

Practicing the Parables

On-Line Bible Study


St. Luke's United Methodist Church


Houston, Texas

by

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How to use this study:

This study is made up of seven lessons, each of which will take anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour to complete, depending on how in-depth you wish to make it. At points in the study you will find a pencil icon  which indicates a place to record your own thoughts on the question. You may also use a “sticky note” paper at any point to write any additional thoughts that come to you as you study.

EDITOR NOTE: This symbol  is in “Wingdings” font. I’m not sure it will come through as a pencil on your computer. If not, substitute an icon that indicates opportunity to write their thoughts.

At the end of the study you will find a list of suggested resources. You can complete the study without additional resources, but any of these will add insight into the text. I would also suggest that you have on hand several translations for comparative study. One translation may give you more clarity than others. Be sure that you have at least one recent translation. I’d particularly suggest the New Revised Standard Version and the Contemporary English Version.

Lesson One

Parables and Purpose

Matthew 7:24-27

Welcome to Practicing the Parables, an on-line Bible study of some of the parables found in the Gospels. Since early time people have used storytelling as teaching tools or to explain a concept.

Sometimes we use actual stories from our own lives or the lives of others in such situations. At other times we may use fictitious stories, such as fables, myths, allegories, or parables. Jesus used both allegories and parables.

Fables and myths

Fables and myths are quite different from allegories or parables. A fable is a short story, not based on fact, where animals and plants talk as if they were people. It is often characterized by shrewdness and sarcasm instead of a moral quality. A myth is an invented story and usually contains imaginary or superhuman beings.

Allegories

Allegories have figurative meanings for every detail in the story. For examples of allegories that Jesus used, read John 10:7-18 and 15:1-11. What figurative meanings might Jesus be using for the following parts of the allegory?

John 10:7-18

Sheepfold

Gate

Thief/bandit

Shepherd

Sheep

Gatekeeper

Hired hand

Wolfs

Other sheep

Flock

John 15:1-11

Vine

Vinegrower

Branch

Fruit

Pruning


Withering

Fire

Parables


A parable is simply a short, fictitious story that applies spiritual life to a familiar experience. The familiar experience is what makes a parable so powerful. Through the experiences that we feel so at home with, we can grasp the meaning. Often we begin to hear the parable as simply a good story, and then it hits the point that zeros in on our own lives.

What are some modern day equivalents of the parables? List some ideas below. You might consider some comic strips or editorial cartoons.

 Modern day equivalents of parables:


Jesus may have patterned his parables after the prophet Nathan who reminded King David of his inappropriate actions by using a parable. The parable sets up a fictitious story that the hearer gets engaged in. Then it turns the point of the story to the listener.

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-6.

 At what point does Nathan turn the point of the story to the listener?

Parables help to reveal our depths of self. They become a mirror. Jesus used this as a way of moving into a person's life before turning the point of the story to the person. In Jesus' parables he simply left it for the hearer to arrive at the meaning.

Why did Jesus use parables?

 Read John 1:9. What was the general purpose for Jesus coming into the world?

✍ How did the different gospel writers explain the reasons for Jesus using parables?

Look at the following scriptures and record the reasons given. How do they differ?

Matthew 13:10-17; 34

Mark 4:10-13; 33-34

Luke 8:9-10

Parables lay foundations

Quite appropriately, Jesus told a story about the foundation of a house. He grew up in the family of a home builder. The carpenter of that day not only worked with wood, but probably was a stonemason and bricklayer. House builders could not order wood or bricks from the local lumber yard. They had to go out into the country and actually wrestle with a large tree, cutting it to the size needed. Or they might have to form the bricks right there on site and lay them out to dry. Jesus knew about how a house should be built, and most of his listeners did too.

Recall a time when you have witnessed a small creek or a streambed that turned into a raging river with excessive rains. How did the land look before the rains? How far from the streambed did it flood? What happened to the land surrounding the creek? What might have happened to a house in Jesus' day if it was built on unstable ground?

