

## Grenades From Heaven: Parable Study Guide

By Nick Roark

Here are seven keys to help you unlock the meaning of the parables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke:

1. **Pray for the Holy Spirit's help as you seek to understand, interpret, and apply the parables in Luke's Gospel.** As you pray, keep in mind Jesus' central message of the gospel of the kingdom of God (Luke 8:1). Much of Jesus' teaching in the parables illustrates and illuminates aspects of His kingdom.
2. **Study the parable thoroughly by reading and rereading it in order to understand both the near and far context.** The *near context* includes what comes immediately before and after the parable. Who is the intended audience of the parable? Does Luke offer any clues to the meaning and significance of the parable? (cf. 14:7; 15:1-2; 18:1; 18:9; 19:11) The *far context* includes the entire Gospel according to Luke. Is something in the parable mentioned in another part of the book? Remember that the parables are *stories* told within a larger *Story*: the death and resurrection of Christ. Luke intends for his readers to interpret the parables of Jesus in constant shadow of the cross and resurrection of Jesus.
3. **Seek the primary point of the parable.** While a parable may teach several related truths, all of these will normally relate to one central point. The primary message of the parable will often come at the end, or in a concluding remark made by Jesus. (cf. Luke 18:14. The point of the parable is the danger of pride and self-righteousness and the need for humility and repentance.)
4. **Pay particular attention to the conclusion of the parable.** Usually the main point of the parable is stressed at the end of the story. Think of the end as the parable's punch line. In other words, look closely at the material that comes at the conclusion of the parable. What comes at the end of the parable is often the clinching indicator of intent.
5. **Pay particular attention to the structure of the parable.** How does Jesus develop the story He is telling in the parable? Who are the characters? How does each character respond in the story? Is there any symmetry or parallelism between the various components of the story?
  - a. **For example:** In **Luke 15:3-31**, Jesus tells three parables that have a similar structure and theme: something or someone is lost, then found, and there is a response of joy. Notice the call and response of joy in the conclusion of the first two parables (cf. 15:6-7; 15:9-10). Is it significant that the final parable includes a call to rejoice but no response? (cf. 15:28) To whom is Jesus directing these parables? (cf. Luke 15:1-2). Jesus leaves the third parable without a closing response of joy because He is calling the Pharisees and the scribes to rejoice that sinners are being found and saved by Him. The question remains: Will these elder brothers join the rejoicing in the party or be left outside?
6. **Aim to discover the implied question a parable is addressing.** Often Jesus' parables come as a response to a statement someone else makes or a question someone else asks. The intent of the parables is often to bring about a response that moves someone past superficial thinking to godly discernment. As you read the text, ask yourself: "What is the ultimate question that is being asked or raised by Jesus?" Focus your attention on discovering this question. Knowing the right question to ask is the first step to finding the right answer.
  - a. **For example:** The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is told by Jesus in response to a series of questions asked by a lawyer that culminates with the lawyer's question: "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29) Instead of answering that loaded question (the lawyer was "desiring to justify himself" 10:29), Jesus tells a parable and concludes by asking the lawyer: "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?" (10:36). So the implied question in this parable is NOT: "Who is my neighbor?" The implied question hovering over this parable is: "Will I be a neighbor?"
7. **Look for help in the Old Testament.** Remember that the primary source of many of the allusions, ideas, and metaphors included in the parables of Jesus is the Old Testament. One of the ways we can know and understand the parables of Jesus better is by knowing and understanding the Old Testament Scriptures that are all written about Him (Luke 24:27). Several of the themes that we find in Luke's Gospel are all drawn directly from the Old Testament. These themes include the fulfillment of God's promises given to Israel, the hope of a righteous Davidic King, unbelief among God's people, and a return from a spiritual exile.

**Further Study:** Much of this material is from the following two resources:

- Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 449-451.
- Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1-30.