

Expressive-initiated Storytelling by Jesus in *the Gospel of Luke* in English Translation: Re-visiting the Narrative Criticism

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Article information	Abstract
Article history: Received: 21 Nov 2025 Last revised: 25 Apr 2026 Accepted: 26 Apr 2026 Available online: 29 Apr 2026	Although Kurz (1993) laid the theoretical foundation for narrative criticism, his analysis of the Gospel of Luke remains at the macro-narrative level, focusing on literary techniques across the Gospel as a whole. By contrast, this present study investigates conflict-driven narrative situations, examining scenarios in which Jesus' storytelling is used in response to accusations, complaints, and criticism. The data consist of nineteen biblical narratives from the Gospel of Luke in English translation in which Jesus responds to expressive speech acts. The conceptual framework on narrative criticism, grounded in structuralist narratology, reveals multi-layered communicative intentions, and, consequently, offers comprehensive interpretations of why Jesus, as the speaker of the parables, responds to expressive speech acts. The results show that most conflict-driven storytelling conveys moral instruction through the illocutionary force of directives aimed at inviting the hearer, the immediate audience, to commit to future actions. Evident in most parables with incomplete story elements, Jesus' responses present narrative gaps that invite not only the immediate audience but also the actual reader to interpret moral lessons from the scriptural text. Intertextuality, which provides narrative echoes to Old Testament stories, appears infrequently when Jesus addresses accusations, complaints, and criticism. In response to these face-threatening acts, parables characterized by narrative gaps without intertextuality are frequently employed.
Keywords: Expressive-initiated storytelling Narrative criticism Literary techniques Expressive speech acts Gospel of Luke	

INTRODUCTION

Pioneering in the biblical text analysis, Kurz (1993), laid the theoretical foundation for narrative criticism by proposing that a deep understanding of the *Gospel of Luke*, one of the Synoptics, can be achieved through the analysis on narrative texts and their literary techniques. This approach subsequently gave rise to literary-critical analyses of the Synoptics (e.g., Brown, 2020; Resseguie, 2005; Wheatley, 2023). Although narrative criticism has received increasing scholarly attention, scriptural analyses have largely remained broad in scope. Kurz (1993), for example, approached the *Gospel of Luke* at the macro-narrative level, exploring overall communicative purposes across the Gospel's storytelling. This perspective provides a general understanding of how biblical narratives function. Across the *Gospel of*

Luke, Jesus strategically narrates 57 stories to achieve a range of communicative intentions. However, loosely specified context may result in coarse-grained analyses of how storytelling is pragmatically used. An examination of stories throughout the *Gospel of Luke* confirms that stories told by Jesus appear under two conditions: (i) without a preceding prompt (29 out of 57, accounting for 50.88%), and (ii) with a proceeding prompt (28 out of 57, accounting for 49.12%). The former condition may be attributed to incomplete records by Luke himself; nevertheless, the investigation on storytelling under this circumstance lies beyond the scope of this study. The latter condition, in particular, is prompted by different locutionary act. According to Searle's (1976) five classifications of speech acts, the locutionary acts that invite Jesus' storytelling can be categorized into two groups: (i) directive-initiated storytelling, that is, storytelling triggered by directive speech acts; and (ii) expressive-initiated storytelling, that is, storytelling triggered by expressive speech acts, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Speech-act-initiated storytelling

	Classification	Speech act	Example	Source
1	Directive-initiated storytelling	Questioning	<i>Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?</i>	Luke 12:41
		Requesting	<i>Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.</i>	Luke 12:13
		Asking	<i>Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority.</i>	Luke 20:2
2	Expressive-initiated storytelling	Complaining	<i>Teacher, when You say these things, You insult us too.</i>	Luke 11:45
		Criticizing	<i>Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?</i>	Luke 5:30
		Accusing	<i>He casts out the demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.</i>	Luke 11:15

Across the two types of storytelling that respond to face-threatening acts, expressive-initiated storytelling predominates, occurring in 19 out of 28 instances of speech-act-initiated storytelling and accounting for 67.85%. As suggested by Ta and Filipi (2020), storytelling holds significant potential for performing pragmatic functions in response to disagreement, an expressive speech act, in educational contexts. In response to accusations, complaints, and criticism in religious contexts, storytelling remains an underexplored yet powerful tool among various responsive pragmatic strategies. Previous research (e.g., Debray & Spencer-Oatey, 2022; Mead, 2013; Ta & Filipi, 2020) highlights the diverse communicative functions of storytelling. Mead (2013), for example, identifies three primary roles: (i) explaining concepts, (ii) inspiring others, and (iii) teaching lessons. Expanding on this perspective, Ta and Filipi (2020) examine storytelling's role in social interaction, including justifying actions and resolving disagreements. Debray and Spencer-Oatey (2022) further emphasize its capacity to unite individuals around shared goals, echoing Saltmarshe's (2018) view of storytelling as a cohesive force that strengthens social bonds. Given these multiple benefits, storytelling therefore offers significant potential as a pragmatic strategy for responding to accusations, complaints, and criticism, with applications extending beyond commonly researched contexts.

