



Connecting, Creating Bonds & Safety Nets Through Parables and Our Biblical Heritages

By Jim Myers

What is your philosophy of life? You may not be able to explain it, but you have one. Your life experiences have produced **beliefs about** who and what you are, **beliefs about** how to have different types of relationships (with your spouse/partner, children, extended family, circles of friends and strangers), **beliefs about** how you spend your time, **beliefs about** what you value and what you don't, and **beliefs** that are the standards you use to judge your actions and the actions of others. You may not be able to clearly and concisely communicate them, but "you feel them" every day.

A primary source of many American beliefs is Christianity. Today, however, when people hear the word "Christianity," they think about God, Jesus, afterlife and conflicts. Christianity, as a religion, has served America in another very important way.

The word "religion" comes from the same Latin root as the words "ligament" and "[tubal] ligation" – *ligare*. It means "connections or ties."

Religions "connect" and create "ties" between people. They provide belief models that connect members of families and communities; models that create ties between members of different classes and come from different places. Religions also provide a transcendent element of human experience. Secular philosophies, such as Western liberalism, Marxism, and existentialism, also offer other belief models. But today, even with all of the focus on "decreasing church memberships" and "new liberal secular options" -- the largest block of citizens in America identify themselves as "Christian."

*They believe in God and an afterlife. They read the Bible and pray.
Some belong to churches while others do not.*

Even though the idea of American exceptionalism has become so dubious that much of its modern usage is merely sarcastic -- *when it comes to religion Americans really are exceptional.*

*No rich country prays nearly as much as the U.S. –
and no country that prays as much as the U.S. is nearly as rich.*

Every human being shares some things with every other human being and a great deal of the Bible from *Genesis to Luke* contains ancient wisdom lessons related to those things. I believe that the ancient wisdom embedded in the teachings of Jesus has the power to “*reconnect Americans*” – even in this “*polarized and fragmented*” environment. And, it also provides options that you may want to include in “*your philosophy of life.*”

I believe that *Yeshua, the original Jesus*, also had a *philosophy of life* -- and it is reflected in his teachings and actions. The story of *the original Jesus*, the Jewish Jesus, is found in *Matthew, Mark and Luke*. The *Book of Acts* contains important stories that reflect his influence on the twelve apostles he chose before he was crucified by the Romans. The *Gospel of John, Epistles of Paul* and *remaining New Testament books* were produced by believers that had very different belief systems and did not understand who Yeshua, the original Jesus, was or what he taught. They focused on “*beliefs about their versions of Jesus.*”

Yeshua focused on life on earth and how to make it better for all people. He challenged people to “believe what he taught” – by incorporating it into their daily lives. He warned people about focusing on man-made theologies and blind submission to religious authorities. I will use two parables to give you examples that apply as much to our lives today as they did to lives almost two-thousand years ago – The Great Day of Judgment and The Lost Sheep.

Parables 101

“With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” (Mark 4:33-34)

Parables, stories some only a sentence or two long, are often seen as the hallmark of Jesus’s teaching – *but few of his private explanations have been preserved*. He left members of the public crowds in the position of finding their own explanations -- *and we too must find ours*.

- *What makes the parables mysterious, or difficult, is that they challenge us to look into the hidden aspects of our own values, our own lives.*
- *They bring to the surface unasked questions, and they reveal the answers we have always known, but refuse to acknowledge.*

His followers, like Jesus himself, were Jews, and Jews knew that parables were more than children’s stories or restatements of common knowledge.

*They knew that parables and the tellers of parables were there to prompt them to see the world in a different way, and to challenge them. They thought **less about what they “mean” and more about what they can “do”** – remind, provoke, refine, confront, disturb, etc.*

The term “*parable*” comes from the Greek *para*, “*along side, together with.*” We need to understand the nuances of each side of the equation and consider the implications for all lives mentioned in a parable.

The Parable of the Great Day of Judgment

(Matthew 25:31-46)

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory all the holy angels will be with him.
He will sit on the throne of his glory and all the nations will be gathered before him.*

The Son of Man was a very well-known **apocalyptic figure** to the Jewish audience of Yeshua, the Jewish Jesus. He is found in the *Book of Daniel* and *The Book of Enoch*. In this parable, the *Son of Man* oversees the *Great Day of Judgment*. The only comparable event in the *Jewish Scriptures* is *The Great Flood*. Both events are God's way of *purifying the Earth* from the evil actions of humans. Please consider the opening scene of this parable:

- *The Son of Man is sitting on a throne in a position of authority.*
- *He is backed by supernatural angels.*
- *In front of the Son of Man are all of the nations on earth.*

This is a supernatural global event in which humans are the powerless creatures. Individuals stand before the *Son of Man* as members of nations. This is not a *Jewish or Christian thing*.

*The Son of Man separates the members of nations one from another,
as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.
He sets the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left.*

Be sure to note that the Son of Man is described in terms relating to a shepherd and that everyone on earth is placed in one of two groups.

