LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

An Expositional Approach to the Parables of Jesus and Applications for Unchurched Korean-American Christians

A Thesis Project Submitted to
The Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

Junyong Cha

Lynchburg, Virginia
May 2019
Liberty University School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Mentor: Dr. Malcolm O. Hester,  
Assistant Professor of Theology

Reader: Dr. Lester D. Kitchens,  
Assistant Professor of Practical Studies
ABSTRACT

AN EXPOSITORY APPROACH TO THE PARABLES OF JESUS AND APPLICATIONS FOR UNCHURCHED KOREAN-AMERICAN CHRISTIANS

Junyong Cha
Liberty University School of Divinity, 2019
Mentor: Dr. Malcolm Hester

Korean-American churches like many immigrant churches often play a role as the ethical and cultural refuge for members. This failure to be a faith-based spiritual community causes ripple effects, in a negative sense, that pastors should not preach uncomfortable messages to the congregation and not to focus on spiritual matters and that this spiritual downspin leads to conflicts and frustrations in church and ultimately to numeral declining in either form of a church split or leaving church. While the reasons for leaving the church are varied, the ultimate source of individual believers’ healing, restoration, and growth is the Word of God. Within this truth, the author of this project chose the parables of Jesus for they teach significantly fundamental lessons that are necessary for unchurched Christians’ revitalization.

The author of this thesis project aims to help unchurched Korean-American believers especially those who live in the Richmond, Virginia, area by teaching and sharing the parables of Jesus and applications from an expositional approach. The expositional approach will give individual believers a better and richer understanding of the parables than the allegorical approach. Lessons from expositional teaching will nurture and mature them for the readiness of their reaffiliation with a local church which is an ultimate goal of the author of this thesis project. Within and towards the ultimate goal, two research methods will be used in this thesis project:
taking two surveys from unchurched Korean-American Christians before and after the 20-week Bible study and researching academic sources on the parables and unchurched Christians.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I give glory and thanksgiving to my God the Father of my Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. He has given me the knowledge, wisdom, and everything I need to start and complete this project. He has graciously drawn me near to Him so that I can confess that I lack nothing in Him. He is my strength, my love, my vision, and my reason to live!

I am deeply thankful to my mother, Hyun-Sook Jung, who has been my spiritual mentor, supporter, exhorter, and a good example of Christ follower. I am so proud and blessed that you are my mother. I also thank my parents-in-law who have supported and prayed for me.

I want to acknowledge and share my deep appreciation to my mentor, Dr. Malcolm Hester, who has been more than a mentor to me. He has been patient with me with sincere prayer and encouragement and given me insightful instructions. He is one of the great blessings in my life in this foreign land. I also thank Dr. Lester D. Kitchens for his aid of revision for this project and his kindness and encouragement.

To the participants of this project, I thank and bless all of you. To my partners for God’s kingdom, Richard and Jenny, I thank you and bless you from the bottom of my heart. You have showed me and my family a genuine fellowship of believers of Christ and a true love and care. Appreciation and blessings go to Si-Yoo’s family as well.

A special appreciation goes to my wife, Kara, whom I love the most in the world. She has been with me with a great patience, encouragement, and love. I would not be here without her. I love you my son, E. L., and my daughters, Lael and Hael. You are the best gifts from God.

Glory be to God!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................................................................................... vi

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................ ix

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

  - Statement of Background and Problem ....................................................................... 2
  - Statement of Limitations ............................................................................................ 6
  - Theoretical Basis ......................................................................................................... 7
    - Biblical Basis ............................................................................................................. 7
    - Theological Basis ...................................................................................................... 9
  - Statement of Methodology .......................................................................................... 11
  - Review of Literature .................................................................................................. 13
    - The Scripture Verses ............................................................................................... 13
    - Books ....................................................................................................................... 15
    - Journal Articles ....................................................................................................... 19

## CHAPTER II: APPLIED RESEARCH DESIGNED TO LEAD TO HELPING THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF UNCHURCHED KOREAN-AMERICAN BELIEVERS ........................................ 22

  - The Necessity of This Research .................................................................................. 22
  - The Purpose and process of the Survey Questionnaire .............................................. 24
    - The Purpose of the Survey Questionnaire .............................................................. 24
    - The Process of Recruitment and the Survey Questionnaire ................................... 25
  - Ministry Setting ......................................................................................................... 26
  - Survey Findings ......................................................................................................... 28
    - Survey Section I ...................................................................................................... 29
    - Survey Section II ................................................................................................... 34
  - Participant Portraits ................................................................................................... 36
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. 1. Americans’ Affiliation with Christianity .................................................. 1
Figure 1. 2. Unchurched Christians’ Percentage in America ........................................... 2
Figure 2. 1. 20-Week Bible Study Schedule ............................................................... 28
Figure 2. 2. Years of Being a Christian – Question 1. 1. 2 ............................................. 30
Figure 2. 3. Attendance Period in the Previous Church – Question 1. 1. 3 ......................... 30
Figure 2. 4. Reason(s) for Leaving the Church – Question 1. 1. 4 .................................. 31
Figure 2. 5. Reason(s) of Non-Attending Church – Question 1. 1. 5 ............................... 32
Figure 2. 6. Understanding on Church (or being a part of a church) – Question 1. 1. 6 .......... 33
Figure 2. 7. Possibility for Future Church Attendance – Question 1. 1. 7 ......................... 34
Figure 2. 8. Understanding on Interpretation of the Bible – Question 1. 2. 3 ..................... 35
Figure 2. 9. Understanding on the Interpretation of the Parables – Question 1. 2. 6 ............. 35
Figure 4. 1. Description of the Participants’ Spiritual Growth – Question 2. 1. 2 ............... 88
Figure 4. 2. Changed Thoughts on Belonging to a Local Church – Question 2. 1. 3 ............ 93
Figure 4. 3. Changed Possibility for Future Church Attendance – Question 2. 1. 7 ............. 94
Figure 4. 4. Familiarity with the Parables of Jesus – Question 1. 2. 4 ............................... 96
Figure 4. 5. The Most Helpful Parable – Question 2. 2. 7 .............................................. 98
Figure 4. 6. Changed Understanding on Interpretation of the Bible – Question 2. 2. 1 .......... 98
Figure 4. 7. Changed Understanding on the Interpretation of the Parables – Question 2. 2. 2 .. 99
Figure 4. 8. Existence of Joy and Delight in Learning the Word of God – Question 2. 2. 8 .... 100
Figure 5. 1. Unchurched Korean-American Christians’ Cause & Effect Diagram ............... 103
Figure 5. 2. Process of Revitalization of the Participants .............................................. 107
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Most Americans today identify themselves as Christian. According to Barna Group’s most recent research, seventy-three percent of Americans identify themselves as Christian and believe that religious faith is a very significant element of their life (Figure 1.1).¹

![Americans' Affiliation with Christianity](image)

Figure 1.1. Americans’ Affiliation with Christianity²

While American churches seem fine in the statistic above, looking at church attendance will reveal a whole different story. Only thirty-one percent of the nearly three-quarters attend church on a regular basis.³ These numbers tell that more than a half of Christians in the United States somehow have disaffiliated from church.

---

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
Since this disaffiliation is a pervasive problem of all churches in the US territory beyond ethnic groups, languages, and denominations, Korean-American churches are not free from this churchless problem. Yet, there are some background matters and the unique characteristics of Korean-American churches that have to be addressed prior to discussion of the phenomenon of unchurched Korean-American Christians.\(^5\)

**Statement of Background and Problem**

The Korean-American population has been growing since the wave of the 1965 Immigration Act. According to the Census research, the Korean-American population is about 1,307,000 people as of 2010.\(^6\) Among 1.3 million Korean residents in the United States, 71 percent declared their religion as Protestant Christianity, and its number is approximately a little

---

\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) The terms, *unchurched Christians* and *churchless Christians*, are used in this project synonymously with the term *disaffiliation from church*.

less than one million. These researched numbers indicate that a growing number of Korean-American people means a growth of American Christianity. However, as long as Korean-Americans are in a different context of cultural setting from other Americans, it is inevitable that Korean-American Christians will gather under the roof of their own ethnic churches. This is why there are 4,233 Korean Diaspora churches in the United States for the number of Korean-American Christians.

As many immigrant churches in the United States, Korean-American churches have a special contextual setting from their starting point. First generation Korean-American immigrants have the trauma that is caused by the fact that most immigrants live as strangers and aliens in their new homeland due to the linguistic barrier and unfamiliarity with the cultural context of America. These verbal and social disabilities restrict them from having what they need for a new life. Thus, they found churches as their ethnic refuge, according to Will Herberg and Oscar Handlin, which provides them “cultural continuity and the psychological benefits.”

Charles Hirschman adds that the role of the church is not only providing mental consolation to them, but also substantial helps for what they need. Hirschman writes, “Almost all immigrant/ethnic churches make major efforts to serve the social and economic needs of their congregants, including information about housing, social, and economic opportunities that facilitate their adaptation to American society.”

---


8 Ibid.


10 Ibid., 1224.

Second generation Korean-Americans are “Americans of Korean ethnic descent either born in the United States or who emigrated from Korea before the age of five whose primary cultural affinity is American and whose primary spoken language is English.”\footnote{Kim and Pyle, “An Exception to the Exception,” 322.} As the definition of second generation Korean-American shows, they have a different context of cultural setting from their parents; thus, it is not too difficult to infer that one of the reasons for Korean-American second generations’ “Silent Exodus” is generation gap.

The term “Silent Exodus” is standing for second generation Korean-Americans’ disaffiliation with church as soon as they leave their parents.\footnote{Ibid.} The seriousness of this symptom is found in Kim and Pyle’s writing as, “One study has estimated that up to 95% of the Korean later generations will not attend any church upon college graduation. This indicates that although church affiliation is the norm among first-generation Korean-Americans, it is the exception among the second generation.”\footnote{Ibid.}
Their complete disaffiliation with church cannot be seen as their disaffiliation with only Korean ethnic churches, but as their disinterest in religious activities. It might be possibly true for some of the second generation that they lost interest in church from their disappointing experiences in church. While the second generation’s disappointing experiences were caused by the first generation’s non-spiritual motivation and the gaps of the culture and generation, the phenomenon of leaving the church is not only the latter generation’s problem. The first generation has left the church from their disappointed experiences as well.

Those who are completely unaffiliated with church, as most of the second-generation Korean-Americans, but still have faith in Christ, identify themselves as ‘spiritual but not religious.’ They are the people who have “a concern for spiritual issues but choose to pursue them outside the context of a formal religious organization.”15 These are the people who are potentially heading toward the stage of “deconversion.”16 Alan Jamieson well summarizes the reasons for disaffiliation into two words: “hurt” and “angry.”17 According to Jamieson, they “left in two major categories either as the ‘Hurt’, i.e. those who had expectations of particular care or support from the church body in times of need which they found were not met when they needed it; or as the ‘Angry’, i.e. those who left the church in disagreement with the leadership of their church because of the direction, vision or leadership structure . . .”18

---


18 Ibid.
American Christians, whether they are the first generation of immigration or the second and later generation, are potentially heading toward the stage of “deconversion,” an action of reaching them for their healing, restoration, and growth is urgent, and the ultimate goal of refitting them is to be grafted into the body of Christ.

**Statement of Limitations**

It is true that there are many significant issues that need to be resolved, and thus, addressed in the context of the unchurched Christians such as personal relationship with God, fellowship with other believers, missional life, pastoral counseling for healing, etc. Yet it is not the writer’s intended focus to cover all the issues in this paper. Rather, the author of this thesis project pays special attention to the parables of Jesus in the synoptic gospels with an expectation of the direct healing, restoration, and growth from the Word of God itself. In other words, such a teaching of why believers need to be in church will not be presented to the participants during the 20-week Bible study. Rather, a thorough study of Jesus’ teaching given in the parables will be addressed.

In spite of the fact that the parables are profitable for all believers (2 Tim 3: 16 – 17) beyond age, ethnicity, denomination, and geography, unchurched Korean-American Christians in the age range of 30 to 45 are the intended targets of this project. Also, it is not this researcher’s goal to discuss all of the parables. If two or more parables teach the same theme in the same or similar manner, then they will be tied together and studied in one Bible study session; and if one parable teaches more than one theme, then it will be studied in two or more Bible study sessions. For example, the parable of Ten Virgins in Matthew 25: 1 – 13 and the parable of Unjust
Steward in Matthew 24: 45 – 51 will be studied together in one session since both teach the same lesson: prepare for Jesus’ second coming.

Theoretical Basis

Biblical Basis

There is a passage about God’s heart for the unchurched Christians in the Bible, and that is the parable of the lost sheep. The lost sheep parable is written in Matthew 18: 12 – 14 and Luke 15: 3 – 7. The two books tell the same story except for a few different details. One man has a hundred sheep, and one of them is missing. So, the man seeks the lost sheep until he finds it, and when he finds it, he rejoices for finding the lost one. Even though the two books tell the same story, what Jesus intended to teach in the two parables was not the same. The two major differences between the two stories are the settings and the verb regarding the loss of the sheep. These two major differences draw audiences to different applications. Arland J. Hultgren well addresses the differences as:

The settings differ. Matthew’s version is set within a context in which Jesus speaks to his disciples (18: 1) concerning care for God’s “little ones” (18: 6, 10, 14). Luke’s is set within a context in which Jesus makes response to the criticism of the Pharisees and scribes that he receives sinners and eats with them (15: 1 – 2).

The verb concerning the loss of the sheep differs. In Matthew’s version the sheep has “gone astray” (πλανηθῇ, 18: 12). In Luke’s version the shepherd “has lost” (ἀπολέσας) his sheep (15: 4). These two verbs, which appear again in the respective texts (Matt 18: 12, 13; Luke 15: 4, 6), are exegetically decisive in interpreting the two accounts.19

While the lost sheep in Luke stands for a sinner who has been lost, the Matthean sheep stands for ones who are already saved but gone astray. Thus, the applications are different in each case as Hultgren writes, “For Matthew the point made is that God does not will the loss of a little one

---

(18: 14) and for Luke it is that God rejoices over the repentance of a sinner who needs it (15: 7).”

It is important to remember that Jesus identifies the little ones as “who believe in” him (Matt 18: 6) and that their going astray out of the flock was the result from their stumbling caused by others (18: 6, 12). A natural and logical inference makes a connection between the little ones in Jesus’ teaching and unchurched Christians today and ties them together as the stray sheep. Also, God’s will is clearly revealed that He does not want the loss of unchurched Christians and wants them to be restored as the shepherd brought a sheep back to the flock (Matt 18: 12 – 14).

If the lost sheep in the Matthean parable can stand for a believer and the stray can stand for leaving church, then finding and bringing a sheep back to the flock can also stand for a believer’s returning to a church. Again, teaching the church-leavers about the necessity and importance of belonging to a church is not what is intended in this project; yet, this does not dismiss the importance and necessity of church for believers at all. Thus, here the biblical basis of the church will be briefly addressed as this writer desires to see the participants’ restoration which hopefully would bring them back to church at the end of this project.

Jesus promised that he will build his church (Matt 16: 18) and that he will be with his followers when two or three of them gather in his name (Matt 18: 20). These promises were fulfilled at the birth of the first church in the book of Acts. Thereafter, the Lord indeed has built his church wherever two or more believers gathered in his name. In Paul’s writings, the biblical reference of church to a group of believers is often observed: “the church of God in Corinth” (1

---

20 Ibid., 51.
21 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Bible.
Cor 1: 2; 2 Cor 1: 1), “the church in Galatia” (Gal 1: 2), “the church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thess. 1: 1), “the church that meets at their house” (Rom 16: 5; 1 Cor 16: 19), “Nympha and the church in her house” (Col 4: 15). Moreover, reading of Acts 9: 31 and 1 Corinthians 16: 19 confirms that the church and believers are interchangeably used in the New Testament: “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9: 31), “The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings” (1 Cor 6: 19). In the New Testament writers’ mind, the church and believers were identical. The biblical references well show that a believer’s belonging to a church is natural and biblical, and thus, nonnegotiable. The reason why the relationship between a believer and a church is necessary and nonnegotiable will be addressed below with the theological approach.

Theological Basis

It is widespread knowledge that the Greek word ἐκκλησία (ecclesia) stands for the English word church and means “those who are the called-out ones.” The word ἐκκλησία is derived from the Greek word κυριακός (kuriakos) which means “belonging to the Lord.” These brief etymologies show the definition of the church as “people or assembly of those who are called out to belong to the Lord.” This definition corresponds with biblical images of the church.

There are three biblical images of the church. The first biblical image of the church is the people of God. God’s promise given through the prophet Hosea was fulfilled through Jesus Christ. Hosea is the one who foretold that God would call people who were not His people as His

---

people (Hos 1: 10), and this covenant was fulfilled by Christ (Rom 2: 24, 29; 2 Cor 3: 3 – 18; Phil 3: 3).

The temple of the Holy Spirit is the second biblical image of the church. The church is the indwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3: 16 – 17). Due to his indwelling presence, the church can be a spiritual (1 Pet 2: 5) and a living assembly. The Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence enables the church to implement her mission and empowers her as well (Acts 1: 8).

The third image of the church is the body of Christ (1 Cor 12: 27; Eph. 1:22 – 23). This imagery emphasizes not only the role of the church, but also the necessity and importance of the connection of believers as a group. Erickson well states the necessity of the church as, “The image of the body of Christ also speaks of the interconnectedness between all the persons who make up the church. Christian faith is not to be defined merely in terms of individual relationship to the Lord.”

When a believer leaves the church, that person is still a child of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6: 19); however, an individual believer alone cannot be the body of Christ, and that is the significant problem. Through the body of Christ, a mutual and mature fellowship is available; through genuine fellowship with other believers, spiritual growth is possible; and through spiritual growth, growing to the fullness of Christ is possible. Ephesians 4: 11 – 16 tells that the spiritual growth to the fullness of Christ is given through the body of Christ:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the

23 Ibid., 1047.
24 Ibid., 1047 – 1048.
whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

**Statement of Methodology**

This thesis project is designed in a systematic way that unfolds chapter by chapter. Beginning with the statement of general problem of Korean-American immigrant churches and Korean-American Christians’ churchless problem based on academic resources, the author of this project will embody those stated problems into individual levels based on the survey to see how and what caused the participants’ churchless status. After a statement based on academic resources of the general problem of members leaving Korean-American immigrant churches, this researcher will individualize the problem through the use of a survey to determine the cause of the participants’ leaving the church. Then a 20-Week Bible study using an expositional approach to the parable and their applications in the synoptic gospels will be presented as a solution for the unchurched participants. A second survey will then be taken. Comparison of the surveys taken before and after the Bible study will show how and what changes were caused by the study of the parables of Jesus.

The order of this project is as follows. The first chapter is where the author will address the status and problems of Korean-American immigrant churches in relation to the unchurched Christians. Also, the author will state the reason and need of this project based on biblical and theological perspectives. A selective review of literature will be contained in the first chapter.

In the second chapter, the author will introduce the participants in this project based on the first survey they took. This chapter contains a brief but clear picture of the participants’ spiritual, mental, and emotional stance toward the church and a brief description of past negative
experiences which drove them out of the church. This also is where the ministry setting will be addressed.

The third chapter is where this writer addresses the introductory matters of the parables of Jesus such as the nature of the parable including identification and classification of the parables along with the distinctive purpose of the parable and the interpretation methods comparing allegorical approach with expositional approach.

In the fourth chapter this writer addresses how the expositional approach interpreted each parable and extracted lessons from them by providing four examples: the parable of the lost sheep (Matt 18: 12 – 14), the parable of unforgiving servant (Matt 18: 23 – 35), the parables of the treasure and the pearl (Matt 13: 44 – 46), and the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow (Luke 18: 1 – 8). The reading of each parable will provide a snapshot of how the participants responded to the messages of the parables. As the main chapter of the project, this chapter will be where this writer presents the participants’ emotional and spiritual changes through the findings of the applied research. The comparisons between the two surveys, one taken at the beginning of the project and the other taken at the end of the project, will be presented through charts and graphs to show what this project accomplished.