In religious contexts, scholars of biblical narrative have long examined storytelling; however, its pragmatic function in addressing expressive face-threatening acts remains under-researched. Expressive-initiated storytelling should be examined to clarify why Jesus, as the speaker of the parables, responds to face-threatening acts by engaging the immediate audience through storytelling. Furthermore, a number of existing studies on the Synoptics, particularly those focusing on the *Gospel of Luke* (e.g., Cuany, 2017; Kurz, 1993; Resseguie, 2005), have adopted narrative criticism to examine literary techniques in the original Greek text. Cuany (2017), for instance, examined the narratives in the *Gospel of Luke* with a focus on the Greek text, without specifying any particular Bible translation. Likewise, Kurz (1993) and Resseguie (2005) explored the Greek text, emphasizing the narrative and literary structures. Given the range of English translations available to intercultural actual readers, the NASB stands out for its accuracy and its role in presenting English as a lingua franca, with its most recent revision in 2020. Grounded in Kurz's (1993) recommendation to explore scriptural texts through literary narrative techniques, this study scrutinizes an English version of Luke's Gospel, renowned for its distinctive portrayal of Jesus' teachings through narratives and parables, particularly when stories emerge in response to accusations, complaints, and criticism. This study aims to address two research questions:

1. In Jesus' expressive-initiated storytelling across the *Gospel of Luke*, which narrative type predominates, and what common features are evident across the narrative types that address accusations, complaints, and criticism?
2. What narrative elements are observed in Jesus' expressive-initiated storytelling, and what common features emerge across the narrative types?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Accusations, complaints, criticism, and responses to them

Before analyzing responses to accusations, complaints, and criticism, it is essential to define the scope of these expressive speech acts. Kauffeld (1998) describes an accusation as a claim against someone based solely on the speaker's words and actions, without conclusive evidence (e.g., *You were the last to leave the room, and now my laptop is missing. Did you take it?*). Boxer (1993) defines complaints as expressions of dissatisfaction directed at an interlocutor or an absent entity (e.g., *The product is defective and doesn't work as advertised.*). Criticism, according to Nguyen (2005), involves a negative evaluation of the hearer's choices, actions, or words (e.g., *Your presentation had great ideas, but the delivery felt disorganized.*). While these speech acts serve communicative functions, they can provoke negative emotions, particularly in contexts that prioritize social harmony. Despite existing research (e.g., Boxer, 1993; Kauffeld, 1998; Nguyen, 2005), responses to these speech acts remain relatively scarce.

According to El-Dakhs and Ahmed (2023), responses to accusations, complaints, and criticism can vary, ranging from acceptance to rejection or possibly ignorance. The choice of response strategies carries significant implications and may be interpreted in diverse ways. For instance, acceptance of a complaint may suggest that the speaker acknowledges the validity

of the dissatisfaction expressed and agrees to make improvements. It may also lead to a commitment by the speaker to undertake future action in order to improve the situation. Conversely, partial agreement in response to an accusation may imply some acknowledgment of its validity while suggesting that the accusation is somehow exaggerated. A complete denial indicates disbelief in the truth of the accusation, while disregarding criticism may imply that the points raised are untrue, signaling that the hearer feels disengaged from the issue. In addition to these pragmatic strategies, few studies have examined storytelling as a response to these face-threatening acts. According to Ta and Filipi (2020, pp. 4–5), one relevant “social action” of storytelling pertains to the expression of disagreements, which, as Searle (1976) notes, threatens the hearer’s positive face. Their study highlights storytelling as a social action that Ph.D. students use to manage disagreements with their professors during doctoral supervision. The research focuses on whether storytelling functions as a responsive act to “accomplish” or “resolve” disagreements (p. 4). Given this background, storytelling presents a promising avenue for responding to other expressive face-threatening acts.

Narratives, stories, and parables

Traditionally, scholars such as Smith (1980) and Polanyi (1982) have defined narrative as an overarching term that includes both stories and parables. Smith (1980, p. 228) describes a narrative as “someone telling someone else that something happened.” Phelan (2005) expands this definition by suggesting that narrative involves “somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened” (p. 18). These definitions foreground the role of significant events situated within a defined temporal context. Polanyi (1982) further distinguishes between narrative and story, arguing that while all stories are narratives, not all narratives qualify as stories. This distinction leads to the classification of narratives into at least two structural types: story-narratives and non-story narratives. With relation to the former, Hobyane (2024) categorizes story narratives into three types: habitual narratives, hypothetical narratives, and topic-centered narratives. Hypothetical narratives are particularly relevant to parables found in the Gospel, as they consist of entirely fabricated elements. The latter category, non-story narratives, may take forms such as plans and descriptions; however, the examination of non-story narratives is beyond the scope of this study.

Contemporary scholars such as Miller (2011), Nasheeda et al. (2019), and Saltmarshe (2018) have adopted a perspective on story narratives that retains similarities to traditional views. Saltmarshe (2018) defines story narratives as detailed and interconnected events unfolding over time, incorporating characters and settings that progress from beginning to end. Nasheeda et al. (2019) emphasize the logical progression of personal experiences within a clear temporal structure, demonstrating how past events influence the present and future of a narrative. Miller (2011, p. 3) parallels Hobyane’s (2024) classifications by identifying three types of story narratives: “traditional stories,” “personal experience stories,” and “created stories.” These categories include narratives drawn from classic cultural tales, individual lived experiences, and innovative blends of personal storytelling with traditional motifs, respectively. The third category can be closely aligned with hypothetical narratives, commonly identified as parables.

