

C I N E M A T I C T H E O L O G Y

MODERN
PARABLES[™]

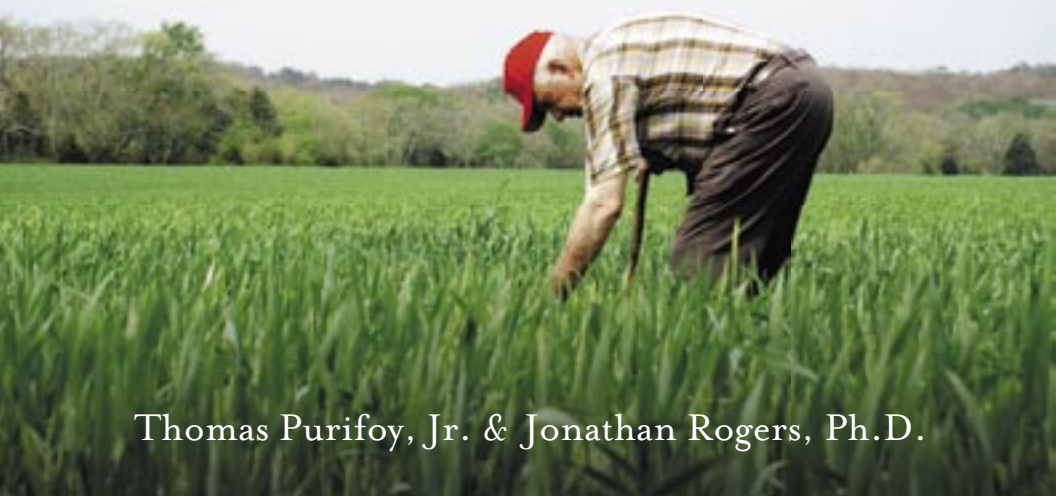
LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

V O L U M E I


Student Book

S A M P L E : L E S S O N 2

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Thomas Purifoy, Jr. & Jonathan Rogers, Ph.D.



Matthew 13:44

LESSON TWO

Hidden Treasure

LIVING THE PARABLE

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. MATT 13:44

Introduction

The lessons on Living the Parable will help you think through what you've learned in order to apply it to your daily life. Each lesson will include a transcript of the pastor's application video so you can review what he said on your own. It will also provide you with related verses from the Bible for further study and reflection.

Everyone is at a different place in his or her walk with the Lord. It is our belief that praying for guidance from the Holy Spirit, studying the Word of God, and then considering how it applies to our specific circumstances are some of the best ways to grow in grace as we live out the life of the Kingdom.

For this first Living the Parable chapter, the speaker's transcript will be followed by a brief discussion of the four questions that Dr. Daniel Doriani uses in his book *Putting the Truth to Work*. *Modern Parables* has used a number of the things

he teaches in that book as the foundation for the Living the Parable sections. If you are interested in further study on the area of Biblical application, we would encourage you to read Dr. Doriani's book.

TRANSCRIPT OF APPLICATION VIDEO

Living out Hidden Treasure - Dr. Daniel Doriani

Dr. Daniel Doriani is Senior Pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri.

Introduction

When I saw this property on screen I thought to myself, "that's one ugly piece of land." And now that I'm standing here, I have to tell you this is urban blight at its worst. This is one ugly piece of property. And that set me thinking. It's very different to watch something on a screen compared to experiencing it in person. It's one thing to live, it's another thing simply to watch.

For example, it's very different to watch a picture of a waterfall as opposed to feeling the spray in your face and the roar in your ears. Seeing versus experiencing—they're different things.

Why Jesus Taught in Parables

That difference between experiencing something and simply watching it is one of the main reasons why Jesus taught in parables. He didn't want to teach things that would enter our minds and then be filed away as some fact that we knew. He wanted to tell us stories that would enter our imaginations, that would enter our bones. We feel ourselves getting into the story, not just to live the story, but to hear what He said, to understand His teachings about the kingdom of God and to act on them.

At first blush, Jesus' parables are just interesting little stories—relatively simple at first reading. But then you notice something strange happens in the parable, something that teases your mind into thought. You wonder, “Why did Jesus put that in the story? What does it mean? What does it mean to me?”

After a while you begin to realize why Jesus taught in parables. He told these stories so they would force you to think—so they would be like a piece of sand in your shoe. Even the last thought before you go to bed at night is one more reflection on that parable. Then you realize that was his purpose in the first place: to make you think, to make you enter, to make you live—really live—what's in the parable.

Explaining Parables

So what exactly are parables?

