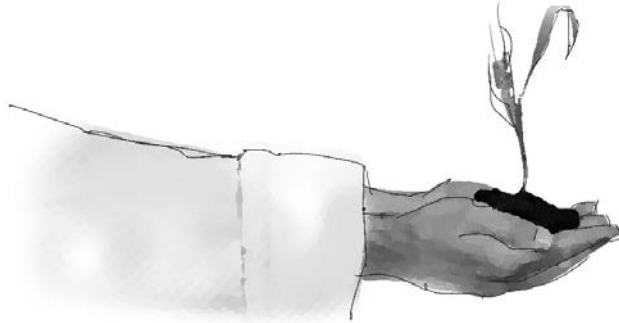


# Discipling<sup>1</sup> Through Metaphor<sup>2</sup>



## SABBATH—JANUARY 4

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** 2 Samuel 12:1–7; Isaiah 28:24–28; Matthew 7:24–27; Matthew 13:1–30; Luke 20:9–19.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd by using stories. He did not say anything to them without telling a story. So the words spoken by the prophet came true. He had said, ‘I will open my mouth and tell stories. I will speak about things that were hidden since the world was made’ ” (Matthew 13:34, 35, NIV).

**CHRISTIANITY IS SMART AND MAKES SENSE.** But being smart cannot explain everything that people do. Robots are programmed (made) to do many things. But only humans can love, cry, care, laugh, imagine things, and feel hurt. So, Jesus taught eternal truths in many different ways. Jesus spoke through simple pictures from everyday life so that He could reach people where they were. He did this so that children and adults could understand deep truths through parables (stories) with pictures and examples.

Jesus' stories helped people to easily understand deep thoughts such as justification (forgiveness), righteousness (God's holy life), and sanctification (living a holy life through Christ). In other words, deep thoughts that are often hard to understand in common language can be understood through pictures and examples.

1. discipling—the process (act) of helping believers become better followers of Jesus.  
2. metaphor—a word-picture, example, or symbol.

**SUNDAY—JANUARY 5****OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES  
(2 Samuel 12:1–7)**

**Read 2 Samuel 12:1–7; Isaiah 28:24–28; Jeremiah 13:12–14; and Ezekiel 15:1–7. How do these parables (stories) help us to understand better God’s relationship with humans? Which examples used by these prophets (special messengers) later appear in Christ’s parables?**

Nathan tells a parable to hide the real reason for his visit. At first David is angry with the injustice in the story. When Nathan tells David that he committed the same injustice, David can see that he is the real sinner. In this way, David announces his own sentence. Thus, by using a parable, Nathan avoids the anger of the king, and he probably avoids his own death!

Isaiah’s poetic story has a farming theme. His listeners knew farming very well. (Hundreds of years later, Jesus used these same farming themes.) Isaiah’s parable uses farming to teach about God’s unlimited mercy during times of punishment. The twelfth chapter of Hebrews also shows that God uses His punishments as tools to correct people. He does not use them as weapons for revenge. God’s punishments are used just to help people turn back to God. But if the people are still stubborn and rebellious (disobedient),

then greater punishments follow.

Jeremiah’s parable is a terrifying example of judgment. Christ also shared parables about judgment with His listeners. And Ezekiel used a different example to give almost the same message. Yet, humans still rebel (war) against God. And when they do, He lets them experience the results that they have chosen.

**Why is storytelling such a powerful way of explaining truth? What are some of your favorite stories? Why do you like them? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.**



**God uses punishments as tools for correction rather than weapons for revenge.**

**MONDAY—JANUARY 6****BUILDING WISDOM  
(Matthew 7:24–27)**

**Read Matthew 7:24–27. How do these verses help us to better understand Christian discipleship?<sup>3</sup>**

3. discipleship—the method of helping believers become better followers of Jesus; the practice of accepting Jesus and following Him.

**Why do you think Jesus uses this example from nature to teach such an important truth?**

Education is so common that we do not think much about it. But during Bible times, there were more uneducated people than educated people. In fact, many scribes (secretaries) became powerful because of their ability to read and write. So, Jesus used everyday examples that uneducated people could understand. (Of course, educated listeners also could understand them.)