As defined by Booth (2005), parables are structured narratives that draw on familiar life experiences to convey profound moral truths or religious principles. Often rooted in cultural contexts, these stories serve as metaphorical tools that unpack spiritual meanings through earthly analogies. Krol's (2023) taxonomy of parables categorizes them into four types: true parables, story parables, illustrations, and parabolic sayings, each offering a unique approach to integrating narrative elements with moral or instructional content. While these classifications are useful for organizing parables, the boundaries between them may overlap, as some parables display characteristics of multiple types. Fundamentally, parables are marked by brevity, simplicity, and analogy, presenting moral lessons through concrete scenarios that resonate with audiences. By linking everyday experiences to higher truths, parables function as accessible means of conveying complex and profound spiritual concepts. This understanding aligns with Saltmarsh's (2018) discussion of the positive effects of story narratives on listeners. He suggests that storytelling can act as light, a web, and glue that fosters connection. In this sense, story narratives enhance the visualization of communication, leading to greater audience engagement. As audiences become more engaged, their shared experience fosters a sense of unity, enabling collective movement toward a common goal. To illustrate this point, consider the following parable, which compares the growth of the kingdom of God to a simple act of planting a seed:

Example 1

It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.

(New American Standard Bible, 2020, Luke 13:19)

This parable adopts an earthly phenomenon, the growth of a seed into a large tree, making it particularly relatable, especially to those engaged in agriculture or farming. The visual of a growing tree is not only familiar but also symbolic. Once the tree matures, it provides a natural habitat for birds to build their nests among its branches. This earthly scenario reflects a deeper symbolism of the Kingdom of God, emphasizing that it begins with a modest effort and expands into something significant. Once fully developed, it becomes a refuge for others. In conclusion, a story narrative serves as a comprehensive structure within which narratives and parables unfold, providing a cohesive framework for conveying meaning. A narrative involves the sequential retelling of events that engage the audience while disclosing moral lessons, whereas a parable, more specifically, employs symbolism to communicate deeper spiritual truths.

Narrative criticism is one of the key approaches used in scriptural analyses. Twenty-first-century scholars (e.g., Brown, 2020; Resseguie, 2005; Wheatley, 2023) admitted that interpreting communicative intentions across the *Gospel of Luke* through literary techniques offers more thorough understanding. An overt reliance on the historical-critical approach may prohibit a well-rounded understanding of the extent to which communicative intentions are expressed. As delineated by Resseguie (2005), narrative criticism entails a range of literary techniques, such as plot, setting, character, and point of view, enabling scriptural interpretations at a micro-narrative level with greater precision. There are two main reasons to underline this

assumption: (i) the scriptural text itself is semantically meaningful, and (ii) the relationship between the scriptural text and previous texts contributes to a more valid interpretation. The latter argument, specifically, is known as intertextuality, which usually refers back to the stories that appear in the Old Testament and are attributed to the meaning-making process. A recent study by Brown (2020) adopted narrative criticism and applied it in her scriptural analyses to arrive at narratively coherent interpretations across the four canonical Gospels (i.e., the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). She inserted that the adoptions of the literary techniques, particularly plot progression and character development, encourages reader engagement and expectations, enabling two-way communication between scriptural text encoders and scriptural text decoders. Based on this literary-critical approach, Brown (2020), Resseguie (2005), and Wheatley (2023) further distinguish scriptural text encoders into four groups: (i) historical author, (ii) implied author, (iii) speaker of the parable, and (iv) characters in the parable. Recognizing multiple voices from different narrative agents improves analytical precision by clarifying what communicative intentions are expressed through different performers. On the other hand, scriptural text decoders are classified into three groups: (i) immediate audience, (ii) implied reader, and (iii) actual reader. Recognizing multiple reader groups also raises awareness of how biblical intelligibility can be achieved across different temporal, cultural and social contexts.

Literary-narrative techniques in scriptural analysis

Literary-narrative techniques may vary from seven to ten elements. Craiker (2022), for example, identifies seven elements: (i) plot, (ii) characters, (iii) setting, (iv) conflict, (v) theme, (vi) point of view, and (vii) style and tone. These elements are evident in studies examining narratives across different contexts. Within the field of biblical narratives, the most commonly examined elements are (i) plots and (ii) characters (e.g., Bennema, 2009; Cuany, 2017; Hagan, 2019; Morgan, 2013). As articulated by Brown (2020), narrative-critical analyses that focus on plot and character are sufficient for producing narratively coherent interpretations across the four canonical Gospels. Following the Aristotelian tradition, plot was historically regarded as superior to character. In this ancient view, characters were typically one-dimensional manner and were assumed to lack development. However, Bennema (2009) argues that modern interpretations no longer classify these elements as superior or inferior but instead view them as complementary. In particular, characters in biblical narratives are not always flat or static; rather, they may exhibit (i) complexity, (ii) development, and (iii) depth of inner life. In his study, Bennema (2009) analyzed eleven characters from the Gospel of John and identified Judas and Pilate as notably complex. Both characters undergo significant development throughout the narratives, revealing their inner struggles and subsequent transformations. For instance, Judas has been characterized by themes of ‘defection,’ ‘apostasy,’ and ‘betrayal’ (p. 397). Nevertheless, the rounded characters identified in Bennema’s analysis emerge primarily from factual narratives, rather than hypothetical or created stories.