The fifth chapter will be the conclusion of this project stating the result of the applied research. All the major points made in the project will be summarized with a brief evaluation of the project regarding the solution to the problem addressed in order to prove that the Word of God, especially the parables of Jesus, is the solution for healing, restoration, and growth of any unchurched Christian in any contextual setting. Also limitations of the project will be discussed in order to appeal to a need for future study in this area.
Review of Literature

The Scripture Verses

The Word of God is the source and the power of giving life to human beings (Deut. 8: 3). This Word can make people who are as spiritually exhausted as dry bones to be alive again (Ezek. 37: 1 – 10). Moreover, correction of all wrong doings and malfunctions is possible through the Word of God because it is God-breathed (2 Tim 3: 16). Also, the Word of God is powerful enough to penetrate even the deepest thoughts of a man as the sharpest two-edged sword (Heb. 4: 12).

The very same God who gave His powerful Word to believers also desires to restore His children’s weary, exhausted, and wounded souls and lead them to the righteous path for His name (Ps. 23). God does not only want to save the lost (John 3: 16) through His Son, but also keep them saved and safe until the last day (John 6: 39). This will of God is well shown in the parable of the lost sheep in the book of Matthew (18: 1 – 14). In addition to the finding of the lost, God wills to heal, restore, and strengthen them as it is written in the book of Ezekiel: “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak . . .” (34: 15 – 16a).

For this recovery of the stray, God has chosen to work through His Word. “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction” (Ps 107: 19 – 20). Jesus, the Word of God, came down to earth (John 1: 1) and dwelt among people (v. 14), and his earthly ministry was indeed the ministry of recovery. He recovered those who were sick and weak (Matt 4: 24, 8: 28) and recovered the sinners’ relationship with God through his perfect sacrifice (Rom 3: 25; 2
Cor 5: 18; Eph 2: 13 – 20; 1 John 2: 2). Jesus Christ, the ultimate source of recovery as the Word of God and the perfect sacrifice, leaves his teaching for his followers.

Among his teachings, the parables are only for the believers (Mark 4: 11) as it is hidden from the unbelievers (v. 12). When Jesus revealed the reason for teaching in parables, he implied that teaching in parables has the power of healing (Matt 13: 13 – 15).

The themes of the twenty-week Bible study are categorized into four: the grace and love of God, the proper attitudes of the forgiven toward God and others, the anticipation of life for the kingdom of God, and discipleship. The parables selected under the themes for this project are listed below.

As written earlier, the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18 reveals God’s will for the restoration of unchurched Christians; thus, this parable will be taught as the first session of the 20-week Bible study in order to show the participants why God calls them to the Bible study by presenting God’s indescribable love and grace for them. The following Bible study sessions will be the three parables of the lost sheep, coin, and two sons in Luke 15 which would teach and remind them about God’s love that is fully shown and confirmed through Christ and his crucifixion (Rom 5: 8).

After the studies about God’s love and grace, the proper attitudes toward God and others will be taught through the parables of the two debtors, the Pharisee and tax collector, the unforgiving servant, and the good Samaritan. The parable of the two debtors in Luke 7: 41 – 43 contains a lesson which is an affectionate attitude of the forgiven toward Jesus, the forgiver. Through the parables of the Pharisees and tax collector in Luke 18: 9 – 14, the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18: 23 - 35, and the good Samaritan in Luke 10: 25 – 37, Jesus taught how Christians should treat others.
Five parables are categorized together under the theme of the kingdom of God both in the present and the future. The parables of the treasure and the pearl in Matthew 13: 44 – 46 are where Jesus taught the great value and the finding joy of the kingdom of God; the lesson that there will be the final judgment will be given through the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25: 31 – 46; and the anticipation of life for the coming kingdom will be presented through the parables of the rich fool (Luke 12: 16 – 21), the ten virgins (Matt 25: 1 – 13), and the faithful and the unfaithful servants (Matt. 24: 45 – 51).

For the theme of discipleship, seven parables are chosen. Three parables tell the meaning of becoming a disciple of Jesus: the two builders in Luke 6, the builder and the warring king in Luke 14, and the unprofitable servant in Luke 17. The parables of the rich man and Lazarus and the unjust steward in Luke 16 are tied together to teach about money, and a lesson about prayer will be given through the parable of the widow and the judge (Luke 18: 1 – 8). The last parable will be the parable of the sower which teaches about how to receive the Word of God in order to be fruitful (Mark 4: 1 – 20).

Books


An Introduction to the parables from the definition to interpreting method and applications is given in this book. This book is composed in two parts: the first part addresses the background matters of the parables and the second part deals with how to interpret each parable. An interesting uniqueness of this book is that Blomberg ties the parables by the parables’ form or structure and divides them into three groups: simple three-point parables, complex three-point
parables, and two-point and one-point parables. This classification helps this writer to grasp a better understanding of the parables especially in discerning the major point(s) of the parables.


Another book written by Blomberg provides examples of how to melt down the interpreted text into applicable messages. While the book does not contain all the parables, what the author intends to deliver is well shown in the given examples. This book, along with the previous volume, is remarkably helpful to catch what Jesus meant in the contextual setting in the gospels and unchangeable applications to modern believers.


Richard N. Longenecker’s edited work classifies the parables into three parts by comprehensive themes: parables of the kingdom, parables of warning and preparedness, and parables of the Christian life. It is profitable that this book provides multiple writers’ slightly different approaches to the parables of the same theme. This book contains a more allegorical approach to the parables than other scholarly sources used in this project; however, the allegorical approach is barely used in the process of interpretation, so this book is helpful when drawing applications for believers today.


This volume is a helpful source by giving insights to this writer as it provides a deeper meaning of each parable. A uniqueness that makes this book as one of the primary resources of this project is that detailed information is given in this book from translation matters to exegetical commentaries and expositions for each and every parable. The author of this book deals not only
with what major interpreters claim but also with what should not be overlooked such as the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* and *Gospel of Truth* for more biblically rich understandings of the readers.


This book can be considered as an extended version of Hultgren’s *The Parables of Jesus*. In more than eight-hundred pages, the author tries to contain considerable information and elements for interpretation of the parables. One of the unique features is the containment of “early Jewish writings” and “early Christian writings” related to each parable. Semantic and textual notes are given along with cultural background information to be considered for modern Christian’s adaptation of each parable.


This book will be utilized in this thesis project to inform how to interpret the passage biblically as a step of preparation to teach. This book conveys the necessary information for teachers of the Word of God such as a way of understanding the Bible with literary genre. Also, it shows various approaches in history with examples; thus, it is helpful for this project to provide historical development of teaching.


A guidance for ministers to the world of biblical hermeneutic is given in this book. As this subtitle indicates, this book’s primary goal is to aid readers to gain a biblical and hermeneutical skill set for discovery of original meaning that was intended by the original authors. Also, a
method how to discern the distinctive features of different genres of the Bible is given in this book to direct readers to a point of original meanings.


Another useful source is this book which provides information primarily on how to cross the bridges from the ancient text to today’s context. Even though this book does not contain a serious academic tone of writing, its contents are profound and insightful enough for teachers of the Bible to grasp the skill of crossing the bridges.


Also useful is *Text-Driven Preaching* due to its aid for this writer to understand what expositional approach to the Scripture is and how to deliver it in teaching. Although this book is extremely biased toward the expositional approach, it is worth the effort to spend much time for a thorough reading this book because of the multiple authors’ various but unified thought on the expositional approach to the text. In the same way, Wayne McDill’s *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* will prove helpful as well.


A set of hints for bridging the cultural gap between the first century Jews and modern Christians is found in this book. The author of this book attempts to enable interpreters to see how the characters and elements appeared in the parables through the first century worldview and provides more vivid description of the parables in order to help interpreters to catch the original author’s intention.

Along with the Young’s *the Parables*, Bailey’s book helps this writer to gain the middle eastern worldview of the first century especially on the characters and elements appearing in the parables. Detailed explanation about the background matters of the parables, especially on the parables of the good Samaritan and Lazarus and the rich man, enrich this writer’s understanding on the unseen yet necessary elements of those parables.


*Unchristian* helps this writer to understand what the Millennial generation thinks about religion, especially Christianity. Along with *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church… and Rethinking Faith*, David Kinnaman shows statistics of young people’s church-leaving phenomenon and explains reasons for their leaving in order to provide ways of approaching them again. In this book, he addresses the differences of their cultural setting which made them distinctive from older generations in their way of thinking, understanding, and accepting.

Journal Articles


Beeke and Smalley provide biblical, theological, and spiritual bases for the necessity of belonging to a church in order to persuade unchurched Christians. This article is not only helpful for those who left church, but also for ministers who are planning to reach those churchless
individuals. From the church’s biblical definition to the theological role of the church and even spiritual benefits are well organized.

Fazzino, Lori L. “Leaving the Church Behind: Applying a Deconversion Perspective to Evangelical Exit Narratives,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (May 2014): 249-266. Lori L. Fazzino’s article helps this writer to see one’s emotional and spiritual changes in each stage moving from an evangelical Christian to a deconversion. He explains each stage’s features to warn evangelicals about the seriousness of the church-leaving problem.

Jamieson, Alan. “Churchless Faith: Trajectories of Faith Beyond the Church from Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches to Post-Church Groups,” *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (April 2003): 217-226. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost. Alan Jamieson’s article is one of interesting yet helpful sources. He interviewed 162 churchless Christians for 4 years in order to establish the realistic seriousness of the church-leaving problem. He distinctively and interestingly classifies 4 stages before the final destination of deconversion, which he calls post-Christianity group. According to his observation, the stages before post-Christianity group are displaced followers, reflective exiles, transitional explorers, and integrated way-finders. He describes each step’s features realistically and provides what a post-Christianity group would be like. He concludes with an open ending of the future form of the church, and there he supposes that churchless Christianity is God’s allowing a new future form of Christianity. In spite of this writers’ disagreement with Jamieson’s opinion about the future form of the church, his classification of each stage before deconversion is useful in this project.

---

25 Ibid., 251. Fazzino defines the term deconversion as, “… deconversion which is conceptualized as a particular exit characterized by ‘disaffiliations without re-affiliation’. Unlike denomination switching, deconversion occurs when individuals reject their beliefs, cease participation, and have no foreseeable plans to re-convert.”

The author of the article addresses very detailed features of immigrant churches in the United States. The author reveals the uncomfortable truths of immigrant churches. Many immigrant church’s primary role is not leading people spiritually but helping physical and social needs of the people. The church of this unspiritual role provides what people think they need and want, but, in fact, does not provide what they really need. This article helps this writer to see a historical background of unhealthy DNA of Korean-American churches.
CHAPTER II

APPLIED RESEARCH DESIGNED TO LEAD TO HELPING THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF UNCHURCHED KOREAN-AMERICAN BELIEVERS

This project has two questionnaires: one taken at the beginning of the Bible study meeting and second one taken at the last meeting. The findings presented in this chapter are from the first questionnaire. What this writer aims to do in this chapter is to demonstrate the participants’ previous spiritual and emotional condition which were affected by some negative experiences in the churches they formerly attended. This “pre-condition” of the participants before the Bible study will be compared later in chapter four with the responses to the second questionnaire, which will show the participants’ “post-condition” after the Bible study, in order to deduce and document some positive changes of the participants’ attitudes – including their emotional and spiritual status – toward the church. For a more vivid description of the participants’ past experiences and their emotional and spiritual status in relation to church, what they had said about themselves in the Bible study meeting is utilized along with the questionnaire’s outcome below.

The Necessity of This Research

It is worth repeating that the phenomenon of disaffiliation with the church is a pervasive problem for most protestant churches in the U.S. In dealing with this negative phenomenon, the Korean-American churches tend to be more vulnerable due to the non-religious role of the
church as mentioned in the earlier chapter. Andrew Sung Park notes on the non-religious role of the Korean-American church as, “The Korean-American Church provides existential meaning, social belonging, and psychological comfort for its members who go through trouble caused by their uprootedness.” Such a non-religious identity of the Korean-American church caused her non-religious functions: promotion of “the education, assimilation, and mobility of the immigrants.”

The Korean-American churches as the spiritually vulnerable institutions consequently produce vulnerable members, and this vulnerability is observed when the members face problems of hurt and anger. It is easy to observe that Korean-American Christians are moving from a church where they struggled and were frustrated into a new Korean-American church in Richmond, VA. During the period of serving a church in Richmond, this researcher had heard of many such cases and met with unchurched believers as well as those seeking another church. Also, it was observed that not a small number of people stopped attending church after a period of time of inactivity and shopping around for a new church home. According to an article, Hemorrhaging Faith, those who stop attending church are in the stage of “Rejecters.” This rejection of belonging in a religious organization is well explained by Kevin Ward as:

Most people with no religion hold conventional religious beliefs, despite their alienation from organized religion. They argue that the evidence indicates how the new religious dissenters have distanced themselves from the churches, not from God. The majority of

---

28 Ibid., 46.
30 James Penner et al., Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults are Leaving, Staying, and Returning to Church. n. p.: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2012. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed May 1, 2018). This article introduces the “Four Spiritual Types” in chapter 3 as Engagers, Fence Sitters, Wanderers, and Rejecters.
adults who prefer no religion continue to believe in God and an afterlife. Few are atheists or agnostics. Most pray. Many reject the religious label, but they think of themselves as spiritual.  

While the spiritual wanderers feel comfortable with “believing without belonging,” God’s desire for them is to recover them and bring them back to the body of Christ, a community of faith, as the shepherd sought, recovered, and brought a lost sheep back to the flock in the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18: 12 – 14. Within the truth that the Bible is the ultimate source of one’s spiritual restoration and revitalization, this researcher has chosen the parables of Jesus for the Bible study because “they enhance communication and they assist persuasion.” Telling an analogy invites hearers into a story, and hearers are unconsciously communicating with the message of the story and persuaded by the message of the story. Since the messages of the parables contain the core themes of Jesus’ teaching, the parables are profitable and sufficient enough for spiritual restoration and revitalization of the unchurched Korean-American Christians in Richmond.

The Purpose and process of the Survey Questionnaire

The Purpose of the Survey Questionnaire

The purpose of this survey was to observe the unchurched Korean-American believers’ past experiences in their churches, their attitude toward the church, and their emotional and spiritual status: whether they were born-again believers; what caused them to leave their churches; how their past experiences affected their attitudes toward the church and spiritual

---


33 Richard N. Longenecker, ed., The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables, 38.
condition; and how they understood the Scripture especially the parables of Jesus. The vivid description of the participants will show the need of their spiritual restoration.

The Process of Recruitment and the Survey Questionnaire

The researcher served a Korean-American church in Richmond, VA for three years as a youth pastor. One of the teachers in the youth group, after she heard about the project, arranged a dinner meeting with an unchurched Korean female Christian on Christmas Eve of 2017. During the dinner, the woman heard about the project and decided to participate in the Bible study meeting. She, in few days, recruited more participants and brought them to the first meeting. Then each participant of the first meeting brought at least one more person to the second meeting.

Among all the participants, two members had an interesting motivation for coming to the meeting. They heard that their friends were attending a Bible study outside the building of an organized church, and they thought it might be a meeting from an unhealthy and heretical group. At first, the suspicious examiners came to the meeting with a mission of rescuing their friends, but they decided to participate in the meeting on their first day.

Thereafter, there were five more people who were contacted by this researcher and participants. Three of them refused to join in the Bible study because, based on what they said, they were not ready yet to be in any form of a faith community. The two others came to the third meeting; however, even though they said that they had spiritual hunger and thirst, they were not able to attend the meeting from that day onwards due to their jobs.

There were also more people who showed their desire to participate in the Bible study meeting, and some of them had struggled in their churches. Some of the strugglers called
themselves as “possible church-leavers.” However, since such church-goers were not subjects for this project, their willingness to participate in the Bible study was politely rejected.

In summary, five participants joined on the first meeting, January 12, 2018, and eight more people joined on the second meeting, January 19, 2018. Thus, confirmed participants were thirteen people in total, aged between thirty-five and forty-five. One of the participants had a unique background in that she was a Catholic believer while others were all Protestant Christians.

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University approved all contents of the survey, the researcher conducted the questionnaire between January 12 and 19, 2018. The participants received a printed consent form before taking the questionnaire and heard an explanation from the researcher, and they took the questionnaire by letter. The survey was taken anonymously.

**Ministry Setting**

The Bible study meeting was planned for twenty weeks from January 12 to May 25, 2018, and the meeting place was a participant’s house in Richmond. Thirteen participants were all female Korean-American Christians who live in Richmond, VA. The Bible study started at 11 am and ended at 1 pm every Friday followed by a time of fellowship with lunch until 2:30 pm. All the teaching materials were made by this researcher, and each lesson contains three major parts: Understanding the background and context of the parable, Reading the parable through a middle-eastern eye, and Applying the lesson today. Also, there is an additional space for writing down prayer requests of the participants (See Appendix).
Totally twenty-five parables were presented to the participants, and those parables were categorized into four themes: God’s love and grace, God’s sovereign grace and our attitude, the kingdom of God in the present and the future, and discipleship. The order of the themes intended by this researcher aims to aid the participants to recover starting from re-realizing God’s love and grace. From there, it was expected that they would change their attitude towards God and others and their lifestyle towards the kingdom of God which is able to be experienced today. Also, practical lessons of how to live as a disciple of Jesus regarding money, charity, prayer, perseverance, humility, etc. were presented to the participants for their spiritual maturity. The themes and the parables under each theme of the Bible study followed the schedule below (Figure 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey 1 Introduction to the Parables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Lost Sheep (Matthew 18: 12 -14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Forgiving Father and the Two Lost Sons II (Luke 15: 11 – 32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Two Debtors (Luke 7: 41 – 43)</td>
<td>God’s Sovereign Grace and Our Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18: 9 – 14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18: 23 – 35)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25 – 37)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Survey Findings

The survey had two sections: seven questions in the first section and six questions in the latter section. The questions in the first section asked the participants about their experiences in
their churches and the latter section asked about their personal understanding of Scripture, especially the parables. Following is an abbreviated list of the questions:

Section I.
1. Are you a born-again Christian?
2. How long have you been a Christian?
3. How long had you been in the last church before you left the church?
4. Choose the reason(s) why you left the church.
5. Choose the reason(s) why you decided not to attend any church anymore.
6. Choose your thought(s) on the church (or being a part of a church).
7. Will you attend a church when you find a church that is biblically and spiritually better?

Section II.
1. Do you believe that the Bible is the living Word of God?
2. Do you believe that the Bible is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that believers may be thoroughly equipped for every good work? (2 Timothy 3: 16 – 17)
3. Choose your opinion(s) on interpretation of the Bible.
4. Are you familiar with the parables of Jesus?
5. Choose your opinion(s) on the parables of Jesus.
6. Choose your opinion about the interpretation of the parables of Jesus.

Survey Section I

Of the thirteen participants, only one person was unsure of her rebirth in Christ, while twelve others marked themselves as a born-again Christian. The participants’ years of being a Christian varied: one participant was a Christian for less than five years, and four for five to ten years, and three for ten to twenty years, three for twenty to thirty years, and two for thirty to forty years (Figure 2. 2).
When the participants were asked about their attendance period in their previous churches, more than a half of them answered one to five years, while other three participants attended the last church for five to ten years, another two participants for ten to fifteen years, and one participant for twenty to thirty years (Figure 2. 3).

When the participants were asked to choose the reason(s) of their disaffiliation from the church, ten out of thirteen participants were frustrated with unhealthy and unbiblical sermons. Ten out of thirteen were frustrated with sermons, while six participants experienced conflicts.
with their pastors. Other reasons like conflicts with church members, a burnout from too many requirements, and a lack of authentic communal relationship were each recognized as a significant cause of disaffiliation by three participants, while two of the participants chose hypocritical Christians (Figure 2. 4).

![Choose the reason(s) why you left the church.](image)

Figure 2. 4. Reason(s) for Leaving the Church – Question 1. 1. 4

As seen above, the two major reasons which caused the participants to leave their churches derived from the spiritual and relational problems of church leaderships. These two major problems are well pointed out by Fuller as:

Those who see themselves as ‘spiritual, but not religious’ reject traditional organized religion as the sole – or even the most valuable – means of furthering their spiritual growth. Many have had negative experiences with churches or church leaders. For example, they may have perceived church leaders as more concerned with building an organization than promoting spirituality, as hypocritical, or as narrow-minded.\(^{34}\)

These negative experiences in the church contributed to the participants being “believing without belonging”\(^{35}\) and preferring private rather than public spheres of life. In other words, those bad experiences in the church have formed a new notion of contemporary Christianity that

---

\(^{34}\) Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious*, 5 – 6.

spirituality is more of a private than public concern. To the unchurched Christians, the term religious is no longer synonymous with spiritual. According to Fuller,

May began to associate genuine faith with the ‘private’ realm of personal experience rather than the ‘public’ realm of institutions, creeds, and rituals. The word spiritual gradually came to be associated with the private realm of thought and experience while the word religious came to be connected with the public realm of membership in religious institutions, participation in formal rituals, and adherence to official denominational doctrines.36

This is exactly reflected on the following question and the participants’ responses. When asked why they no longer attend a church, none of the participants chose “I no longer believe in Christ,” “I fear of being more hurt again,” or “I do not want to waste more resources.” Rather, twelve out of thirteen responders believed that “not attending a church is better for my spiritual growth,” while nine participants thought that “attending a church is good but unnecessary,” and then participants stated that “all churches are the same (there are no better churches)” (Figure 2.5).

