regions of the world today, reading and writing have been limited to only a small percentage of the population. In these cultures, **verbal forms** of communication predominate, like memorization of traditional poems and genealogies in what is called the “oral tradition.” **Storytelling** also ranks high with them as a means of communication, sometimes accompanied by dances or actors. Rather than dancers, Jesus’ stories painted pictures on our imaginations.

Imagine caravans or Bedouins gathered around the campfire after a long day, telling stories. Muslim cultures today remain closer to that storytelling heritage than the West. So it was in Jesus’ day. **Stories grabbed people’s attention** and also entertained them. If people were wise, they would think about the meaning. Possibly they would discuss them afterward with each other, as did Jesus disciples.

Agatha Christie, the third best-selling author of all time, after the Bible and Shakespeare, made an interesting observation. While working with her archaeologist husband on an archaeological dig in Syria she noticed,

*“The New Testament comes very near when I ask Max to repeat the gist of long conversations that he has had with the Sheikh, for their exchanges consist almost entirely of parables- **to illustrate your wishes or your demands, you tell a story with a point to it, the other counters with another story which turns the tables, and so on. Nothing is ever couched in direct language.**”*

Although this describes communication from the 1930s, Dr. Cynthia has found that even today, a great way to engage the attention of many Muslims is with a story parable. Although we tend to overlook it, stories often work with Westerners too, as shown by the popularity of novels and movies.

### **Jesus’ Teaching: Similes and Metaphors**

While sitting in a gazebo surrounded by a beautiful lake, Dr. C explains to Huda that a common way Jesus taught was with metaphors. He also used similes.

- A metaphor is saying that something is something else – something that it is not, but has qualities in common with.
- A simile is stating that something is like, or similar to something else.
  - Parables often start with a simile, saying for example that, “The Kingdom of God is like...”

### **Example of Metaphors – SALT and LIGHT**

Jesus said that:

- We are the **salt** of the earth. (Matthew 5:13) Why is that important? Think:
  - Salt brings flavor to bland food – and we should bring good flavor to the world!
  - Salt preserves meat from rotting – so Christians preserve society from rotting.
  - Salt was, and at times still is, used for healing – so Christians should be healing in what we say and do!
- He is the **light** of the world. Why is that important? Think: (John 8:12)
  - Without light we stumble in darkness.
  - Light brings warmth in a cold world.
  - Seen shining in sunlight, the world is a beautiful place. This cheers us.

**Reality – Visiting a Lighthouse:** To demonstrate the importance of light as a guide, Dr. C visits a lighthouse on the Northern California coast. She points out as how the lighthouse saves lives by giving ships at sea knowledge of where the land is. So to us light is what directs us through the darkness and fogs of this world.

**LIGHT is a common and powerful image** used throughout the Bible to describe how God’s way keeps us out of darkness. We discuss this also in the lesson on Christmas, because that is when the true light came into the world. Since we think that Light is very meaningful, we would like to share a few more examples of Bible verses on “light.” You will notice that many are from John’s gospel or letters.

### **Light in the OLD TESTAMENT – God’s Word**

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*      Psalm 119: 105

*The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out. Proverbs 13:9*

### **Light in the NEW TESTAMENT - Jesus**

*And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. John 3:19 NLT*

*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: **God is light**; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But **if we walk in the light, as he is in the light**, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

I John 1:5-7

May we always walk in the light, with Jesus, our Savior.

### **Risks of Overinterpreting**

Parables, Similes and Metaphors

Parables, metaphors and similes are **analogies**. This means they are something used to describe something else. Analogies have limitations. Good ones illustrate in a powerful and memorable way. But **all analogies break down at some point**.

- This means that not everything about them exactly mirrors what they illustrate.
- Some analogies fit better than others. The important thing is their strength in illustrating our point.
- “Leave a good thing alone” is a saying we have in English which means not to risk ruining something by overdoing it. That applies to analogies as well.

### **Example - Common analogies Christians use:**

An egg, the Irish shamrock, and the phases of water are common illustrations of the Trinity – because they are **three in one like God**. But these analogies break down at some point, because obviously God is identical to none of them. For example, the egg has membranes dividing its parts, and a shell made of calcium, which God is not, and so on.

### **Example – Using the Empty Glass Analogy:**

Muslims have difficulty understanding how God could be Jesus. Some obstacle keeps them from seeing that **God can be inside Jesus and outside at the same time**. They challenge us by asking,

“If God was in Jesus who was watching the world?”

Sometimes they ridicule us when saying this, as if they caught us being stupid in thinking that God could be limited to a body. Yet the question is almost humorous to longtime Christians, because we accept automatically that God is always everywhere because he is *omnipresent*. David tells us this in Psalm 139.

(Note: It may surprise Christians that Muslims are not sure that Allah is everywhere at once.)

**How do we answer?** First we remind them that God was **in the burning bush** and outside it at the same time. The Qur'an says this as well as the Bible. Then we remind them that Jesus is “God in human flesh.”