They're simply comparisons that Jesus used that teach important truths about the Kingdom of God. This particular parable teaches us four different things about the Kingdom of God. The first is that the Kingdom is priceless. The second is that the Kingdom reveals itself to us often unexpectedly. Third, when it does, we should take radical, decisive action to acquire the Kingdom. Finally, when we do acquire the Kingdom—or maybe we could say it acquires us—it transforms everything.

When it comes down to it, the parable of the Hidden Treasure is about a very simple question: once we realize the supreme value of the Kingdom, will we enter it? Will we live faithfully before the King?

The Four Questions

As we apply the parables to the Kingdom of God and life in the Kingdom, there are four aspects of application of our studies. I'd like to phrase them as “the four questions people ask.” They are four questions people have asked throughout

the ages—philosophers, ethicists—and they certainly also appear in the Bible. In fact, the Bible teaches us to ask these questions, and it gives us abundant answers to them.

The first question is “What is my Duty?” What should I do—what does God require of me? What behavior is specified in the Law of God? What do the Ten Commandments require? What does Jesus require in His teachings? What does God require as a bare minimum for our actions? That’s the first question: What’s my duty? What should I do?

The second question is “What should I be?” or the question of character. The question of character—who should I be—touches on our ability to do what God requires us to do. In other words, we all know that we can’t simply resolve to do whatever we wish. Because we’ve all experienced those times when we want to do something, but we find that we can’t. Or we do it for a little while, but then we peter out—we don’t persevere. How can I actually have the capacity to persevere in the obedience that God wants of me? How can I achieve virtue? How can I be a loving and kind and gracious and generous person? That’s the question of character.

The third question is the question of goals, or the question, “Where should I go?” The first and second questions are answered the same way for everybody. Everybody has the same duties, everyone should pursue the same Godly character. But then, when it comes to our goals, they are unique for each one of us. God has given each one of us particular gifts, experiences, skills, teachers, even failures, that uniquely prepare us for what He wants us to do.

How do I figure out what my gifts, what my experiences, what my passions are, what’s unique in the way God has made me? What will lead me into the projects and the kinds of things that I’ll invest my life’s energy in?

The fourth question is that of vision or discernment. How can I learn to see the world God’s way? Now we know that the Lord gives His absolute truth in the Bible, but His

truth is challenged in so many ways in our culture. There are other religions such as Islam or Buddhism. Beyond that there are agnostics and atheists and naturalists. And they're all putting forward their claims.

Even people who aren't philosophers are simply saying, "Hey, enjoy the good life. Live for pleasure. Live for achievement. Live for recognition." How can I screen out—understand, but disregard those false voices? How can I hear the truth and see the world God's way? How can I discern His voice among all the others?

Those are the four basic questions the Bible teaches us to ask in so many ways. We will consistently apply those four questions to the parables as pathways to application.

Purchasing the Kingdom

So, what does the parable of the Hidden Treasure require in regard to our duty? It's very clear: the parable requires that we use decisive action to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom and God's righteousness." This parable requires us to be willing to take the radical action of selling everything—giving up everything, paying any price—to enter the Kingdom of God.

The second question concerns our character: who should we be? This parable answers that we should be men and women who have the kind of character that is able to take decisive action to enter the Kingdom of God. We need to see an opportunity and take advantage of it quickly. Even further, we need to be willing to give up what is most precious to us in order to acquire the Kingdom.

Third, we have to think about our goals. The parable of the Hidden Treasure really makes one simple point: until we actually do enter the Kingdom of Heaven, the main goal we have in life is to enter the Kingdom. We have to be willing to do whatever it takes, make any sacrifice, endure the ridicule, even the scorn of friends and relatives. We should

be willing to pay any price to finish the race in order to win the prize.

Finally let's talk about wisdom or discernment. Let's not do it through a series of statements, but rather through questions. The first question this parable teaches us to ask is, "What is of true worth? What is of supreme value?" And beyond that, once we as Christians accept the supreme value of the Kingdom, do we sometimes reacquire those things that we once sacrificed for the Kingdom? How, in short, can we forget what the Kingdom of God is worth?

If you're watching this story today, it's possible that you aren't sure that you're a member of the Kingdom of God. Now is the time to ask if you're not sure. Ask your teacher, ask your pastor, ask a friend. This study may be God Himself revealing His Kingdom to you at this hour. It could be time for you to act—to act decisively so that you can live in the Kingdom of God.

It's also possible that you're watching this video and you are a child of God—you are living the Kingdom. But as you think about the cost that the man in this story paid, you realize you haven't done anything radical or risky like that for a long time. You've been assuming—you've even been presuming on God. It may be time for you to recommit yourself so that you'll live truly in the Kingdom of God.