![Figure 2.5. Reason(s) of Non-Attending Church – Question 1.1.5](image)

36 Fuller, 5.
Although most participants had a negative impression about attending a church from their past experiences, many showed that their mind toward the church is not completely closed (Figure 2.6). For example, eight participants out of thirteen knew the biblical meaning of the church: that church is not a building but a community of believers. Furthermore, four participants believed that being a part of a church is what the Bible teaches, and four participants believed that attending a church is good and necessary.

This openness towards a biblically healthy church is clearly shown in the responses to the last question of the first section. Of the thirteen participants, eight answered “yes” to the question “will you attend a church when you find a biblically and spiritually better church?” No participants marked “No,” and five others answered, “not sure yet” (Figure 2.7).
Survey Section II

All participants believed that the Bible is the living Word of God (question 1) which is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness for believers’ spiritual maturity (2 Timothy 3: 16 – 17, question 2). To the question of interpretation of the Bible, however, only eight participants believed in the exegetical interpretation which means that there are God’s intended meanings and specific messages in each and every passage (and that interpretation of the Bible is to discern God’s intended messages within given text), while the rest of them agreed upon private interpretation (Figure 2. 8).
An interesting finding, in relation to Question 3, is found in the responses to Question 6. The eight participants, who affirmed the exegetical interpretation of the Bible, answered that there is God’s intended main theme(s) in each parable and, thus, that the parables should be interpreted within the given text and context. Meanwhile, the five participants who agreed upon private interpretation believed that parables should only be interpreted and understood spiritually because every single element in the parables has God’s intended meaning (Figure 2. 9).
Participant Portraits

While all participants had their own negative experiences in their churches, not all of them shared their stories in the Bible study meeting. What had been observed throughout the meeting was that those who had comparatively recent negative experiences were unwilling to bring out their stories and that they were still struggling with the experiences. Thus, the most stories presented here are the stories of those who had negative experiences a relatively long while ago.

- Participant A started attending church when she was ten years old; however, she recalled her childhood as a church-goer without faith in Christ. She just liked having friendships in church, and this faithless religious life continued until when she was thirty-three years old. By the grace and love of God, as she confessed, she accepted Jesus as her personal savior in 2012. However, the church had problems such as a pastor’s financial corruption and a church separation from the pastor’s problem, and these problems caused her family members to convert to Catholic.

  What she saw was that the people in the church chased money, people, and power instead of Christ Jesus, and this negative impression drove her out of the church. In the summer of 2017, she moved to Richmond, VA and tried to find a good church; but all that she heard from people about Korean-American churches in Richmond was negative such as pastors’ financial and sexual corruptions, church separations, unhealthy sermons, etc. So, she decided not to attend any church because she thought that not attending church would keep her faith healthier and stronger.

- Participant B’s family problem led her to go to a church when she was a high school student; but her personal encounter with Jesus occurred when she met a true believer, her husband.
Her and her family member’s faith had grown until 2015 when she moved to Richmond. As soon as they moved, they found a Korean-American church and became church members. However, crisis was approaching to her and her family. The church’s senior pastor prohibited church members having any prayer meeting or Bible study meeting outside the church building, and the church did not provide any weekly Bible study or prayer meetings inside the church. Consequently, it caused her to become spiritually hungry and thirsty. In addition to the spiritual thirst, the church had a negative tension from conflict between two separated membership groups. One group was standing with the senior pastor and the other was against the pastor.

The main problem which triggered her family to leave the church was that her son was bullied in the youth group of the church. A major group of children of church leaders bullied him in the church and even in school. The son does not have an outgoing personality, so she and her husband overlooked the son’s being alone in the church until the bullying moment was caught.

After she left the church because of the problems above, she was afraid to become a member of any church; but, at the same time, she desired to be in a healthy community of faith because of her spiritual hunger and thirst especially for the Word of God.

- Participant C grew up in Christian family. Her grandparents and parents are all faithful Christians, so Christian culture, such as the Bible, prayer, worship service, etc., was very familiar to her. However, she confessed that she didn’t go to the church from her love for Jesus. Church was a major part of her life as it was of her family members. However, her negative impression toward church had started from her family when she was twelve years
old. Her grandparents and parents forced her to live a church-centered life. She was forced to give offerings and attend every single church event even though she was unwilling.

Her grandparents and parents especially emphasized one of the attributes of God, the God of judgment. God who punishes disobedient believers has been her impression toward God, so her relationship with God has been from a fearful mind. She attended church from a desire not to be punished, not from her love for God. Even though she has faith in Christ, it is still not easy to see God as the loving Father.

After she married a nonbeliever, her churchless life began. Her husband and his family are pious Buddhists, and they had several ancestor worship rituals a year. She was forced to cook food for the altar and bow down before the altar. A few years after the marriage, she felt that her soul was perishing due to two reasons: first, she was afraid of God’s punishment for her worshiping dead souls; second, she felt a spiritual thirst deeply from the bottom of her heart. This was the reason why she moved from South Korea to the United States. Despite the fact that she immigrated for religious freedom, she found no good church she wanted to attend.

• It was ten years ago that participant D accepted Jesus Christ as her personal savior. After moving to Richmond, she attended a church and encountered Jesus; however, soon after the church was divided into two groups, one stood with a senior pastor and the other was against the pastor, and the conflict became worse. The senior pastor, to her and the opposing group, was a loveless person. She said the pastor was respectable and full of love for the first few years after she was saved. At some point, however, he changed his attitude, and his sermons were influenced by the change from love to force.
Although she tried to stay in the neutral position in between the two groups in the church, she was swayed by people in the opposing group and hurt. After she was hurt by slander, gossip, and bullying for a few months, she decided to leave the church and not to attend any church. She said that even though she is a churchless Christian, she goes to American church where no one can recognize her on holidays and when she feels like going.

- Participant E was saved when she was a high school student. She and her boyfriend who later became her husband debated about Christianity when they dated. He tried to share the gospel, but she refused it because of Christians’ hypocritical behaviors and the teachings of the Bible. It was not easy to accept all the elements in the Bible as truth to this young Buddhist girl. However, by the grace of God as she confessed, she accepted Jesus as her personal savior right before marriage and began to attend a church which her husband was attending. Since the moment of being born again, she had attended the church more than twenty years. During the couple of decades, she had experienced a church split, a senior pastor’s sexual immorality, and the church’s decline.

Despite the fact that she went through all those negative experiences, she had tried to remain in the church because she believed that was what God wanted her to do. Through every frustration and problem, she believed that God was training her to be a mature believer and that she could show her love for God by enduring all. However, the last senior pastor was the hardest problem and one that she could not overcome. She felt that the pastor was not spiritual at all. His sermons were neither Christ-centered nor textually faithful. He read the Scripture and used it to unfold and support what he wanted to say. Christless, loveless, and pointless are the words in her memory about his sermons.
Furthermore, the pastor preached about more offerings and telling the congregation of his unpaid wages. The church size was small due to the gradual declining of the church membership, but he was not hesitant to spend big amounts of money to replace church equipment such as audio and sound system and carpet. She remembers his leadership as a dictatorship. He forced people to follow his plan and used the Scripture to defend his position and what he was doing. She felt that the pastor’s concern was not for God and church members, but for himself and his business. Even in this hard season, she did not want to decide based on her thought and feeling, so she prayed for forty days for God’s guidance in making a decision to leave the church. After forty days, she left the church but still could not find a better church in the Richmond area, so she became a churchless Christian.

- Participant F’s negative experiences in the church were not that different from other participants above. She attended the church where the participant B attended. The senior pastor forcefully restricted church members from having any type of Bible study or prayer meeting outside the church building. She guessed that the restriction was for defending the pastor’s leadership. His leadership was a dictatorship and caused the separation of the church members into two groups, one was with him and the other was against him. The pulpit was used for reinforcement and defense of his leadership.

Many church members, especially those who were against the pastor, left the church, so the English Ministry\textsuperscript{37} was dismantled. When she and her husband, who is a Caucasian, were trying to find an American church due to linguistic barrier of her husband, the pastor forced

\textsuperscript{37}English Ministry (EM) is ministry that is made up of the English-speaking memberships including second-generation Korean-American members and that is usually under the control of the Korean-speaking congregation leadership.
them not to leave the church by making them feel guilty of leaving the church. This triggered them deciding to leave the church.

- The participant G has unique and distinguished background from others. Her family is faithful Buddhist, but she started to attend the Catholic church by herself. It was not from friend’s invitation or problems she had, but from her own spiritual desire. Everyday afterschool, she stopped by the church to pray. She recalled her memory of praying alone in the Cathedral as peaceful moments and of feeling of being loved by God.

  Right before her marriage, she was saved but never read the Bible and studied it. However, a desire for knowing God and His Word has been growing recently, and this was why she decided to participate in the Bible study meeting even though all members are Protestant Christians. She honestly stated that she had some negative impressions on Protestant Christianity because of hypocritical behaviors and immorality of leaders and that if this meeting was held by any church, then she would not have come to join.

  The results of the first survey questionnaire along with personal stories above affirmed that the participants were matching the target audiences of this thesis project. They all had negative experiences in their former churches, and their spiritual and emotional conditions were affected by those past experiences. Thus, a need for their spiritual and emotional restoration and revitalization through the Word of God was indispensable.
CHAPTER III

A DISCUSSION OF THE NATURE OF THE PARABLES AND INTERPRETING METHOD

The aforementioned participant’s spiritual and emotional disaffiliations from church were derived from their negative experiences in their former churches, and this unwillingness to belong to any form of church has caused them a spiritual decay which would possibly drive them to a total deconversion as Jamieson observes.\textsuperscript{38} While the wounds of the participants are not identical, the ultimate source of healing and restoration for their various wounds is the Word of God. A clear vision on Jesus’ introduction of who God is and what He wills given through the parables in the synoptic gospels would turn the participants’ eyes from their wounds, people, and themselves to the founder and perfecter of their faith (Heb 12: 1 – 2), and this sight change would not only heal and restore them but also make them to be complete and equipped (2 Tim 3: 16 – 17).

The first session of the 20-week Bible study presented the participants introductory elements of the parables such as the parables’ adequacy, identification, purpose, themes, and interpretation methods to aid them to gain the basic but necessary nature of the parables as following.

\textsuperscript{38} Jamieson, 217- 226.
Adequacy of lessons of the parables

The fact that one-third of Jesus’ teaching in the synoptic gospels was given in parabolic forms demands believers not to underestimate or overlook the parables because the parables convey the essence of Jesus’ teaching.\textsuperscript{39} To the importance of the parables, one scholar radically says that if a Christian does not know about the parables then he or she does not fully know the historical Jesus.\textsuperscript{40} Many scholars consent to the fact that there is no exaggeration in emphasizing the importance of the parables due to the functionalities of the parables: communication and persuasion. Simon J. Kistemaker compares the effectiveness of the parables’ communicational function with cartoons in newspapers as:

Newspapers often put a cartoon in a prominent place on the editorial page. With a few simple lines, the artist sketches a caricature of the political, social, or economic situation we face. By means of a drawing, he conveys a striking message even an editor cannot match in eloquence. Jesus drew verbal pictures of the world around him by telling parables. By teaching in parables he depicted what was happening in real life. That is, he told a story, taken from daily life, using an accepted, familiar setting, to teach a new lesson. When we hear a parable, we nod in agreement because the story is true to life and readily understood.\textsuperscript{41}

The excellency of persuasiveness of the parables is well stated in Robert H. Stein’s writing by comparison with the prophet Nathan’s parabolic saying to the king David as:

Parables function in two ways. They enhance communication and they assist persuasion – that is, they possess a referential dimension and a commissive dimension. They perform the latter by disarming their hearers and by piercing through defenses and resistance. They can do this because the analogy in a parable is different from the sensitive reality with which it is dealing. Through a parable Nathan was able to discuss the issue of David’s murder of Uriah and his adultery with Uriah’s wife, for the reality part of the

\textsuperscript{39} While there is a little consensus among scholars about the number of the parables ranging from thirty-seven to sixty-five depending on how they defined the parables, it is agreed by many scholars that Jesus’ teaching given in parabolic form is approximately thirty-five percent. See Klyne R. Snodgrass, \textit{Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus} (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 23; Hultgren, \textit{The Parables of Jesus}, 2 – 5.


parable was only recognized after the parable had been told and explained. How far would Nathan have gotten if he had said to David: “O King, I would like to talk to you about your adultery with Bathsheba and your murder of Uriah?” The nature of a parable, however, enabled the prophet to speak to David about both his adultery and his murder. For disarmed by the innocuous nature of the parable, David was open to judge honestly the issue at hand. And he found out too late that he was the man – that he was the one who, with his teeming flocks, had stolen another man’s one ewe lamb! 42

Although the parables are stories that were told in the first century Jewish culture and worldview, this does not dismiss the transcendent value and benefit of the parables beyond time and space due to the parables’ theological significance and spiritual dimension. 43 As the familiarity of ordinariness dramatically became alive in meaning to the original audiences, the divine messages in the parables are still valuable and beneficial to the modern Christians if the parables were properly understood and interpreted. This is why there is no exaggeration in the claim of Joachim Jeremiah who is considered as the most influential modern scholar of the parables: “We stand right before Jesus when reading his parables.” 44

The participants were in spiritually and emotionally vulnerable conditions which prevented them from fixing their eyes on the core teachings of Jesus just as were the first century Jewish audiences. Jesus who was the good shepherd (John 10: 5 – 8) taught the parables to the Jews who were like wandering and lost sheep (Matt 18: 12 – 14; Luke 15: 4 – 7) in order to find, gain, and restore them. Therefore, it was anticipated by this writer to see the participants’ spiritual redirection to the good shepherd from where they have wandered along with their restoration and growth through expositional studies of the parables.

43 Young, The Parables, 5.
An expositional approach to the parables of Jesus requires a proper understanding of the nature of the parables such as its distinctive characteristics from other forms of the teaching of Jesus, the cultural settings of the first century, and Jesus’ intention of choosing the parabolic form. The rest of this chapter, therefore, will discuss the introductory matters of the parables including an explanation of an expositional approach as the interpretation method of this project.

**An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus**

**Identifying the Parables of Jesus**

There is an agreement among scholars that defining and classifying the parables of Jesus is not as simple or easy as many scholars answer differently to the question regarding the number of the parables. By how the parables are defined, the number of the parables are determined and the range along the scholars is wide from around thirty to sixty or more.\(^{45}\) For instance, some interpreters include “Physicians heal yourself” (Luke 4: 23) in their category of the parables while other interpreters do not.\(^{46}\)

Most famous and simple definition of the parables is “the earthly stories with heavenly meaning.” This definition, however, is too broad and ambiguous as Snodgrass points out its vulnerability as, “Parables are much more than illustrations, and although some are concerned with future eschatology, they are not about heaven. They are directed to life on this earth. In fact, possibly no definition of parables will do, for any definition that is broad enough to cover all the forms is so imprecise that it is almost useless.”\(^{47}\)

---

\(^{45}\) Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2.

\(^{46}\) Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 11. He disputes Julicher’s classification of the parables which integrated aphoristic sayings into the parables and stresses an importance of separation of parabolic sayings from aphoristic sayings.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 7.
Nevertheless, a narrowed and specified definition is not always better and helpful. For example, one well-known modern definition that has been quoted by many was C. H. Dodd’s definition which stated in 1935: “At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature of common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness of strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”48 Although this definition is helpful for identifying many parables, recent scholars disagree with this definition for its omission of narrative characteristic of Jesus’ parables and more reasons.49

For grasping a better definition of the parables, a brief study on how the first century Jewish people understood parables is helpful and necessary because “story parables only appear in Jewish literature and in the gospels.”50 The word “parable” which appears forty-eight times in the synoptic gospels is from the Greek word παραβολή (parabolē) which literally refers to what is cast alongside. From this original reference, the word’s basic and primary meaning is “comparison.” Young writes on this, “The Greek parable, parabolē (παραβολή), refers to what is cast alongside. The dramatic image of a story illustration is thrown out as a comparison of the reality of the source with its fictional representation in words.”51

The Greek term alone, however, does not provide enough information to identify and classify the parables of Jesus, and for this reason, many scholars refer to the Hebrew term מָשָׁל ( mâshâl) which “lies behind the Greek term parabolē found in the Gospels.”52 As Aramaic

50 Brad H. Young, Jesus and His Jewish Parables: Rediscovering the Roots of Jesus’ Teaching (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 1.
51 Young, The Parables, 3.
52 Stein, The Genre of the Parables, 39.
was Jesus’ mother tongue, māshāl, its semantic range along with its functions, was in Jesus’ mind when he spoke the parables. While Stein’s classification of the parables of Jesus is not always accepted by other scholars, his reference to the term māshāl and its broad semantic range is undeniably helpful for a better understanding of the parables as he writes,

The parables of Jesus in the Gospels exhibit a similar breadth and semantic range of meaning as found in the Old Testament māshāl. This is hardly surprising. Rather, it is what we should expect. For since the most formative influences in the life of Jesus were the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. Matt 5: 17) and the Jewish world of the first century as shaped by those Scriptures, it is only natural that Jesus’ understanding of a parable would follow the lines of the Old Testament māshāl.53

Remaining in the references to the meanings and semantic ranges of the both ancient terms parabolē and māshāl, the parables in the synoptic gospels can be defined as Hultgren defines it as, “A parable is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between God’s kingdom, actions, or expectations and something in this world, real or imagined.”54 This writer also follows Hultgren’s classification of the parables into two types: Narrative parables and Similitudes.55

Distinctive Purpose of the Parables of Jesus

The definition above naturally leads one to questions of “Why Jesus taught through the parables? What was his purpose?” as the disciples asked the same question to their teacher Jesus

53 Ibid., 41 – 42. Stein sorts Jesus’ parables into seven: maxims or proverbs, similes and metaphors, riddles, similitudes, story parables, example parables, and allegories as he sorts māshāl as a maxim or proverb, a byword or taunt, a riddle, a parable, an allegory, figurative discourses, and fables.

54 Hultgren, The Parables of Jesus, 3.

55 Ibid., Narrative parables have a “once upon a time” quality and the particularity of stories set in the past while similitudes are made by means of the words “is like” or “is as if?” analogies between their subjects and general and timeless observation.
in Matthew 13: 10. The disciples wondered why their Lord frequently taught them and people in the crowds by telling the parables as one-third of his teachings were given in parabolic forms.

By synthesizing what has been discussed so far in this chapter, it became clear that Jesus intended to teach through the parables to communicate better by the familiarities of the stories in order to persuade listeners as he expected their active responses to God’s kingdom, actions, and expectations revealed through the parables. Along with his intention, Jesus revealed the very purpose of teaching in the parables as recorded in the synoptic gospels (Matt 13: 10 – 11; Mark 4: 10 – 12; Luke 8: 10): revealing and concealing. To the question of the disciples asking the purpose of teaching in the parables, Jesus answered that the secret of the kingdom of God was only given to the followers as it was hidden to the outsiders or rejecters by quoting Isaiah 6: 9 – 10,

And he said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.’”

This “revealing and concealing” purpose of the parables would provoke anxious wonderings as the questions Kistemaker asks: “Does this mean that Jesus, who was sent by God to proclaim redemption to fallen, sinful human beings, hides this message in the form of incomprehensible parables? Are parables some kind of riddles understood only by those who are initiated?”56 He then suggests taking a look at a broader context in order to know to whom the secret of the kingdom of God was revealed and concealed. He quoted Mark chapter 4 and the preceding chapters to defend the idea that the “concealing” group was intentional rejecters and heart-hardeners. Morna D. Hooker shares the same idea as she writes, “To those who refuse to

accept the challenge of the teaching of Jesus, his parables inevitably remain nothing more than parables. Though they see and hear him, they are totally without comprehension – and so without the salvation he brings. But to those who respond, the meaning of the parables is explained. To them the secret of God’s kingdom is given.”57

Major Themes of the Parables of Jesus

The principle is now confirmed that the parables are more than just stories as they deal with “the secret of the kingdom of God” which is the overarching theme of all of the parables as Jesus revealed in his answer to the questioners who asked the purpose of the parables (Matt 13: 10 – 11; Mark 4: 10 – 12; Luke 8: 10).