In relation to plot, various theoretical frameworks have been proposed. Morgan (2013) maintains that plots are constructed through the interaction of characters and events, emphasizing that these interactions must unfold sequentially. This view aligns with Bennema’s (2009, p. 375) definition, which asserts that “[a] story comprises two main elements:

events and characters.” Within scriptural texts, Hagan (2019) identifies the rebirth plot as a significant theme, noting that it represents a fundamental narrative structure. This theme captures “the transformative journey from death to life, emblematic of Christian resurrection beliefs” (p. 210). In the analysis of parables, this plot frequently appears across the *Gospel of Luke*, as illustrated by the parables of the Mustard Seed (Luke 13:19), the Leaven (Luke 13:21), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), and the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–36). These parables symbolize “the movement from winter to spring, sickness to health, imprisonment to liberation, shadow to reality, sleep to consciousness, despair to hope, lack of love to love, [and] death to rebirth” (Booker, 2004, p. 204).

In a narrower perspective on narrative elements, plot completeness, as conceptualized in Freytag’s Pyramid, guides hearers from beginning to end, reflecting a sequence of events that leads the audience through the narrative. However, most parables in the four Gospels are observed to lack all the elements of a complete plot. Given this distinctive characteristic, Akpan (2018), and Snodgrass (2018) pointed out that such incompleteness provokes both the hearers of the parables and the actual readers to reflect more deeply on the moral teachings embedded in these incomplete plot structures. Snodgrass (2018) raised an important point that this incompleteness functions like an open-ended question that invites various responses, thereby generating multiple interpretations. Actual readers, who are asynchronous with the speaker of the parables, are able to read the scriptural text from a bird’s eye view and contemplate their own interpretations. This feature is encapsulated as a core essence of sacred texts in religious contexts. With respect to characters, Bennema (2009) noted that the developmental complexity of characters is often less pronounced in parables than in scriptural narratives such as the life of Saint Paul, which serves as an exemplary case of character transformation. The present study, however, argues from a different perspective, especially when stories are pragmatically employed in response to expressive speech acts. The parable of the Prodigal Son, for example, demonstrates that the character of the young son exemplifies a developmental nature, depicting a well-rounded figure through life transformation. This developmental character in the parables resembles those characters presented in the biblical discourse whose lives are manifested through transformation, not only in the life of Saint Paul but also in the life of the younger son in the parable (see also Luke 15:11–32). This observation aligns with the assertions of Booker (2004) and Hagan (2019), both of whom highlight the central theme of character transformation, a journey from death to life that mirrors the Christian concept of repentance and resurrection.

METHODOLOGY

Data

Although the data used in this study were drawn from a secondary source and did not involve any human experimentation, the analysis of scriptural texts reflecting profound religious beliefs requires caution. Therefore, obtaining IRB approval from the researcher’s home institution prior to the scriptural investigation was mandatory. Unlike previous studies (e.g., Cuany, 2017; Kurz, 1993; Resseguie, 2005) that adopted narrative criticism to explore the

Gospel of Luke, this study particularly narrowed its scope to analyzing expressive-initiated storytelling across the *Gospel of Luke*. This type of storytelling occurs most frequently (19 out of 28, accounting for 67.85%). Table 2 explicates the dataset used in the analysis of this study. The presentation of this table serves two objectives: (i) to ensure the accuracy that each linguistic stimulus represents one of the expressive speech acts, and (ii) to demonstrate the biblical verses as the data sources of expressive-initiated storytelling that emerged in response to accusations, complaints, and criticism.

Table 2
Linguistic stimuli inviting Jesus' storytelling

	Linguistic stimuli	Speech acts	Narrative responses
1	"Is this not Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22)	Criticism	(1) Luke 4:25–26 (2) Luke 4:27
2	"Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" (Luke 5:30)	Criticism, Complaint	(3) Luke 5:34–35 (4) Luke 5:36 (5) Luke 5:37–39
3	"Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" (Luke 6:2)	Accusation	(6) Luke 6:3–4
4	"If this man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner!" (Luke 7:39)	Criticism	(7) Luke 7:41–42
5	"He casts out the demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." (Luke 11:15)	Accusation	(8) Luke 11:17–18 (9) Luke 11:21–22 (10) Luke 11:24–26
6	"Teacher, when You say these things, You insult us too." (Luke 11:45)	Complaint	(11) Luke 11:49–51
7	"There are six days during which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." (Luke 13:14)	Criticism Complaint	(12) Luke 13:19 (13) Luke 13:21
8	"This man receives sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:2)	Complaint	(14) Luke 15:4–6 (15) Luke 15:8–9 (16) Luke 15:11–32
9	"Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were ridiculing Him." (Luke 16:14)	Criticism	(17) Luke 16:19–31
10	"He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!" (Luke 19:7)	Accusation Criticism	(18) Luke 19:12–25
11	"Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?" (Luke 20:2)	Criticism	(19) Luke 20:9–15