AN OVERVIEW OF LIVING THE PARABLES

Knowing and Doing

We who live in the West have perfected the art of knowing without doing. Many of us can discourse intelligently on the Bible and God's commands while ignoring them on a daily basis. Of course, we are not the first culture to do so. Some Pharisees in Jesus' day had also been infected with this kind of thinking. As Jesus pointed out: "The teachers of the law and

the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach." (Matt 23:2-3)

This idea of practicing what we preach often makes us uncomfortable. The fact is, if we really did this it would make our lives pretty rough. There is a general level of comfort that we live in which would likely be disturbed if we did exactly what we say we believe about taking care of the poor, tithing, loving our neighbor and so forth.

Jesus knew that hypocrisy is endemic to all people, whether they've developed a philosophical system that encourages it or not. And one of His primary means of combating pervasive hypocrisy was the parable.

After all, the whole point of teaching in parables was to drive His followers to change their lives in light of the Kingdom of God. It does us no good to listen to the parable of the Good Samaritan, agree that it is important to love our neighbors as ourselves, and yet not love our neighbors more. To do so merely means that we don't understand the parable.

Now some people may say that we can't change our lives ourselves, that we are sinful, and that the Holy Spirit must do this for us. That is true. But as C.S. Lewis pointed out, we do have the dignity of causality (in other words, *we can do things*). And if we are regenerate (or saved) then the Holy Spirit is working in us. Jesus, Paul and the epistle writers all used imperative verbs on a regular basis: *love your enemies; be holy; forgive others*. We not only *have* the ability to do these things, we are *expected* to do them as followers of Christ. If we do not do them, we are in sin.

We are talking here about living as Christians on a day-to-day basis. We are talking about the choices we make from the moment we wake up to the moment we go to sleep. We are talking about money, about prayer, about love, about trust, and about all the other things that come with being part of the Kingdom of God. All these things are the primary subjects

of the parables. It was exactly because Jesus knew that these things would be the bread and butter of our lives that He told us parables about them. Our responsibility is to incorporate the parables into our daily lives.

Four Aspects of Living the Parables

In normal Christian parlance, we often talk about applying the scripture to our lives. *Application* is putting something into operation, actually doing something. But it also suggests a conscious effort, something we have to think about and do.

The idea of *living*, however, is much more basic. Living is what we do whether we think about it or not. It's the basic level of our being. If we're not living, well... you get the picture.

Living is just the daily outworking of life. And Jesus tells us over and over again that true life is found only in Him: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." (John 5:21) What is this life, and how does it work into our daily living?

At its base, this life is *knowing God* (John 17:3). But knowing God is not a static thing; rather it manifests itself in an ongoing, redemptive relationship with God as He changes us from being naturally sinful to naturally holy (a process also known as sanctification). Dr. Daniel Doriani has identified four aspects of living in God's kingdom that are manifested in our living out the commands and principles found in the Bible.⁶ He has expressed them as four questions:

1. What should I do? That is, what is my duty?
2. Who should I be? That is, how can I become the person or obtain the character that lets me do what is right?
3. To what causes should I devote my life energy? That is, what goals should I pursue?
4. How can I distinguish truth from error? That is, how can I gain discernment?⁷

We will briefly look at each of the questions here:

I. WHAT SHOULD I DO? THAT IS, WHAT IS MY DUTY?

The moral life begins with commands. As Jesus Himself said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching." (John 14:23) and "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Luke 11:28). Jesus expects us to obey His commands. It's our duty to love others, to give to the poor, to love God. In a Biblical sense, duty is what is expected of us. Duty is the ground floor where we all have to start.

There is a lot of controversy today about the idea of duty. Some Christians warn against being too consumed with duty; others see it as the key to a happy life. The fact is, were there no sin in the world, we would all naturally do our duties (loving God and loving our neighbor) and there would be no debate. However, our sinfulness can take the principle of duty and make it a means of personal salvation or condemnation (legalism) or we can rebel against it and make it a hated concept (antinomianism).

But let's look at an example of duty put in the proper Biblical perspective. It is the duty of a husband and wife to love one another. Assuming they have a healthy relationship it is an easy thing to love one another. Their duty can be very enjoyable and not "seem" to be a duty at all (evidence that the word itself has taken on bad connotations). Of course, if a husband and wife are in a fight and have sinned against each other, the duty of loving one another can be onerous and even impossible. The Holy Spirit is required in both instances: in the first instance, the Spirit was actively involved in the pleasant doing of their duty; in the second, one or both were sinning against the Spirit and needed conviction and change. The point here is not that the duty is altered, but that *sin affects the exercise of duty*.

Doriani explains it well: "By schooling people in their duty we establish a necessary minimum standard for conduct."⁸ And the concerns about falling into legalism? "The best way to

combat legalism is to join duty and character. Character balances duty by stifling the notion that Christian living consists in adherence to a set of rules.”⁹ And it helps us realize that we live the Christian life fundamentally in gratitude to God for saving us in a way we could never have done ourselves.