Read Matthew 7:24-27. (The story is also found in Luke 6:46-49.)

✍ Remember, a parable applies spiritual life to a familiar experience. If we apply this story to our spirituality, what does the story say about the possibility of floods in our lives?

✍ In the story, the man did not set out to fail at building the house. It was simply a matter of some poor choices. What unwise choices have you made in your spiritual life? What were the circumstances of those choices – hurry, stress, indifference, distraction? How could you have made better choices in those situations?

✍ What practices in life can be represented by shifting sand?

✍ How can we develop a firm foundation for our spiritual lives?

✍ What is one concrete action that you will take in the next week to firm your spiritual foundation?

Prayer:

Write a prayer of commitment to follow that action in the next week.


Lesson Two


What Do We Value?

Luke 12:13-21

How do we decide what is of great value? Most of Jesus' life and teachings centered around selecting the right relationships, the right choices, and the right way to honor God.

If a person values only things that gratify himself or herself, life can become so self centered that it is a form of isolation or solitary confinement. We cut ourselves off from relationships, and we also cut ourselves off from our relationship with God.

 Consider a person who makes lots of money but is not satisfied with the wealth, constantly trying to make more money. What drives the person to spend time making money, and what is he or she ignoring in order to do this?


 What sort of god does this person expect God to be?

The Rich Fool

Read Luke 12:13-21

In biblical times it was not unusual for people to bring unsettled disputes to a Rabbi who was respected. In this case, as always, Jesus refused to give answers but instead made his listeners think for themselves. He did grasp the opportunity to teach about what we value in life.

 In this parable, what words did Jesus use to describe this man?

 Write a character description of the man in the parable. What sort of family life do you suppose he had? What was his attitude toward those less fortunate than he? What was his expectation for life? What did he value?

✍ Paraphrase this parable using a situation today.

✍ Read the creation story. (Genesis 1) How does it speak of God's generosity? Did God delight in sharing creation and creativity with us? If we are created in God's image, then what does that say of how our generosity should be?

✍ Reread the parable and count the number of times that the man used the personal pronouns: I, me, my, and mine. What does this tell us about the man's attitude of how he came about his wealth?

✍ What credit did he give God for his ability to accumulate wealth?

✍ Think of a success in your own career or life. What is the ultimate source of such success? What influence did your parents or some special person have on your ability to have that success? Who gave you even the ability to read? What inventions do you use? Who was responsible for those inventions?

✍ Think of a time you have given something to someone or taught someone something – and you have seen real joy in the face of the recipient. How did you feel? Can that joy be measured materially? How would you interpret life differently if you knew you would die in one week?

✍ Reflect on the last part of verse 21. To which of the 10 commandments does this parable speak? (Deuteronomy 5:1-21)

Prayer:

Write or pray a prayer including the following:

~ Ask forgiveness for the times you have looked at God as a god who only fulfills personal desires.


- ~ Ask for a sensitivity for others.
- ~ Pray to find meaning in life that goes beyond self.
- ~ Remember the first commandment and spend some time simply listening to and loving God.

Lesson Three

Who Is My Neighbor?

Luke 10:25-37

Jesus was a master of conflict resolution. The parable in Luke 10:25-39 is an example of a method he used, telling a story.

 Read Luke 10:25 and paraphrase the lawyer's question. What is the real reason behind his question?

Note that Jesus answered a question with a question. This is typical of rabbinical practice, encouraging the listener to dig deeper. Jesus was not going to TELL the man the answer, but he wanted to encourage him to come to his OWN understanding. We will more likely accept a truth if it springs from within ourselves instead of having it set before us.

Consider the background

Samaritans shared common heritage with the Jews. Read John 4:12 for reference to a common ancestor that the Samaritan woman referenced. John 4:20 tells of a primary difference in the religions. The Jews' temple was on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem; Samaritans worshiped on Mt. Gerizim. Legal traditions also differed regarding cleanliness of vessels.