Dr. C likes to point to an **empty or partly filled glass** as an illustration of the incarnation – God becoming man in Jesus Christ. Many times we are sitting with Muslims eating or drinking, as fits with their hospitable culture. So usually an empty glass of water, and a partly filled cup of tea or coffee are the table. We can use those for an easy illustration.

*Just as air is both inside and outside the empty glass at the same time,  
so God was inside the human body of Jesus as well as everywhere else.*

If we leave the analogy at that, it is powerful and gives them something to think about. The fact that they saw it on the table helps make it memorable. But we keep the illustration simply to the analogy of where the air is. We don't overinterpret it by referring to what is in the cup, or say that the Holy Spirit is like the caffeine in coffee, or worry about other cups on the table. **Short and sharp** make it memorable.

(Note: This is an example of using everyday things and situations that we encourage you to do in sharing God's truth with Muslims and others. Keep your eyes open for other examples.)

## Parables and Metaphors in the Gospels

### The First Three Gospels

Have you noticed that the first three gospels in the New Testament are similar? That is because they used similar eyewitness testimonies to tell their stories of the life of Jesus (*synoptic*). Some people ask why there were three if they were so similar?

- Each gospel has a slightly different slant and length. This is because of the **people groups** that they were written for.
- The gospels were not all circulated in the same **location**, for example, Mark went to Alexandria, Egypt as a missionary, where his gospel was mainly used.
- **Matthew** is especially focused on fulfilled prophecies. It is felt that is because he wrote for the Jews. He included many of Jesus' metaphors in the most complete Sermon on the Mount recorded.
- **Luke** is especially thorough on including parables.
- **Mark**, felt to be directed to the Romans, is shorter, action oriented, and includes the emotion accompanying the events.

### The Gospel of John

QUESTION: The Gospel of John, comes after Matthew, Mark, and Luke in the New testament. Many people have noticed that it is **very different than the first three** and have wondered why?

ANSWER; The early church historian Eusebius explained it for us. Within a few decades after Jesus' resurrection the first three gospels were written. They were good descriptions of what Jesus did and said. But Eusebius tells us that decades later, some believers approached Jesus' disciple John. They knew he had a unique view, focused on love and other spiritual aspects of the Christian life, as we can see from the three letters he wrote in the New Testament. They asked John to write a "spiritual gospel."

When we think of it that way, it makes sense why John's approach is so different. He was not as concerned with as many of the different activities and miracles that Jesus did compared to the other three gospel writers. He was much more **focused on the spiritual discussions** that Jesus had, the **symbolism and metaphors**.

John's gospel has some of the best **metaphorical descriptions of Jesus**. For example,

- the Word of God
- the light of the world
- the bread of life
- the source of living water
- the resurrection and the life
- the Good Shepherd
- the door
- the way
- the truth
- the life

### **Teaching: CONTEXT**

When interpreting a parable – or anything Jesus taught – we should consider it in the context he was presenting the parable in. If we dig a little to uncover the setting Jesus was speaking in or about, Jesus’ teaching takes on more power.

#### **Examples of Jesus’ Teaching in Context:**

- **Living Water.**
  - When he offered living water to a woman in Samaria, they were seated by a well, drawing water. (John 4)
  - When Jesus invited the spiritually thirsty to come to him, he was in the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. Water was an important part of this festival.
    - Jesus was likely standing near the water gate. The people would see the water flowing forth, so when he spoke about spiritual water, the impact would be unforgettable. (John 7:2,37,38)
- **Light of the World.** When Jesus said he was the Light of the World in John 8:12, he was likely near candlesticks in the temple during the Feast of Hanukkah, which was a festival of lights. These lights behind him would hold the people’s attention as he announced that he was the light. Then they must all have turned their eyes to him, amazed!
- **Bread of Life.** Jesus’ claim to be the Bread of Life came just after he fed bread to over 5,000 people in John 6.
- **The Resurrection and the Life.** Jesus arrived at the home of Mary and Martha to mourn with them after their brother Lazarus had died. They were severely disappointed by Jesus’ late arrival, for they had hoped Jesus would heal him.

*Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?”* John 11:25,26 NLT

- Jesus could have claimed any day to be the resurrection and the life. But...
- Imagine how you would feel if you had just lost a loved one. Hearing this message when the despair of death was upon them, made the promise of resurrection especially hopeful to Mary, Martha, and their gathered friends.
- After making this bold claim, Jesus actually raised Lazarus from the dead! What a way to prove his point!

**Reality – Eating Bread:** In this reality segment Huda and Dr. C share a lunch of tasty homemade soup and Middle Eastern bread. Bread has been called *the staff of life*, because of its great importance as a food in many cultures. Dr. C points to Bible verses written on her wall, which mention food. One is from Job.

The Prophet Job suffered very greatly in the Old Testament (and the Qur'an). In trying to prove his innocence to the friends who accused him of being punished for his evil, he used bread to express how important God's words were to him. Job said,

*“I have not departed from the commands of his lips;  
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.”* Job 23:12

These words are even more significant when we consider that Job is possibly the oldest book in the Bible – written even before Moses recorded Genesis (*Taqueen*). Notice that even at that early time, believers had and cherished God's words.