The Greek term for “secret” or “mystery” is μυστήριον (mystērion) which appears only in the synoptic gospels. This term as it refers to hidden eschatological secrets can be revealed and concealed by the Divine authority alone that belonged to Jesus. Hultgren explains that the ordinary stories of the parables contain and convey the significantly extraordinary knowledge and messages of the kingdom of God disclosed to chosen ones only.58

The hidden, but disclosed to believers, messages of the parables teach various lessons under the overarching theme “the kingdom of God.”59 Interpreters have approached the parables of Jesus as they group different passages together thematically because the disclosed μυστήριον (mystērion) of God’s kingdom was given under major themes. According to Blomberg’s

---


59 Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 411. He observes major scholars’ agreement (Huner, Stein, Jeremias, Hultgren, Snodgrass, and many others) on that “all of Jesus’ parables revolve around one central theme: the kingdom of God.”
research, this thematic approach to the teaching of the parables is the most common approach as he lists major scholars’ thematic classifications,

For example, Hunter identifies certain parables that describe “the coming of the kingdom,” others that elucidate “the grace of the kingdom,” a third group that portrays “the men of the kingdom” and a final collection dealing with “the crisis of the kingdom.” Stein proposes a threefold division under the headings of “the kingdom as a present reality,” “the kingdom as demand” and “the God of the parables.” And Jeremiah divides the parables into nine categories, with such titles as “now is the day of salvation,” “the challenge of the hour,” “the imminence of catastrophe,” “God’s mercy for sinners” and the like.60

Snodgrass, who published one of the lengthy volumes on the parables of Jesus, also sorts the parables under nine themes: “Grace and responsibility,” “lostness,” “the sower parable,” “the present kingdom,” “specifically about Israel,” “discipleship,” “money,” “God and prayer,” and “future eschatology.”61 These scholars’ thematic classifications show how they label the major themes of the parables.

Blomberg, however, believes that the most common themes accepted by the majority are not always right. He argues that the topical categorization has been faded away due to its inadequacy. He, for instance, refutes Snodgrass’ categorization of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus under the theme of money as he believes that the parable is “far more detailed eschatological imagery.”62 Rather, he adopts the structural categorization as he classifies the parables by the numbers of lesson points of each parable: “Simple three-point parables,” “complex three-point parables,” and “two-point & one-point parables.”63 His belief is in that main characters or elements in the parables represent significant lesson points. Parables, for

60 Ibid., 409.
61 Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, viii – ix.
62 Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 408 – 410. He also points out inadequacy of thematic approaches of other scholars such as Hunter and Hultgren.
63 Ibid., Contents page.
example, that have triadic structure such as the parable of the prodigal son and the parable of two debtors are of three-point parables whether they are simple or complex.  

While Blomberg’s book *Interpreting the Parables* is one of the most used sources in this thesis project due to its insightful interpretation method and commentaries, his categorizing approach causes confusion and complexity. This project, therefore, follows what was believed as more helpful by this writer for the participants’ understanding on the parables, and that is the thematic categorization simply under four themes: “God’s grace and love,” “God’s sovereign grace and our attitude,” “the kingdom of God in the present and future,” and “discipleship.”

Twenty-five parables under the four major themes above were presented to the participants during the 20-week Bible study. The four parables were studied to present the first theme “God’s love and grace”: the parable of the lost sheep (Matt 18: 12 – 14), the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15: 4 – 7), the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15: 8 – 10), and the parable of the forgiving Father and the two lost sons (Luke 15: 11 – 32). The second major theme “God’s sovereign grace and our attitude” was presented through six parables: the parable of the forgiving Father and the two lost sons (Luke 15: 11 – 32), the parable of the two debtors (Luke 7: 41 – 43), the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18: 9 – 14), the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18: 23 – 25), and the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25 – 37). Another six parables were under the theme “the kingdom of God in the present and the future”: the parable of the treasure and the pearl (Matt 13: 44 – 46), the parable of the children in the marketplace (Luke 7: 31 – 35), the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12: 16 – 21), the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25: 31 – 46), the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25: 1 – 13), and the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants (Matthew 24: 45 – 51). The last theme

---

64 Ibid., 29.
“discipleship” was presented to the participants through studying ten individual parables: the parable of the rich and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19 – 31), the parable of the unrighteous steward (Luke 16: 1 – 9), the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow (Luke 18: 1 – 8), the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (Luke 13: 18 – 21), the parable of the sower and the four soils (Mark 4: 1 – 20), the parable of the two builders (Luke 6: 47 – 49), the parables of the builder and the warring king (Luke 14: 28 – 32), and the parable of the unworthy servant (Luke 17: 7 – 10).

Interpretation Methods: Expositional vs Allegorical

How to interpret passages of Scripture has been a significant issue not only to the interpreters of the parables but also to all Scripture interpreters throughout the history of Christianity. The parables in the synoptic gospels, however, require more careful approach due to the fact that most interpreters took an allegorical approach to the parables throughout the history of Christianity.65 Blomberg’s writing with quotations from the famous church fathers gives an example of how the parable of the prodigal son was allegorized as following:

To take perhaps the most famous parable of all as an example, the story of the prodigal son (Lk 15: 11 – 32) was viewed not simply as a poignant drama of a Jewish father’s remarkable forgiveness for his wayward son. Rather it was assumed that a series of one-to-one correspondences could be set up so that the father stood for God, the prodigal for any sinner running away from God and the older brother for the hardhearted Pharisee. Usually the number of correspondences was extended. The right the father gave the prodigal might represent Christian baptism, and the banquet could easily be associated with the Lord’s Supper. The robe that the newly returned son put on could reflect immortality; and the shoes, God’s preparation for journeying to heaven. One by one, most all of the details were explained, and the spiritual significance of the story was determined.66

65 Ibid., 19.
66 Ibid.
As shown above, an allegorical approach results in arbitrary and anachronistic interpretation which seems unconnected to the original intention and meaning. In the regard of the anachronistic error, Klein along with Blomberg and Hubbard asserts that “neither Christian baptism nor the Lord’s Supper had yet been instituted when Jesus told the parable of the prodigal.” The allegorical approach as one of the interpretation methods distinguished from the literary use of allegory is defined as a method that is “characterized by a search for a deeper meaning in the literal statements of a text that is not readily apparent in the text itself. The method often indicates more of the thought patterns of the interpreter than those of the original author.” Snodgrass harshly rejects the allegorizing method as he calls this method an obfuscation which has no means of interpretation. He continues to blame that method as, “Such an interpretive procedure assumes that one know the truth before reading a text, and then finds that truth paralleled by the text being read – even if the text is about another subject.” This is what is called “reader-oriented or reader-centered” interpretation that is intentionally chosen to produce one’s “unique reading” of a text.

Most mistakes taken by allegorical interpreters are from attempts to find allegorical correspondences as seen in the example of the prodigal son’s case above. However, the concern

---

68 Ibid., 411 – 412.
69 Examples of the literary use of allegory are found in Psalm 80 where Israel was depicted as a vine from Egypt and in John 10: 11 – 16 where Jesus portrayed himself as the Good Shepherd.
72 Ibid.
73 Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, Jr. Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, 188.
in the parable interpretation as Snodgrass asserts is “not ‘what does this element stand for?’ or ‘how many correspondences are there?’ even though correspondences may exist and may be identified.”74 The history of the anti-allegorical interpretation movement that changed what had been the dominant method of interpretation for all preceding centuries began with Adolf Julicher who pointed to the fallacy of allegorical interpretation. He declared that “the parable is there only to illuminate . . . one point, a rule, an idea, an experience that is valid on the spiritual as on the secular level.”75 Julicher’s interpreting method is well shown in his interpretation of the prodigal son parable as he rejected the allegorizing method on interpretation as, “As a father . . . greets his son as soon as he returns in contrition, with warmth . . . so the way to the father-heart of God stands always open, even to the most rotten sinner.”76

Although Julicher’s assertion that all parables have only one point is not always welcomed by modern scholars,77 his anti-allegorical interpretation method has had a great influence.78 In the early to mid-twentieth century, well-known scholars such as Charles H. Dodd and Joachim Jeremias followed Julicher’s anti-allegorical method of interpretation and published numerous volumes to call “interpreters to hear parable as they were heard by Jesus’ original,

74 Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 27.
77 While there are interpreters who follow Julicher’s one-point interpreting method such as Robert H. Stein, other interpreters such as Craig Blomberg insist that the main point(s) could be more than one as the number of points is determined by the number of main characters or elements. Kostenberger and Patterson also agree upon the multiple main points of the parables. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011), 436 – 437.
78 Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 13. Hultgren’s writing on Julicher’s work shows how Julicher’s influence was impactful to the area of the parable interpretation: “Since the work of Julicher, one cannot go back to the allegorical method of interpretation.”
first-century Jewish Palestinian audience.” Later, Snodgrass by adopting Julicher’s method suggests the practical tips of biblical and text-oriented and reader-response interpretation instead of such a farfetched one-to-one interpretation as it is in a reader-oriented attempt:

1. Analyze each parable thoroughly.
2. Listen to the parable without presupposition as to its form or meaning.
3. Remember that Jesus’ parables were oral instruments in a largely oral culture.
4. If we are after the intent of Jesus, we must seek to hear a parable as Jesus’ Palestinian hearers would have heard it.
5. Note how each parable and its redactional shaping fit with the purpose and plan of each Evangelist.
6. Determine specifically the function of the story in the teaching of Jesus.
7. Interpret what is given, not what is omitted. Any attempt to interpret a parable based on what is not there is almost certainly wrong.
8. Do not impose real time on parable time.
9. Pay particular attention to the rule of end stress.
10. Note where the teaching of the parable intersects with the teaching of Jesus elsewhere.
11. Determine the theological intent and significance of the parable.

These eleven practical tips serve as an invitation to more text-oriented, and thus, a thoroughly text-driven interpretation. This exactly corresponds with what an expositional approach to a text requires. Expository preaching which is essentially synonymous with text-driven preaching is defined as, “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context . . .” An expositional approach to the parables can be seen as a discovering process and combination of “the main and subordinate information of a given text . . . [through] careful exegetical work in grammatical, syntactical, and semantic structure of the text.

---

79 Robert L. Plummer, 40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010). 268.

80 Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, 24 – 30.


in order to determine what the author has encoded as main and subordinate information in the text . . . so that modern-day hearers understand the meaning that the original audience would have understood.”  

One further note should be made in order to avoid confusion with a running commentary. An expositional approach whether in forms of teaching or preaching does not merely mean the verse-by-verse explanation of Scripture which commentary does; rather, it is more likely focusing on the extraction of the intended messages or lessons through combining and utilizing the information given by the author in the text. Thus, “to expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view” regardless of the length of the text which could be a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter, or a whole book.

At its easier level, J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays explain an expositional interpretation through four-steps: 1) “Grasping the text in their town,” 2) “measuring the width of the river to cross,” 3) “crossing the principilizing bridge,” and 4) “grasping the text in our town.”

The first two steps observes historical, traditional, and textual information of the biblical audiences, and the third step seeks to theological principle within and given by a text in order to reach to the last step which finds practical applications for modern believers.

An expositional approach is this project’s adopted method in interpreting the parables of Jesus, in teaching the participants, and in drawing applications from each parable presented in the Bible study. This approach was adopted for the purpose of this project that is providing the participants the original author’s intent and drawing active responses from them.

---

83 Allen, “Preparing a Text-Driven Sermon,” 133.
85 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS FOR THE PARTICIPANTS BASED ON THE EXPOSITIONAL STUDY OF THE PARABLES

This writer aims in this chapter to visualize the changes in the participants as an outcome of the 20-weeks expositional study on the parables and its lessons. In the terms used earlier, this chapter is to address the participants’ emotional and spiritual healing and restoration as a result of each and every study of the parables of Jesus in a way to compare the two surveys which will show the before-and-after conditions of the participants. Prior to discussion of the results, an explanation of how the parables were studied and presented to the participants in an expositional approach and what and how the lessons were extracted and applied is needed. Therefore, this writer will explain in the first half of this chapter the expositional study on the parables and the drawn lessons from it and will visualize the participant’s changes in the second half.

The Expositional Study of the Parables and the Lessons

The writer of this project, as stated earlier, selected the twenty-five parables under the four major themes. All of the twenty-five parables are valuable as each parable illuminates each theme from a different angle in a different approach; yet, only four parables will be discussed in this chapter to present how the expositional approach interpreted each parable, presented the parables to the participants, and drew lessons and applications.

The four selected parables are the parables of the lost sheep (Matt 18: 12 – 14), the unforgiving servant (Matt 18: 23 – 35), the treasure and the pearl (Matt 13: 44 – 46), and the unjust judge and the persistent widow (Luke 18: 1 – 8). These will be presented in the following
pages, and each parable will be presented in three steps following the Bible study materials:
Understanding the Contextual Settings of the Parable, Reading the Parable through the Original Audiences’ Eyes, and Extracting Lessons for the Participants.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18: 12 – 14)

*What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.*

The parable of the lost sheep written in Matthew 18 was the biblical cornerstone of this project and the milestone for the participants’ engagement into the Bible study as the parable embraces the unchurched Christians. The brief explanation concerning the biblical basis of this parable given before⁸⁷ will be unfolded below in detail and a comparison will be made with Luke’s version of the lost sheep parable.

**Understanding the Contextual Settings of the Parable**

The preceding scene begins with the disciples’ question asking, “who is the biggest in the kingdom of heaven?” (18: 1). He informed the disciples that “whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the heaven” (v. 4) and warned not to cause any one of the little ones to stumble for the price of being a stumbling block is unable to be paid (vv. 5 – 6).

The parable of the lost sheep was given to the disciples as an extension of Jesus’ teaching concerning the little ones. This background setting of the Matthean version of the parable differs from the identical parable in Luke 15 as the targeted audience in Matthew 18 was the disciples while Luke’s lost sheep parable was given to the Pharisees and the scribes when they were

---

⁸⁷ See pages 7 – 9.
grumbling about Jesus’ acceptance of the tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15: 1 – 3). Although “the two accounts in Matthew and Luke show an identical outline” on the identical theme “the lost sheep,” the different details and background settings of the parable confirm that Jesus told the same story twice in two different occasions.

One of the distinctive features between the two accounts is the Greek verb used for the description of the sheep’s condition as being lost. Hultgren agrees as he writes, “The verb concerning the loss of the sheep differs. In Matthew’s version the sheep has ‘gone astray’ (πλανηθῇ, 18: 12). In Luke’s version the shepherd ‘has lost’ (ἀπολέσας) his sheep (15: 4). These two verbs, which appear again in the respective texts, are exegetically decisive in interpreting the two accounts.”

The different contextual background settings in the two gospels – the respectively targeted audiences and the different situations along with the different usages of the verb describing the sheep’s condition – clearly visualize the respectively intended messages of the two accounts.

Reading the Parable through the Original Audiences’ Eyes

Identifying the Shepherd. The imagery of the original audiences on shepherding was unlike what modern Christians have as it was considered one of the most despised vocations. Hultgren quotes R. Jose bar Hanina’s teaching on Psalm 23 concerned shepherding which says, “In the whole world you find no occupation more despised than that of the shepherd, who all his days walks about with his staff and his pouch.” Yet, the original audiences immediately linked

---

88 Kistemaker, The Parables, 171.
89 Ibid.
90 Hultgren, The Parables of Jesus, 50.
91 Ibid., 102.
the shepherd to God as “the shepherd image was used of God’s tender care of his people and for leaders of the people in the OT and Judaism, including the eschatological deliverer.”

**Identifying the Lost Sheep.** A prerequisite for identifying the lost sheep in Matthew’s version is to clarify the Lukan lost sheep in order to distinguish one from the other. Unlike Luke’s version which identifies the lost sheep with the tax collectors and sinners by using the verb “has lost” (ἀπολέσας), Matthew’s lost sheep is in a condition of “has gone astray” (πλανηθῇ). An immediate inference links the lost sheep to the children which is expressed “these little ones” in verse 6; however, this literal matching does not convey Jesus’ intended message. Rather, the lost sheep refers to Christ-followers (v. 6) who are weak in their faith as a childlike level. Kistemaker rightly notes, “The reference in context is to the children. But in view of the visual demonstration Jesus gave by placing a child among the disciples, the expression ‘these little ones’ has taken on a spiritual meaning. Jesus is referring to those believers whose faith is characterized by childlike simplicity.”

If the lost sheep stands for the believers of a little and weak faith (v. 6), the verb “has gone astray” (πλανηθῇ) helps to comprehend the little ones’ condition. The verb “has gone astray” (πλανηθῇ) is an aorist passive subjunctive which can be translated into “to wander away, to stray, even to be deceived, or to be misled.” Although the verb appears in the book of James to speak of one who “wanders from the truth” (5: 19), its nuance in the Matthean parable is different as it refers to Jesus’ warning “do not despise one of these little ones” (v. 10). Therefore,

---

92 Ibid.
94 Kistemaker, The Parables, 173.
95 Hultgren, The Parables of Jesus, 55.
a logical inference leads to an understanding that the sheep’s condition of “gone astray” is
metaphorically expressing the little-faith-believers’ emotional, physical, and spiritual detachment
from a community of faith caused by another person’s despising or misleading. This emotional,
physical, and spiritual detachment from a community of faith is “not necessarily outright
apostasy.”

**A Reference to the Old Testament Prophecy.** The short story of the shepherd’s rescuing
the lost sheep in the parable was intentionally presented by Jesus to recall the audiences of the
prophetic messages in the Old Testament. Both prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah use the imagery of
the shepherd and the sheep to speak of the relationship between God and his people Israel (Isaiah
40: 11; 53: 6, Jeremiah 50: 6). Above the two prophets, Ezekiel provides the exact same imagery
what was used in the parable as Hultgren boldly believes that “there can be no doubt but what the
passage from Ezekiel provided imagery for the Parable of the lost sheep.”

Snodgrass stresses the parallelism between the parable of the lost sheep and Ezekiel’s
prophetic imagery to highlight the significance of Ezekiel in discerning the message of the
parable. He writes as:

Ezekiel 34 is particularly striking because of the similarity of some phrases to the
wording of the parable. Whereas Matthew and Luke differ in describing the one sheep as
having strayed or become lost, Ezek 34: 4, 16 uses both words (planao and apollymi) in
parallelism to describe lost sheep. Ezekiel 34 mentions sheep wandering on the
mountains and hills (v. 6) and says that God himself will search for his sheep (v. 11), care
for them (v. 16), judge their oppressors (vv. 17, 20, and 22), and set a Davidic shepherd
over them to care for them (vv. 23 – 24). In addition, God will judge the shepherds who
have failed to care for the sheep. Other texts have the same thoughts and hopes that God
will shepherd his people and/or appoint a Davidic deliverer to shepherd them. Ezekiel 34
is only one of several texts carrying this shepherd theology...... at the very least the
parable has been framed on the OT shepherd tradition which Ezekiel 34 expresses so
forcefully.

---

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 53.
The Father’s will. God who promised to be the shepherd of his strayed people in the Old Testament now appears in the New Testament as the Father whose will is against the little one’s perishing. The Father’s will is not only preserving the little ones from perishing but also the little ones’ restoration as the details written in Ezekiel 34: He seeks the lost sheep until He finds (vv. 11 – 12a); He rescues them to bring them to where they are supposed to be (vv. 12b – 13a), and He heals and restores them by feeding them and binding up their injuries (vv. 14 – 16). God fulfills and accomplishes his promises through the appointed Davidic shepherd (vv. 22 – 24) who is Jesus Christ as he proclaims that he is the Good Shepherd (John 10: 11 – 18).