Although the two peoples shared a common heritage, by Jesus' time they seldom associated with each other. The Jews considered the Samaritans inferior in religion and in their heritage. They had settled in an area and had intermarried with those not Jewish. In John 8:48 the people slandered Jesus by calling him a Samaritan.

Read John 4:7-10 and Matthew 10:5 to recognize how the two peoples avoided contact. Read about the usual itinerary of a trip to Jerusalem in Mark 10:1 and Matthew 19:1. It was standard Jewish practice to avoid Samaria. However, Jesus made a special trip through the country of Samaria, as we see in the story of the woman at the well in the fourth chapter of John.

Samaritans consider themselves as bearers of the true faith and strong observers of the Torah (the five books of Moses). Jews were descendents of Judah. Samaritans consider themselves as descendents of the Joseph tribes.

The setting for this story is somewhere between Jerusalem, the primary city of the country, and Jericho. Jerusalem is on highest elevation in Palestine (about 2300 feet) and Jericho is 1300 ft. below sea level, near the northern edge of the Dead Sea which is the lowest elevation on earth. There is a 3600 foot drop in a little more than 20 miles of travel. This makes for dangerous territory. The fact that it is a desert area makes it more dangerous. The road was known as “The Red and Bloody Way” because it was narrow with sudden turns and rocky ledges, the perfect place for an ambush.


Read the story and look at the characters


Read the complete parable from Luke 10:25-37.


The first person to encounter the man was a priest. The first and foremost responsibility for a priest was service in the Temple. It is likely this man was on his way to the Temple and could not be certain whether the traveler was dead or alive. Read Numbers 19:11-13 for an understanding of the dilemma this man faced. The Temple and the liturgy of worship was more important to him than the suffering of others. It would be no surprise to the Jewish listeners when this man passed up the opportunity to help.

The second man was a Levite. The Levites considered themselves among the select few, in the same lineage as Aaron and descendents of Levi, a son of Jacob. They were servants of the priests. This man came closer to the injured traveler, but probably recalled how outlaws acted as decoys by appearing to be wounded. His own safety was of prime importance to this man, which was understandable to Jesus’ listeners.


When Jesus said that the third man was a Samaritan, the listeners likely expected this man to be the villain of the story. Although most Jews never actually knew a Samaritan, they expected only bad behavior from them. If Jesus had actually used the term “Good Samaritan” the listeners would have considered it a contradiction of terms.

 What caused the first two men to turn away instead of sharing God’s love?

 What might the Samaritan have experienced in his past that made him willing to stop?

 The inquirer of Jesus asked the question, “Who are my neighbors?” How did Jesus turn around this term, neighbor? How did he challenge the man to turn his thoughts from receiving to giving?

What about today?


 Look at the three men: religious, professional, and outcast who was expected to do evil. Parallel them to persons today.

Jesus used situations in his parables that were common for his listeners of that day. Sometimes we can better understand the meaning of the parable if we see the story in today’s world. Read the scenario “One Dark Night” and make up an ending, placing yourself in the situation. How would the story end?

EDITOR NOTE: Please put this in some sort of box or set apart. If it can have an icon-link so that they click on the icon to read the scenario, all the better.

One Dark Night


You are walking down your street with your girlfriend in the dark of the night. The neighborhood is not in the best part of town, but it is home. However, you still feel eerie because only weeks before you were robbed on this same street. At 4:30 a.m. you are returning home from a night of working with Safe Ride America, an organization where volunteers drive drunken people home. Suddenly a frenzied man and woman approach you. He is carrying a bundle in his arms. The disheveled woman frantically screams, “My baby isn’t breathing. My baby isn’t breathing. We need help!”


 What would you do?

