



When Jesus came rather directly declaring and demonstrating that the long-awaited time of God’s salvation had arrived, he soon discovered that his directness proved to be a challenge to the ones he had come to save.

As Mark tells us in his gospel account, Jesus came as a messianic (God-anointed) King, announcing that he was bringing into vibrant view the kingdom of God. His actions, teachings—and eventually, his death and resurrection—accomplished once and for all the eternal purpose God had for the world. And yet, the very ones who were most prepared to receive him were so confounded by him that they confused his Spirit-filled, heavenly Father-directed, efforts for those of the enemy he came to overcome.

By the fourth chapter of Mark, Jesus realizes that if he is going to get at the heart of his hearers, he is going to have to come at things in a not so direct manner. The manner Jesus chose to tell things slant¹ was the *parable*: “And he was teaching them many things in parables...” (4:2).

It is this disarming feature that makes the parables the most useful tool in Jesus’ arsenal, as Robert Capon reminds us. “In resorting so often to parables, Jesus’ main point was that any understanding of the kingdom his hearers could come up with would be a misunderstanding.”

Now here is the thing about parables, they don’t define, diagram, or systematize; they describe something, usually something just as real but more challenging to see than the familiar elements of the short stories themselves: things like our souls, our hearts, our relation to the world, how God relates to us, and the kingdom of God. Parables, since they are (most of them) stories, disarm our assumptions about how God works by coming at such challenging topics sideways. Because they come at us on the slant, parables get to the heart of our relationship with God and one another before we know what to dismiss.

Eugene Peterson once said that “Parables trust our imaginations, which is to say, our faith. They don’t herd us paternalistically into a classroom where we get things explained and diagrammed. They don’t bully us into regiments where we find ourselves marching in [moral, unthinking conformity].” Parables are crafted to foster relationship with the communicator and in the stories. **Parables don’t do the work for us; they require us to put in work, imaginative or meditative work. Effort we could call *the work faith*.** They train us to hear the voice of the Lord and see with the eyes of the Spirit (see [Matthew 13:11-17](#)).

In other words, while we (like the men and women of Mark 1-3) can misunderstand Jesus’ straight-line efforts before he can get us to see what he sees, the parables get around our defenses by inviting us into a relationship with the teacher and the text. Parables invite us into a courtship of faith, requiring the use of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength as we grow into maturity in the kingdom.

So, here are the parables we will be entering into together this Epiphanytide. Our encouragement is to not just wait until Sunday to jump in, but to walk with Jesus into these stories with intent at least twice a week during January. To help, we’ve put together a schedule along with some questions to ponder along the way.

¹ One of my favorite poems is Emily Dickenson’s [Tell It Slant](#). A poem that seems to me to speak to the method and disposition of Jesus as he revealed to us the superb surprise of life with God now and forever.

WEEK OF JANUARY 4TH

- **Day One:** Read “The Parable of Sower” in [Matthew 13:1-9](#), and then the disciple's questions and Jesus’ response in verses [10-23](#). Then re-read the parable and write down any thoughts, observations, and questions that come to mind.
- **Day Two:** Re-Read [Matthew 13:1-23](#), and then consider the following questions:
 - Who is the sower?
 - Who or what is the seed, “the word of the kingdom”?
 - What does the seed consistently do on each of the four “soils”?
- **Sunday:** Re-Read [Matthew 13:1-9](#), asking for eyes to see and ears to hear what the prophets and righteous have longed to know.

WEEK OF JANUARY 11TH

- **Day One:** Read “The Parable of the Weeds” in [Matthew 13:24-30](#), and then the parables of The Mustard Seed and Leaven in verses [31-33](#) and Jesus’ comments about prophecy and parables in verses [34-35](#), and finally Jesus’ explanation in verses [36-43](#). The re-read the Weeds parable and write down any thoughts, observations, and questions that come to mind.
- **Day Two:** Re-Read [Matthew 13:24-43](#), and consider the following questions:
 - How would you describe the difference between the sower's response to the weeds from that of the servants?
 - In what ways might the Weeds parable relate to the Mustard Seed and Leaven parables?
 - In what ways does Jesus’ explanation (vv. 36-43) seem in conflict with or different to the feel of the parable itself?
- **Sunday:** Re-Read [Matthew 13:24-30](#), asking for eyes to see and ears to hear what the prophets and righteous have longed to know.

WEEK OR JANUARY 18TH

- **Day One:** Read “The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant” in [Matthew 18:21-35](#), then read Jesus’ comments on familial issues in verses [15-20](#). Re-read the parable and then write down any thoughts, observations, and questions that come to mind.
- **Day Two:** Re-Read Matthew [18:15-35](#), and consider the following questions:
 - Why does the king forgive the servant who owed so much?
 - Why might the forgiven servant not forgive the one who owes him?
 - What might this parable communicate about the value and place of forgiveness in the kingdom of God? (And, how might that connect with the parable of the Weeds?)
- **Sunday:** Re-Read [Matthew 18:21-35](#), asking for eyes to see and ears to hear what the prophets and righteous have longed to know.

WEEK OF JANUARY 24TH

- **Day One:** Read the parable of “The Friend at Midnight” in [Luke 11:5-13](#), then read Jesus’ response to the disciples’ question about prayer in verses [1-4](#). Re-read the parable and then write down any thoughts, observations, and questions that come to mind.
- **Day Two:** Re-read [Luke 11:1-13](#), and consider the following questions:
 - How does the one in need try to get his friend to answer his plea?
 - What does this parable communicate about friendship versus “impudence” (persistence) as it relates to prayer?
 - In what ways is God like and dissimilar to the friend being asked?
- **Sunday:** Re-Read [Luke 11:5-13](#), asking for eyes to see and ears to hear what the prophets and righteous have longed to know.