As the will of God for the little ones is not for them to perish but their restoration, God who is metaphorically expressed as the shepherd rejoices extremely over the finding of the lost one (Matt 18: 13 – 14). This overwhelming joy shows how one believer is precious to God’s eyes as Hultgren writes, “One in a hundred does not appear to be much of a loss (only one percent). But in the eyes of God, the loss of a single person is a tragedy.” 99 Hultgren continues to confirm that “the rejoicing is not in the success itself, the accomplishment achieved, but over the person who has been brought back into faith and discipleship. It is a rejoicing that the one gone astray has now come home spiritually.” 100

The Father’s gracious will for the little and lost ones brings terrible judgment to those who despise or cause the little ones to stray. The unimaginably severe punishment, which is metaphorically expressed in comparison with “being thrown in the deep sea with a great millstone around the neck,” is written in Matthew 18: 5 – 6 where the “these little ones” are identified. Beyond the textual identification of the little ones, the text provides the spiritual fact

99 Hultgren, The Parables of Jesus, 56.
100 Ibid., 57.
that the little ones who believe in Jesus are being identified with Jesus: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me” (v. 5). This spiritual identical equation explains why the punishment is so severe: despising a little one who believes in Jesus is the same as despising Jesus himself as well as one can receive Jesus by receiving a little one.

**Other Features of the Parable.** “For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (v. 10). What Jesus mentioned in this verse has brought more debates whenever this parable was interpreted in the church history even though this verse is not a part of the parable. Even though this verse supports those who believe in guardian angels, “nothing requires any one-to-one correlation between the ‘little ones’ or believers and ‘their angels.’” A proper interpretation of “their angels in heaven” in the given context leads an interpreter to what Donald A. Hagner concludes: “If the very angels of God’s presence are concerned with the ‘little ones,’ how much more then should also fellow Christians be for one another!”

Another intriguing feature is associated with the ninety-nine sheep that the shepherd left behind to find the one lost sheep. An excessive allegorical approach in the early church era interpreted the ninety-nine as the angels. This interpretation was accepted because the abandoned condition of the ninety-nine did not fit in their theology which interpreted the shepherd’s departure for the lost sheep as Jesus’ incarnation for the salvation of humanity. Whereas this old interpreting model was not accepted by modern scholars, some interpreters still interpret the

---


shepherd’s departure for the one lost sheep as the shepherd’s abandonment of the ninety-nine.\textsuperscript{104} This theory of the abandoned sheep results in unacceptable and absurd interpretations such as: Francis Agnew sees the shepherd’s abandonment of the ninety-nine sheep as incomprehensibly mysterious divine mercy,\textsuperscript{105} and others portray the shepherd as an irresponsible\textsuperscript{106} or a risk-taking figure.\textsuperscript{107}

If finding one lost sheep means the abandonment of the ninety-nine sheep, then the shepherd and his action cannot stand for “the Father’s will” as the shepherd metaphorically represents God and Jesus.\textsuperscript{108} It was most likely, as many interpreters’ feel, that “shepherds traveled in groups [in the ancient Mediterranean world], so presumably this shepherd’s associates would watch his flocks while he was away from them.”\textsuperscript{109} Snodgrass overtly suggests a solution to this issue by highlighting the nature of the parables as, “Parables are marked by focus and brevity and do not care about unnecessary issues. This parable does not care about any of these questions, for it is focused on the certainty of searching and the celebration at finding.”\textsuperscript{110} Therefore, an interpreter can conclude as that the shepherd’s action of leaving the ninety-nine sheep behind is showing God’s extraordinary love and grace which are expressed by his diligent and eager searching for the lost one.


\textsuperscript{106} Charles W. Hedrick, \textit{Many Things in Parables: Jesus and His Modern Critics} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 49.


\textsuperscript{109} Blomberg, \textit{Interpreting the Parables}, 214.

\textsuperscript{110} Snodgrass, \textit{Stories with Intent}, 105.
Extracting Lessons for the Participants

As an opening parable of the Bible study, the parable of the lost sheep was studied to open the participants’ heart as it invites the “little ones” or the “lost sheep” to the bosom of the Father or the shepherd. The expositional approach to the parable discussed in the previous pages in this chapter was also presented to the participants in order to help them gain a better understanding of the parable and a way of healthier interpretation method with an expectation of their assimilation into the parable as one of the little ones and as the vulnerably lost sheep. Although the main intended message for the participants was their understanding of the compassionate Father’s passionate will for their restoration through an assimilation of themselves into the lost sheep’s position. The words spoken by Jesus, “do not despise one of these little ones” was also taught to the participants as below.

The intention of Jesus, teaching the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18, is undoubtedly to show the grace and love of God the Father. Although the exact words “grace” and “love” of God do not appear in the text, it is easy to infer that the passionate will of the Father for the strayed ones is an outcome from the compassionate heart of the Father which is usually called as God’s grace and love. The shepherd – who is compassionate for his strayed possessions’ condition and passionate for the strayed one’s discovery, recovery, and reattachment to community – portrays the grace and love of God towards His possession, especially the little believers who are gone astray.111 Moreover, the Father’s unwillingness of the little one to perish (v. 14) affirms immeasurable love and grace of God for them.112

111 Ibid., 110.
112 Kistemaker, The Parables, 173.
A proper knowledge of who God is and what He likes leads believers to act in obedience based on what they know of God. Snodgrass agrees that “the most important thing in adapting the parable is to understand what God is like and what was the nature of Jesus’ ministry. Few things are more important than our perception of God, for from that understanding we perceive our own identity, how we should think and act, and how the world ought to be.”¹¹³ Thus, this project writer extracted one major lesson remaining in the intended message of the parable mentioned above, and that is “understanding the grace and love of God.”

For the legitimacy of applying the parable’s lesson today, Blomberg strongly stresses that this parable provides timeless lessons and applications which are “perfectly legitimate and clearly relevant for contemporary Christians as well.”¹¹⁴ One of the timelessly valuable lessons is “do not despise one of these little ones” (v. 10a) because it is against the will of God. Whether it is “hurt” or “anger” which causes a believer of little faith to leave a community of faith,¹¹⁵ there will be punishment for those who despise which would be more severe than drowning in the depth of the sea with a great millstone on his/her neck (v. 6) because of their unkind behavior to God’s possessions.

This warning seems to point specifically to church leadership when it is understood with the reference to the Old Testament prophecy in Ezekiel 34 where God rebuked the religious leaders of Israel for their despising God’s people (vv. 1 – 10). Young correctly points out that “Matthew seems to see a warning in the parable for the spiritual leadership of the church.”¹¹⁶ Therefore, believers and especially leaders in the church should not cause other believers of little

---

¹¹³ Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, 109.
¹¹⁴ Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 219.
¹¹⁶ Young, The Parables, 190.
faith to leave the church and know that they are responsible for the lost ones due to their understanding of God’s grace and love toward the unchurched Christians. Snodgrass addresses this spiritual responsibility for others as, “That His grace is to determine how we treat others should cause us to be caring and sensitive.”

Another lesson of the parable is given to those who left their churches as it was significantly emphasized in the Bible study. While the parable testifies that the participants, as they marked themselves as unchurched Christians, are the targeted recipients of this lesson of the parable, most of them refused to be called a lost sheep at the beginning of the Bible study because of the negative aspect of the term “lost.” According to their previous understanding of the parable, the lost sheep stood for “unsaved” people as it means in Luke 15. So, to them, it sounded like that they had lost their salvation since they became unchurched Christians. However, the expositional study on the parable enabled them to see the parable’s message clearly which helped to see themselves as the lost sheep.

Indeed, the parable itself communicated with the participants and persuaded them through a process of assimilation of themselves into the position of the lost sheep and the little ones. The participants became able to see their spiritual condition. Previously they were unable to recognize any spiritual damage or loss because they thought that they just stopped attending church. God’s view of their status, however, was different. They had gone astray, wounded, in need to be found to bring them back to the flock like the lost sheep in the parable.

This assimilation with the lost sheep enabled them to open their eyes to see the immeasurably amazing grace and love of God the Father. God seeks them until He finds them. This divine diligence of seeking them described through the shepherd’s risk-taking willingness

---

for the one lost sheep amazed the participants as they became speechless in tears. Furthermore, the parable testified of God’s desire for their healing, restoration, and strengthening as written in Ezekiel 34: 11 – 16.

Again, it was not the intention of the researcher of this project to mention of the participants’ negative experiences in their churches. Neither was it the intention to show the necessity of being a member of a community of faith. Rather, healing and restoration of the participants through studying of what the Word of God teaches, especially through the parables of Jesus, was what was intended and expected. In this regard, this parable of the lost sheep corresponded exactly with this writer’s intention because the parable asked a question “how would you respond to the Father’s will?” not only to the group of potential despisers but also to the despised ones. The parable did not allow the participants to only stay in amazement and gratefulness for God’s love and grace; rather, it required their answers to the question “Would you let God find, heal, and restore you?” The participants answered “yes” as they decided to respond actively to the grace and love of God.

To sum up, the participants studied the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18 through an expositional approach to grasp the intended message of the parable that is “understanding the grace and love of God.” Under this major lesson, the participants identified the shepherd with God the Father to see the compassionate love and grace of God for them, and the lost sheep was identified with themselves to realize their spiritually urgent condition. Finally, they learned about the specific will of God for themselves in which they decided to respond actively along with a decision not to despise any other believers. As long as the participants were found by the Good Shepherd (John 10: 11) in his words, the heavenly joy was anticipated in the process of restoration (Matthew 18: 13).
The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18: 23 – 35)

*Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.*

After the studies on the four parables of the first theme “God’s love and grace,” the second theme “God’s sovereign grace and our attitude” was presented through six parables, and the parable of the unforgiving servant was one of the six parables which was studied along with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in one Bible study session. Both parables were woven together to present how God’s grace and love change one’s attitude toward others. Although each parable focuses on different Christian virtues respectively as the first parable teaches on humility and the second on forgiveness, a unified lesson of the two parables is deeply interrelated as it is ‘A true identity found in God brings about the believer’s humility and forgiveness toward others.’ The following pages will focus on the parable of the unforgiving servant and its lesson ‘forgiveness’ from an expositional approach to the extracted lessons for the participants’ applications.
Understanding the Contextual Settings of the Parable

Identifying the targeted audience and background setting of the parable is a simple work but takes a significant role in the interpretation of the parables because the two elements determine the nuance and intended message of the parable. For this reason, the participants were led to practice identifying the contextual setting and audience in every Bible study meeting in order to catch the differentiation of the nuances.

The parable of the unforgiving servant was given by Jesus when Peter asked a question “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? as many as seven times?” (v. 21). Jesus answered to forgive not only seven times but as much as seventy-seven times and told the parable to explore what he meant by seventy-seven times on forgiveness. Even though this parable was given to Peter as an answer to his question of forgiveness, a targeted audience was not only Peter alone. Rather, it is obvious that the parable was given to the disciples when the preceding was considered. The words “Then Peter came up and said to him” appearing in verse 21 show that the parable was an extended scene of the preceding text. Therefore, it is a natural conclusion that the parable of the unforgiving servant was given to the disciples as was the parable of the lost sheep.

Reading the Parable through the Original Audiences’ Eyes

The parable of the unforgiving servant consists of three scenes in addition to an application at the end: the first scene is the king’s dealing with the servant (vv. 23 – 27); the second scene concerns the servant’s dealing with his fellow servant (vv. 28 – 31); the last scene concerns the king’s second dealing with the servant (vv. 32 – 34); and the last verse is the application (v. 35).
**First Scene.** The parable begins with the words “therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants” (v. 23). While some attempt to link the kingdom of heaven with the king in the story, this preposterous linkage derives from a lack of proper understanding on Matthean usage of ὡμοιώθη (homoiothe, has become like). Instead of the linkage with the king, the kingdom is like the following story. Hultgren rightly notes that what Jesus meant here is that “all who claim to be members of the kingdom are expected to heed the story that follows.”

The king in the story is dealing with the servant who owes the king ten-thousand talents. Considering that one talent was six thousands denarii and that one denarius was a common daily wage, ten-thousand talents was approximately equivalent to two-hundred thousand year’s wage for a common laborer. Converting to modern U.S. dollar, it would be equivalent to millions of dollars. The historical fact that the king Herod’s annual income including the collected taxes was around a thousand talents surprised the original audience concerning the excessive amount of the debt the servant owed to the king and implies the debt was un-payable at all.

The servant was commanded to be sold with all of his possessions including his wife and children (v. 25) to make a payment to the king, and the servant promised to pay all the debt which was impossible (v. 26). The scenario was predictable to the first-century Jews as they were familiar with such cases. Keesmaat notes, “They knew all-too-well how such stories would

---


120 Ibid.


122 Sharon H. Ringe, “Solidarity and Contextuality: Reading of Mattehw 18.21-35,” in *Reading from This Place*, ed. F. F. Segovia and M. A. Tolbert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 203.
unfold in their own situations: a lord or landowner decides to settle his accounts and forecloses on his debtors; those who owe him money end up losing their land – with the result that the debtors, along with their wives, sons, and daughters, end up becoming slaves.”¹²³ Jesus, however, concluded the story differently. The king granted a complete forgiveness of the unpayable debt from his compassionate heart for the debtor (v. 27).

**Second Scene.** The debtor of the ten-thousand talents, after granted remission of all debt by the king, encountered his fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii (v. 28). The forgiven servant as the creditor demanded his fellow servant pay the debt, and the debtor asked for the creditor’s mercy until he paid them all. When the exact same words that the forgiven servant spoke to the king were spoken by the fellow servant (v. 29), the first-century audiences probably expected forgiveness to be granted to the fellow servant.¹²⁴ Here, however, is the author’s twist to make his intended point. The forgiven “refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt” (v. 30) despite the fact that the amount of debt was equivalent to a little less than four-months wage which was payable.

**Third Scene.** The king who forgave the servant in the first scene heard what happened between the two servants and summoned the forgiven servant to say “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” (vv. 32 – 33). Because of the king’s anger, the forgiveness granted to the servant was cancelled as the debt was placed back to him, and the servant is thrown into prison until he pays it all (v. 34). The emotional change of the king compared with verse 27 draws attention here. The king whose mind had changed from request

¹²³ Keesmaat, “Strange Neighbors and Risky Care,” 268.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 269.
for payment of the debt to forgiveness of the debt in verse 27 has changed his mind again from forgiveness to the debt repayment in a severe way.\textsuperscript{125}

The unforgiving servant’s behavior toward his fellow servant’s debt identified him as a wicked and ungrateful servant for he does not possess the grace of forgiveness like the king. This caused the king to hand him over to the jailer. The term “delivered to the jailer” in association with the Jewish tradition refers not merely to the fact that he was handed over for incarceration but for torture.\textsuperscript{126} Thus, his imprisonment regarding the amount of his debt implies that he will be under severe torture for the rest of his life.

**Extracting Lessons for the Participants**

What Jesus said in the last verse evidently shows a lesson, and that is “forgive others as you are forgiven.” Although this single lesson seems simple, but it is not easy to apply when considered together with the preceding text which is the “seventy-seven times” or “seven times seven” spoken by Jesus when he answered Peter’s question in verse 22.\textsuperscript{127} Either translation has no objection among interpreters unless one insists on a particular number of forgiveness because the exact number is not an issue in the text.

As the widespread understanding indicates, what Jesus meant by “seventy-seven times” or “seventy times seven” was forgiveness of others an enormous number of times. Beyond that matter of quantity of forgiveness, the Old Testament’s concept of “the Levitical legislation about the year of Jubilee”\textsuperscript{128} regarding the quality of forgiveness should be considered. The Sabbatical

\textsuperscript{125} Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 28. He argues that the Greek text provides more vivid and evident contrast between the phrase “out of his pity” or “being moved by compassion, lord” (σπλαγχνισθεὶς δὲ ὁ κύριος) in verse 27 and the phrase “and in anger his master” or “and lord was angry” (καὶ ὀργισθεὶς ὁ κύριος).

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{127} Some English versions such as *King James Version* and *New Living Translation* translated it “seventy times seven” while ESV translated it “seventy-seven times.”

\textsuperscript{128} Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 319.
forgiveness shadowed God’s perfect grace which brought forgiveness to the nation of Israel in every Jubilee. Keesmaat observes the connotation of the “seventy-seven times” as:

In the Old Testament the number seven is the number of fulfillment and, more importantly, the number of Sabbath. Every seven years debts are to be forgiven (cf. Deut 15). And every seven times seven is the year of Jubilee, when slaves are to be freed as well (cf. Lev 25). In fact, freeing from slavery in the ancient world was a matter of debt forgiveness, since one became a slave if one was unable to pay one’s debts. An emphasis of “seventy times seven,” therefore, would evoke the sabbatical forgiveness of Israel’s past.  

Thus, it was referred by Jesus to the perfect and limitless forgiveness graciously given by God in the year of Jubilee in order to promote the disciples to forgive others limitlessly not only in number but also of the target and range.

At the time of the first survey, twelve out of thirteen participants confessed that they were saved by faith in Christ; however, six weeks later when the parable of the unforgiving servant was studied, all thirteen participants confessed that they were saved. They knew because they were thankful that they were forgiven, redeemed, and being restored. All the sins they could not pay for were paid by Jesus and forgiven by God’s grace and love. All the participants followed the text well and accepted the message of the parable for the first two scenes of the parable. However, they became unhappy and expressed frustration and inner conflict as they came to the third scene and the application part because the parable’s lesson required them to forgive even those who were to them most unforgivable.

An immediate question of the participants following up on verse 35 was if one can lose salvation for not forgiving others. The king’s cancellation of the forgiveness in responding to the forgiven servant’s unforgiving and ungrateful treatment toward his fellow servant seems to support ‘work righteousness.’ However, the point made in the parable does not speak of ‘work

129 Keesmaat, Strange Neighbors and Risky Care, 266.
righteousness’, rather it is informed that if a person fully understood God’s forgiveness from His grace and love, then he/she would actively imitate what he/she received from God in a relationship with others. The contextual setting indicates that the parable was given to the disciples and that the nuance is not rebuking them but exhorting them to keep from falling. Therefore, “the fear of works righteousness is far too exaggerated.”

To most of the participants, the subjects of forgiveness were the people who hurt them and caused them to leave the church, especially people who were in leadership positions. As the participants’ wounds were serious and deep enough to cause them to decide to leave their churches, it was not an easy task for them to forgive those people. The fact that those who hurt them were the church leaders worsened the case, according to one participant, because of the emotional and spiritual reliance and expectation they had for the leaders. The participants were still living in the wounds of the past with a fixed gaze upon those spiritual perpetrators and themselves instead of looking upon the God of grace and love.

The study of the parable of the unforgiving servant through the expositional approach reminded them of what they had lost and forgotten. The nonsensically huge amount of debt of the forgiven servant reminded the participants that what they were forgiven by God were their virtually un-payable sins. The king’s unconditional forgiveness reminded them that they were forgiven by God’s unconditional grace and love which was demonstrated by Jesus, the Son of God, who died on the cross as he took their position of death on their behalf. So, the participants came to realize that the faults of the people who hurt them were nothing when compared to their forgiven sins.

---

130 Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, 74.
131 See “Participants Portraits” in pages 33 – 39.
Consequently, some of those who exposed uncomfortable feelings with the parable’s lesson “forgiveness” made a decision to implement what was taught. For example, one participant decided to call a person who hurt her in the church to attempt a chance of reconciliation while another participant confessed that it was very difficult to put the lesson into action immediately but that she would seriously pray for that person. God’s love and grace shown in the parable overwhelmed the participants to enable them to forgive even the most unforgivable people from their heart (v. 35) as they took one further step in the process of healing, restoration, and growth as this writer intended through this project. The lesson of the parable was indispensable as Snodgrass notes:

The message of this parable is badly needed by churches and individuals who live in a society where people insist on standing on their rights and division marks our churches, families, and societies. The teaching of the parable is counterintuitive, but it is possibly the most forceful expression of how Christians should live. Christian living – rather than insisting on rights – should be a continual dispensing of mercy and forgiveness, mirroring God’s character and treatment of his people.132

The Parable of the Treasure and the Pearl (Matthew 13: 44 – 46)

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

The parable of the treasure and the pearl was studied on the ninth meeting of the Bible study to present the third theme “the kingdom of God in the present and the future.”

---

132 Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 76.
Understanding the Contextual Setting of the Parable

Matthew 13 records eight parables\textsuperscript{133} in one single chapter to inform the disciples concerning the kingdom of heaven. All eight parables’ direct recipient were the disciples even though the first four parables were spoken in crowds, and the parables of the treasure and the pearl were given only to the disciples as verse 36 records. Unlike the parables of the sower and of the weeds, there was no explanation of these parables; but only the short conversation, “have you understood all these things? They said to him, yes” (v. 51), allows interpreters to assume that the disciples understood the meanings of each and every parable.