2. WHO SHOULD I BE? THAT IS, HOW CAN I BECOME THE PERSON OR OBTAIN THE CHARACTER THAT LETS ME DO WHAT IS RIGHT? If duty is about what we *should* be doing, then character is about who we *should be*. It concerns the state of our hearts, our internal nature. Jesus explained it as: “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart.” (Luke 6:45) Our character directly influences our actions; in fact, it is the source of our actions.

This does not mean that our character is static. Rather, due to the sin in our hearts, our character is flawed at its source. Were it not we would naturally do the duties and obey the laws required of us. The Holy Spirit, however, is continuously sanctifying our character in order for us to do what God wants us to do. As Paul tells us, “But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” (Rom 8:10-11)

In other words, our character is constantly being pulled between our sinful natures and our new natures in Christ. Not being robots, we do have the ability to choose between these two options. Our choices not only spring from our character, but progressively influence our character on a long-term basis.

Ultimately the Holy Spirit is transforming our characters to reflect the character of Christ. As Paul tells us in Corinthians, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s

glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2Cor 3:18)

3. TO WHAT CAUSES SHOULD I DEVOTE MY LIFE ENERGY? THAT IS, WHAT GOALS SHOULD I PURSUE? The two preceding aspects of living out the parables, duty and character, were personal in nature. They related primarily to us as individuals. These two aspects are the twin foundations of living in the Kingdom of God, but they must naturally grow outward into the *goals* God has for our lives.

History shows us that God is redeeming this sinful world through the work of His servants. One need only glance at the ways Christianity has impacted the world for good to see how He is doing this: civil laws, hospitals, orphanages, art, business practices, and so forth. God is redeeming the world not only through changing the inner lives of people, but by using those people to alter the institutions and culture of the world through the choices they make for their lives.

A classic example of this is William Wilberforce, the member of British parliament who set as his life goal the abolishment of slavery in the British Empire. He used the skills that God had given him and the position that God had put him in to push forward the Kingdom of God in a specific and important way.

We are living in the midst of an enormous war. There are two kingdoms in conflict, and as Christians, we are the soldiers fighting Christ’s battles with Him. This is the meaning of David’s prophecy concerning Jesus: “The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. Your troops will be willing on your day of battle.” (Psa 110:2-3) Paul confirms this when he tells Timothy, “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” (2Tim 2:3)

In light of this, the choices that we make in terms of our daily work, our friendships, our hobbies, our places of wor-

ship, our missions activities, our evangelism, our service to others, our recreation – all these choices relate to the goals we have set for ourselves. The daily choices we make are not inconsequential. A building is built one brick at a time. But as Klass Skilder pointed out, there are only two possible uses of those bricks.¹¹ One builds an abortion clinic while another builds a church. In our daily decisions, we are following goals that support the growth of either the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan. There is no middle ground.

The parables force us to examine our goals and then to set them in light of the Kingdom of God. “Pursuing the right goals, we improve our corner of the world and feel God’s pleasure at our actions.”¹²

4. HOW CAN WE DISTINGUISH TRUTH FROM ERROR? THAT IS, HOW CAN WE GAIN DISCERNMENT? Solomon admonishes us in Proverbs to “preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.” (Prov 3:21-22) In this sense, discernment is directly related to Biblical wisdom. It is “the insight...to see things as they are from God’s perspective.”¹³

In our daily lives there are countless things that compete for our attention. We are constantly making decisions between competing duties, competing character issues, and competing goals—and as often as not, the choice isn’t between good and bad, but between good and better. It is the attribute of discernment that helps us to *see through* the issues to what God would have us do at that particular moment.

The Bible is clear that it is the Spirit who gives us discernment. Paul tells the Ephesians that “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...may give you the Spirit of wisdom” (Eph 1:17). Biblical discernment helps us to look at our culture and see what is edifying and what is not. It helps us look at our work and see what is godly and what is not.

It helps us look at our relationships and see what is Biblical and what is not.

In our day and age discernment for daily living is a necessity. The parables teach us to think God's thoughts in relation to the world and to see things with His *worldview*. Such a worldview often means that we will be going against the grain not only with those outside of God's Kingdom, but even with those lacking discernment *within* His Kingdom. It is to this end that Paul encourages us "that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to *discern* what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ." (Phil 1:9-11)

ADDITIONAL VERSES FOR STUDY AND REFLECTION

MATTHEW 13:44-46

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

* * *

LUKE 18:18-30

A certain ruler asked [Jesus], "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit

adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.””

“All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus replied, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”

Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.”

* * *

PROVERBS 8:12-21

“I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power. By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing wealth on those who love me and making their treasuries full.”