In the Qur'an, Job is called *Ayub*. This is why Dr. C calls him that as well as in English.. A few other Arabic social words are used in this segment, fitting with the reality of Huda tutoring Dr. C in Arabic; but they are obvious from the context, and repeated in English.

### **Parables Illustrating our Value to God**

#### **Jesus' Parables of Jewelry**

**Some of the most effective parables** in sharing God's love with Muslims, in Dr. C's opinion, are those of jewelry (*Luke 15:4-32*).

Women of Jesus day placed a high importance on their jewelry. It provided a degree of security and could serve as a form of dowry. The coin mentioned in the parable was possibly hanging on a chain, as we see in done in some cultures today. Jesus used the coins as a meaningful illustration of our importance to God. He told us that the way a woman searched her house for a lost coin that was is the way God values and seeks us.

Jewelry is still of great importance to Middle Eastern and Asian women. Even now they relate to the idea of losing something special to them.

#### **Examples of searching for lost Jewelry:**

1. In the video, Huda tells us a very similar story. She **lost a piece of valuable jewelry** and diligently searched for it. When she found it, she was joyous, like the woman in the parable.
2. Another of Dr. C's Muslim friends lost a valuable piece of jewelry and looked all over her apartment for it. When she shared this distressing experience, Dr. C pointed to this parable of Jesus, **illustrating how much God loved her**. That helped make it real to this young woman. Eventually, after three years Bible study and discussions with Dr. C, she became a Christian.

#### **Example of Jewelry's value to a Muslim Woman:**

**Bejeweled yet Homeless.** We know a divorced Middle Eastern woman who became homeless after moving to America. She was so low she had to live in a women's shelter and suffered from bed bugs. Yet in her safe deposit box she had tens of thousands of dollars of gorgeous jewelry!

If you are Muslim or from the Middle East, this might not surprise you. But to Americans this is a *paradox* (meaning two opposite things which are both true). We would never imagine that a woman so poor would have such jewelry. But easily divorced and ousted in Islam with only their jewelry, jewelry can represent to them both a woman's security and identity.

Most people have lost something of value to them. So, the parable of the lost coin/jewelry might hit closer to home than the parable of the lost sheep with adults in today's culture.

Both parables can also be used with those of a variety of backgrounds to illustrate how God values and searches for us. **There is no similar illustration of God's persistent love in Islam.**

### **Jesus' Parable of the Lost Sheep**

People who cannot relate to jewelry might be able to connect better with Jesus' parable about a lost sheep. The shepherd left alone his 99 sheep to seek for the lost one. When it is found the shepherd says,

*Rejoice with me I have found my lost sheep.*

Then Jesus explains it,

*I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."*  
Luke:15:4-7

### **Jesus' Parable of the Pearl of Great Price**

Here is another parable, not presented in the video, that Dr. C has found to be very effective in explaining God's love to Muslim women. It tells of a valuable pearl.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.* Matthew 13:45, 46

Oysters from Kuwait and other countries on the Arabian/Persian Gulf have long been known as a source of pearls. So, pearls are typical gifts from this region. They present the perfect kind of bridge which leads into sharing Bible truth that we talk about in our *Lesson Building Bridges with Muslims*.

### **Examples of using the Pearl Parable:**

1. Once Dr. C took two Muslim students out to eat, young women from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait respectively. They had brought her gifts back from summer vacation returning home, including **pearl jewelry**. They had never heard how pearls form from a grain of sand in an oyster shell.  
Dr. C was delighted for the opportunity to share a pearl's formation with them, plus Jesus' parable of the pearl. **How valuable they are to God!** Both these women became Christians before returning to the Middle East permanently. They now face trials there and need your prayers.
2. Another time, at a medical conference Dr. C met Nelly, a Muslim doctor serving in Qatar, which is also on the Arabian Gulf. The two got along well, giving Dr. C had the opportunity to share the *Path of the Prophets* and a few local souvenirs with her.  
Later that week, Nelly returned with a **multi-strand pearl bracelet** as an appreciation gift for Dr. C. What a surprise! But also, what an opportunity to share how much God loves her.

**Reality - Seeking Coffee:** This is a short modern parable which illustrates in a humorous way a kind of search. While on a driving trip, Dr. C and Huda need a break. They vigorously search for coffee, but have difficulty finding a place open where they are. This reminds them of Luke 19:10, where Jesus **seeks and saves the lost**.

### **Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son** with Bob Siegel

One of Jesus' most famous and powerful stories, parable of the Prodigal Son, is virtually unknown to Muslims. Jewish background believer Bob Siegel recounts the story for us. He includes background information from the Jewish culture he was raised in, and in which the story was set. This makes parable even more interesting and powerful.

In Luke 15:11-31 in the New Testament, Jesus tells us of a **rebellious young man**, a wasteful "prodigal," who does not realize what is important until he hits rock bottom. He demands his share of the inheritance and runs off to a sinful place far away. When he has lost all of his money, is lonely and starving, then he remembers how good his father was. He decides to return and beg for mercy.