This is exactly what happened during the summer of 2003. A homeless couple rushed through the streets of Atlanta, crying out for someone to help them. Their 25 day old son had quit breathing, and they had no way of reaching medical assistance. They shouted into windows of a three-story condo building and stopped anyone they saw on the street, including Ian Burke, the character in the scenario. But no one came to their aid, not even Ian Burke. The couple walked on down the street, past the post office, the coroner's office, and the Delta billboard that says "Spend Some Quality Time With The Kids." About a mile from the boarded-up house where they were staying, they reached the Atlanta City Detention Center. But it was too late. When their 25 day old son was taken to the hospital, he was pronounced dead on arrival.

Ian Burke must live with the knowledge that he may have been able to help but simply said, "No, we can't help you." When he learned of the death of the baby he said, "I didn't help them, and now my conscience is eating me up."

 What causes us to ignore the needs of others?

 If we are not capable of helping or do not have the tools, we can offer to get help. We are no help if our "helpfulness" is only a hindrance. In what ways can we help others?

 How can we allow our past to be a positive force in our present and future actions?

Prayer:

Write or pray a prayer including the following:


- ~ For a recognition of those who are your neighbor.
- ~ For discernment in ways to help or find help.
- ~ For the deeper relationship with God that such neighborly action brings.

Lesson Four

Can We Be Forgiven?


Luke 15:11-32


This parable, often called “The Prodigal Son”, is probably the most familiar one in the Bible. It has been called the greatest short story in the world. But we sometimes forget two things about the parable. We forget the circumstances under which it was told, and we forget to look at who is the main character. More recent translations title this parable “The Forgiving Father.”

 Read Luke 15:1-2. What has caused Jesus to tell this story, along with the stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin?

Read the parable and reflect


Read the parable in Luke 15:11-32. This story has been called “The Prodigal Son”, probably because we can best identify with that character. But read it looking for the real hero.

 In biblical times if a son took his inheritance and squandered it, the father would have disowned him and never looked at him again. It would have been as if the son were dead. But what does this father do, even before the son returns to his home country? What is his attitude? What does the phrase “...saw him when he was a long way off” indicate about his watchfulness?


 Read Deuteronomy 21:18-21 in light of the actions of the youngest son. What would the average Jewish father have done about the actions of his younger son?


Notice that the father did not mention the inheritance – he was happy that the son had learned from his mistakes. The father/son relationship went deeper than what the son did. It is a lasting bond, no matter what.

Now let's consider the sons. According to Jewish law (Deuteronomy 21:17) the father was not free to leave his property as he saw fit. Two-thirds of the property, by law, went to the eldest son. This might have been established because the eldest son would have responsibility for entertaining the clan and guests and for offering sacrificial gifts from the family.

 Since it was also customary for the eldest son to assume control over the remaining properties and divide it among those to inherit an estate, how do you suppose the older son in this story “played politics” and used his advantage, both emotionally and materially, even ahead of time?

Reread verses 15-19. Pigs or swine were considered the most repulsive thing that a Jew could eat. Read Leviticus 11:4-8 and Deuteronomy 14:3-8 for laws about eating these animals.

 Consider the most repulsive, degrading job you can think of. Meditate on the story, using that degrading job in place of the one in story. Place yourself in the role of the son who must take that job. Form thoughts of what you might tell your father on return.

 Verse 17 states, “When he came to himself (or to his senses)....” What does this say about the state of our relationship with God when we have reached the lowest point in life and decide to return to God?

We cannot truly understand the decision that the young man made unless we understand the circumstances of slaves and hired hands. Slaves were different in that day than we consider them today. They were usually a part of the family and well cared for, but the hired hands could be dropped from employment for no particular reason. The son

asked for a position as a hired hand, the lowest position in his father's household. He was truly repentant.

But the story goes on, and we realize that the father never even gave him an opportunity to ask for a position as a hired hand but immediately calls for a robe, (denoting honor), a ring (authority), and sandals (indicating that he was a son and not a slave). And then the feasting began and the unhappy older brother enters the picture.

✍ How does the role of the older brother mimic the attitude of the Pharisees and tax collectors who approached Jesus in the first place?

