



# STORY TIME

Discovering the Parables of Jesus



# Parables in the Bible

- The first use of the word for parable (mashal מָשָׁל) in the Bible is when “Balaam spoke his mashal.” (Numbers 23:7)
- The parables of Yeshua are metaphorical stories. A story, at minimum, contains a main character (king, owner, shepherd) who has a problem (with a son, field, sheep) that gets resolved.
- In that resolution process we find deeper purpose and meaning of how God wants us to live in this world.
- God tells us He is the author of many parables: “I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets gave parables [literally, likenesses and representations].” (Hosea 12:10)

## Hebrew noun mashal מִשָּׁל

- Definition: a parable, proverb, riddle, anecdote, allegory
- It defines the unknown by using what is known.
- The mashal begins where the listener is, but then pushes beyond into a new realm of discovery.

## Greek noun parabole παραβάλλω

Definition: a comparing, comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude, juxtaposition

- Jesus is recorded teaching about 40 parables in the Gospels.
- All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in **parables**, and He did not speak to them without a **parable** [parabole παραβάλλω]. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.” Matthew 13:34–35
- I will open my mouth in a **parable** [mashal מִשְׁלָּה]; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. Psalm 78:2-4 (by Asaph, a Levite musician)



# 39 Parables of Jesus

PARABLE/LESSON	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
Wheat and tares	13:24-30		
Barren fig tree			13:6-9
Children in market	11:16-19		7:31-35
Budding Fig Tree	24:32-36	13:28-32	21:29-33
Lamp under basket	5:14-16	4:21-23	8:16-18
Dinner guests			14:15-24
Divided Kingdom	12:24-30	3:22-27	11:14-23
Faithful servants			12:35-40
Feast invitations			14:12-14
Friend at midnight			11:5-13
Good Samaritan			10:25-37
Great physician	9:10-13	2:15-17	5:29-32
Groom's attendants	9:14-15	2:18-20	5:33-35
Growing seed		4:26-29	
Hidden treasure	13:44		
Humbled guest			14:7-11
King's war plans			14:31-32
Laborers in vineyard	20:1-16		
Leaven	13:33		13:20-21
Lost coin			15:8-10
Lost sheep			15:4-7

PARABLE/LESSON	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
Marriage feast	22:1-14		
Mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
Net of fish	13:47-50		
New cloth	9:16	2:21	5:36
New wine	9:17	2:22	5:37-39
Pearl of great price	13:45-46		
Persistent widow			18:1-8
Sower	13:3-23		
Rich man			12:13-21
Talents	25:14-30		
Minas			19:11-27
Prodigal son			15:11-32
Steward and rich man			16:1-8
Ten virgins	25:1-12		
Great Supper			14:15-24
Two sons	21:28-31		
Merciless servant in debt with his master	18:23-35		
Wicked Vinedressers	21:33-46	12:1-11	12:35-48

# Why is it important to study the Parables?

- One-third of the recorded sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels are in parables.
- If we do not understand the parables, we miss what may be known about the historical Jesus. One must understand parables to know Jesus.
- The parables are designed to portray a reality. In a world of metaphorical redescription, the reality behind the parable is dramatized in word-pictures. (Brad H. Young)
- The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is largely distinct. (Wikipedia)

# Six Components of a Parable

1. Prologue – prepare the audience, build anticipation
2. Introduction of the cast
3. Plot of the story
4. Conflict
5. Conflict resolution
6. Call to decision and/or application



# The Father of Two Sons

(The Prodigal Son)

Luke 15:11-32



The term “prodigal son” does not appear in the parable most often known by that name. The earliest reference is from the church father Jerome (347–420 AD), who speaks of having written “on the prudent and the prodigal sons.” Nevertheless, the label “Prodigal Son” necessarily influences both what messages we take from the parable and what lessons we fail to hear. On the simplest level, far too many people think the term “prodigal” has a partially positive connotation, such as “adventurous” or “daring” or “ambitious.” Some people hear “prodigal” and think “prodigy.” The word “prodigal” indicates wasteful spending, financial recklessness... there is nothing complimentary about being prodigal, that is, in wasting resources for personal gratification.

