

Fixed Metaphors

Finding Meaning in Our Story

April 07, 2024

Today we're exploring how God uses this world to communicate His Word. Cuz from seeds to stones, He sure seems to love making metaphors out of our everyday lives. But the more symbolic His speech, the more meaning we can miss – like last week; who ever considered that literal cornerstones might unlock mountains of meaning! So, it's vital that we learn to slow down to look around for anything profound in the everyday lives we lead. Cuz every little word from God is a huge step toward life; and to hear them all, you gotta ask: **Where is God speaking to you?**



Now, here at His Place, I know most of you wanna raise your hand to say, "Duh, He speaks through His Word, I thought you were a pastor." And you're right; but, are you sure you're picking up everything God's laying down? Cuz **even when we're listening, it's easy to miss a meaning.**



For example, you ever go to a good action movie and walk out thinking about car chases and kung fu while your more brainy buddies are discussing the deep symbolism and clever metaphors?



Inception, The Matrix, and The Life of Pi are all action-packed, but also meant to make us contemplate the nature of the actual truth we trust. While Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings, and Star Wars all intended to get us philosophizing about our personal relationship with good and evil. And WALL-E, Avatar, and King Kong all snuck in subtle messages about humanity's dangerous relationship with nature. Did you catch 'em all?



It's okay if not, cuz those are 'hidden meanings' and by definition, **they're supposed to be buried beneath the surface.** But – the whole reason we hide them comes from how happy humans are to find them! Because the chemical for pleasure, dopamine, is directly connected to all the things that could lead to a potential payoff. Y'know how Pavlov's dogs started salivating at the ding of a bell because it meant dinner was approaching? Well, **anticipating a reward really rings our bell, too!** We actually get high on searching and seeking when it leads to digging and finding!



And that means **we're all wired to look for hidden meanings** because unearthing anything previously unseen has the same pleasurable payoff as a treasure hunt. And besides, just look around – all human history makes it easy to see: **finding meaning is a drug we're all addicted to!**

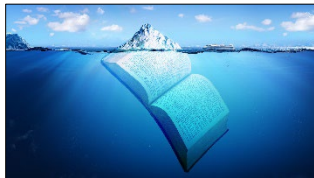
But here's why all that matters; when God decided to communicate His Word – the signature style of His speech was the same as our favorite filmmakers: **seemingly straightforward stories, with a hidden, deeper meaning!** Especially when explaining Scripture to His disciples:

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the Word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. – Mark 4:33-34 NIV

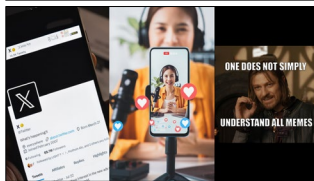
And just in case we'd ever *question* whether the *hunt* for more meaning in *His Word* was worth our effort, **Jesus explicitly promised the satisfying payoff that motivates our pursuit:**

I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. – Luke 11:9 NIV

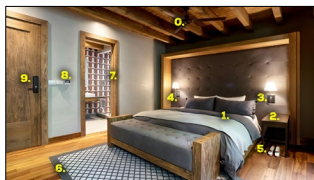
But, although that's great, you gotta wonder, *what's the point?* Why wire us to want this whole 'hide and seek' *hunt* for hidden meaning instead of just laying it all out *plainly*?



Well, there's at least *three* good reasons for all the *metaphoric meaning* and *symbolic stories*: **1. They help us receive the truth, 2. They help us perceive the truth, and 3. They help us believe the truth.** And those are critical *helps* cuz His Word can only *save* us when we *hear* it, *understand* it, and ultimately *live* it! Which *are* the steps Paul *praises* for followers:



[We] thank God continually because, when you received [into your heart] the Word of God, which you heard from us, you *accepted* it not as a human word, but [perceived it] as it actually is, the Word of God, which is indeed *at work* in [the lives of] you who believe. – 1 Thessalonians 2:13 NIV



So, to see how symbolic words help *us* through *these* steps, let's start with how **they help us receive the truth.** Cuz **we can't do anything with truth until we actually obtain and retain the truth.** It's our *top* priority:



[Like God commands Ezekiel:] Receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. – Ezekiel 3:10 NKJ



But the truth *is*, **the truth is big!** And if you've ever tried to teach anybody *anything*, you know **our attention span is small.** I mean, the *pinnacle* of our *information exchange* has been reduced to *tweets*, *shorts*, and *memes*. *Why?* Cuz **learning is hard and we like easy!** So, for us to *hear out* and hold *on* to massive amounts of *information*, it needs to feel as *effortless* as social media *scrolling*. And thanks to God, *it is*.

You ever hear of a memory palace? It's a *method* that we've used *throughout* human history when we need to *remember* a *lot* of *specific* stuff. In fact, most World Memory Champions (*yes, it's a thing!*) use *it* to memorize hundreds of *faces*, abstract *images*, and over a thousand *digits* in under *30 minutes*. And all we have to do is **attach new information to things we already know;** like your *home*. So, if your *bed* represents the number 1, your *slippers* are attached to 5, and the *bathroom* is a 7 – you can remember the number 1-5-7 by imagining you woke from *bed* and put on your *slippers* to go to the *bathroom*. All we really have *remember* is the everyday *life* we lead.