*So he got up and went to his father. 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.*

Luke 15:20

The foolish young man's father is patient and loving. He faithfully awaits the son's return, and willingly forgives him. The father is a picture of God as our Heavenly Father, full of hope, waiting for us to come to life's most important realization: that following God's way is the best. He loves us and wants us in his family! **There is nothing like this in Islam.**

GOD as FATHER: Most Muslims dislike hearing of **God as a Father**, feeling that it makes him less, one of several gods. In our experience however, some Muslims that at first found the idea of Father God offensive, over time came to find it comforting. It helped lead them to faith in Christ.

(Note: We discuss more about the father in the parable with parenting, in the study guide and *Lesson on Godly Relationships*.)

## **Parables about Farming**

### **The 4 Types of Soil**

In Matthew 13:1-23, Jesus tells a story based on something people knew from every day life: seeds and types of soil. He told them that a farmer sowed seeds onto four types of soil, but only one type bore a good crop.

Here is what the parable means: God's word is like seed.

1. If we do not understand or accept it, it is as if it fell on the packed dirt of a **path**, and the birds snatched the seed away.
2. Perhaps we accept God's word with joy when we first hear it; but we fall away at the slightest difficulty. Then we are like the seed that fell on **rocky** soil, and could not get rooted.
3. In the **thorny** soil, the weeds choke the seed, and keep out the light so that the sprout can't grow. Probably most of us who claim to believe are like thorny soil. Life is hard. It is full of distractions. In



most of us the seed does sprout; but we focus on the **cares or pleasures of life** rather than God's word and kingdom. So we don't bear fruit.

4. The best soil is **fertile**, and receptive to the seed. In it the seed will grow, and it might produce up to even 100 times what was sown. This is the type of soil we want our hearts to be!

### More Parables on Seeds and Soils

Mark 4 has four wonderful stories using seeds to help us understand spiritual truths. Besides repeating the one from Matthew 13 above, it includes two more:

- One of Dr. Cynthia's favorite parables is also in the way of using what Jesus' audience knew about seeds and soils. As you have seen in other videos, she loves gardens. Many times she has planted seeds, eager for the day that their heads pop above the soil.

This parable tells us that after the farmer plants the seed,

*Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. Mark 4:26-29*

This reminds us that **God is the one who makes things grow, even the gospel seeds** that we have planted. We are not the ones responsible for bringing fruit from the seed. That is the work of the Holy Spirit of God. What comfort! We simply do our part – sharing as he told us to – and he does the rest. As the Apostle Paul confirms,

*It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. I Corinthians 3:7 NLT*

This parable encourages Christians to keep sharing, and praying for fruit from gospel seeds we planted hours, years, even decades ago.

- **Seeds of Faith.** The third story from Mark 4 is also of a seed. The seed is teeny; but when it is planted it becomes so big that even birds rest in its shade. So it is when we live and share God's word in faith. A little can do a lot. But if we do nothing, how can we hope for results? (Mark 4:30-32)

### Jesus' Parable of the Weeds - Explaining Evil

Besides seeds and soil, Jesus spoke symbolically about weeds.

If you farm or have a garden, you are familiar with how annoying weeds are. They were a curse of the earth in Genesis 3. People have been looking for ways to get rid of them ever since.

Many times we wonder why God allows evil people and evil deeds to hurt us and contaminate our planet. Have you ever asked God why? What is he thinking letting people like Hitler and (*name someone who hurt you or your people*) to live and harm others? Well, Jesus explained it to his followers in this parable:

A man sowed good seed, but during the night an **enemy came and sowed weeds** into his field. When the wheat sprouted, the farm workers were distressed to find the crop polluted with weeds. They asked the owner if they should pull out the weeds,

“No,” he answered, “because when you are pulling up the weeds you may root up the wheat.”

The owner told them to wait until harvest, then the weeds would be destroyed. Since as usual, Jesus’ disciples were clueless to the meaning of the parable, he later explained it to them. The explanation concluded with,

*“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and **they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.** They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.*

Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43

Dr. C says that this parable encourages her when she is discouraged at the evil surrounding us. It helps her understand **why God tolerates so much evil** for so long. Maybe you too have been discouraged with the wrong that you have seen or suffered?

If so, isn’t the parable encouraging? Not mainly that evil people will be destroyed, but that someday all evil and the things that cause us to sin will be taken away. Jesus told his hearers that the righteous, those that believed in his message, would be in their Father’s kingdom. **They will shine** like the sun! Won’t that be nice? Believers will live somewhere perfect and we will be glorious. What encouragement!

A sense of waiting, of **holding back judgment** is seen in something that happened when Jesus and his disciples were passing through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem. In Luke 9:51-56 we learn that the **Samaritans would not receive them** because they travelled to Jerusalem. They did not agree with worshipping in Jerusalem. James and John asked Jesus, should call down fire from heaven to destroy them?

No! Jesus rebuked them, and they went on to another city. Some ancient manuscripts tell us that Jesus reminded them that he came to save men, not to destroy them.