— Amy-Jill Levine

# And He [Jesus] said, “A man had two sons.”

## Luke 15:11

- Adam had two sons originally, Cain and Abel
  - Abel, the younger, had his sacrifice accepted by God
- Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac
  - Isaac, the younger, inherited Abraham’s covenant
- Isaac had two (twin) sons, Esau and Jacob
  - Jacob, the younger, gained the birthright and blessing, became the father of the 12 tribes of Israel (Jacob’s new name)
- Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim
  - Ephraim, the younger, received the primary blessing



“The parable has three actors. Each of them plays a very significant role in the drama. Each one of them surprises the audience. The audience expects the actor to play a different role. Jesus loves to use role reversal in his parabolic teachings to break normal expectations. He shocks the listener by turning the world upside down. The audience probably expects the elder son to fill the role of a family mediator. Instead, he acts out the part of a greedy hypocrite. It expects the younger son to die of starvation rather than accept the shame of returning to his father. It would have understood severe punishment from a father who suffered such abuse from his sons. Instead, the audience is overwhelmed by his compassion. The plot of the story and the unexpected role reversals make a lively drama that captures the attention of the listeners and leads them to embrace the type of love that comes from God alone.”

— Brad H. Young

Jesus said, “The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ So he divided his wealth between them.” Luke 15:12

- The original Greek says literally “he divided to them the life [βίος *bios*].”
- In effect, the son told the father he cared more about his inheritance than a relationship with his father.



“And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered [scattered] his estate with loose [excessive] living.” Luke 15:13

- We wonder what happened in the few days before his departure.
- The father had to sell property and possessions to liquidate assets.
- Did the father try to have the son reconsider his decision to leave?
- Was the older brother happy or sad about the younger leaving?
- Where is mom in this story?

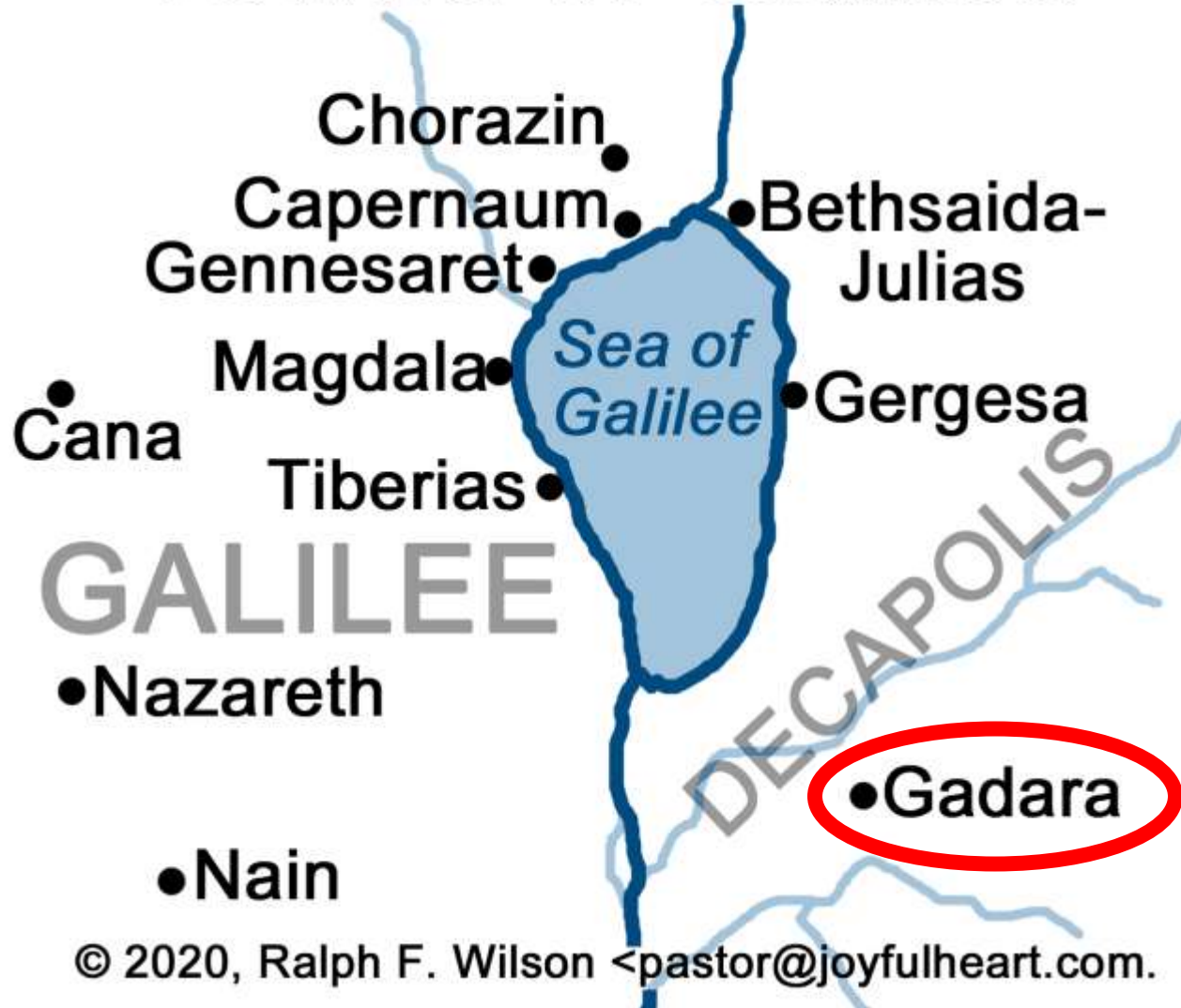
“Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the [Gentile] citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine [pigs]. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods [of a carob tree] that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.” Luke 15:14-16