As illustrated in the table above, the dataset consists of 19 stories, prompted by a total of 11 linguistic stimuli. Some stimuli elicited multiple stories such as Luke 5:30, Luke 11:15, and Luke 15:2. These three linguistic prompts: (i) accusations, (ii) complaints, and (iii) criticism, each resulted in the sequential narration of three stories. The stimuli can be classified as expressive face-threatening acts, which inherently damage the positive face of the hearer, in this context mainly, though not exclusively, the speaker of the parables. These face-threatening acts, directed toward Jesus and His disciples, are elicited by various groups, including the Pharisees, scribes, elders, lawyers, and the general crowds, who can be categorized as the immediate audience.

Data analysis

To address the two research questions, 67.85% of speech-act-initiated storytelling, identified as expressive speech acts, was examined. Drawing on the conceptual framework of narrative criticism grounded in structuralist narratology (Brown, 2020; Dawson & Mäkelä, 2022; Resseguie, 2005; Van Hulle, 2024), this study adopts literary narrative techniques to analyze expressive-initiated storytelling across the *Gospel of Luke* at two levels: (i) an overall analysis of narrative types and (ii) a detailed analysis of narrative elements.

Narrative types

Following Hobyane (2024) and Miller (2011), stories were classified into three types: (i) traditional stories, (ii) personal experience stories, and (iii) created stories. In relation to narrative criticism (Brown, 2020; Resseguie, 2005), the categories proposed by Hobyane (2024) and Miller (2011) are equivalent to (i) stories referencing the Old Testament, (ii) narrations concerning Jesus' crucifixion, and (iii) parables, respectively. In this process, 67.85% of speech-act-initiated storytelling, identified as expressive speech acts, was analyzed in terms of the narrative types. To address the first research question, frequencies were calculated and the percentages were reported to determine which narrative type prevails when Jesus responds to accusations, complaints, and criticism.

In light of narrative criticism (Brown, 2020; Dawson & Mäkelä, 2022; Resseguie, 2005; Van Hulle, 2024), the coding schemes, together with examples for the three narrative types, are presented as follows. The first narrative type, *traditional stories or stories referring the Old Testament*, is illustrated when Jesus commenced His public ministry in His hometown of Galilee and faced skepticism regarding His teachings and miracles. This skepticism prompted Him to engage in storytelling. He recounted the narrative of the prophet Elijah (as shown in Example 2), who performed an act of salvation for a widow in Israel.

Example 2

²⁵ But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of **Elijah**, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a severe famine came over all the land; ²⁶ and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to **Zarephath**, in the land of **Sidon**, to a woman who was a widow.

(New American Standard Bible, 2020, Luke 4:25–26)

In this narrative type, Jesus, the speaker of the parable, references three names that relate to a story from the Old Testament, which can be found in 1 Kings, Chapter 17, Verses 7–16. The mentioned names, Zarephath, Sidon, and Elijah, frame the story within a historical context, also referred to as intertextuality according to Resseguie (2005), who asserts that shared background knowledge is crucial for both the speaker of the parable and the immediate audience. The communicative intention of recounting this type of story may not be achieved if the immediate audience lacks knowledge of the Old Testament. This is also true for actual readers who study the scriptural texts. Learning the *Gospel of Luke* requires substantial knowledge of the Old Testament.

The second narrative type, *personal experience stories or narrations concerning Jesus' crucifixion*, is when Jesus, the speaker of the parable, narrates His own death on the cross. Although Jesus had not yet experienced the crucifixion at the time of His narrative, He was fully aware that He would endure profound suffering, as the Father had sent Him on this mission of salvation. Example 3 unfolds following Peter's response to His question, "Who do the people say I am?" (Luke 9:18), to which Peter replied, "The Christ of God" (Luke 9:20). In verse 22, Jesus began recounting His impending death by crucifixion.

Example 3

²¹ But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, ²² saying, "**The Son of Man** must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised on the third day."

(New American Standard Bible, 2020, Luke 9:21–22)

In this second narrative type, Jesus, the speaker of the parable, narrates His own death. He commences the account by outlining the experiences He will face. He later employs passive-voice syntactic structures in which, despite being the subject, He receives actions expressed through the phrases *be rejected* and *be killed*. Although these events had not yet occurred, Jesus, the speaker of the parable, understands what lies ahead and explains the situation to the immediate audience. In a theological sense, this narration of personal experiences also requires what Resseguie (2005) describes as intertextuality because this particular account of Jesus' death and resurrection had long been mentioned by prophets in the Old Testament. To understand the speaker's communicative intention thoroughly, both the immediate audience and the actual reader requires background knowledge of the Old Testament.

The third narrative type, *created stories or parables*, occurs when He narrates a fictional story during his public ministry. This narrative type is fictional and lacks specific events or references to the past (Booth, 2005; Krol, 2023). In other word, what Resseguie (2005) described as intertextuality, which is present in the first two narrative types, does not appear in the parables. For example, an anonymous individual in the crowd asks Jesus to intervene in a family inheritance issue by telling his brother to divide their inheritance (Luke 12:13). Instead of responding directly to the request, Jesus narrated a parable.