Regarding God’s delaying his return, the day when he will gather his own and destroy those who like weeds are of the devil, Peter tells us,

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, **not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.** 2 Peter 3:9*

We are also encouraged to know that **God loves everyone!** He wants us all to repent. He does not want to destroy us, and so he is patient. He lets the weeds grow with the wheat. That means there **still is hope for our friends and family, Muslims and atheists.** May they all come to know our glorious heavenly Father, and shine with us in his kingdom!

### **Jesus’ Teaches about Neighbors with a Parable**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us to **love our enemies** (Matthew 5:43-48). He taught us how to treat our neighbors, and who our neighbors are.

Some of this teaching is in the laws of the Old Testament, but with his usual flair, Jesus affirms, expands, and breathes life into the old law. It is part of his teaching on how we should live for God’s kingdom here on earth.

These are some of Jesus' **teachings which contrast with Islam**. They are refreshing and at times startling to people from Muslim background. As former Muslim Huda tells us in the video lesson, she loves these teachings of Jesus on neighbors and enemies.

### **The Parable of the Good Samaritan**

Jesus taught us to **love our neighbors as ourselves**, confirming what God instructed the Jews under Prophet Moses. When Jesus was challenged on who a neighbor was, he told the story of the Good Samaritan. (Matthew 22:39, Leviticus 19:18, Luke 10:25-37).

The story's message is especially powerful if we remember that in the prior chapter, Luke 9, Jesus' disciples were so angry at the Samaritans that they wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy them!

In the parable, **a man is beaten by thieves and left for dead**. Two Jewish holy men passed by, but could not be bothered to dirty themselves by helping him. Finally, a Samaritan passed by. He would be **considered an enemy**, yet he was the one who took pity on the injured man, treated him, and left him at an inn with funds to assist in his recovery.

Jesus teaching on neighbors illustrates that **we must love whoever comes across our path**, as ourselves, whether they are like us, or dramatically different, as was the Good Samaritan from the injured Jew he rescued.

Other religions have incorporated *The Golden Rule* into their teachings, without knowing that it was Jesus who taught it in Matthew 7:12,

*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,  
for this sums up the law and the prophets.*

### **The Importance of Abiding and Being Prepared**

#### **Jesus' Parables of The Vine and The Virgins**

#### **The Parable of the Vine and the Branches**

**Reality – Driving past vineyards:** Huda and Dr. C pass by vines on a trip through California. Huda tells us that one of her favorite parables of Jesus is that of the vine and the branches. Actually, the story of the vine is also Dr. C's favorite parable.

In John 15:1-8, Jesus uses the powerful parable of the vine and the branches to illustrate the importance of **abiding in him like a branch of a vine**. He spoke these words after his last supper with his disciples on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, probably as they were walking through a vineyard. This is another example of where the context of a story helps strengthen its impact.

He takes the metaphors of himself as the vine and his followers as the branches, and expands it into a parable with the heavenly Father as the Gardener.

If we stay attached to Christ, and **let his word live in us we will bear fruit**. Simply trying to do it on our own, in our own way will accomplish nothing worthwhile for the eternal kingdom of God.

**Barbie on the Parable of the Vine.** We include an interview Barbie, Dr. C's Bible teacher from long ago, explaining why the vine is also one of her favorite parables. She again reminds us that we must remain in Jesus to bear fruit.

(Note: For more on bearing fruit, see the study guide and *Lesson on the Fruit of the Spirit*.)

### **Example from Christian History – the Vine and Hudson Taylor:**

This was not mentioned in the video lesson, but it illustrates the power of this parable. Hudson Taylor was a missionary to China, and the first Protestant to seriously push into the interior with the gospel. His ministry in China was during a very turbulent period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many conflicts and battles occurred. Missionaries and other white people were often targeted and killed.

Taylor said that what helped him overcome fear of the many dangers was when it fully dawned on him what it meant that **we were united to Christ, like the vine**. If we are so attached to Jesus, then he will let nothing hurt us unless it is so important that he would allow it to hurt him too. So abiding in Christ not only lets his fruit come forth, but keeps us assured of his guidance and protection.

### **The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins**

**Reality – Being Unprepared:** Have you ever felt unprepared? Probably most people have had nightmares about not being prepared for a big day or event: a test, wedding, going on stage, and so on.

In this video segment, we discover that Dr. C has forgotten to bring her sunglasses on a trip into the sunshine. Like Jesus taught her, Dr. C likes to use ordinary events to teach Huda truths from the Bible. So she tells us that being unprepared reminds her of a parable Jesus, the one about wise and foolish young women, or “virgins.”

That story reflects the culture of the time, when young women would wait for the bridegroom to come to take them to the wedding feast. In this parable five young women had oil for their lamps and five did not. By the time the foolish five returned with their oil, the party had started without them and they were excluded. (Matthew 25:1-13)

The meaning of the parable is that something important is coming our way, and we should be ready. **We certainly want to be ready when the Lord returns for us, don't we?**

### **The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant**

As we discuss in other lessons, Muslim cultures are considered to be “shame and honor” based. Much of cultural influences of the Middle East arise out of nomadic tribal traditions. Holding grudges against others, especially those of another tribe is not uncommon, and blood feuds (vendettas) can arise. It can be considered honorable not to forgive.