\*A food shortage hurts the poor and the homeless first.

\* Did the new boss assign him to this offensive job intentionally?



# Towns of Galilee



When He [Jesus] came to the other side into the country of the **Gadarenes**, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way. And they cried out, saying, “What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” Now there was a herd of many **swine** feeding at a distance from them. The demons began to entreat Him, saying, “If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of **swine**.” And He said to them, “Go!” And they came out and went into the **swine**, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. Matthew 8:28-32

“But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my **father’s** hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my **father**, and will say to him, “**Father**, I have sinned against heaven [God], and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.” ’ ” Luke 15:17-19

\*Literally... “when he came to himself” ... the idea of repentance

\*What caused the son to “come to himself”? His desperate need and hunger

\*The son has sinned, but he has not forgotten his relationship to his father

\*With a contrite, penitent, and obedient heart, we refer ourselves to the covenant of grace, which offers forgiveness to those that confess their sins.



# What do we experience when we run from the Father?

- Separation
- Distance
- Expense
- Waste
- Wanting
- Servitude
- Dissatisfaction
- No relief
- Feeling lost
- Spiritual death

Afflictions, when they are sanctified by divine grace, prove happy means of turning sinners from the error of their ways. The ear is opened to discipline and the heart disposed to receive instructions; they are sensible proofs both of the vanity of the world and of the mischievousness of sin. – Matthew Henry Commentary

# The younger son struggles

- Spiritual pain – regrets his decisions
- Emotional pain – loses his family
- Physical pain – experiences hunger
- Social pain – feels alone
- Financial pain – wastes his resources

Rabbi Aha said “When a Jew has to resort to carobs, he repents.”

-Leviticus Rabbah 13:4 (a homiletic midrash to the Book of Leviticus)



# The first step toward home

The younger son's first step is saying, "I have sinned."

What is a sinner? An unworthy person. One who deserves nothing. Yet a sinner wants something. So the sinner searches for someone who loves the unworthy, who is willing to help the undeserving. - Holman New Testament Commentary

Who is allowed to attend our church? Only sinners.

# The father waits and watches

“So he [the younger son] got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and [continually] kissed him.” Luke 15:20

\*He left with a selfish demand; he returned with a humble prayer. – Wycliffe Bible Commentary

\*The Father expressed his kindness before the son expressed his repentance. The prodigal son came slowly, under a burden of shame and fear; but the tender father ran to meet him with his encouragements. – Matthew Henry Commentary



# Would the father really have run?

- As He was setting out on a journey, a man [rich young ruler] **ran** up to Him [Jesus] and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Mark 10:17
- So he [Zaccheus] **ran** on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He [Jesus] was about to pass through that way. Luke 19:4
- But Peter got up and **ran** to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened. Luke 24:12