Before Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, books were handwritten in most places in the world. The writing of books took a very long time. And not many people could afford to buy them. So, people got information by word of mouth or from legends and parables.

God offers salvation to the entire human race. We should not be surprised that Christ used spoken communication to preach His message so that He would reach as many people as possible. From generation to generation, people still learn about God's gift of salvation by word of mouth through simple stories.

**Read Luke 14:27–33. What lessons can we learn from these stories? How do the examples here show our understanding of discipleship?**

Building requires planning. Long before people start to work on a building, they figure out how much it

will cost. In the same way, discipleship requires planning. Jesus' miracles of feeding people and healing them might make disciples think it was easy to follow Him. But Jesus encouraged His listeners to study the complete picture. He wanted them to know that self-sacrifice and suffering come at great costs to themselves. Notice once again that Jesus chose to share this message by using symbols and examples. He did not give a simple checklist of problems that His disciples might face.



**Discipleship, like building, requires careful planning.**

**TUESDAY—JANUARY 7**

**FARMING EXAMPLES  
(Matthew 13:1–30)**

**Read Matthew 13:1–30. What is Jesus teaching His listeners about discipleship? What lessons can modern Christians learn from these examples?**

Christ's parable of the sower is well

known to many readers. The place for the story also was well known to people who lived in the country at the time. And the story was something that Jesus' listeners could easily understand. This is because there is a clear connection in it with discipleship. Jesus is challenging His listeners to reconsider their standing as disciples. He does not speak to each person. He speaks through parables. But in doing so, He invites disciples to examine themselves. By examining their souls, the disciples can know if they really need the things they own. They can review their willingness to make sacrifices. They can choose the lifestyle of faithful discipleship with full knowledge of what such a choice means.

At the same time, true discipleship puts the responsibility of judging people into the hands of Jesus only. Human judgment is imperfect. Human knowledge is limited. Only God has perfect understanding. Jesus warns, too, that Satan may get in the way of disciples. Disciples, however, cannot surrender their judgment to other believers. This is because these believers may be weeds, not wheat. And both grow together until harvest time.

"The heavenly glory [power] of God was a mystery to humans. But it could be seen in Christ's human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known. Heavenly things were shown through the earthly." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 17.

**In the parable of the sower, Jesus talks about people being "fooled by the desire to get rich" (Matthew 13:22, CEV). What is He talking about? How can "the desire to get rich" fool even people who do not have riches?**

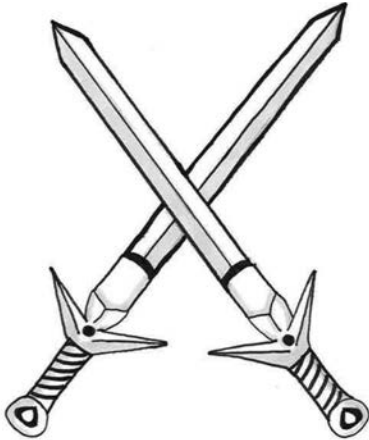
### WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 8

#### A DIFFERENT KIND OF WAR (Matthew 21:28–32)

Christ's ministry (work) upset the way things were in society at the time without using the weapons of warfare. His tools were more powerful than swords or knives. His tools were life-changing words that were explained by parables and examples. These words became Christ's weapons in the fight against evil.

Christ's methods of attack surprised many leaders. He was very popular with the crowds, and the leaders were not able to fight this power. Many of His parables also had messages that worked against the leaders. The religious leaders saw that they would lose their influence over the people when Christ's message reached the people's hearts.

**Read Matthew 21:28–32; Luke 14:16–24; and Luke 20:9–19. What powerful messages come through these parables? These parables are about certain people. But what principles (important rules) are directed at us, no matter who we are?**



The tools of Christ's ministry (work) were more powerful than swords or knives.

"The parable of the vineyard is not directed at the Jewish nation alone. It has a lesson for us. The church in this generation has been given great rights and blessings by God. And He expects His people to use these gifts to honor Him."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 296.