*Then the King will say to those on his right hand,
"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom
prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

Notice the switch from "Son of Man" to "The King" – from shepherd to **ruler/judge**. It is also important to note the following:

- *He is speaking to the group on his right ("the sheep").*
- *"Come" – they are about to go somewhere else.*
- *"you blessed of My Father" – They have been blessed by "God" (My Father).*
- *"inherit the Kingdom prepared for you" – They are no longer members of separate nations. They all belong to the one Kingdom – and it is on earth.*
- *"prepared at the time of the creation of the heavens and the earth" – It has been waiting for this day to take place since the Seventh Day of Creation.*

Yeshua's Jewish followers recognized that the link between his words and the Creator's Blessing in Genesis 1 (below is a popular English translation):

Have dominion over the fish of the Sea,
the winged creatures of the Heaven,
and over everything that moves on the Earth.

The words "have dominion" are not an accurate translation of the Hebrew word. *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Volume 3* provides the key for translating it:

*The basic meaning is not "to rule over" or "have dominion."
It actually denotes the travelling around of the shepherd with his flock."¹*

The Creator created humans to be His co-shepherds over all living things – including other humans. Now let's update the translation:

Be My Co-Shepherds over the fish of the Sea,
the winged creatures of the Heaven,
and over everything that moves on the Earth – including humans.

The key for discovering what "*the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" means are found in the story of *Day Seven*:

*In the Seventh Day the Creator completed His work
and He rested in the Seventh Day.*

The key is the phrase "and He rested."

*A deity rests in a temple, and only in a temple.
When the deity rests it means that "he is taking command;"
"mounting to his throne to assume his rightful place and his proper role."²*

The Creator's Temple is "The Heavens and the Earth" and "*when He rested*" He established His Kingdom – a Kingdom of Co-Shepherds. Now think about the things shepherds do to care for their flocks as you read what people in the group on the right did:

- *The least of my brothers were hungry and you gave them food.*
- *The least of my brothers were thirsty and you gave them drink.*
- *The least of my brothers were strangers and you took them in.*
- *The least of my brothers were naked and you clothed them.*
- *The least of my brothers were sick and you visited them.*
- *The least of my brothers were in prison and you came to them.*

The *King* identified himself with the “*least members*” of all nations – *they were “his brothers.”* Why did he view them that way? The answer is also found in Genesis 1:

*The Creator created humankind in His image,
with the image of the Creator He created him,
male and female He them.*³

Every human is either a brother or sister of everyone else, from *the most powerful leaders to least members of the nations*. Now let’s continue with Yeshua’s parable.

*And the Son of Man will say to those on the left hand,
“Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire!”*

People in that group wanted to know why the *King* “*cursed them.*” Here is his answer:

- *The least of my brothers were hungry and you did not give them food.*
- *The least of my brothers were thirsty and you did not give them drink.*
- *The least of my brothers were strangers and you did not take them in.*
- *The least of my brothers were naked and you did not clothe them.*
- *The least of my brothers were sick and you did not visit them.*
- *The least of my brothers were in prison and you did not come to them.*

The Hebrew word “**bless**” means “**to empower the thing blessed to do what it had been created to do.**”

*The people in the group on the left had been “empowered to be
the Creator’s Co-Shepherds, but they didn’t do it.*

The people in the group on the right had a different destination.

They shall go away into eternal life.”

Keep in mind that is a parable – *not divine law*. Yeshua challenged his followers to “*look into the parable and their own lives*” and consider what they saw.

- *Consider how leaders and members of nations viewed “their least members.”*
- *Consider why all of those people lacked food, water, clothing and shelter.*
- *Consider the relationships between members of nations.*
- *Consider why sick and imprisoned members were left alone.*

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

(Luke 15:4-7)

The title of this parable wasn't provided by Yeshua, it was added by publishers of English translations. It is best to simply ignore the titles and subtitles follow the words of the text.

*“Which person among you,
having a hundred sheep and losing one out of them . . .”*

That question caught the attention of his audience very quickly because *“he wasn't speaking to the least members of the nation.”* Most members of the audience would have answered Yeshua's question: *“Not I.” they did not own a hundred sheep. But, everyone would have been impressed by the owner's recognition that a single sheep was missing from such a large flock.*

A poor person might own about five sheep, so noticing that only four were grazing on a hillside would be easy. However, one sheep missing from a flock with hundred would be easy to overlook. In this parable, as soon as the owner recognizes his loss, he takes whatever steps are needed in order to bring the group to wholeness. This reveals something even more remarkable about this shepherd -- *he was familiar enough with all of the animals in his flock.*

Yeshua is asking the audience to consider the possibility that they too have lost something, or someone, as well -- *but they have not noticed it yet. Before a search can begin, they must know what, or who, is no longer there.* Yeshua wasn't talking about animals – *he told them to make sure all members of their families and circles of friends were there.* I suggest that people make a list of their names and contact info. Now let's return to the parable again.