# What does Repentance sound like?

“And the son said to him, ‘**Father**, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’” Luke 15:21

- “With weeping they will come, and by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, on a straight path in which they will not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.” Isaiah 31:9
- “From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord of hosts. “But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ Malachi 3:7



# What does Restoration look like?

“But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a [signet] ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened [grain-fed] calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate [rejoice].” Luke 15:22-24

\*The initial audience of Jesus would have had no clue that He would be both proclaimed dead and resurrected. – Amy-Jill Levine

# What does the father give the son?

- the best **robe** – reserved for an honored guest
- a **ring** on his hand – a signet ring marked the position of sonship
- **sandals** on his feet – to make his travel easier
- the fattened **calf** - one animal was usually held in readiness for a special occasion, that honored guests might be served quickly





James Tissot

*The Return of  
the Prodigal Son*

(Le retour de l'enfant  
prodigue)

– Brooklyn Museum

Pesikta Rabbati פסיקתא רבתי is a collection of midrash (homilies) on the Pentateuchal and prophetic readings, the special Sabbaths, and so on. It was composed around 845 AD. - Wikipedia

Pesikta Rabbati 184–85 recounts:

A king had a son who had gone astray from his father on a journey of a hundred days. His friends said to him, “Return to your father.” He said, “I cannot.” Then his father sent word, “Return as far as you can, and I will come the rest of the way to you.” So God says, “Return to me, and I will return to you.”



**Is Restoration available for us?**

Thus says the Lord God,

“It will also come to pass that before  
they call, I will answer; and while they  
are still speaking, I will hear.”

Isaiah 65:24

“Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, ‘**Your brother** has come, and **your father** has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound [healthy].’” Luke 15:25-27

\*Why was the older son not invited to the party?

\*No one even noticed he was missing.



“But he [the older son] became angry and was not willing to go in; and **his father** came out and began pleading [comforting] with him. But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat [kid], so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when **this son of yours** came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’” Luke 15:28-30

# How did the older brother react?

He was angry. The reaction of the older son was jealousy and disgust. He was bitter over what he regarded as an injustice. The language implies self-righteousness, self-pity, and an inward alienation from his father's feeling comparable to the younger son's outer alienation from the family. A kid would have been of small value compared to the fattened calf. The son was accusing his father of cheating him out of a small gift, while lavishing extravagant favors on the prodigal. The older brother was contemptuous, and ready to think the worst of the younger brother. – Wycliffe Bible Commentary

**\*How do we react to the grace shown to others?**



“The story, then, is the story of a loving father who had two boys, one of whom walled himself off from his father’s love by doing evil, while the other walled himself off from that same love by doing good... in both cases the sons were prodigals, for they were estranged from their father, and the love relationship between them and him was broken.” – Leslie Weatherhead

“They did not love their father and they were not capable of loving one another.” – Brad H. Young

“The crisis of the family is dramatized. Personal relationships are shattered as the younger brother asks for his inheritance, sells everything, and leaves home. The elder brother’s silence speaks louder than anything he says. His actions at the end of the parable are not surprising because he did nothing to prevent the breakup of the family. The crisis is revealed in what the younger son says as well as in what the elder son does not say. The younger wants his father to die, and the elder quietly receives his double portion of the inheritance, doing nothing to bring reconciliation. Neither of them tries to build a relationship with the other or their father.”

– Brad H. Young



“And he [the father] said to him [older son], ‘**Son**, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for **this brother of yours** was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’ ” Luke 15:31-32

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

[Hymn written by John Newton]

The word “son” is Greek *teknon*, better translated “child.” It is the same address Mary uses when she and Joseph, after desperately searching for their lost son, find him in the Temple: “Child (*teknon*), . . . your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety” (Luke 2.48). The endearment “Child” begins the father’s attempt to reconcile with his older son. In stating, “You are always with me, and everything that is mine is yours,” the father makes both an emotional and a technical appeal. Emotionally, the point is correct: in the father’s view, the son had never been lost; he has “always been with” the father. But what the father felt and what the son felt were two different reactions.