Reading the Parable through the Original Audiences’ Eyes

\textit{A Man who Found the Hidden Treasure}. A chance of discovery of a hidden treasure in the ground in the ancient era was much higher than modern days because it was a usual way of hiding some valuables especially during insecure times such as war. Hiding valuables in the ground was not at all unusual for the first-century Jews as history recorded.\textsuperscript{134} The fact that hiding valuables in the ground was quite common for the first-century Jews dismisses any charges of immorality for the finder in the story because that treasure belonged to no one. The decision to sell by the field’s owner reveals that the treasure was hidden in the field even before he owned the field. Whether the finder’s action was unethical or not, the point made by Jesus in the parable was surely not about

\textsuperscript{133} The number of the parables in Matthew 13 is not always agreed by interpreters. The variation depends on the interpreters’ identification and classification. Some interpreters tie the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven together as one parable while others exclude the parable of the new and old treasures from their list.

\textsuperscript{134} Snodgrass, \textit{Stories with Intent}, 241. He quoted Josephus’ recording as, “Josephus tells of wealth hidden by Jews and the efforts of Romans to find it.”
ethics but about the finder’s response to the treasure as well as was the merchant’s response to the pearl of great value.

A Merchant who Found the Pearl of Great Value. Pearls had extremely higher value in the ancient world which was even higher than gold as pearls frequently appeared as “a figure of speech for something of supreme worth.”\textsuperscript{135} Although the merchant’s action of selling all of his possession for one single pearl was nonsensical, the hyperbole which emphasizes the great value of the pearl was presumably understood by the original audiences.\textsuperscript{136}

The merchant’s response to the pearl is parallel to the treasure finder’s response in the actions of finding, going, selling everything, and buying except the emotional response of joy which is described only in the finder’s case. The text does not provide any description about the merchant’s feeling after finding the most valuable pearl; but it is implicit as the merchant’s response shows his excitement on finding the pearl of great value.\textsuperscript{137}

Another distinctive feature between the treasure finder and the merchant is that the merchant’s discovery happened in the course of seeking, while the first parable portrays the discovery as accidental rather than a result of seeking. Too much focus on this difference resulted in some factitious interpretation in church history such as identifying the merchant with Jesus and his selling with Jesus’ sacrifice.\textsuperscript{138} Nothing,

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 250.


\textsuperscript{137} Hultgren, The Parables of Jesus, 422.

\textsuperscript{138} Wailes, Medieval Allegories of Jesus’ Parables, 120 – 124.
however, supports such a conclusion. Rather, it was intended to draw the original hearers’ attention to the responses of the finder and the merchant that are alike.

Common Responses. Both figures’ common actions are finding, going, selling everything, and buying as a response to each valuable object. Instead of an attempt to attach a significance to each precious object, Ernest Van Eck’s observation sounds more plausible and reasonable. He argues that the parables were spoken with an intention of revealing the greatest value of the kingdom of heaven which leaves both finders “owning nothing but the pearl” and the treasure. Rather than separating the men’s actions to signify each action’s spiritual meaning, the whole action should be regarded altogether as it points to one message that is ‘attitude to the kingdom of heaven.’ The intended lessons of the parables are, therefore, the great value of the kingdom of heaven and believers’ sacrificial attitude toward the kingdom of heaven which eventually brings joy to the believers.

Extracting Lessons for the Participants

The participants gladly agreed upon the supreme value of the kingdom of heaven because they all knew the price Christ paid for them (Gal 3: 13 – 15). However, when the lesson of the sacrificial attitude for the kingdom of God was considered, they were perplexed and asked the following questions: “What does it mean to sell everything to own the kingdom of heaven?” “Aren’t we already owning the kingdom of heaven as we

---

139 Stanley A. Ellisen, *Parables in the Eye of the Storm: Christ’s Response in the Face of Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 114. The author addresses that such connection is dubious not only to the modern hearers but also to the original hearers as appears to be “answering questions that are foreign to the hearers. The Lord did not make known either the cross or the church until nearly a year later (Matt. 16: 18, 21).”

are destined to enter heaven?” “Do these parables teach ‘no possession now for a possession of heaven later’?”

The participants without exception had misconceptions about the kingdom of heaven, and these misconceptions led them to confusion every time they heard sermons about the parables in Matthew 13. To them, heaven was merely a location which always comes with the future tense where they are destined to go in the future. Some of them were confused with the terms, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, as one of them said that the kingdom of heaven is a future place which comes with Jesus’ second coming while the kingdom of God is a present realm of God which stands for the church.

The biblical concept of the kingdom of God/heaven was presented to the participants due to the misunderstanding revealed above. The participants learned that the terms “the kingdom of God” and “the kingdom of heaven” stand not for two different kingdoms respectively but for the same concept that is God’s rule or reign for both present and future. When the kingdom of God/heaven was understood as God’s rule or reign, the participants’ confusion about the present tense of the kingdom was solved. By living in obedience to God’s reign, believers can live the kingdom life even though this kingdom life on earth is a partial and incomplete experience compared to what is coming.

---

141 The term “the kingdom of heaven” was mostly used in the book of Matthew which had written for Jews. The Jewish culture avoided mentioning God’s sacred name and this caused the author to substitute “heaven” for “God.” Comparing Matthew 4: 17 with Mark 1: 14 and Matthew 5: 3 with Luke 6: 20 support that the only difference between the two terms “heaven” and “God” was Matthew’s preference. Furthermore, the Greek term for the kingdom βασιλεία stands for God’s reign instead of a realm. In this regard, both terms “the kingdom of heaven” and “the kingdom of God” identically indicate God’s rule or reign.

The biblical references of the kingdom’s present reality, which can be experienced, were also given to the participants (John 3: 3; Luke 11: 20, 17: 21; Rom 14: 17).

One participant stated that this biblical concept of the kingdom of heaven that they learned in the class was the last piece of the puzzle to their incomplete image of the kingdom of heaven. They became able to comprehend properly the meaning of the parables through the understanding obtained on the kingdom of heaven/God. The value of the kingdom of heaven is the most precious due to the most precious blood that was spilled for the price. As the kingdom of heaven has the “already not yet” aspect, believers can live the kingdom life or heavenly life on the earth by obeying and following God’s reign at any cost like the men in the parables. To those who obey God’s Word and live under His reign, indescribable joy will be given additionally as it was to the man who found the treasure and as it was to the merchant presumably.

The precious value of the kingdom of heaven was shown to the participants through studying the parables. A sacrificial attitude toward the kingdom of heaven was decided on by the participants. The overwhelming joy of the kingdom of heaven along with the joy of learning was restored in the participants.

The Parable of the Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow (Luke 18: 1 – 8)

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to
them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

The parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow as one of the eight parables under the fourth theme “Discipleship” was presented to the participants to encourage them to grow as true disciples of Jesus Christ especially in the area of prayer and faith. The interrelated attributes of prayer and faith were focused mainly as the teaching of the parable indicates.

Understanding the Contextual Settings of the Parable

Jesus told this parable to “them” (v. 1), and this “them” was “the disciples” (17: 22). The disciples, who learned about the Parousia of the Son of man which was inaugurated by the Pharisees’ question concerning the coming of the kingdom of God in the previous chapter, now hear the parable of the unjust judge and the widow which contains concerns on prayer and faith. The theme “prayer and faith” is extended even wider through the following parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (18: 9 – 14). Since the parable of the unjust judge and the widow “shares the themes with both the preceding and following sections,”143 the work of recognizing the contextual setting becomes more significant. In the context of 17: 20 – 18: 8, Jesus did not merely instruct about prayer in a normal sense but in a special regard to the coming of God’s kingdom and the Parousia of the Son of Man144 as John Nolland argues, “[Luke] does not say it in so many words, but it is clear from the context that this prayer is about the end-time

143 Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, 453.
144 Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 368.
resolution of the problems of the present and not simply about answered prayer in the normal sense.”

Reading the Parable through the Original Audiences’ Eyes

Widows were one of the lower classes who needed help and care in the ancient Jewish culture as they were always classified with orphans in both Testaments (Exod. 22: 21 – 24; Deut. 27: 19; Jas 1: 27). A widow came to a judge with a case between her and her adversary and pleaded with the judge to adjudge justly against her adversary (v. 3). While some suggest that the woman’s issue was a money matter, the details of the case of the widow with her adversary were not given. Beyond that uncertainty, what was certain to Jesus’ hearers was that they recognized the most vulnerable woman’s desperate situation. The Jewish custom that women did not come to the courts alone proves the woman’s desperate need without any other help than herself and supports the idea that the audiences heard the story with their sympathy focused on her.

The woman continually came to the judge who kept ignoring her loud persistent pleading for he was, as the description was given, a man “who neither feared God nor respected man” (v. 2). Whether the judge was a Gentile judge or Jewish, the focus of the first half of the parable was on neither the judge’s identity nor the details of the widow’s situation, but on the woman’s desperation and persistent pleading in contrast to the corrupt and unsympathetic judge. This


147 Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 255.

148 Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 164.

unsympathetic judge ignored the widow’s plea for some period of time but eventually gave up and said, “I will give her justice” (v. 5a). He changed his mind to respond to the woman, and the only reason of that change was the woman’s persistence as his soliloquy as, “though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming” (vv. 4b – 6).

This internal conversation reveals the wit of the storyteller. The original Greek verb used for “beat me down” is ὑποπιάζω (hupopiazo) which literally means “strike under the eye.” The judge was afraid of getting a ‘black eye’ from the widow in a metaphorical sense that “this judge was afraid of losing his reputation [as a result of ignoring a widow] . . . in the context of a culture of shame and honor”\(^{150}\) instead of any physical damage.

Jesus then concluded the parable with a sense of “how much more” with the contrast drawn between the judge and God to confirm that God unlike the unsympathetic and unjust judge, listens to His elect. The fact that God surely listens and answers His elect without a long delay is a great lesson by itself; however, Jesus’ intention was not only giving an instruction on persistent prayer in general, but, as already mentioned earlier, “praying and not becoming weary or giving up with respect to the eschaton, the time when deliverance comes.”\(^{151}\) The opening speech in verse 1 “And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart” and the closing question in verse 8 “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find [the] faith on earth?” support that interpretation. The word “faith” in verse 8 is surely not a faith in general sense, but such a faith like the widow’s as the Greek text includes the definite article τὴν (ten) in front of “faith” (πίστιν, pistin). Thus, what Jesus expected from his followers


\(^{151}\) Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 457.
was that they would have such a faith which appeared through the widow’s persistent prayer with respect to the coming of the kingdom of God. Snodgrass observes as well:

Luke’s concern is that believers not give up while they are waiting for their vindication, which in this context is tied closely to the coming of the Son of Man. For Luke faith/faithfulness and praying are necessary ingredients of readiness for eschatological deliverance… disciples should go on praying “thy kingdom come,” and the maintenance of faith depends on persistence in prayer. If this is the case, then Luke’ introduction to the parable is not inappropriate.  

**Extracting Lessons for the Participants**

In the participants’ former understanding, the main figure of the parable was the persistent widow and the lesson was that ‘A persistent prayer like the widow’s persistent pleading will be answered by God.’ What this parable meant to them was simply nothing more than ‘how to get one’s prayer answered by God.’ One participant recalled that she learned about persistent prayer without giving up until God’s answer from the story of Jacob’s wrestling with God (or His angel) as an Old Testament example.

The first correction given to the participants was that the main figure of the parable is not the widow, but the judge even though he is described as unjust.  The textual evidence which spent more words on the judge’s description and thought than on the widow’s plea proves that the intended message was instruction about God by the contrast with the unrighteous judge. If that interpretation was right, then appropriation was given to the second correction which was given to the participants as the main lesson of the parable.

The second correction pointed out what they formerly understood had no textual and contextual support. As noted earlier and shared with the participants, the parable’s focus was

---

152 Ibid.

neither on how to get one’s prayer answered nor on teaching that persistent prayer earns God’s favor although perseverant and persistent prayer is a recommended ingredient to all believers. Rather, the focus of the parable is on God’s attributes such as His righteousness, compassion, and loving-kindness which are unlike the judge’s character.154 Those attributes of God, drawn from the contrast with the judge, are the basis for the believers’ persistent prayer. A believer must not be weary or give up not only until the prayer is answered, but also until the Son of Man comes.

Persistence in prayer requires faith, and faith like that of the woman is what Jesus will expect to see from his followers on the day he returns when the ultimate vindication will be given. The participants were encouraged and instructed to be steadfast, faithful, and ready instead of becoming weary because “the evidence of faithfulness and a primary path to alertness and faithfulness is prayer, constant involvement with God as we interpret and deal with the world in which we live.”155

As participants confessed, the expositional approach to the parable and its lesson helped them to realize their inappropriate understanding from former preaching and teaching which had led them to praying for vindication in their church-leaving status. One participant stated that she prayed based on this parable for her vindication especially with the people who hurt her in her former church. Those who hurt her and her family were still attending the church and criticizing her and her family as faithless ones because she left the church. Other participants nodded their head while listening to her honest speaking with tears. Although she was frustrated with God’s silence to her prayer, according to what she said at the end of the study of the parable, she

---

155 Ibid., 462.
became able to fix her eyes on who God is rather than on her and the people who hurt her and realize that what God wants from her is to keep her faith until the end without wavering or becoming weary even in the situation she faced.

The parable of the unrighteous judge and the persistent widow was much more helpful for the participants than this writer expected due to two facts. First, the participants put themselves in the widow’s position for the similarity of their chagrin with the widow’s. Second, the participants’ former understanding was corrected through the expositional study of the parable which enabled them to comprehend the intention of Jesus Christ.

**The Changes of the Participants as a Result of the Study on the Parables**

As the examples show above, the participants studied the parables through an expositional approach in interpretation and applied the lessons drawn from each study. They actively participated in the Bible study for twenty weeks, and their enthusiasm drew a remarkable result that no one could have expected at the beginning. Throughout the rest of this chapter, this author will visualize those results through comparison between the two surveys, one taken at the beginning and the other taken at the end of the Bible study.

The second survey which was taken at the end of the 20-week Bible study had two sections as did the first survey: the questions in the first section asked the participants to express their feelings about belonging to a community of faith, and the latter section asked about their benefits from the expositional study on the parables. Both sections asked some of the same questions that were asked in the first survey to reflect and clarify the changes of the participants. To highlight the changes of the participants such as their spiritual growth, healing and
restoration, and increased knowledge on the parables of Jesus, some questions are presented in the following pages.

The Participants’ Spiritual Growth

The first question in the first section asked the participants if the Bible study on the parables of Jesus was helpful for their spiritual growth, and all thirteen participants answered yes. The most remarkable change was found in the following question which asked them to describe in what way the Bible study helped them to grow spiritually (Figure 4. 1).

![Figure 4. 1. Description of the Participants’ Spiritual Growth – Question 2. 1. 2](image)

Briefly describe how the Bible study helped your spiritual growth

One participant noted that she was unsure about her salvation before the Bible study, but now was assured of her salvation. Compared to the first survey, it became evident that the one who was unsure of her rebirth in Christ was saved through divine intervention during the 20-week Bible study. To three out of thirteen participants, a restoration of a relationship with God was their major spiritual growth given through the Bible study. One among the three specified

---

156 See page 28 of this thesis project.
her previous difficulty in a relationship with God as she felt guilty for not attending church because she knew that being a part of community of faith was God’s will for her as it is for all believers. The study on the parables, however, opened her eyes to see God’s heart that cared for her with love and grace as He desired her restoration.

Another participant among the three wrote that she learned how to read and interpret the Bible. Although she read the Bible regularly before the Bible study, she confessed that she read it with a self-centered mind which led her to a different direction of interpretation; however, an expositional approach convinced her of a truth that reading and interpreting the Bible is to know who God is and what He does and wills. Her self-centered mind was changed to God-centered in reading the Bible. Especially the parables embossed God’s love, grace, and will for her and, thus, enabled her to obtain a better relationship with Him. It is exactly what N. Graham Standish claims for reaching unchurched Christians: help and guide those people “open up to God” rather than injecting religious customs and theological ideas that are necessary but secondary elements.157

Three out of thirteen participants found their spiritual growth in association with the kingdom of heaven/God. Their previous understanding of the kingdom of heaven which was incorrect made them regard the present life separately from the future life. In other words, they perceived their salvation as an inheritance of the kingdom of heaven/God only as a notion of a future place after the end of this earthly life either by death or Jesus’ second coming. So harshly speaking, their understanding of their salvation was not so much different from a free pass to heaven. This partial apprehension consequently caused them to live this present life naively as if

---

it would have no effect on the future life. However, the participants grasped the biblical concept of the kingdom of heaven/God which stands for “God’s reign” both in the present and future life rather than merely for a realm in the future. This proper understanding on the kingdom affected not only their interpretation of the kingdom parables but also their life under God’ reign. The continual connection of the kingdom of heaven between the present and the future caused them to take their present life more seriously with an effort to be in God’s reign.

The central theme of Jesus’ teaching, especially of his parables, was the kingdom of heaven/God, and his intention in teaching the kingdom of heaven/God was not solely proclaiming “the sovereign activity of God” but also displaying “the set-up created by the activity of God, and that set-up consists of [His] people.” Jesus’ intention of teaching the kingdom of heaven/God affected the participants, and they correspondingly responded to it.

Two out of thirteen participants described their spiritual growth as discovery or rediscovery of joy of a believer’s fellowship in Christ. One of the two participants wrote that she did not have any expectation at the beginning of the Bible study since the members were all somehow wounded people including herself. For that reason, she thought it would be hard to expect an intimate relationship or joy of fellowship in this group as she came in with a closed mind because of her fear of getting hurt again by other Christians. Yet, she found an authentic and joyful fellowship in this group and she confessed that she had waited for every Friday. That was the authentic fellowship of believers in Christ that she had pined for because she believed it is a necessary ingredient for every church.

---

What this researcher observed was that they bonded easily and fast due to the fact that all the participants shared similar past experiences. Another observation made by this researcher was that their spiritual hunger and thirst took a significant role in their relationship as the fellowship was built mostly upon God’s grace and love and His Word. A logical inference indicates that their fellowship would not be authentic and joyful as the participants experienced it if its basis was only their similar experience.

The authentic and joyful fellowship is what Kam Ming Wong called “a greater gift.”\(^ \text{160} \) In Wong’s definition, the church is “a divine institution and a human community”\(^ \text{161} \) which always accompanies with fellowship of believers as it is the very nature of the church.\(^ \text{162} \) If the church’s nature is unity of believers, then “Christian disunity” consequently means one’s failure to reach the divine will for the church. Wong harshly diagnoses churchless Christians as the people who “ignore the fact that belonging to Jesus is mediated by the fellowship of his church”\(^ \text{163} \) because for them “individual subjectivity seems to be the true center of religion; by contrast, the religious fellowship of the church appears something secondary.”\(^ \text{164} \)

Although Wong’s critique seems not to reflect the churchless Christians’ past experiences of hurt and anger in their former churches, his diagnosis overtly makes a point that a lack of


\(^ {161} \) Ibid., 822.

\(^ {162} \) Ibid., 823.

\(^ {163} \) Ibid., 832.

fellowship is the spiritual disadvantage of churchless Christians as well as of the participants. Compared with the first survey, although the major reasons of the participants’ disaffiliation from the church other than the frustration of unhealthy and unbiblical sermons were the relational disappointment, conflict, and frustration including the lack of authentic communal relationship (Figure 2.3), it was most likely impossible for the participants to find an authentic and joyful fellowship outside the community of faith. By participating in the Bible study, the participants gained not only their individual-level benefits such as a relationship with God and a better knowledge of the Bible but also what they hungered for, the authentic and joyful fellowship with other believers, which proves that an individual’s spiritual life is never meant to be a private realm.  

For four out of thirteen participants, their spiritual growth was found in association with the Word of God as they found a joy of reading, meditating, and applying the Bible. It was uncomfortable for them, as they wrote, to read the Bible on a daily basis, and, even when they were reading it daily, they could not find such a joy that they felt and enjoyed during the past twenty weeks. Mostly they read the Bible out of a sense of duty in order to avoid the guilty feeling of not reading God’s Word. In addition to their involuntary and passive approach to the Bible, they read the Bible randomly as they opened a random page and read it for that day. Whether that random picking and reading occurred frequently or not, that showed how reading, meditating, and applying the Word of God was burdensome to the participants.

