

Literary Genre: Parables

Literary genre is a category of written works. Recognizing the type of writing prepares one for how to read and observe the text. For example, parables are short stories that are loved for their simplicity and memorable morals; they are the hallmark of Jesus' teachings. In contrast to historical narratives, these true to life stories may not have historically occurred.

Parables are found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

How should you read a parable?

Look to see if there are different Gospel accounts of the same parables, because this will help you discover all the details of the story.

Understand the characters in the story: what is happening, their motives, and their actions.

Who heard Jesus' parables? Who did the characters of the parable represent?

Here's an example: the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8).

Where is Jesus teaching?

What group of people is the focus of the parable?

How is this story "true to life" to hearers of the parable?

How does Jesus interpret the parable?

What is being sown?

What does the soil represent?

What does hard soil represent?

What does rocky soil represent?

What does soil with thorny plants represent?

What does the good soil represent as well as the fruit being produced?

Literary Genre: Parables Teacher Notes

This lesson assumes that the student has heard the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8) at some point earlier in his life. The emphasis of the lesson is to help the student observe the text carefully so that he can see for himself that answers to many questions of a passage can be easily seen.

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How should you read a parable?

Reading any literary genre starts with observation. The more you observe, the less you need to interpret, and the more accurately you can apply to your life.

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Understand the characters in the story: what is happening, their motives, and their actions.

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Here's an example: the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8).

Where is Jesus teaching?

Since there are three accounts of this parable, consider dividing your class into three groups (one for each gospel account) so that all can participate in observing the biblical passages: Matthew 13:1-2; Mark 4:1-2; and Luke 8:4

What group of people is the focus of the parable?

Help each group by focusing their observation of the text: Matthew 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-9; and Luke 8:5-8.

How is this story "true to life" to hearers of the parable?

Help the student by asking the question: What type of worker would identify with this parable? Provide the student with a histo-cultural context of the first century in which most people, outside of large cities, were involved with agriculture.

How does Jesus interpret the parable?

Most readers of the Bible interpret God's word with a subjective bias. Here Jesus provides the interpretation which can be objectively observed.

What is being sown?

Help each group by focusing their observation of the text: Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:14; and Luke 8:11.

What does the soil represent?

Help each group by focusing their observation of the text: Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:15; and Luke 8:12.

What does hard soil represent?

Help each group by focusing their observation of the text: Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:15; and Luke 8:12.

What does rocky soil represent?

Help each group by focusing their observation of the text: Matthew 13:20-21; Mark 4:16-17; and Luke 8:13.

What does soil with thorny plants represent?

Help each group by focusing their observation of the text: Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:18-19; and Luke 8:14.

What does the good soil represent as well as the fruit being produced?

Help each group by focusing their observation of the text: Matthew 13:23-9; Mark 4:20; and Luke 8:15.