*“ . . . will not he leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness
and go after the lost until he finds it?”*

Notice that the sheep are *“in the wilderness,”* not grazing in a pasture close to home. There is always the possibility that the shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness to find one animal that strayed, will have at the end of the day, only one sheep -- *sheep are not among the animal kingdom's brightest creatures.* Sheep stray. There are predators and hazards. But this owner has lost a sheep and, in desperation, does what he can to find it.

He is so concerned about the one lost sheep that he not only “leaves,” but *“leaves behind”* the other ninety-nine. *That missing “one out of one hundred” is as important to him as all the others – something like a parent would feel if he suddenly learned that one of his children was gone!*

“And finding the lost sheep, he put it up on his shoulders, and rejoiced.”

Whether or not that sheep cared one iota about being found is irrelevant to the parable. But according to farmers, it would not have been very happy about being carried on the owner's shoulders. As a matter of fact, there may have been a bit of a struggle. The thing that stands out the most is the joy of the owner at that moment.

*He has found the sheep that strayed.
Now his flock is complete!*

His joy continued to increase. After returning to the flock, he guided the flock back home.

*“And coming into the house he called together friends and neighbors and said:
‘Rejoice together with me, because I have found my sheep -- the lost one!’”*

Instead of not telling anyone about his problem, he let his friends and neighbors know about the happy outcome -- *and as the host he also provided the hospitality*. Yeshua was making another important point here.

If a person became that excited about finding one sheep, how much more excited should people be when people are helped by God’s co-shepherds?

Now get ready for the surprise ending Yeshua has instore for the audience:

*“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven
at one sinner repenting than at ninety-nine righteous,
those who have no need of repentance.”*

What sinner is Yeshua talking about? Was the sheep that strayed away the sinner? In a lot of sermons, that sheep magically becomes a church member that has strayed from the church. But in this parable it was just a sheep, not a person.

The idea that someone, let alone ninety-nine such someones, “do not need repentance” tends to be overlooked by members of churches today, where the prevailing view is that everyone needs to repent. If there are ninety-nine folks in the neighborhood who have nothing to repent for, we really are in the land of fantasy rather than reality.

The main figure in the parable is ***the owner***, not the sheep. He is the one that realizes he has lost something of value to him. He is the sinner in the parable too – and he immediately did what sinners are required to in the Jewish culture – *teshuvah* (turns around/repents). “Repentance” means turning around and getting back on track.

- *He did not prevent the sheep from straying.*
- *He searched for the sheep and found it.*
- *He restored the flock to what it was before the sin.*
- *He repaired the damage caused by the sin.*

The title given to the parable -- *The Lost Sheep* – clearly doesn’t apply. Maybe we should call it the parable of *the Initially Oblivious Owner* or *the parable of the Happy Repentant Shepherd*. “*The idea of shepherding*” connects this parable to the parable of the *Great Day of Judgment*. *One shepherd took care of sheep, the other shepherds “shepherded members of their nation*. Think of the joy and happiness created in the lives of those fed, given drinks, clothed, sheltered and visited. Think of the happiness and joy of those that “**shepherded**” them *and the King of the Creator’s Kingdom! God cares about people, but he empowered people to be co-shepherds.**

Conclusion

I began this newsletter with this question -- *What is your philosophy of life?* As you read the two parables, did you notice things that “felt right”?

- *How about the Standard the King used to judge people from all nations?*
- *How about the actions of the shepherd that rescued the lost sheep?*

Incorporate ideas from the parables into your **beliefs about** *who and what you are, how to have different types of relationships (with your spouse/partner, children, extended family, circles of friends and strangers), how you spend your time, what you value and standards to judge your actions and the actions of others. And keep an eye on your families and friends.* **BHC**

May Memorials

In Loving Memory

**SIDNEY
PERRY
DOSH, JR.**

**Born: October 18, 1938
Died: May 17, 2006**

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to seek those
qualities of mind and heart which they
shared when we walked life's journey
together.*

*May we help to bring closer to fulfillment
their highest ideals and noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our loyalty to
those things which we valued and shared --
faith, love, peace and devotion and our
biblical heritage. As long as we live, they
too will live; for they are now a part of us,
as we remember them.*

In Loving Memory

**SIDNEY
BERRY
WARD, SR.**

**October 3, 1891
May 27, 1976**

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

*(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor Reflections - The New Mahzor - The Prayer Book Press)

Remembering those who came before us is a very important part of the Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is our privilege to honor them by the BHC Memorials are printed in this newsletter. The Memorial Garden is on the website at <http://www.biblicalheritage.org> . Please visit it the next time you are on the Internet and stop back by often. If you would like to add your loved one to this section, send the information to us. There is no charge, but donations are accepted. Remember those who have meant so much to you with a BHC Memorial.

* The primary source for the *Parable of the Lost Sheep* is *Short Stories By Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* By Amy-Jill Levine © 2014; HarperCollins Publishers, Broadway, NY; pp. 34-41. I highly recommend this book!

¹ *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Volume 3* by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner; © 1996 by E. J. Brill; New York, NY; p. 1190 col. a-b

² The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origin Debate by Dr. John Walton; pp. 71 & 75.

³ Genesis 1:27