

Don't dissect the parables

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Parables aren't too helpful, are they? Here's what would be helpful: six steps to better discipleship. Or the three secrets of the kingdom of God, spelled out in an acrostic.

If only Jesus' teachings were as simplistic as they are often portrayed. If only parables were neatly packaged moralisms. If only these stories were clearer, perhaps packaged as an easy-to-read policy manual or employee handbook—that sort of thing.

It's just so much work to try to dissect them for their meaning. It takes a lot of effort to carefully analyze parables for hidden allegory, to crack the imagery and reach some clear and simple meaning beneath, something with easy-to-read instructions.

This morning, my breakfast cereal box did not contain a parable decoder ring. I did not get one. No one did—not me, not my kids, not you and not the crowds who listened 2,000 years ago. That's because there is no better way to suck the life out of a parable than to explain it, to decode it, to finalize the meaning of it.

That's not how parables are. They aren't to be studied and interpreted so much as to be experienced. We don't figure them out; they figure us out.

A parable is like a living thing—a growing organism of meaning. Yeah, you can dissect it to try to understand it. But to do so is to kill it.

See, I'd love to understand my husband better. I'd love to know how he works and what he means. I'm a bit more likely to get there if I experience him in my life everyday than, say, by autopsy—by which I may see some sort of mechanical meaning but in so doing prevent him from ever again changing me, interpreting me,

figuring me out. A living thing changes—and changes us.