### **Example of non-forgiveness – Shiites and Sunni:**

At the battle of Karbala Mohammed's grandson Hussein was killed by the Sunni. During Ashura, the annual festival of remembrance of the battle, besides beating themselves the Shiites chant,

“We will never forget. We will never forgive.”

Since the Shiites will never forgive the Sunni for the battle, and the Sunni consider the Shiites idolaters for honoring Hussein and their other saints, you can understand why the two branches of Islam continually fight.

### **Examples of non-forgiveness – Middle Eastern Muslims:**

Parenting skills are not well-taught in the Muslim world. They do not have the Holy Spirit to guide them. Women are married young and can feel competition with their children. They are inexperienced. Fathers may have several families and can be distant. This of course is not true of all families, but many children, especially girls, have been harshly treated.

1. A Muslim student said with passion and pride,

“I will **never forgive my father** for how he mistreated me!”

Years later, now as a new Christian the student said with the same passion, “I will never forgive X!” Even with discipleship, and having been after Jesus’ teaching on the topic, the student has not forgiven.

2. Another former Muslim said the same thing to Dr. C about **both her parents**. She had been severely beaten and locked up and drugged many times. As a result, she carried physical, emotional, and mental scars.

Decades later, the mother, formerly Muslim became a Christian and deeply apologized. Part of the daughter’s discipleship has been trying to address her understandable deep-seated resentment and helping her move toward forgiveness.

**Jesus on Forgiveness** Jesus taught to love our enemies and forgive those who have offended or mistreated us. Responding to this, Matthew 18:21-35 records that Jesus’ disciple Peter asked Jesus how many times he needed to forgive someone. A natural question, correct?

### **Jesus’ Forgiveness Story – The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant**

In Jesus’ usual style he illustrated his answer to Peter with a story. He told of a man who begged for forgiveness by his master for the loan of a tremendous sum. In mercy the master forgave him.

However, the forgiven man immediately grabbed another worker and threatened him over a small unrepaid loan. When the boss heard of this, he severely punished the unmerciful servant, saying,

*Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had on you?*

Jesus then commented to his disciples,

*This is how my father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.*

Wow! How powerful.

## The Parables of the Rich

Another category of story that Jesus told was about rich people. In those days, as often in ours, wealth was seen as a blessing from God. Sometimes it can be. Jesus does not tell us that money and all rich people are evil; but he does make it clear that a greedy heart is. We must love and serve God first!

1. **Rich and Foolish** Jesus told a story of a man who had had luck with farming. He was making his plans to get richer and have a good life. But abruptly, the man's life ended. All his work was for nothing. Jesus summarized the meaning,

*This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself  
but is not rich toward God.* Luke 12:13-21

2. **The Rich Man and the Beggar** is a popular story Jesus told of a rich man and a sick man who begged at his gate. In the afterlife the roles were reversed – the beggar was in paradise, but the rich man was suffering in hell.

Then just when we are thinking that the message is not to be inconsiderate of the poor, the story takes a twist. Another message is coming:

Jesus tells us that the rich man was begging, not only from relief of his fiery pain in hell, but for his family. He begs that someone be sent back **to warn his five brothers** so they would not follow him to hell. The answer is,

*If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced  
even if someone rises from the dead.* Luke 16:19-31

And so, Jesus explained in advance that **people with hard hearts would not be convinced** to follow God either from the writings of the Scripture, or from the testimony of Jesus' resurrection. Let us not be like one of those!

(Note: It is important to remember that this is a story, not a theological explanation. We should not base our understanding of heaven and hell upon this story. It might reflect the way things are, at least in some ways; but Jesus did not say that. That was not the point of the story. For a more accurate picture, it better to look at other passages that clearly describe heaven and hell.)

## The Power of Parables

As we mentioned earlier, modern psychology has discovered that if we can use a fitting word picture to illustrate a point that touches emotions, it gives the story more impact.

Huda confirms this by telling us that she loves Jesus' stories, and that the power of Jesus' parables is such that she will never forget them. That is so encouraging to hear from a former Muslim. May Jesus' words continue always to live in her heart.

## Problems with Parables... and Answers

1. **The Kingdom.** Sometimes readers get confused with the different ways that Jesus referred to "the kingdom."

QUESTION: Luke and Mark refer to the *Kingdom of God*, why does Matthew call it the *Kingdom of Heaven*?

ANSWER: Remember we mentioned that Matthew was written for the Jews? Well, the Jews were so protective of the name of God, so anxious not to dishonor it or blaspheme that they were reluctant to write any form of it. And so, sometimes they would even use the word “heaven” instead of “God.” It was sort of a code. Other Jews would automatically understand that they meant “God.”

This is why in understanding the Bible it is important to know the context. For example, who Jesus is speaking to, and to whom is a portion of the Bible is written? Asking these questions can keep us from mistakes in interpretations.

(Note: we speak more about interpreting the Bible in the study guides and *Lessons on How to Study the Bible* and others.)

## 2. **A Difficult Parable: The Shrewd Manager**

One of our volunteers likes what is considered a problem parable. Yet it is only a problem if we mistake the message.