Example 4

¹⁶ And He told them **a parable**, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive."

¹⁷ And he began thinking to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and I will store all my grain and my goods there. ¹⁹ And I will say to myself, "You have many goods stored up for many years to come; relax, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!"' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is demanded of you; and as for all that you have prepared, who will own it now?'

(New American Standard Bible, 2020, Luke 12:16–20)

Example 4 is entirely fictional; both the protagonist and the setting are anonymous and lack any historical reference, that is, there is an absence of *intertextuality* (Resseguie, 2005). Not only Jesus, the speaker of the parables, but also the characters within the parable express the central theme, which serves as a warning against greed and the pursuit of worldly possessions, emphasizing the unknown timing of life's end.

Following studies on narrative types of scriptural texts (Booth, 2005; Brown, 2020; Krol, 2023; Resseguie, 2005), eight recurring themes that expand the analytical scope to encompass the three narrative types examined in scriptural text analyses. Viewing from the perspectives of the speaker of the parables and the immediate audience, these emerging themes serve to identify distinctive features across the three narrative types, thereby providing in-depth responses to the first research question. Table 3 summarizes the eight emerging features classified under three main categories, with operational definitions that provide the researcher and research assistants with comprehensive guidelines for conducting a more rigorous and less subjective analysis of narrative types across the *Gospel of Luke*.

Table 3
Eight recurring themes

Major-level classification	Minor-level feature	Definition
Narrative structure	Character	The inclusion of human or human-like agents and their actions shapes the narrative and conveys its thematic significance.
	Temporal and spatial setting	The reference to time and place in which events unfold.
	Event sequencing	To ensure narrative coherence and clarity, a connected sequence of event from a beginning to an end shows how narrative timelines take place.
Narrative expression	Figurative language	The use of metaphor, analogy, or symbolic imagery to express meanings beyond literal meanings.
	Narrative brevity	A concise and informative narrative style that employs vivid, everyday scenarios.
	Historical rooting	The references to events that took place in the past. In some cases, this can be referred to as <i>intertextuality</i> .
Narrative intention	Moral lesson	Through the narrative elements, ethical, theological, or instructional insights are conveyed and expressed. This can be achieved explicitly or implicitly.
	Didactic purpose	The intentional aim is two-folded: (i) to respond to someone's intention, (ii) to encourage reflection on moral issues.

These eight emerging themes (Booth, 2005; Brown, 2020; Krol, 2023; Resseguie, 2005) are organized into three main classifications: (i) narrative structure, (ii) narrative expression, and (iii) narrative intention. These classifications are primarily form- and function-focused. Three minor-level features—namely characters, temporal and spatial setting, and event sequencing—are classified under narrative structure, focusing on narrative form in accordance with the conceptual framework of narrative criticism. Another three minor-level features—figurative language, narrative brevity and historical rooting—are categorized under narrative expression, likewise emphasizing narrative form. The remaining two minor-level

features, moral lesson and didactic purpose, are classified under narrative intention, focusing on narrative function. Following the eight recurring themes, the researcher, together with the research assistants, analyzed expressive-initiated storytelling throughout the *Gospel of Luke*, to examine the presence and absence of these minor-level features across each narrative type.

Narrative elements

Building on the conceptual framework of narrative criticism (Brown, 2020; Dawson & Mäkelä, 2022; Resseguie, 2005; Van Hulle, 2024; Wheatley, 2023), this study expands its scope to examine narrative elements and adopts the framework proposed by Craiker (2022), which identifies seven key components commonly found in narratives: (i) plot, (ii) characters, (iii) setting, (iv) conflict, (v) theme, (vi) point of view, and (vii) style and tone. In scriptural texts, plot and characters are the most frequently investigated elements (e.g., Cuany, 2017; Hagan, 2019; Morgan, 2013). Contemporary scholars of biblical narratives suggest that plots emerge from the interaction between events and characters, implying that these two elements are intricately interwoven. Departing from traditional views that hierarchically rank these two elements, Bennema (2009) contends that event and character function together to form a cohesive plot. To further elaborate on the concept of plot, Craiker (2022), drawing on Freytag's Pyramid, identifies five essential components of a well-structured story: (i) exposition, (ii) rising action, (iii) climax, (iv) falling action, and (v) resolution. While not all expressive-initiated stories contain all five elements, the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) exemplifies a complete narrative arc that includes all elements. Detailed information on these story elements is presented in Table 4 to demonstrate how 67.85% of speech-act-initiative storytelling was analyzed in terms of the narrative elements.