The elder son separated himself from his father's love by doing good and being a model of obedience. His conduct is fine – but his heart relationship with his father and brother is fragmented from the very beginning of the parable. According to Middle Eastern culture and Jewish traditional values, such an elder son would hold the position of a mediator in a family crisis.... The elder son should have demanded that his younger brother apologize to their father... Instead he silently waited for his share of the property and family assets. By not doing anything, he was just as wrong as his younger brother... He boasts about his faithful service to his father and reveals his true feelings when he speaks about his father as a boss to be obeyed or a banker to be respected. He is interested only in the money that he deserves and the reward that, in his view, he has earned by his hard work. He does not love his father as a parent or see the needs of his younger brother. Instead of the family mediator the elder boy became a greedy opportunist. – Brad H. Young

“In every scene of the story, the father plays the major role as the compassionate parent. He loves his sons enough to allow them the freedom of decisions. But when they make a wrong choice that is harmful for them, the loving father is always there waiting to help them in the time of crisis. He seeks restoration and healing of relationships. Neither of the sons understands him as a loving parent. They view him from a financial side; he is like a banker who has the money to supply their needs and pay their wages.”

– Brad H. Young



# All three human characters needed Hope.

## Are you one of these?

- Are you the younger son (or daughter) who has run away from the father?
- Are you the parent whose child has run away from home (or the faith)?
- Are you the older brother who stubbornly and arrogantly refuses to forgive?

# Questions for the younger son

- Have you made selfish choices?
- Have you wasted time, money, or opportunities?
- Do you hurt enough to go home?
- Do you hurt enough to ask for forgiveness?
- Has your hurt taught you humility?
- Do you miss the Father?
- Do you know that no one is too sinful or too lost or too forgotten to come home?



# Questions for the father

- Has your child run away from home (physically, spiritually, or emotionally)?
- Are you waiting and looking for them?
- Have you begged God for their safe return (physically, spiritually, emotionally)?
- Are you willing to unconditionally forgive them if they come home?
- Are you willing to forgive both the prodigal child and the arrogant child?

# On Father's Day, can we relate to this father?

“Recognize that the one you have lost may be right in your own household. Do whatever it takes to find the lost and then celebrate with others, both so that you can share the joy and so that the others will help prevent the recovered from ever being lost again. Don't wait until you can muster the ability to forgive; you may never find it. Don't stew in your sense of being ignored, for there is nothing that can be done to retrieve the past. Instead, go have lunch. Go celebrate, and invite others to join you. If the repenting and forgiving come later, so much the better. And if not, you still will have done what is necessary. You will have begun a process that might lead to reconciliation. You will have opened a second chance for wholeness. Take advantage of resurrection – it is unlikely to happen twice.”

– Amy-Jill Levine



# Questions for the older brother

- Do you begrudge God showing grace and forgiveness to others?
- Do you want blessings for yourself but dislike when others are blessed?
- Do you follow all the rules but fail to show love?
- Do you believe that your actions will earn you the Father's love and acceptance?
- Do you share the Father's passion to bring others into His family, especially when you have nothing to lose?
- Do you refuse to rejoice when lost people come home?
- Do you even notice those who have left the spiritual family?

The parable gives a strong call to action. Each person must understand God as a compassionate father who yearns for a strong and meaningful relationship with his children. There are indeed two types of sinners. The outwardly righteous sinner is just as wrong as the blatantly wicked evildoer. The cause of wrongdoing is rooted in a broken relationship. The elder brother is poisoned with hatred and resentment. Though outwardly righteous, inwardly he is in great need. He must not only be restored to a right relationship with his father but forgive his brother. Forgiveness and reconciliation between individuals greatly influence their relationship with God. These two concepts permeate the thought of the parable. God is a compassionate father. Sin is a broken relationship. The parable first and foremost portrays God as a compassionate parent who longs for a strong and healthy relationship with his two boys. The drama of this family crisis leads the listener on a path of urgent decision. – Brad H. Young



# What about us?

- God the Father understands what it means to hurt
- God also understands what it means to have a child who hurts
- God loves you so much that He was willing see His Son hurt (even killed) to forgive your sins.
- Do you want His help with your hurt?
- Are you ready to give Him your life?

# What happens if I run away?

“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” Acts 3:19

- Do you need to come home?
- Are you ready to follow Jesus as Savior?