✍ This is an open-ended parable. We don't know whether the older son will join the celebration or not. What do you think?

A parallel might be drawn between this story and Israel's capture by the Babylonians.

✍ Read of their capture in 2 Chronicles 36:17-21 and of God's promise in Isaiah 44:21-22. Compare the story of Israel in exile, desiring to return to God but not sure if they would be accepted, to this parable. Might Jesus have drawn his concept from this?

✍ Read Zephaniah 3:14-17 – Who is rejoicing? How would Jesus' familiarity with this scripture have made a difference in this story?

✍ Of which of the 10 Commandments does this parable speak? (Deuteronomy 5:1-21)

Prayer:

Write or pray a prayer including the following:

- ~ Repentance for times when you have neglected your relationship with God.
- ~ Asking for God's forgiveness.
- ~ Accepting God's forgiveness, no matter how low we have fallen.

Lesson Five

What Does God Require?

Matthew 25:31-46


Parables are “remembered” stories that Jesus told, although they may not be remembered verbatim and may be colored by the audience that the writer was targeting. Read the parable (Matthew 25:31-46) through once.

This should not be taken as an “earning of reward” theme. To see this as a “rewards” theme diminishes the reason for doing the acts, making it a selfish reason. Jesus did not emphasize this in his life.

Read Luke 17:20-21 for a definition that Jesus gave of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God can be defined as both 1) here and now and/or 2) later time.

Even God cannot force us into the Kingdom of God. Read Luke 13:34 to see Jesus’ view on forcing us to follow him.

Matthew is the only gospel writer who recorded this parable. There are other occasions carrying out the same theme.


 Look at the following references from Jesus’ life. How are the themes alike although these are not parables?

Matthew 18:5

Matthew 10:40-42

Mark 9:41.

Our red letter Bibles deceive us into thinking the spoken word of Jesus is the most important, but we must look at Jesus’ life, his actions, and his attitude to truly understand his words.

 Read the following references to Jesus’ life and note ways that his actions and attitude carry out the theme of this parable.

Mark 1:49-45 (Consider the fact that no one touched a person with leprosy for fear of contracting the disease.)

Matthew 9:20-22 (Recognize that anyone touching a woman who was hemorrhaging was considered unclean and must go through a period of purification. This is also the only time that Jesus is recorded to have called someone “daughter”.)


Luke 7:36-50 (Recognize that it was an act of grave immodesty for a Jewish woman to appear in public with her hair unbound.)

Matthew 15:21-28 (Note how Jesus was open minded enough to listened to the woman and then change his attitude.)


The parable today

 How has this parable shaped Western Culture and Christian behavior expectations?


Living the point of this parable is what produces joy within, with God. The purpose of the parable is to teach, not to condemn. Reread the story and compare Jesus to a teacher who prepares you for a test, then gives a test and afterwards brings you to a chair beside the desk and explains the wrong answers while grading the paper. This is a means of moving into the joy of living with God.

 Reread Matthew 25:37-39. Why were these people surprised and not aware of what they had done?

 Read Genesis 1:26a. If we are created in God’s image, if we have God’s DNA, then what sort of love should we exhibit?

 Think through this situation: As you rush in the door of the church, late for a meeting, someone coming out of the building falls. What do you instantly do? We are

created to reach out and help. Do you ask yourself before reacting, “Should I help or not?” You respond with the instinct that you inherited from God. What has happened to change that? Why are we not following that inherited instinct?

 Go back and look at verse 44 of the parable. What are they saying? Why did the people on the left answer as they did?

Bottom line

Why did Jesus tell the story? Not to scare us into good behavior so we go to heaven, but to turn our attitudes around – to bring us back into relationship with God. The bottom line of the parable is recognizing our identity and claiming it. We can define the quality of “eternity” as the quality of experience with God – anytime anywhere – as compared to the quality of experience without God.