Table 4
Five story elements

Elements	Definition	Example (Luke 15:11–32)
Exposition	The beginning of a plot establishing the setting, time frame, and character introduction, helping readers comprehend the context of the story.	<i>Luke 15:11–12</i> A man with two sons receives a request from the younger son for his share of the inheritance.
Rising action	The part of a plot where the story develops through introduced conflicts that complicate the characters' lives and create suspense, leading to excitement or crises as they confront these challenges.	<i>Luke 15:13–14</i> The son then travels to a distant country and squanders his wealth.
Climax	The peak of tension and action in a plot, marking a turning point for the characters. At this stage, readers are left wondering what will happen next and whether the tensions will be resolved.	<i>Luke 15:15–16</i> When a severe famine strikes, he faces hardship and takes a job feeding pigs, enduring such hunger that he longs to eat their food.
Falling action	It occurs after the conflict begins to resolve, leading the story toward its conclusion.	<i>Luke 15:17–21</i> Recognizing that his father's servants are better off, he decides to return to his father
Resolution	The final element of a plot, serving as the conclusion of the story, which can be happy, tragic, or open to interpretation.	<i>Luke 15:22–24</i> He repents and seeks forgiveness from his kind-hearted father.

To answer the second research question, the five story elements based on Freytag's Pyramid were adopted as the coding scheme. The researcher, together with the research assistants, analyzed 67.85% of speech-act-initiated stories, all of which were identified as expressive speech acts. Each story was analyzed to determine whether the five elements were present or absent. Frequencies were then reported to identify which narrative elements appeared most frequently and which appeared least frequently.

Reliability and validity

The selection of the data used in this study and the procedures for data analysis required a high level of accuracy. Accordingly, each stage of data verification was conducted not only by the researcher who is Catholic and has studied philosophy and theology, but also by four research assistants who are not Catholic. The inclusion of non-Catholic assistants was intended to ensure that the analyses were carried out without prior theological bias. The research assistants were trained in narrative criticism of scriptural texts. To be eligible for analysis, the research assistants were required to analyze stories that did not appear in the main analysis in terms of narrative types and narrative elements. This is to ensure that they had acquired comparable research skills for conducting the analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narrative types

In expressive-initiated storytelling, Jesus, the speaker of the parables, did not use narrations described by Hobyane (2024) and Miller (2011) as personal experience stories, or by Brown (2020) and Resseguie (2005) as narrations concerning Jesus' crucifixion. The other two types: (i) stories and (ii) parables, did occur, with the latter outnumbering the former. As a responsive strategy, Table 5 shows that parables were used almost twice as frequently as stories when the speaker of the parables responded to expressive face-threatening acts.

Table 5
Distribution of narrative types

Stories	Narrations	Parables
7:19 [36.85%]	0:19 [0%]	12:19 [63.15%]

Adopting narrative criticism, Table 5 shows that 63.15% of the narrative types used in expressive-initiated storytelling were parables, which may also be described as created stories (Hobyane, 2024; Miller, 2011). These narratives are considered hypothetical or fabricated in nature. A defining characteristic of this narrative type lies in its fictional quality, as it does not refer to specific historical events or contexts and therefore lacks what Resseguie (2005) defines as intertextuality. This hypothetical nature is particularly advantageous for addressing expressive face-threatening acts, as it allows the speaker of the parables to construct a narrative freely while embedding the intended meaning within the story. This feature is especially beneficial for actual readers who are not synchronously present at the time the

parables are narrated by Jesus, since knowledge of specific references is not required. A notable example of a parable shared by Jesus occurs when He responds to a complaint raised by the Pharisees and scribes while He was associated with tax collectors and sinners.

Example 5

Scenario: While Jesus was teaching, tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to Him, eager to listen to His words. In response, the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

(New American Standard Bible, 2020, Luke 15:2)

Jesus: 8 “Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found the coin which I had lost!’

(New American Standard Bible, 2020, Luke 15:8–9)

Jesus often found Himself in the company of tax collectors and sinners, groups traditionally marginalized within Jewish society. Although these tax collectors shared a common cultural background, many were known to misuse their authority to exploit their fellow Jews. Rather than condemning their behavior, Jesus chose to embrace them, a decision that starkly contrasted with Jewish law and provoked complaints from the Pharisees and scribes, who, in this context, were categorized as the immediate audience. Instead of employing conventional pragmatic strategies to accept or reject the complaint (cf. El-Dakh & Ahmed, 2023), Jesus responded with the parable of the lost coin, conveying a profound message: sinners are likened to the lost coin, and immense rejoicing follows when they are found. In line with Booth (2005), parables typically draw on familiar life experiences to convey specific meanings. The narrative of a woman who loses one of her silver coins serves as a metaphorical device, offering spiritual insight through an earthly analogy. This parable exhibits characteristics of four types of parables: true parables, story parables, illustrations, and parabolic sayings, as identified by Krol (2023). This overlap reinforces the idea that these categories are not mutually exclusive and should not be examined in isolation.

A deeper analysis of this parable reveals Jesus’ underlying intention. Rather than justifying His association with sinners or defending their actions, Jesus uses the story of the lost coin as an invitation, which, according to Searle (1976), is categorized as a directive that subtly encourages the immediate audience to take future action. From this perspective, the parable urges the Pharisees and scribes to welcome, rather than condemn, those labeled as sinners. In addition, when re-read by actual readers who were not present synchronously, the scenario elicits moral contemplation. Aligning with Saltmarshe’s (2018) metaphor, Jesus’ use of this parable may be understood as light that clarifies the moral imperative to embrace sinners and celebrate their repentance through vivid explanation. Expanding on Ta and Filipi (2020), the parable of the lost coin fulfills a social action beyond addressing disagreements. This parable thus serves as a response to an expressive face-threatening act, especially a complaint.