However, as one participant wrote, the fact that they studied about the parables which were mostly in a narrative form aroused their interest. Furthermore, the use of an expositional approach which was used as an interpretation method helped them to gain an interpretation skill

---

165 Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious*, 5.
with surrounding texts and contexts. Also, as another participant wrote, the practice of extracting the main lesson(s) helped them to grasp the author’s intended message and apply it. This was not like the multiple lessons of the allegorical interpretation method.

The Participants’ Emotional and Spiritual Healing and Restoration

An individual’s growth, especially when it comes to one’s spirituality, is premised on one’s healing and restoration whether the spiritual growth and healing/restoration occur simultaneously or sequentially. In other words, the participants’ spiritual growth came along with or after their emotional and spiritual healing and restoration as it was reflected on their responses to the survey questions.

When asked if their thoughts and impressions on belonging to a local church or any form of community of faith have changed in a positive way, twelve out of thirteen answered yes while one other participant did not mark either on yes or on no. Instead, she left a memo that her impression on belonging to a local church had changed positively but still a negative thought was remaining (Figure 4. 2).

![Pie chart showing the response to the question: Do you think that your negative thoughts on belonging to the church has been changed through the Bible study?](image)

**Figure 4. 2. Changed Thoughts on Belonging to a Local Church – Question 2. 1. 3**
These positive changes of the participants implied that their emotional wounds were healed through the Bible study. This emotional healing along with their spiritual restoration is well shown in their responses when asked the same question that was asked at the beginning of the Bible study (Figure 4.3).

![Figure 4.3. Changed Possibility for Future Church Attendance – Question 2.1.7](image)

The participants’ negativity toward being a part of a local church was reshaped through the study of the parables of Jesus, and this positive conversion of thought affected their willingness to attend a church in case they found a spiritually and biblically healthy church. When the same question was asked at the beginning of the Bible study, eight out of thirteen answered “yes” while five others answered, “Not sure yet.” Twenty weeks later, the five participants who answered “Not sure yet” at the beginning changed their answers to “Yes.” So all thirteen participants showed their willingness to be a member in a local church if they find a better and healthier church.

Any teaching of the necessity of being a part of a church was not presented to the participants; rather, a thorough focus was on instructing them about Jesus’ intended messages with a special attention to God’s grace and love as it runs as a core theme throughout all of
Jesus’ teachings including the parables. In spite of the absence of instruction regarding the church, the participants’ emotional and spiritual healing and restoration bestowed by the Word of God especially in the teachings of the parables led them to grow, and this spiritual revitalization of healing/restoration and growth provoked their spiritual instinct to be a part of a community of faith. Frank Viola notes, “The open-participatory meeting envisioned in the New Testament is native to our spiritual nature. Every Christian has an innate spiritual instinct to gather together with other Christians and share their Lord in an open atmosphere that’s free of ritual and human control. To pour out of their hearts what God has poured into them.”

That individual believers need a spiritual unity with other believers as “an undeniable and irreversible fact” is maintained by the biblical nature of the church. “The New Testament is clear that the church is a biological entity (Eph. 2: 15; Gal. 3: 28; 1 Cor. 10: 32; Col. 3: 11; 2 Cor. 5: 17). This biological entity is produced when the living seed of the gospel is planted into the hearts of women and men and they are permitted to gather together naturally.”

If the Word of God through the teaching of the parables healed and restored the participants and brought them a spiritual growth and if those spiritual revitalizations provoked the participants’ spiritual instinct of a willingness to be a part of a church as it revised their impressions from a negative to a positive, then what this writer aimed at in this project was accomplished. Whether the participants sensed it or not during the twenty-weeks’ journey, they were found, brought back, and fed as well as their wounds were bound up by God through His


168 Viola, Reimagining Church, 44.
Words, and spiritual growth was also given to them as He desired to strengthen them (Ezek. 34: 16).

The Participants’ Intellectual Benefits and Joy of Enlightenment

The first survey reported the participants’ unfamiliarity with the parables of Jesus as only three out of thirteen believed that they knew the parables well and were familiar with the parables while nine participants marked themselves as unfamiliar with the parables. The remaining one did not mark on neither “yes” nor “no” but left a memo that she hoped to be. Regarding the last participant’s answer as “no,” the parables of Jesus in the synoptic gospels were not a familiar genre to ten out of thirteen participants even though one-third of Jesus’ teaching was recorded in parabolic from (Figure 4. 4).

![Are you familiar with the parables of Jesus?](image)

Figure 4. 4. Familiarity with the Parables of Jesus – Question 1. 2. 4

However, all thirteen participants after the studies of the twenty-five parables believed that they became familiar with the parables when asked the same question after the Bible study (Question 2. 2. 4). They also answered “yes” to both questions “Do you think that you gained an
increased knowledge of the parables of Jesus?” and “Do you think that you gained skills of interpretation of the Bible?” (Questions 2. 2. 5 & 6).

When asked to choose the most impressive and helpful parable among the twenty-five parables and describe how the parable helped, five out of thirteen chose “the parable of the lost sheep” in Matthew 18 with a reason that the parable opened them up to God’s grace and love in a situation they faced. Two others chose “the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl” for they learned the true meaning of the kingdom of God/heaven which granted them a joy of heavenly life. The rest of them chose the parables as shown in the Figure 4. 5., and the unified reason of choosing was that each parable helped each individual to relocate God from the side to the center of their lives as a result of the realization of God’s grace and love for them.

The participants’ intellectual benefits about the Word of God in a special association with the parables are vividly shown in the comparison with two of the first survey questions. To the question of the general interpretation method of the Bible, five participants agreed upon the use of private interpretation in the first survey; but twenty-weeks later, the five changed their opinions to the exegetical interpretation which means that there are God’s intended meanings and specific messages in each and every passage and that the interpretation of the Bible is to discern God’s intended messages within a given text (Figure 4. 5).
The study of the parables through an expositional approach also brought a change to the participant’s understanding on interpretation of the parables. Four among the five participants who formerly held a belief in allegorical interpretation approach – that the parables should only be interpreted and understood spiritually because every single element in the parables has God’s intended meaning – came to believe that there is God’s intended main theme(s) in each parable and, thus, the parables should be interpreted within the given text and context (Figure 4.6).
Not a complete change was observed in this question unlike the preceding question as one of the five who formerly held an allegorical interpretation approach slightly changed her opinion as she checked on both exegetical interpretation and allegorical interpretation. Overall, however, the study through the practice of an expositional approach provided the participants with exegetical interpretation skills which enabled them to extract the intended message(s) and lesson(s) from the parables.

In addition to the intellectual benefits, the participants gained a joy in studying and learning the parables, and this joy of enlightenment was that which the Word of God provided by itself. Twelve out of thirteen testified that there was an abundant joy in learning and studying God’s Word. While the remaining one participant answered “no,” a note she left reflected that there was a spiritual benefit for her in learning the Word of God (Figure 4. 7).

![Choose your opinion(s) about the interpretation of the parables of Jesus](image)

Figure 4. 7. Changed Understanding on the Interpretation of the Parables – Question 2. 2. 2

She wrote that there was a joyful moment, but it was mostly painful as her heart was broken for the reason that she had broken God’s heart. The more she learned and understood God’s grace and love for her, the more sorrow, pain, and regret came to her. The penetrating
process of the Word of God which led her to repentance was painful, but her joy was eventually restored as she wrote when asked to leave a comment.

There was a joy and delight in learning the Word of God?

![Pie chart showing the responses to the question](image)

Figure 4.8. Existence of Joy and Delight in Learning the Word of God – Question 2. 2. 8

The participants experienced what they could not experience outside the church, “the divine institution”\(^{169}\) of the Word of God which is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3: 16 – 17). Indeed, the parables as the Word of God were profitable for the participants in teaching, reproof, and correction and completed them by healing and restoration of their emotional and spiritual damages and equipped them as they had grown. This is why the church fathers emphasized the importance of the institutional features of the church as Wong summarizes as:

The teaching ministry assumed by the church has been advocated as early as in the patristic period. Irenaeus claims that as mother, the church alone can nourish the faithful from her breasts. This view is echoed by Clement, who also sees the church as the locus of nourishment and life. For Clement, the church is a virgin mother, who calls all her children to her and nurses them with holy milk.\(^{170}\)

---

\(^{169}\) Wong, “Christians Outside the Church,” 822.

\(^{170}\) Ibid., 832 – 833.
Calvin’s statement also supports that view as, “Wherever we see the Word of God sincerely preached and heard . . . there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence.” To put it another way, it means that a proper and profitable teaching of the Word of God cannot be found elsewhere outside the church, the divine institution. Along with the participants’ individual-level benefits such as their emotional and spiritual healing and restoration and spiritual growth, a communal-level benefit that is an authentic and joyful fellowship was given to the participants. Therefore, it can be boldly said that the Bible study gathering not only achieved what this thesis project aimed at but also showed a small but vivid example of a biblically healthy community of faith.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This chapter will contain a review of the project, proven effectiveness of the project, limitations, and recommendations for future research. A brief review presents what has been discussed in this project along with what was implemented with the participants. Also, an examination will be given through a discussion of the findings of the project both in validation of the effectiveness and the limitations of the project in order to draw recommendations for future research in both empirical and academic fields.

Project Review

This project started with the claim that unchurched Christianity has become the pervasive phenomenon in America and that Korean-American churches are not exempt from that phenomenon. Non-spiritual aspects of Korean-American churches such as the role of ethnic and cultural refuge which is not different from a social community accelerate the symptom of members leaving the Korean-American Christian church.\(^{172}\)

That phenomenon of members leaving the church was observed among Korean-American Christians in Richmond, VA. They experienced problems of hurt and anger in their former churches\(^ {173}\) usually had a period of time of shopping for a new church home and eventually stopped attending church. While the identity of unchurched Christians does not always indicate

\(^{172}\) Kim and Pyle, “An Exception to the Exception,” 323.

their rejection of faith in Christ, a research result reports a high possibility of their rejection of faith in the near future (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Unchurched Korean-American Christians’ Cause & Effect Diagram

Within the contextual setting of the unchurched Korean-American Christians, this writer recruited thirteen participants in the Richmond area who were all female Korean-Americans and

175 Fazzino, “Leaving the Church Behind,” 250.
aged between thirty-five and forty-five. As unchurched Christians, they all had negative experiences in their former churches that caused them to leave their churches and that affected their pessimistic point of view on belonging to a local church as shown in the first survey which was taken at the first meeting.

The thirteen participants were invited to join in the Bible study for twenty weeks from January 12 to May 25, 2018. The 20-week Bible study taught the participants the parables of Jesus in the synoptic gospels with the premises: 1) The Word of God is the ultimate source for the unchurched Christians’ emotional and spiritual healing and restoration as well as for their spiritual growth, 2) Expositional approach to the parables as it stands against allegorical interpretation method provides the participants an interpretation skill which can extract the intended messages from the parables, 3) The parables of Jesus compared to other books and themes are far more adequate for they teach the essence of Jesus’ teaching in the effective manners of communication and persuasion.¹⁷⁶

With the premises above, the participants studied twenty-five parables categorized under four major themes: “God’s grace and love,” “God’s sovereign grace and our attitude,” “The kingdom of God in the present and the future,” and “Discipleship.” The main focus of this writer in presenting the parables was on revealing and reminding the participants of God’s great love and grace for them as it was portrayed in most of the twenty-five parables and especially in the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18 so that the participants would respond voluntarily and actively to God’s desire of seeking, healing, and strengthening for them (Matt 18, Ezek. 34). The participants also practiced the expositional approach as they interpreted the parables with a

¹⁷⁶ Longenecker, The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables, 38.
caution about the use of the allegorical interpretation method unless there are allegorical elements in the parables.

As a result of the 20-week Bible study on the parables of Jesus, the participants experienced healing for their wounded emotions and minds, restoration for their damaged spirits, and spiritual growth. Their negative and pessimistic view toward the church changed to a positive view as they showed willingness to belong to a church (Figure 4. 2 & 3). Intimacy was given in their relationship with God. Additionally, they gained increased knowledge of the parables along with interpretation skill and experienced an authentic and joyful fellowship with other members in the Bible study.

Validation of the Effectiveness of the project

The survey findings from a comparison between the two surveys showed a validation of the effectiveness of the project which can be discussed in association with the three premises. In fact, this project was designed with the three premises as a combinational experiment that was theological, homiletical/hermeneutical, and practical. The theological aspect was to show the profitability of the Word of God, and the homiletical aspect in association with hermeneutics was to prove an efficiency of the expositional approach to the parables. The practical aspect was to demonstrate the adequacy of the parables of Jesus for unchurched Christians especially with the ethnic background of Korean-American.

As the findings proved in the earlier chapter, the validation was made for the effectiveness of the project relating to the premises as:

- The Word of God was the ultimate source for the unchurched Korean-American Christians’ emotional and spiritual healing and restoration and their spiritual growth
as it is profitable for correcting, equipping, and edifying all God’s people (2 Tim. 3: 16 – 17). God’s word shined a light to the participants (Ps 119: 105) and gave them a revitalization when they were in a dark and painful situation (Ps 119: 50).

- An expositional approach to the Word of God especially in interpretation and teaching the parables of Jesus was efficient to reveal what the divine author intended to teach and extract the lessons from the parables for the participants to apply in their lives.

- The parables of Jesus practically communicated with the participants and persuaded them to respond to the revealed will of God in each parable.

The proven effectiveness of the project brought additional benefits of the fellowship which the participants were longing for and of the familiarity with the parables along with their increased interpretation skill.

As a result, the participants began to attend a local church once the Bible study was finished. Even though not all of the thirteen participants are registered members in their churches, their reattending the church demonstrates that this project’s ultimate goal was achieved (Figure 5. 2).

Additionally, the participants voluntarily have had their own “quiet time gathering” by themselves. The authentic and joyful fellowship of the Bible study bonded them as one body of Christ and led them to keep on gathering continually. They still meet on every Friday to read and share following their purchased Quiet Time book, and new members who are also unchurched Korean-American Christians have been added to this authentic fellowship group which is based on God’s Word.
Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

In spite of the effectiveness and achievements above, it cannot be said that the approach this project took for the unchurched Christians is the absolute way of reaching unchurched Christians due to the limitations of this project. First limitation is that this project had a small number of participants of one gender. Only thirteen individuals participated in this project’s surveys and Bible study, and they were all female. For those who demand a quantitative research model, it might be difficult for this project to be convincing because achieving the goal for this project was brought about by divine power. For the future researchers who would be agonizing in a spiritual burden for unchurched Christians, it is recommended to have a larger number of people in the group of both genders for a quantitively better case to be made.

A second limitation was seen in this researcher’s physical distance from where the participants lived. This researcher lives in Lynchburg, VA which is two and a half hours driving time from Richmond where the participants live and where the Bible study was held. This
limitation of space caused a lack of enough time of fellowship with the participants. Although the designed meeting was only for two hours per week, there would have been more opportunities to have fellowship with the participants which possibly could bring a better result if there was no limit of space and time for pastoring them. This limitation, therefore, naturally brings a recommendation for future researchers to spend more time in pastoring their participants for a better result to be made.

In fact, when asked to leave a final comment, some participants stated that the weekly meeting of the Bible study was like a small church for them. Praising God with a few songs, opening prayer, delivering the Word of God, and sharing prayer request and praying for one another made them feel that they found a small but genuine spiritual home. Only difference from a local church was the delivery method of the Word of God as the Bible study delivered God’s Word in teaching form which engaged with them more than preaching. The fact that the gathering had more meaning for the participants than this researcher initially expected implies a possibility of developing a group into a church. Although it was not possible for this researcher to develop it into a church form or start a church with them due to the limitations of time and space, future researchers are encouraged to consider a way of keeping a meeting group and developing it.

A third limitation was a lack of enough academic sources. Most academic sources including published books and journal articles are writings focused on telling the identity of unchurched Christians or Spiritual but not religious people and tracing back the causing factors in association with social, mental, emotional, religious, and spiritual studies. In other words, in spite of the recognition of many scholars and pastors on the urgency of the churchless Christianity phenomenon, there was “almost zero” academic sources for how to reach the
unchurched Christianity. For this researcher, the absence of academic sources implied not only the difficulty of reaching those who already left the church from their negative experiences, but also implied at the same time that this “unchurched Christianity” is the area where the spiritual leaders, both in practical and academic fields, should invest more time and energy with a spiritual burden for that which God is compassionate and passionate. A rich and abundant source in both academic and practical fields will assist and support future researchers, unchurched Christians in their future ministry, and God’s will to be done.

God’s compassionate heart for the unchurched Christians is clear as His passionate will of seeking, bringing back, healing, restoring, and strengthening for them is unyielding as obviously shown in Matthew 18 and Ezekiel 34. The same God, who sought, found, healed, restored, and strengthened the participants through this project, desires to find and restore more of His wandering children.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Journal Articles


**Website Contents**


APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE 1

An Expositional Approach to the Parables of Jesus and Applications for Unchurched Korean-American Christians

Junyong Cha
Liberty University
School of Divinity

Section I

1. Are you a born-again Christian?
   □ Yes
   □ No

2. How long have you been a Christian?
   □ 5 or less years
   □ 5 – 10 years
   □ 10 – 20 years
   □ 20 – 30 years
   □ 30 – 40 years
   □ 40 – 50 years

3. How long had you been in the last church before you left the church?
   □ less than 1 year
   □ 1 – 5 years
   □ 5 – 10 years
   □ 10 – 15 years
   □ 15 – 20 years
   □ 20 – 30 years
   □ 30 – 40 years
   □ More than 40 years

4. Choose the reason(s) why you left the church.
   □ Conflict with pastor
   □ Conflict with church members
   □ Unhealthy and unbiblical sermons
   □ Burned out from too many requirements
   □ Lack of authentic communal relationship
   □ Radical change of the church (explain briefly: ________________________________ )
5. Choose the reason(s) why you decided not to attend any church anymore.
☐ I no longer have faith in Jesus Christ
☐ Attending church is good but unnecessary
☐ All churches are the same (there is no better church)
☐ Not attending church is better for my spiritual growth
☐ I don’t want to get hurt by people anymore
☐ I don’t want to waste my time, energy, and money on church
☐ Other (explain briefly: ______________________________________________________)

6. Choose your thought(s) on church (or being a part of a church).
☐ Church is a building
☐ Church is not a building but a community of believers
☐ Attending church is good but unnecessary
☐ Attending church is good and necessary
☐ Attending church is neither good nor necessary
☐ The Bible doesn’t require church attendance
☐ The Bible requires church attendance

7. Will you attend a church when you find a biblically and spiritually better church?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure yet
Section II

1. Do you believe that the Bible is the living Word of God?
   □ Yes
   □ No

2. Do you believe that the Bible is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that believers may be thoroughly equipped for every good work? (2 Timothy 3: 16 – 17)
   □ Yes
   □ No

3. Choose your opinion(s) on interpretation of the Bible.
   □ There are God’s intended meaning and specific messages in each and every passage, and interpretation of the Bible is to discern God’s intended messages
   □ Private (my own) interpretations are possible, so various and different interpretations are normal

4. Are you familiar with the parables of Jesus?
   □ Yes
   □ No

5. Choose your opinion(s) on the parables of Jesus.
   □ Jesus taught in parables to help our understanding
   □ Jesus taught in parables to reveal heavenly secrets
   □ Jesus’ parables were only applicable to the Jews at that time, so they are inadequate for modern Christians

6. Choose your opinion about the interpretation of the parables of Jesus.
   □ Every single element in the parables has God’s intended meaning, so the parables should only be interpreted and understood spiritually
   □ There is God’s intended main theme(s) in each parable; therefore, the parables should be interpreted within the given context
   □ Interpreting the parables requires both spiritual and literal approaches
QUESTIONNAIRE 2
An Expositional Approach to the Parables of Jesus and Applications for Unchurched Korean-American Christians
Junyong Cha
Liberty University
School of Divinity

Section I

1. Do you think that the Bible study was helpful for your spiritual growth?
   □ Yes
   □ No

2. If you answered yes to the previous question, briefly describe how the Bible study helped your spiritual growth.
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

3. Do you think that your negative thoughts on the church have changed through participating in the Bible study?
   □ Yes
   □ No

4. Choose the reason(s) why you left the church.
   □ Conflict with pastor  □ Conflict with church members
   □ Unhealthy and unbiblical sermons  □ Burned out from too many requirements
   □ Lack of authentic communal relationship
   □ Radical change of the church (explain briefly:______________________________)
   □ Frustration with church system (explain briefly: _____________________________)
   □ Other (explain briefly: _________________________________)

5. Choose the reason(s) why you decided not to attend any church anymore.
   □ I no longer have faith in Jesus Christ
   □ Attending church is good but unnecessary
   □ All churches are the same (there is no better church)
   □ Not attending church is better for my spiritual growth
   □ I don’t want to get hurt by people anymore
   □ I don’t want to waste my time, energy, and money on church
   □ Other (explain briefly: _________________________________)
6. Choose your thought(s) on church (or being a part of a church).
☐ Church is a building
☐ Church is not a building but a community of believers
☐ Attending church is good but unnecessary
☐ Attending church is good and necessary
☐ Attending church is neither good nor necessary
☐ The Bible doesn’t require church attendance
☐ The Bible requires church attendance

7. Do you want to attend a church from now on?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure yet
Section II

1. Choose your opinion(s) on the interpretation of the Bible.
   □ God has intended meanings and specific messages in each and every passage, and our responsibility in interpreting the Bible is to discern God’s intended messages
   □ Private (my own) interpretations are possible, so various and different interpretations are normal

2. Choose your opinion(s) on the parables of Jesus.
   □ Jesus taught in parables to help our understanding
   □ Jesus taught in parables to reveal heavenly secrets
   □ Jesus’ parables were only applicable to the Jews at that time, so they are inadequate for modern Christians

3. Choose your opinion about the interpretation of the parables of Jesus.
   □ Every single element in the parables has God’s intended meaning, so the parables should only be interpreted and understood spiritually
   □ There are God’s intended main theme(s) in each parable; therefore, the parables should be interpreted within the given context
   □ Interpreting the parables requires both spiritual and literal approaches

4. Do you think that you became familiar with the parables of Jesus through participating in the Bible study?
   □ Yes
   □ No

5. Do you think that you gained an increased knowledge of the parables of Jesus through participating in the Bible study?
   □ Yes
   □ No

6. Do you think that you gained skills to interpret the Bible?
   □ Yes
   □ No
7. What was the most helpful and impressive parable to you? Choose one parable and describe how it helped you.
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

8. Have you experienced a joy in learning the Word of God through participating in the Bible study?
   □ Yes
   □ No

9. Do you think your relationship with God became better and closer through participating in the Bible study?
   □ Yes
   □ No

10. Are you willing to participate again in a biblical and healthy Bible study?
    □ Yes
    □ No

11. Leave any suggestion or comment.
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
1. Introduction to the Parables

“With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.”