Prayer:

Write or pray a prayer including the following:


- ~ For recognition of opportunities to follow Jesus’ teaching in this parable.
- ~ Thanks for inheriting God’s DNA and discernment for how to keep it foremost in your life.

Lesson Six

What Is Just?

Matthew 20:1-16

This parable has caused many people to wonder about Jesus' understanding of justice. The Pharisees and Jesus certainly had differing opinions on justice.

 First read the parable (Matthew 10:1-16) and write your immediate reactions on what is happening.

On our first approach to this parable, it appears that the landowner does not do justice to the laborers he first hired on. But let's look at the background and circumstances.

Background

As with any study of scriptures, we cannot really understand what Jesus is saying unless we know the circumstances of that era and how it differs from today. Click on each icon below and read about the background for each element of the story.

EDITOR NOTE: Can we put icons or "buttons" for the learners to click on to bring up each of the following items? I don't want them in the open and viewed before they write their immediate reactions without knowing this background.

Vineyards:

The text does not say what time of year this story occurred. If it was at planting time, the landowner would be very anxious to get his new vines in early so that they had a full season to grow, giving him strong rooted vines for future years. If it was harvest time, there was even more urgency to have a full company of laborers. The grape harvest usually happens all at once, particularly in vineyards that have all the same type of grapes. The varieties of grapes, maturing at different times of the season, were not available at that time. Once the grapes were ripe they had to be harvested quickly,

because soon after the harvest the seasonal rains would come, spoiling any unpicked grapes. The landowner would welcome any worker, even for a few hours.

Workers:

When we read about people “standing idle in the marketplace” we think of shiftless people. However, the marketplace was the place to hire day laborers, like a labor exchange. Those who were hired early would have been happy to have a day’s work, and those still idle at noontime or in the afternoon would expect that they would go without a day’s wages and their family might go hungry the next day. The worker who remained until late afternoon, still hoping for employment, was certainly desperate for income. In normal times, the servants and slaves were assured of having food to eat, but the day laborers knew that if they weren’t hired there would be no food for their family.

Wages:

The amount offered for wages was typical of a day’s pay, giving a subsistence existence. It was important to have even a few hour’s work. It may make the difference in a child eating or going to bed hungry.

Time:

The Jewish workday began at sunrise, about 6:00 a.m. The hours then were counted until 6:00 p.m., when the day officially ended and the next day began. The end of the third hour then is 9:00 a.m.; the end of the sixth hour is midday or our noon, and the end of the eleventh hour is 5:00 p.m., with only one hour of time left in the day.

Look at it from the viewpoint of three characters and write down what that character might be feeling at each period of the day. Note whether they enter into a contract and speculate as to why or why not.

 Landowner:


6:00 a.m.

9:00 a.m.

12:00 noon

5:00 p.m.

6:00 p.m. (pay-off time)

 Laborer hired in the first hour:


6:00 a.m.

9:00 a.m.

12:00 noon

5:00 p.m.

6:00 p.m. (pay-off time)

 Laborer hired in the last hour:


6:00 a.m.


9:00 a.m.


12:00 noon


5:00 p.m.

6:00 p.m. (pay-off time)

 How might the worker who was hired first have felt if everyone had been given their pay in a sealed envelopes so that one didn't know what the other had received?

 What was it that made him unhappy – the actions of the landowner or of his own perception?

 What would his feelings have been if he was a worker who never got a job that day? The unhappiness did not come in the amount of pay but in the attitude of the worker.

 How can this parable apply to Christians today who have been Christians all their lives and those who are new to the faith?

✍ When the gospel of Matthew was written there was great debate about whether Gentiles should be included in the church. Matthew wrote the gospel for a Jewish audience. How might they have interpreted this parable?

✍ How does this parable show justice? Generosity?

Prayer:

Write or pray a prayer including the following:

~ Appreciation for acceptance into God's kingdom, no matter how long you have been a Christian.

~ Thanks for the compassion and generosity of God, such as that shown by the landowner in the parable.