In Luke 16:1-13, Jesus tells a story, about a man who knows he is going to lose his position. He gets an idea about how to gain favor with some people who might be able to help him when he is unemployed. Just before he loses his job he goes through the account books and reduces the amount that clients owe to his boss. This effectively gains him friends. In a surprise twist, when the owner finds out he actually compliments this dishonest action!

*The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. v. 8*

QUESTION: Does this mean that Jesus approves of dishonesty?

ANSWER: No! In the next sentence Jesus explains that the manager is a man of this world. He is not a believer or good man. In fact, he is called dishonest. The aspect of the manager that we are called upon to admire is that he was wise in providing for his future.

*For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Luke 16:8,9*

So then, the message of the parable is that we should treat people on earth in a way that they will be glad to see us in heaven.

## 3. **Misuse of Parables.** Beware of the misuse of parables, especially by enemies of the cross.

Jesus’ parables were used to illustrate a point that he was trying to make, not as a basis for theology. Dr. C has seen parables not only used out of context, but deliberately twisted to make a point by enemies of the cross.

Now there are many opportunities for Christians and Muslims to interact online without ever meeting each other, for example on YouTube or Facebook. Dr. C and her associates are dismayed at how often they see Muslims quoting things taken out of context of the passage, or overlooking what the rest of the Bible says on the issue. Then they say that Christians are wrong or stupid!

**Example of misusing a parable:** Dr. C cites the parable of the talents in Luke 19:11-27, and the misuse of this parable by an imam she heard lecturing at a large event. The story is about a man who is going away to be crowned king, but has enemies. At the end of the parable **the king says,**

*“Those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me.”*

Wow! Strong words! But they are part of a story, not a command.

Dr. C heard this **Islamic teacher publicly misattributed this quote to Jesus** himself, saying that Jesus told his followers to kill their enemies! He used this to justify violence in Islam, a completely wrong application. Perhaps he purposely overlooked that it was said by a character in a story Jesus told. Perhaps he was sincere but wrong. Sadly, the audience was unfamiliar with the Bible and likely believed him.

**Jesus never told his followers to kill his enemies,** nor did he teach the promotion of faith by force, rather the opposite (Matthew 13:24-30). Moses did not teach promoting the faith by violence. Mohammed however had his enemies killed in front of him and taught promoting his faith by force.

(Note: for more about Mohammed’s violence see the study guide and *Lesson on Islam and Violence.*)

### **There are More Parables ...**

The parables that we discussed in the video and study guide are not **all of the parables** that Jesus told. When you read the four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you will find others – perhaps even one that you like better. But we hope that these we have discussed will help you understand more about Jesus, his style, and his teachings. If you **meditate** on, or think about, these parables over the next few days, we are certain that you will find deeper meaning and blessings in them.

*With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. Mark 4:33,34*

### **Peace and Purpose in the Garden**

We close with another word picture in a modern setting. In several lessons and study guides we propose that Peace and Purpose is a good way to look at the Christian Life. In review:

The **3 kinds of Peace** are:

- with God
- ourselves
- and other people

Our goal as believers is to **balance that peace with fulfilling God’s purpose** for our individual lives. Each of us was created for a reason, and are given special things that only we can do.

### **Peace and Purpose in the Garden**

Some places and situations make it easier for us to sense God’s peace than others. In the peaceful garden we visit in this video, the way **the pond reflects the trees is like the way we should reflect the image of**



**Jesus** in our lives. The trees are beautiful. The colors are strong. The reflection in the water comes close to capturing the beauty of the original. This is a word picture of how Christians should live. (II Corinthians 3:18)

Every region and culture has some way that it demonstrates the image of God in its beauty and creativity. Japanese gardens, even if at times designed around Buddhist principles, nevertheless demonstrate God's glory, because,

*Every good and perfect gift is from above.* James 1:17

The pleasing Japanese design of the garden that we visit in this video illustrates how we should reflect Christ in our lives. Such reflection of Christ brings together both peace and purpose.

Likewise, the sun shines to light the day, and the moon reflects it to light the night. We could also say that Christians should **reflect Jesus' light, like the moon** does the light of the sun. Then we too can overcome the darkness. We can be like little moons. What a simile! Let's **try to remember** that when we see the moon, or beautiful nature reflected in water.

(Note: In in the study guide and video *Lesson on the Fruit of the Spirit*, we talk more about, and give the Bible references for Peace and Purpose. Its segment on Peace and Purpose in the City, discusses how the idea applies to life in New York City.)

**Scripture References for this Episode:** *New International Version* unless otherwise stated, and *New Living Translation*

II Corinthians 5:17	Luke 10:25-37 & 9:51-56
Luke 19:10	Luke 15:4-32
John 8:12 & 7:2,37,38	Matthew 13:1-35
Psalms 11:105 & 139	Luke 12:16-21 & 16:1-13
Proverbs 13:9	Matthew 7:12
John 3:19 & 6:35 & 11:25, 26 & 4:1-26	Matthew 5:43-35
I John 1:5-7	John 15:1-8
Mark 4:26-29, 30-32, 33-34	Matthew 13:36-43 & 25:1-13 & 18:21-35
Job 23:12	II Peter 3:9
I Corinthians 13:7, 3:7	Luke 19:2, 11-27, & 12:13-21 & 16:19-31
Matthew 22:39	James 1:5,17
Leviticus 19:18	II Corinthians 3:18

**Islamic Reference:**

Moses and the burning bush – Qur'an, surah 20:11,12

Note: the Agatha Christie quote is from, Come Tell Me How You Live. Pocket Books division of Simon and Schuster, New York, 1977 edition.