Mark 4: 33 – 34

1. Definition of the parables

1) **Etymology**: The word “parable” is from the Greek term *parabole* which is a compound of *para* (to come along side or compare) and *ballo* (to throw or see). So it’s literal meaning is “throwing beside to compare.”

2) **Parables in the Old Testament**: The Hebrew term for parable is *masal* which means “to be like.” While there are some disagreements among scholars, there are approximately five parables in the Old Testament. And the most famous and representative parable is what the prophet Nathan told David when the king committed sins of adultery and murder (2 Samuel 12: 1 – 4).

3) **Parables in the first century Jewish culture**: Parable was a commonly used form of speech especially in teaching from the Old Testament times to the time of Jesus’ ministry. Since many rabbis taught in parabolic form even before Jesus, it was not unusual to Jesus’ audiences to hear and learn in parabolic form of speech. Almost 35% of Jesus’ teaching was given in parabolic form.

4) **Definition**: In an easiest sense, parable can be defined as “earthly stories with heavenly meanings.” However, since this famous definition limits the parables as only of narrative form, a better definition is that “A parable is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between God’s kingdom, actions, or expectations and something in this world, real or imagined.”

---

2. **Purpose of the parables**

When the disciples asked the reason of teaching in parables (Matt 13: 10), Jesus revealed the dual purpose of parables in his answer as “Revealing” and “Concealing” (v. 11).

1) **Revealing:** Jesus revealed the secrets of the kingdom of God to the believers which had come and appeared through the person and ministry of Jesus himself.

2) **Concealing:** The secrets of the kingdom of God was concealed from the non-believers as they were not allowed to perceive the meanings of the parables.

3) Therefore, it can be said that the parables were given only to the believers to inform them the secrets of the kingdom of God which are the mysteries that human perception cannot obtain without divine aid.

3. **Themes of the parables**

1) **Number of the parables:** Definition determines number of the parables as its range is from 30 to 60. To those who include “Physician, heal yourself” (Luke 4: 23) and “the vine and the breaches” (John 15), the number of the parables is around 60 and the number of themes is much more than those who exclude those passages from parable.

2) **Themes of the parables:** Although a diversity exists among scholars in determination of themes and classification of the parables under themes, there are correspondingly main themes: the kingdom of God, the final judgment, Christian life, God’s love and grace, Prayer, money, discipleship, etc. This bible study selects 26 parables under 4 major themes: God’s grace and love, God’s sovereign grace and our attitude, the kingdom of God in the present and the future, and discipleship as the schedule in the next page.

4. **Interpretation methods**

1) **Allegorical approach:** Allegorical approach looks for a deeper meaning than literal sense because this approach believes that there are various levels of meaning. Allegorical is synonymous with spiritual interpretation as ones who use this approach attempt to spiritualize each and every element (one – to – one correspondence) in the given text especially when it comes to the parables.
2) **An example of allegorical approach**: An allegorical interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11 – 32) is as below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The father – God</th>
<th>The prodigal – any sinner</th>
<th>Older brother – Pharisees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The banquet – the Lord’s Supper</td>
<td>The restored right of the prodigal – Christians baptism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The robe – immortality</td>
<td>The shoes – God’s preparation for journeying to heaven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) **Expositional approach**

As shown above, the allegorical approach results in arbitrary and anachronistic interpretation which seems unconnected to the original intention and meaning. This Bible study takes an expositional approach in interpreting the parables as to explain what the text means as following:

1. The parables of Jesus should be studied and seen in the cultural and social context of the original audiences.
2. The parables should be seen in the surrounding texts which inform a situational context of each parable instead of separating a parable.
3. The parables’ targeted audiences should be identified as well as a main figure(s) in a parable because nuance and meaning can be differed by audiences.
4. Instead of one – to – one correspondence, main point(s) should be extracted from the parables since the parables were told within a divine intention of addressing main message(s).
5. As crossing a bridge of time and space, we should consider what, why, and how the parables teach the contemporary Christians in a step of extracting lessons for applications.

5. **20-Week Bible study schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey 1, Introduction to the Parables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Lost Sheep (Matthew 18: 12-14)</td>
<td>God’s Love and Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Lost Sheep (Luke 15: 4 – 7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Lost Coin (Luke 15: 8 – 10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Forgiving Father and the Two Lost Sons I (Luke 15: 11 – 32)</td>
<td>God’s Love and Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Two Debtors (Luke 7: 41 – 43)</td>
<td>God’s Sovereign Grace and Our Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Forgiving Father and the Two Lost Sons II (Luke 15: 11 – 32)</td>
<td>God’s Love and Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18: 9 – 14)</td>
<td>God’s Sovereign Grace and Our Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18: 23 – 35)</td>
<td>The Kingdom of God in the Present and the Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25: 31 – 46)</td>
<td>Discipleship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The Ten Virgins I (Matthew 25: 1 – 13)</td>
<td>Discipleship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Ten Virgins II (Matthew 25: 1 – 13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (Matthew 24: 45 – 51)</td>
<td>Discipleship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Unrighteous Steward (Luke 16: 1 – 9)</td>
<td>Discipleship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow (Luke 18: 1 – 8)</td>
<td>Discipleship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Sharing Prayer requests
2. The Lost Sheep
(Matthew 18: 12 – 14)

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

Psalm 23: 1, 3

1. Understanding the Contextual Settings of the Parable

1) Where is the location that this parable was given?
   __________________________________________

2) Who are the targeted audiences of this parable?
   __________________________________________

3) Under what circumstances does Jesus speak this parable?
   __________________________________________

2. Reading the Parable through the Original Audiences’ Eyes

1) In association with the preceding context, who does the stray sheep represent in this parable?
   __________________________________________

2) In association with the preceding context, what does the sheep’s lostness figuratively stand for?
   __________________________________________

3) Who does the shepherd who went out for the lost sheep represent?
   __________________________________________

4) What is the shepherd’s response when he found the lost sheep?
   __________________________________________
5) What is the reason that a despiser of the little ones would be better to be thrown with a great millstone around his neck (v. 6)?

6) The Jesus’ audiences probably recalled passages of Ezekiel 34 when they heard the parable. Read Ezekiel 34: 7 – 16 and find out God’s will for the lost sheep.

   ①
   ②
   ③

7) Furthermore, God gave a promise that links to a person called “my servant David” as written in Ezekiel 34: 23 – 24. Who is “my servant David?”

3. Extracting Lessons to Apply

1) We have learned that the lost sheep stands for the believers who are despised and detached from a community of believers. So it is a parable about the Christians who have left their churches from negative experiences.

2) As the shepherd in the parable, God cares and seeks for His children who are wounded and lost. This parable’s focal point is to tell God’s love and grace for those despised believers. As He promised, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to demonstrate his love (Rom 5: 8) for us and lead us to the Father as a shepherd leads his own sheep (John 10: 11). God cares for us even when we are wandering because we became His children by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2).

3) This compassionate God is passionate for us to be found, healed, restored, and brought back to a community of faith through His Word which shines a light (Ps 119: 105) and gives a revitalization when we are in a dark and painful situation (Ps 119: 50) for His Word is profitable enough for correcting, equipping, and edifying His own people (2 Tim 3: 16 – 17). Therefore, we have to be thankful for His grace and love and responding in an active manner to His will.

4) Additionally, we should examine ourselves if we have despised others and caused them to leave a church for God’s will is obviously against such despisers.
4. Sharing Prayer Requests
7. The Unforgiving Servant
(Matthew 18: 23 – 35)

“... God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”
1 Peter 5: 5

1. Understanding the Contextual Settings of the Parable

1) Under what circumstances did Jesus speak this parable?
________________________________________________________________________

2) What does it mean that forgive others seventy-seven times (vv. 21 – 22)?
________________________________________________________________________

3) Identify the main figures that appeared in the parable.
   ① _____________________________________________________________
   ② _____________________________________________________________
   ③ _____________________________________________________________

2. Reading the Parable through the Original Audiences’ Eyes

1) 1 Denarius was a daily wage for common laborers, and 1 talent was equal to 6,000
denarii at that time. Then how many days (or years) should a laborer work to gain 10,000
talents?
________________________________________________________________________

2) What did the king demand to the one who owed the 10,000 talents?
________________________________________________________________________

3) Why did the king forgive the debt of who owed the 10,000 talents?
________________________________________________________________________
4) How much was the debt that his fellow servant owed him? And was it payable or non-payable?

5) Read verse 33 and write how one who have been pitied and forgiven should treat others.

6) What did the king call the man who did not forgive the debt of his fellow servant, and what punishment did he receive?

7) Based on this parable, why should we forgive someone else’s errors seventy-seven times (or seventy times seven)?

3. Extracting Lessons to Apply

1) Last week we learned about a proud man before God and others through the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. And today we learned that those who do not understand God’s grace treat others mercilessly and arrogantly. So we can conclude as combining the two parables that another name of “pride or arrogance” is “unappreciation of God’s grace.”

2) Our sins were forgiven freely by God’s grace through Jesus’ blood, and the sins we were forgiven for were much bigger than the debt of the servant (10,000 talents).

3) If we properly understand how big God’s grace was, then we cannot be like the unforgiving servant and there are no persons and sins that we cannot forgive.

4) How we treat others reflects if we really understood God’s great grace. God wants us to forgive others from our hearts (v. 35). If there is anyone that you feel as you cannot forgive, it is the time to forgive and reach that person with grace and love.

5) Write down name of the person who you need to forgive and rebuild a relationship with. Also, write down specific actions you can take for it.
4. Sharing Prayer Requests
9. The Treasure and the Pearl
(Matthew 13: 44 – 46)

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Philippians 3: 20

“If then you have been raised with Christ, see the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”
Colossians 3: 1 – 2

1. Understanding the Contextual Settings of the Parable

1) Who were the targeted audiences of this parable?

________________________________________________________________________

2) Where was the location that this parable was given?

________________________________________________________________________

3) What was it that Jesus intended to teach through the parable?

________________________________________________________________________

2. The Kingdom of God/Heaven: What is VS What is not

1) Matthew 13 has 7 kingdom parables. When Jesus taught about the kingdom of God/Heaven, he taught through parables and explained their meanings only to the disciples (v. 34). Find out the reason that he taught the kingdom of God/Heaven through the parables in verses 11 – 12.

________________________________________________________________________
2) At that time, the Jews lived with an expectation and anticipation for the kingdom of God/Heaven. Read the following passages and write what kind of kingdom they expected and anticipated.

- “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” (2 Samuel 7: 12 – 13)

- “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River[a] to the ends of the earth” (Zechariah 9: 9 – 10)

- “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” (Daniel 2: 44)

- “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7: 13 – 14)

3) When Jesus entered Jerusalem, people shouted and followed him with a praise “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21: 9). Yet, when he was arrested, suffered, and crucified, all the people who followed him and shouted their praises including the disciples ran away because it was not like what they expected and anticipated for the kingdom of God/Heaven.

4) The kingdom of God/Heaven was the central theme of Jesus’ teachings as it appeared 104 times in the gospels. Write down your opinion or understanding on the kingdom of God/Heaven.
5) The term “Kingdom of heaven” was mostly used in the book of Matthew while the term “Kingdom of God” appears in all 4 gospels. Although there are views that distinguish two kingdoms, but it is the more biblical view that it is only a difference of word usage or preference. When we think and consider the Jews’ way of thinking which was avoiding the mentioning of God’s sacred name, it is understandable why Matthew preferred to use the term “kingdom of heaven” as his primary recipients were the Jews. Also, when we look at the Jesus’ words, it became more obvious that those two terms are interchangeable and undistinguishable.

“For that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matthew 4: 17)
“And saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” (Mark 1: 15)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5: 3)
“And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 6: 20)

6) The kingdom of God/Heaven: What is not!

① The kingdom of God/Heaven is not simply a place (or paradise) where believers go after death.

② The kingdom of God/Heaven is not merely a realm.

③ The kingdom of God/Heaven is not the church.

7) The biblical concept of the kingdom of God/Heaven: What it is!

① The kingdom of God/Heaven represents God’s reign rather than a realm. The Greek term for the kingdom is βασιλεία (basileia), and its meaning is God’s sovereign reigning and ruling.

“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11: 15)

② The kingdom of God/Heaven is only for born-again believers.

“Jesus answered him, ‘truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” (John 3: 3)

③ The kingdom of God/Heaven has already come to us through Jesus Christ.
- “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11: 20)
- “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say look, here it is! Or there! For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.’” (Luke 17: 21)

④ The kingdom of God/Heaven is an experienceable spiritual reality for believers.
“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14: 17)

⑤ Also, the kingdom of God/Heaven what has already come partially will be completely given in the future when Jesus returns (already/not yet).
“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11: 15)

⑥ There will be no sadness, no pain, no suffering in the kingdom of God to come.
Instead we will live eternally with full of joy and peace in the kingdom of God to come because it is the kingdom God reigns (Rev 21 – 22). The snapshots of this kingdom of God was shown through Jesus’ earthly ministry when he healed the sick and demonized and raised the dead. As Jesus proclaimed, the kingdom of God/Heaven has come with him partially and will come in a full scale when he returns.

⑦ Therefore, the kingdom of God/Heaven is God’s reign in and through His people who were born again by Jesus’ precious blood. Although it is partial, the kingdom of God/Heaven is an experienceable spiritual reality for believers today by submitting and obeying His reign. And we will live forever and ever in His reign when Jesus Christ returns.

3. Reading the Parable through the Original Audiences’ Eyes

1) Write down what the figures found in the parables.
①
②

2) What do each person’s discovered treasure and pearl represent?

3) There are corresponding actions of the two figures when they found the valuables. What are the actions?
   ① ____________________________________________
   ② ____________________________________________
   ③ ____________________________________________

4) Giving too much meaning to the actions of selling and buying can bring an interpretation that deviates from the original intention. Write down what lesson Jesus intended to teach through the parables.
   ① ____________________________________________
   ② ____________________________________________
   ③ ____________________________________________

4. Extracting Lessons to Apply

1) We as saved through Jesus are already the people of the kingdom of God/Heaven because we live according to His will and are governed by the relationship of love with Him. So, we are living the heavenly life in the present by obeying His will in His reign, and this is an evidence that we have received a promise of eternal life in the coming kingdom.

2) The kingdom of God/Heaven given to us through Jesus Christ is invaluable because the price paid for us to enter the kingdom is Jesus’ blood and his sacrifice on the cross.

3) Therefore, we as living the heavenly life should have abundant joy as the men in the parable did. This joy is not merely happiness or momentary emotions but expressions of emotion and gratitude that constantly emerge from the depths of the heart.

4) A true understanding of the value of the kingdom of God/Heaven and the joy from it make us to live our earthly lives for His kingdom and righteousness and use everything we have for His will. We use our time, money, strength, and heart for His will as we live under His reign, the kingdom of God/Heaven (Matthew 6: 33).
5. Sharing Prayer Requests
16. The Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow
(Luke 18: 1 – 8)

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

2 Timothy 4: 7 - 8

1. Understanding the Contextual Settings of the Parable

1) Who were the targeted audiences of this parable?
________________________________________________________________________

2) What did Jesus teach about before he told this parable?
________________________________________________________________________

2. Reading the Parable through the Original Audiences’ Eyes

1) Identify the figures that appeared in the parable.
   ① _______________________________________________________________________
   ② _______________________________________________________________________

2) This judge was expressed as “unjust judge” in verse 6. What was the reason he was called in this way?
________________________________________________________________________

3) Write what this widow’s situations was and what she did.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
4) At that time, it was not that common for a woman to come into the courts. But she alone and frequently came to the judge with the matter of her grudge. What can we tell from this?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5) What was the judge’s first response to the woman?
________________________________________________________________________

6) Later the judge changed his mind to release her grudge. Write what caused him to change his mind.
________________________________________________________________________

7) Who do you think is the main figure of this parable?
____________________
____________________________________________________

8) Who do you think this unjust judge represents?
________________________________________________________________________

9) The main verse of this parable is verse 1. Why should we pray always and not lose heart?
________________________________________________________________________

10) What did Jesus intend in saying “nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (v. 8)? Discuss about “When the Son of Man comes” and “Faith” and write down.
① When the Son of Man comes: ____________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
② Faith: ________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

11) We are told that we “ought always to pray and not lose heart.” From what should we not be discouraged (losing heart)? Find an answer in the parable.
________________________________________________________________________
3. Extracting Lessons to Apply

1) This parable is often used as an example of “persistent prayer” which brings an application that one’s persistent prayer earns God’s favor. But such interpretation has no support from the text. As we learned, this parable does not teach us how to get one’s prayer answered.

2) “Pray always and do not lose heart” (v. 1) is to keep “faith” (v. 8). And this faith is to believe in the fact that God is righteous unlike the judge in the parable and He answers to his children. But God’s answer to prayer in the parable seems more related to the “coming of the Son of Man” (v. 8) rather than to normal requests of what we need. As the judge decided to give her justice, God will vindicate for his children at the day of Jesus’ return.

3) Therefore, the main lesson of this parable is “keep faith until the day of Jesus’ return.” This genuine faith is expressed through prayer as prayer is the evidence of faithfulness.
   - “And he said to them, ‘when you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.’”
     (Luke 11: 2)
   - “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4: 7 – 8)

4) Furthermore, this parable gives us additional teachings about prayer. Prayer is ① a process of knowing who God is and ② an asking for His will to be done instead of what we want. A proper understanding of God leads us to ask based on what we have known about him. And in this process, we learn and experience an assimilation of our will with His will, so we are not being discouraged even if our prayers are not answered because we know a silence of good God is still good for us.
4. Sharing Prayer Requests
IRB Approval Form

November 14, 2017

Junyong Cha
IRB Exemption 3016.111417: An Expositional Approach to the Parables of Jesus and Applications for Unchurched Korean-American Christians

Dear Junyong Cha,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971