We have been greatly blessed by the Lord. We have been purchased by the blood of Christ. We have been presented with the gift of salvation based on His righteousness (holiness) and not our own. We have been given the promise of eternal life. And we have been offered the Holy Spirit. We have received so much. But it is easy to forget all that we have. We may not have thought much about it. Or like the vinedressers in the parable, we might not even realize what we are really doing. In the end, their lack of knowledge did not excuse them on Judgment Day. It will not excuse us either.

How often have you been deceived (tricked) in the past about your own spiritual condition? What have you learned from those experiences that can help you not to make the same mistakes again?



Christ's message reached the people's hearts.

## THURSDAY—JANUARY 9

### CHRIST'S CREATIVE GIFT OF PARABLES (Acts 10:9–16)

After Christ finishes His work on earth, the telling of parables seems to stop in the Bible. Why? Certainly the largest remaining part of the New Testament centers around Paul. Fourteen New Testament books were written by Paul. And nearly half of Luke's historical story in Acts centers around Paul, too. However, Paul did not use stories in the way that Jesus did. But he still made many of his points using examples, word-pictures, and comparisons (read Romans 7:1–6; 1 Corinthians 3:10–15; 2 Corinthians 5:1–10).

Paul was not a storyteller. But his

writings are not boring. They have some interesting examples. Both Christ's sermons and Paul's writings show different styles, but both have some creative ideas.

Other New Testament writers come closer to using parables in the same way that Christ did. Jesus' brother, James, writes, "Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring" (James 2:2, NIV). He writes this as a way of teaching a lesson. But Christ's brother and the other disciples did not use stories as much as Christ did. However, they do use examples and comparisons a lot in their writings. For example, "he will pass away like [the same as] a wild flower" (James 1:10, NIV). Or "take ships as an example" (James 3:4, NIV). Peter's vision (Acts 10) is another example. And the book of Revelation also has many symbols and examples, such as, "When the dragon saw that he had been hurled [thrown] to the earth, he pursued [chased] the woman" (Revelation 12:13, NIV).

**Choose two of the following verses and point out what comparisons or word-pictures they have: Acts 10:9–16; James 3:3–12; Revelation 12:7–17; Revelation 18:9–20; and Revelation 19:11–16. What are the different messages that these verses have? What examples are used to give each message?**

The principle remains the same, no matter how it is expressed: meta-

phors (word-pictures), comparisons, parables, symbols, and other examples help us to better understand ideas that are taught in the Bible. In this way, Christ and His disciples built upon the listener's experiences. They did this by using comparisons and examples to teach truths more clearly. We should not be afraid to do the same at the right time.

### FRIDAY—JANUARY 10

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, "Teaching in Parables," pages 17–27, in *Christ's Object Lessons*.

"Jesus desired to make people more curious and to ask questions. He tried to wake up the careless, and bring truth to the heart. Parable teaching was popular. It gained respect and attention from the Jews and the people of other nations. . . .

"Again, Christ had truths to give when the people were not ready to accept or even to understand. For this reason also, Jesus taught the people in parables. By connecting His teaching with life or nature, He held the people's attention and impressed their hearts. Afterward, as the people thought about the examples that Jesus gave, they remembered better the words of the Divine Teacher. . . .

"Jesus searched for a way to every heart. By using many examples, He presented truth in different ways that reached different minds."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pages 20, 21.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

① In class, share your answers to Sunday's questions. What can you learn from one another's stories?

② Jesus used word-pictures and examples from things that His hearers knew well. What could you use from your own culture that could help to teach spiritual truths?

③ Jesus used examples from farmland settings. But much of early Christianity grew in cities. What "city"

examples can you find in the writings of Paul or any of the other New Testament writers?

④ Think about a good story. What are the parts that make it good? How do they work? How can we learn to use these parts in our witnessing?

⑤ Read Luke 16:19–31. What kind of story does Jesus use here? What do these verses teach us about using fiction (imaginary stories) when we teach spiritual messages?