*Names Note: The names of Muslims, and some people working with them, have been changed for their protection.*

## Study Questions:

1. As you might remember from English class, a **simile** says something is **like** something else, a **metaphor** says it **is** something else. For example, in John 8:12 Jesus uses a metaphor when he says, “I am the light of the world.”

- Could you give an example of a metaphor from today’s lesson, or The Sermon on the Mount?
- Can you remember a simile that Jesus used?

2. God is so above humans, it is a challenge, even for Christians, to view him in terms of a father in comparison to earthly fathers.

- How does your relationship with your father affect your relationship with your **Heavenly Father**?
- How might you approach presenting God as a loving Heavenly Father to your Muslim contacts?
- If you are Muslim background, how do you struggle with this picture of God? Would you like to share that with the study group?

3. One of Huda and Dr. Cynthia’s favorite metaphors for Jesus and his followers is in John 15. Jesus is the **vine and we are the branches**.

- As time allows, meditate on this chapter
- What of Jesus must abide in us if we are to bear fruit?
- Hudson Taylor, missionary pioneer to China’s inland, found this passage so empowering it motivated and enabled his work. How could you see this passage empowering you to serve and please God, perhaps in a greater way than you do now?

4. This lesson reminds us that Jesus came to “**seek and save the lost**” (Luke 19:10). He tells stories of a lost sheep and a lost coin to illustrate this. We illustrate these with examples of how we applied these parables with Muslims. If we are his disciples, we should do likewise.

- What are some ways that you could “seek and save the lost” that you encounter in your every day life
- The unreached people groups in Europe and America often lived in isolated areas. This can make them easy for us to ignore or forget. What are some ways that you could “seek and save the lost” of the immigrant or unreached groups in your region?
  - Beyond your region?
- Is this a practice that you need to perform more? Less?

5. **Which of the parables** presented in the video and study guide,

- did you find the most interesting for the concept it presented?
- did you learn the most from?
- most touched your heart?

6. The Parable of the **Good Samaritan** was given to illustrate to us how we should love whoever comes our way, regardless of who they are.

- Think of someone, or some people group, that would be especially difficult for you to love and care for the way the Samaritan did the Jew. (If in a group, you might or might not want to share this with the others.)
- Even for a stranger who was not an enemy, would you be as willing as the Good Samaritan to go to the time and inconvenience that he did, and pay for their medical bills?
- Can you imagine how the world would be different if everyone behaved like the Good Samaritan?

7. The **Parable of the Prodigal Son** reveals much to us of God's character.
- Do you know someone who has foolishly wasted the opportunities and gifts that they have been given?
  - Have you ever run away from the Heavenly Father?
  - Before this parable, did you realize that God was like that, patiently waiting for us to come home?
  - If you are or were Muslim, how does this depiction of God/Allah compare with what you knew of him.
  - If you are wanting to share Jesus with Muslims, might you be able to use this parable in some way?
8. **The Parable of the Virgins** is about being prepared. They are to go to a wedding, but not all brought enough oil to light their way.
- Have you ever felt unprepared for something?
  - What do you think the parable is warning us to be prepared for?
9. Dr. C has found the **parables about jewelry** to be powerful with Muslim women.
- Can you visualize a situation in which you could use a parable about sheep or jewelry to help someone feel that they are of value?
  - Why do you think that heaven rejoices more over one sinner who repents, like a lost lamb that is found, more than over the 99 righteous who never ran away.
10. What did you learn about the **importance of context** and the use and misuse of parables in this lesson?
- Have you ever heard a parable misused?
  - Have you heard Jesus misquoted or taken out of context?
  - Give an example of how context affects a parable, or any other story you can think of, including outside the Bible.
11. **From studying** Jesus' parables, metaphors, and similes
- Did you sense a tenderness of Jesus?
  - Do you think that you have been revealing that kind of tender love of the Father, Good Shepherd, and Good Samaritan in your life?
  - How do you think you could be a better testimony of God's care for humanity?
    - Perhaps abiding in the vine?
    - Being filled with the Holy Spirit?
    - Keeping your eyes on Jesus?
12. Considering all the parables, similes, and metaphors you learned about today (and perhaps in the *Lesson on Jesus Style of Teaching and Living*),
- Putting them together, what is the picture that you get of "The Kingdom of God."
  - Do you think that they teach how we should really live, or are some sort of ideas?
  - How do you think we should apply them?
13. Considering your background:
- If you are Christian or Western background, was there something about Muslim culture that you found especially insightful?
  - If you are Muslim background, what struck you as different from what you are used to?

by Christian from Muslim, 2020  
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