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The Parable Of The Lily

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795582881185329

Unearthing Grace: The Timeless Wisdom of The Parable Of The Lily

In a world that often measures worth by what is new, shiny, and instantly gratifying, there is profound power in stories that celebrate patience, forgiveness, and unexpected beauty. One such narrative, **The Parable Of The Lily**, has quietly nestled itself into the hearts of readers across generations. Written by Liz Curtis Higgs and beautifully illustrated by Nancy Munger, this children's book is far more than a simple Easter story. It is a layered allegory that speaks to the human condition—our tendency to discard what we do not understand, and the breathtaking redemption that comes when we learn to wait. For parents, educators, and spiritual seekers alike, this parable offers a gentle yet profound lesson in grace, timing, and the transformative power of love.

Understanding **The Parable Of The Lily** requires peeling back its simple exterior. On the surface, it tells the story of a young girl named Maggie who receives a mysterious gift from a neighbor. Disappointed by a seemingly dead bulb, she tosses it aside, only to discover months later that it has bloomed into a magnificent lily. But the true depth of the parable lies in its spiritual and emotional resonance. It mirrors the Christian narrative of Easter—death giving way to resurrection—but it also transcends religious boundaries to speak to anyone who has ever felt overlooked, forgotten, or impatient. In this article, we will explore the background, themes, lessons, and lasting impact of this beloved story, uncovering why it remains a staple in homes and classrooms around the world.

The Origin of The Parable Of The Lily

The Parable Of The Lily was first published in 1997 as part of Liz Curtis Higgs's "Parable Series," which includes other titles like *The Parable of the Good Shepherd* and *The Parable of the Talents*. Higgs, a bestselling author and speaker, designed each book to introduce children to the core messages of Christianity through everyday, relatable situations. The lily parable, however, holds a special place because it directly echoes the Easter story without ever mentioning the crucifixion explicitly. Instead, it uses the life cycle of a bulb to illustrate the concept of dying to self and being born anew.

The inspiration for the story came from Higgs's own gardening experiences and her desire to create an Easter book that focused on the joy of the resurrection rather than the sorrow of the cross. She often notes that children can struggle with the violence of the crucifixion narrative, but a lily bulb planted in the ground—seemingly dead, then bursting into life—offers a gentle analogy. This makes **The Parable Of The Lily** a valuable tool for parents who wish to discuss themes of forgiveness, patience, and new beginnings with their children in a non-threatening, artistic way.

Plot Summary: A Story of Disappointment and Discovery

The narrative centers on a young girl named Maggie. On a cold, gray day, a neighbor named Mr. Putter gives her a mysterious package. Inside is what appears to be a dry, shriveled brown bulb. Maggie is crestfallen. She had hoped for something exciting—a toy, a puppy, or a shiny present. Instead, she receives "a dead onion."

Disappointed, she places the bulb in a small pot, waters it halfheartedly, and soon forgets about it. In her frustration, she even sets the pot aside on the porch, where it is repeatedly knocked over and ignored.

Months pass. Winter turns to spring. One morning, Maggie awakens to a stunning sight: from the neglected pot rises a tall, elegant stalk crowned with a brilliant white lily. The flower is so beautiful that it takes her breath away. In that moment, Maggie realizes her mistake. She had judged the gift too quickly. The bulb was not dead—it was dormant. It needed time, cold, and darkness to prepare for its glorious bloom. The story concludes with Maggie rushing to thank Mr. Putter and learning that the best gifts often arrive in humble packages, requiring patience and faith to reveal their true worth.

This simple narrative is enriched by Higgs's lyrical prose and Munger's warm, detailed illustrations. But the real magic of **The Parable Of The Lily** lies in its allegorical layers, which we will now unpack.

Key Themes in The Parable Of The Lily

The Parable Of The Lily is remarkably rich in thematic content. Below are the central themes that resonate with both children and adults.

Patience and the Value of Waiting

Perhaps the most obvious lesson is the importance of patience. Maggie's initial reaction—impatience and disappointment—is entirely relatable. We live in a culture that demands instant gratification. A bulb that takes months to bloom feels like a failure. Yet the story gently teaches that some of the most beautiful outcomes require the longest waiting periods. This theme aligns with the horticultural truth that many bulbs need a period of cold dormancy (vernalization) to flower. Spiritually, it echoes the biblical concept of "waiting on the Lord." For children, it offers a tangible example that good things come to those who wait—and who care for things even when they seem lifeless.

Forgiveness and Second Chances

A deeper layer of **The Parable Of The Lily** involves forgiveness. Maggie did not just neglect the bulb; she rejected it. She left it exposed to the elements, let it get knocked over, and essentially abandoned it. Yet the lily still bloomed. This speaks to the unconditional nature of grace. The bulb (representing God's love or the potential within each person) did not hold a grudge. It simply did what it was created to do: grow and bloom. Maggie, in turn, must forgive herself for her hasty judgment. The story implies that it is never too late to appreciate what we have overlooked, and that forgiveness can bloom even from neglect.