And is it *hard* to memorize the location and purpose of your *car*, *dishwasher*, or *lawnmower*? *No!* That's just *life*; life is a *huge* collection of *people*, *places*, and *things* that we *experience* and *remember* without effort. And that means we're ready to *attach* and remember *new ideas* to millions of things we *already* know – like *seeds*, *soil*, *fruit*, *stones*, *pillars*, and *hearts*. **Life is our enormous and unforgettable memory palace just waiting for new meaning.**

And again, we *know* this is God's M.O. cuz He tells us *plainly* how He *always intended* for things like the *shallow* religious practices of everyday *OT life* to lead us to His *deeper, hidden* truth:

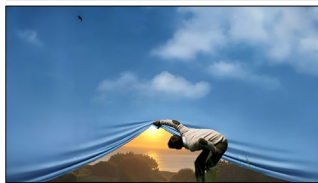
[About the first covenant, the tabernacle, the priests, holy bread, ark, altar, and holy of holies, we're told:] This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were *not* able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. – Hebrews 9:9 NIV

The law is only a *shadow* of the good things that are coming—*not the realities themselves*. For this reason it can never, by the same **[symbolic]** sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, *make perfect* ... But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. – Hebrews 10:1-3 NIV

And atoning for *sins* is a very *real* concept we *must* remember! So *sacrifice* was *made* a symbolic component of life so we'd have *something* to attach God's *bigger* truth to. And in the same way, this *whole life* is full of *shallow* things *waiting* to reveal their *deeper* meaning. So don't get it *backward*, **truth doesn't depend on this world, this world depends on truth**. Everything God created down *here* is a simplified and symbolic *shadow* of an infinite and incredible *reality* up *there*!



Here's why that's great: **Whether we catch the intention or miss the meaning; the symbols stick**; just *waiting* for us to find the meaning. And once you see this world as the memory palace created to *catalogue* and *connect* us to the truth *hidden* in His Word, then all those strange symbols in Scripture start to **help us perceive the truth**.



For since the creation of the world God's invisible **[aka hidden]** qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, – Romans 1:20 NIV



And *that's* a necessary step, cuz **understanding the truth is what makes it worth remembering**. In fact, *perceiving* is the second *half* of *receiving*:

[Like God commands Ezekiel:] Receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. – Ezekiel 3:10 NKJ



Which essentially means, **“Dig for the deeper meaning!”** Cuz it's what God asks after His Word has *already* been *heard*. It's more like the English expression, **“Give ear to my words.”** – asking for the listener to make an *effort* to truly *pursue* the meaning of what's being said.

And sometimes, **it takes seeing the meaning in symbolic story to dig up and discover the message hidden in our own lives**. Like the time King David was *somehow* oblivious to his own *adultery* and *murder* in the *Bathsheba* blunder and his prophet *Nathan*, wanted him to see his *sin*. Nathan had to make up a *shallow* story about “*some rich guy*” who stole and killed some poor guy's “*sheep*” so *David* could see the *deeper* dilemma more *easily*. And sure enough:

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, **You are the man!** **[You big dummy!]** – 2 Samuel 12:5-7 NIV

Sometimes we're just too *close* to something to see it; and that's when **it takes a shift in perspective to finally get the picture**. If we can catch the *same message* hidden in a *different story*, it can start a chain reaction of *understanding the meaning* in our *own lives*. That's how watching WALL-E might make you an *environmentalist* and Lord of the Rings can *inspire* stronger moral convictions. Cuz **metaphors can compress life's complex concepts into easily understood images**.

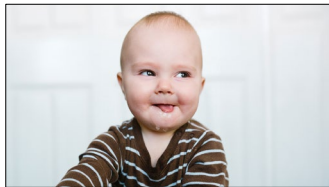
And as we start to *perceive* what we *receive*; those previously unseen layers of *new meaning* **help us believe the truth**. Because hearing and understanding is only half the battle, **believing the truth means rejecting the rest**. And it's part of the main reason *Jesus* gives His disciples for His speech:



This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. **[Why?]** For this people's heart has become calloused – Matthew 13:13-15 NIV



Y'see, the Pharisees *received* God's Word, but *wouldn't* dig deeper to *perceive* it and *that* revealed what their hearts really *believed*. Cuz **our pursuit proves our purpose and passion**. If we *believe* we already *have* the *whole* truth, we *won't* dig deeper – but if we trust there's still *more* to see that only *God* can give, we'll follow Him until we *find* the *real* meaning and *real* reward that *really* rings a *real* believer's bell!



Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the *blind* **[but believing]** will see **[deeper]** and those who **[think they already]** see will become blind." Some Pharisees ... asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you *were* blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. – John 9:39-41 NIV



For the **[weirdly written]** Word of God is alive and active ... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. – Hebrews 4:12-13 NIV

By being full of strange symbols that continue to *confuse* those too *prideful* to pursue *God's* help.

For God is not the author of confusion **[Shallow believers are; cuz]** – 1 Corinthians 14:33 NKJ

Where *envy* and *self-seeking* exist, confusion and every evil thing are *there*. – James 3:16 NKJ

So, **Where is God speaking to you?** *Literally everywhere!* But the real question is, **are you listening?** Because you can't receive and perceive the deeper meaning *hidden* in *your* life until you truly *believe* **all truth does depend on God's Word**. So, *do you?* It's easy to tell: when you're having trouble finding meaning in any area of your life, **are you turning to His Word?** And just how *passionate* is your pursuit? Ask yourself. And answer *honestly*.

Sometimes it *seems* easier to sit through life as a *simple* and *somewhat* satisfying movie without *worrying* about any deeper meaning – but *here's* the question: **why would you accept that** when we're *wired* to enjoy life as an *action-packed*, *mind-blowing*, *blockbuster?*! You *wouldn't!*

But, if you *have*, **it just takes three things to flip the script**: an open *heart*, and an open *mind*, and an open *Bible*. Cuz *that's* how we pursue the *only* Author with words that give *our* life *real meaning*.