~ Ask for a willingness to work for God, no matter what the reward – simply for the joy of working for God.

Lesson Seven

How Do I Use My Gifts?


Matthew 25:14-30

The common translations of this parable use the term “talent” for the wealth that the man entrusted to his servants. Although some translations translate the amount into coinage, a talent was not actually a coin but a weight of measure. The value of it depended on the type of coinage involved: copper, silver, or gold. Although we do not know the exact value of the talents, we do know the proportions of wealth entrusted to each servant.

 Read Matthew 25:14-30 and reflect on how this parable has influenced our culture today, not only in our usage of the word “talent” but also in our attitude toward work.

Let’s look at the situation. Think back before cell phones and email, before telephones and fax, even before the pony express and dependable mail service. A trip of any distance completely cut connections with one’s business. If this man was a merchant he might have gone on a buying trip to India, involving weeks of travel plus the time for business. If it was a political trip, he might have traveled to Rome probably through treacherous storms at sea. The uncertainty of travel caused an uncertainty of when he would return. What should he do about his business or investment while he was gone? Wives normally took no part in business, and so the logical thing was to turn them over to his trusted servants, whom he knew well.

 Why is the amount not equal?

 Look closely at the parable. Exactly what sort of command did the master give his servants? Did they follow any instructions he gave? What does this say about the initiative of each servant?

- ✍ Look at the first and second servant. What is the difference in the two?
- ✍ Why do you suppose the master gave them different amounts?
- ✍ What is the difference in the responses that the master gave to these two when he returned?
- ✍ A disturbing factor of this parable is the fact that the master was not “honorable” in general. What are your thoughts on this?
- ✍ Look at the actions of the third servant. Remember that not doing anything is a decision in itself. His decision took the lazy way out. What other characters in Genesis 3:1-8; 2 Samuel 11; Exodus 2:11-15a; and chapter one of Jonah took the lazy way out? When confronted with a decision, how might they have reacted differently? Are there other characters in the Bible that took the lazy way out?
- ✍ When, in your life, have you taken the lazy way out?
- ✍ Read John 21:15-22. How does this scripture relate to the parable? What common message do they have?
- ✍ What did the third servant say about the master in verses 24 and 25? Reflect on how his fear of the master correspond to our fear of God that sometimes blocks our relationship with God.
- ✍ Look at another parable that Jesus told in Matthew 18:10-14. With this understanding of God, and considering the fact that the master in this parable knew his servants well, what does this say about God’s desire for even those of us who often fail?

✍ Read the parable of salt and light in Matthew 5:13-16; Mark 4:21-25; and Luke 8:16-18. What theme does this parable have in common with the one about talents?

✍ As a parent we must release a toddler in order for the child to learn to walk. If a child is never given the opportunity, the child will never learn to walk. Compare the master's release of control over his property to God's release of control.

This parable is not about how much each servant made with the money but about the fact that they did or did not work at earning the money, at bettering the master's kingdom. If the man who hid the money had worked at it, then he would have been praised as the others were.

Prayer:

Write or pray a prayer including the following:

- ~ For forgiveness of times when you have let a fear of God hinder your actions.
- ~ For recognition of the abilities that you have that are hidden and should be used.

Suggested Resources

Bible Student's Map Book, Abingdon Press

Complete Bible Lessons for Adults (CD-ROM, edited by Delia Halverson), Nashville: Abingdon Press

Concise Concordance to the New Revised Standard Version (The) ; Oxford University Press.

Daily Bible Study; William Barclay; Westminster John Knox Press (Volumes Matthew and Luke)

HarperCollins Bible Dictionary; Paul Achtemeier (Editor); HarperCollins.

Introducing the Bible; William Barclay; Abingdon Press

New Interpreter's Bible (The) (12 volumes); Abingdon Press

New Interpreter's Study Bible; Abingdon Press.

Parables of Jesus; J. Ellsworth Kalas; Abingdon Press