Humility and the Hidden Nature of True Worth

The bulb's appearance—brown, wrinkled, and lifeless—is a powerful metaphor for humility. Things of great value often begin in unassuming forms. **The Parable Of The Lily** teaches children (and adults) not to judge by outer appearances. The most precious gifts may come wrapped in plain paper. The most beautiful souls may hide behind rough exteriors. This theme encourages readers to look beneath the surface, whether in people, situations, or even themselves.

The Easter Connection: Death and Resurrection

While the story is suitable for year-round reading, its strongest resonance is during the Easter season. The bulb being buried in the soil parallels Jesus's burial in the tomb. The long winter mirrors the darkness of Holy Saturday. The sudden, glorious bloom evokes the resurrection morning. Liz Curtis Higgs intentionally crafted the narrative so that parents can gently introduce the concept of life after death without needing to describe the crucifixion in graphic detail. The lily itself has long been a symbol of Easter in Christian tradition, representing purity, hope, and new life. Thus, **The Parable Of The Lily** serves as a beautiful allegorical bridge for faith conversations.

How to Use The Parable Of The Lily in Teaching and Parenting

This story is not just a read-aloud book; it is an interactive experience. Below are practical ways to incorporate its lessons into home, school, or church settings.

- Plant a real lily bulb together: After reading the book, give each child a bulb to plant in a pot. Over the following weeks, water it, talk about patience, and observe the slow growth. This hands-on activity reinforces the story's message.
- Discuss times of waiting: Ask children to share a time they had to wait for something important—a birthday, a vacation, a new sibling. Compare that feeling to Maggie's experience and the eventual joy of the bloom.
- Explore forgiveness: Use the story to talk about how Maggie neglected the bulb, yet the bulb still bloomed. Ask: "Have you ever been forgiven even when you didn't deserve it?" Or, "Is there someone you need to forgive, like the bulb forgave Maggie?"
- Create art projects: Have children draw or paint their own "ugly bulb" and then its beautiful flower. Discuss how people can look ordinary on the outside but have amazing talents or kindness inside.
- Connect to Easter traditions: If celebrating Easter, use the book to explain why lilies are present in churches. Compare the bulb's "death" in the ground to Jesus's burial, and the flower to His resurrection.

The Enduring Popularity of The Parable Of The Lily

Since its release, **The Parable Of The Lily** has sold millions of copies and has been translated into multiple languages. It consistently appears on lists of best Christian children's books and is a favorite among homeschooling families. Why does this particular story endure? Partly because of its beautiful illustrations and lyrical text. But more importantly, it taps into a universal human experience: the struggle to trust in processes we cannot see. Whether one is religious or not, the image of a dormant bulb bursting into life resonates as a metaphor for hope, resilience, and the possibility of transformation.

Moreover, the book's gentle approach to difficult topics makes it a safe tool for emotional education. Children learn that disappointment can lead to delight, that neglect does not necessarily destroy potential, and that the greatest surprises often come from the most unassuming beginnings. In an age of anxiety and instant gratification, these are lessons worth revisiting again and again.

Comparing The Parable Of The Lily to Other Parables

Liz Curtis Higgs's parable shares DNA with classic New Testament parables, particularly the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Like the sower, Maggie receives a gift that she initially fails to value. Like the mustard seed, the bulb starts small and seemingly insignificant but grows into something large and beautiful. However, **The Parable Of The Lily** is unique in that the focus is on the recipient's attitude rather than the sower's actions. Mr. Putter (a Christ figure) gives freely, but it is Maggie's journey of realization that drives the lesson. This makes the story more accessible for modern readers, who may identify with Maggie's skepticism before experiencing her joy.

A Modern Spin: Lessons for Adults Too

While marketed as a children's book, **The Parable Of The Lily** holds powerful truths for adults. Many of us have "dead bulbs" in our lives—dreams we gave up on, relationships we neglected, talents we buried under busyness. The story invites us to revisit those dormant areas and give them another chance. It reminds us that timing is not always under our control, and that what looks like failure may actually be preparation for a season of blooming. For adults navigating grief, career changes, or spiritual dryness, the lily's message is a balm: *It is not over. Wait. Water. Watch.*

Conclusion: The Bloom of Hope

The Parable Of The Lily is far more than a charming tale for children. It is a timeless reflection on patience,

forgiveness, humility, and the mystery of new life. Through the simple journey of a girl and a bulb, Liz Curtis Higgs offers readers a gentle yet profound glimpse into the nature of grace. The story teaches us that the ugliest beginnings can yield the most beautiful endings, that waiting is not wasted, and that love—like a lily—will find its way to the light.

Whether you read it on a spring morning with a child on your lap, or alone during a season of personal winter, let the story sink in. The bulb is in your hands. The soil is ready. All that remains is the quiet patience to let it bloom.

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