

**Tell Me a Story**

A parable is a story that teaches a truth or a moral lesson. Parables appear in stories from around the world. The New Testament of the Christian Bible includes some of the parables that Jesus told his followers. He used them to explain some of his teachings, what is now called Christianity.

In about 30 CE, Jesus began his ministry near Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee. He spent three years traveling throughout the region in Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. People gathered to hear him in their homes, in synagogues, and on the hills overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Many of them could neither read nor write. Most of them were very poor. Jesus spoke to them, promising them hope if they believed in him and his teachings.



Jesus spoke to his followers at this site, beside the Sea of Galilee.

The Bible's accounts of the parables show Jesus as a captivating speaker. He used vivid language and descriptions to make his points. Two of his most famous stories are "The Parable of the Sower" and "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." After you read the parables, continue reading to learn about the importance of the stories.

**The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1–8)**

Once there was a farmer who went into his fields to sow his seeds. As he was planting, not all of the seeds landed in the same place. Some of the seeds fell by the wayside. Birds found those seeds and ate them up. Other seeds fell upon ground that was filled with rocks. These seeds began to grow, but there was not much soil, so their roots were too shallow. When the sun came up, these plants withered and died. Still other seeds fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked the life from the plants. The last group of seeds fell upon rich soil. They grew strong and produced a great harvest for the farmer.

**The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32)**

Once there was a man with two sons. One day the younger son came to him and demanded to receive his inheritance early. The father gave it to him, and the young man left for a distant land. There he spent all his money going to parties and having fun. After he had spent all his money, there was a famine, and life got difficult for him. Eventually the son got a job with a farmer, tending his pigs. He was so hungry that he would have eaten the slop he fed the animals. No one offered him anything to eat. He remembered that even the servants in his father's house had always had enough to eat.

He decided to return home and become a servant, thinking that he was no longer worthy to be considered a son. However, his father was watching and waiting for him. He saw his son from afar and ran to him, taking him in his arms. The son was astonished. “Father, I have sinned against heaven. I no longer deserve to be your son.” But the father called his servants to give his son his finest clothes. He told them to kill the fatted calf so they could feast and rejoice in his son’s homecoming.

The man’s other son was working in his father’s fields when he heard about the celebration of his brother’s return. He was angry with his father. “All these years I have worked for you and never once disobeyed your orders,” he told him. “And you never even gave me a little goat to enjoy with my friends. But now you’ve killed the fatted calf for a feast for my undeserving brother.” The father replied, “My son, you are with me always, and all I have is yours.” But now, he said, they had to rejoice in the return of his brother, because they had thought he was dead. “He was lost,” the father said, “and is found.”



The prodigal son returns to his father in this artist’s portrayal.

### Listening and Understanding

In one section of the Book of Matthew, Jesus is said to have told his disciples, “Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.” The parables were a teaching tool to reach people who might not understand otherwise, if they were already open to the message.

Jesus told the parable about the sower to help people understand the kingdom of heaven. The farmer in the story is God. The seeds represent different people and how they receive the word of God, and the field represents the kingdom of God. Through the story Jesus explained that different people will receive the word of God differently. Some people, like the seeds who fell by the wayside, will not receive the word of God and instead will be consumed by something evil. In the parable the seeds that did not fall on good soil were consumed by a bird, which represents something evil. Other people will be more receptive to the teachings of God and will grow for a bit, like the seeds that fell upon the rocky soil, but the

word of God may not stay with these people. Some people hear the word of God, but are too wrapped up in the riches of the world to fully listen. In the story, the distractions of the world are shown as the thorns.

Finally, some people will listen to the word of God and fully understand it. They will not be distracted by wickedness or influences from the world. Instead, religion will thrive in these people, just as the seeds that fell upon good soil grew healthy and strong. Jesus explained that there are different kinds of people in the world, just like there are seeds that land in different places.

In the story about the Prodigal Son, Jesus explained the way God cares for everyone on Earth. The son in the story that goes away from his family is happily welcomed back by his father. Jesus was showing an example of how God welcomes back people who believe in him, even if they ignored him in the past.

It is interesting to think about how these parables affected the mostly poor people of Galilee who first heard them. These people were used to having little of value and not much to look forward to. Jesus taught that it is not those with money and possessions, but those with open and generous hearts that would reach the kingdom of heaven. In this story, he offered hope to the poor and oppressed.

These stories were told in a time when people had never heard of a God like Jesus was talking about. They needed to hear stories that were easy for them to relate to. Jesus used locations and experiences that the people could easily understand. Everyone understood about sowing seeds, tending the growth of plants, and taking care of animals. They knew about family problems and parent-child relationships. Jesus used what they already knew as analogies, or comparisons, to help make his points about God. Jesus's parables still help people understand religion, almost 2,000 years after they were first told.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** What is a parable?
  - A.** a book of fairy tales
  - B.** another word for the Bible
  - C.** a story that always has two parts
  - D.** a story that has a message or lesson
  
- 2.** In “The Parable of the Sower,” where do the seeds fall that grow shallow roots and die?
  - A.** in hard-packed soil
  - B.** among thorns
  - C.** in a rocky place
  - D.** in good soil
  
- 3.** What is the theme of “The Parable of the Prodigal Son”?
  - A.** Children will always get what they want.
  - B.** God still loves you, even if you get lost in life.
  - C.** You cannot come back to God if you get lost.
  - D.** Animals are not important to God.
  
- 4.** Jesus used parables to share his ideas with his followers. Why was using parables an effective way for Jesus to teach? Provide details from the passage to support your answer.