Table 6
Narrative features

Major-level classification	Minor-level feature	Stories 7/19 [36.85%]	Parables 12/19 [63.15%]
Narrative structure	Character	7:7 [100%]	12:12 [100%]
	Temporal and spatial setting	6:7 [85.72%]	6:12 [50%]
	Event sequencing	6:7 [85.72%]	12:12 [100%]
Narrative expression	Figurative language	1:7 [14.29%]	12:12 [100%]
	Narrative brevity	1:7 [14.29%]	12:12 [100%]
	Historical rooting	5:7 [71.43%]	3:12 [25%]
Narrative intention	Moral lesson	3:7 [42.86%]	12:12 [100%]
	Didactic purpose	7:7 [100%]	12/12 [100%]

An in-depth analysis of 67.85% of speech-act-initiated stories reveals that parables addressing expressive speech acts are consistent in terms of their narrative features, particularly in conveying narrative intention. The focused examination of expressive-initiated storytelling provides a more specific understanding of Jesus. Evidently, both stories and parables consistently include characters, which constitute one of the two narrative structures. Drawing on Bennema's (2009) analysis of biblical characters, most characters, particularly those in stories, tend to be one-dimensional and show little to no development (e.g., King David in Luke 6:3–4). They are typically presented as flat and static, reflecting a traditional view of character construction. By contrast, a few figures in parables (e.g., the younger son in Luke 15:11–32) demonstrate complexity, development, and psychological depth. These portrayals correspond to what Hagan (2019, p. 210) refers to as the "rebirth plot," which encapsulates Christianity's central teaching, namely the belief in resurrection and repentance. In addition, both stories and parables consistently serve a didactic purpose. This shared feature underscores the role of storytelling in addressing accusations, complaints, and criticism, fulfilling functions identified by Mead (2013), such as inspiring others and conveying moral lessons, which reflect the broader nature of religious scriptures. Not only the immediate audience but also the actual readers of the scriptural texts are invited to welcome sinners rather than despise them. Expanding on the study of Ta and Filipi (2020), the parable also operates as a pragmatic strategy for managing expressive face-threatening acts beyond disagreements.

On the other hand, marked differences emerge in the use of figurative language and narrative brevity, which are under the narrative expression. Stories rarely exhibit these features (14.29% for both), whereas parables consistently include them (100% for both). This distinction aligns with Booth's (2005) definition of parables as narrative forms that employ familiar life experiences to convey profound moral truths. Such experiences are typically illustrated through metaphor, analogy, or symbolic imagery, thereby expressing meanings that extend beyond the literal and often point to abstract theological concepts. This reflects

the eloquence of the speaker of the parables in His ability to convey moral lessons through comparison without cultural specification, benefiting both the immediate audience and the actual readers. While most parables lack historical grounding and are predominantly hypothetical (Hobyane, 2024) or constructed (Miller, 2011) and lack intertextuality (Resseguie, 2005), stories are more frequently rooted in historical reference. This is exemplified in the stories of Elijah and Elisha found in Luke 4:25–26 and Luke 4:27, respectively, which evince historical connection. Based on these examples, classifying such stories as traditional stories, as proposed by Miller (2011), is well-founded. Where intertextuality involves references to the Old Testament, exploring the New Testament necessitates some engagement with the Old Testament. In other words, immediate audiences and actual readers who lack the relevant background knowledge may find it difficult to apprehend the intention of Jesus, particularly when He responds to expressive speech acts.

Narrative elements

Although narrative studies typically identify seven key story elements (cf. Craiker, 2022), biblical scriptures, when analyzed through narrative criticism, primarily emphasize events and characters, which together give rise to the plot (Bennema, 2009; Cuany, 2017; Hagan, 2019; Morgan, 2013). With regard to plot structure, both stories and parables consistently include exposition and rising action. By contrast, climax, falling action, and resolution occur less frequently in stories than in parables, with falling action and resolution being particularly scarce in stories. Table 7 presents the comparative percentages of these five plot elements across both narrative types.

Table 7
Plot elements

	Stories 7:19 (36.85%)	Parables 12:19 (63.15%)
Exposition	7:7 [100%]	12:12 [100%]
Rising action	5:7 [71.43%]	11:12 [91.67%]
Climax	3:7 [42.86%]	8:12 [66.67%]
Falling action	2:7 [28.57%]	6:12 [50.00%]
Resolution	2:7 [28.57%]	7:12 [58.33%]

Bennema (2009), Hagan (2019), and Morgan (2013) agree that the emergence of plot lies in the interaction between events and characters. This interaction provides the foundation for the consistent presence of exposition. Supporting this observation, Table 6 discloses the presence of characters in all expressive-initiated storytelling. When viewed through the lens of narrative economy (Booth, 2005; Krol, 2023; Miller, 2011; Nasheeda et al., 2019; Phelan, 2005; Polanyi, 1982; Saltmarshe, 2018; Smith, 1980), the element of exposition is never omitted in either stories or parables. Exposition is not merely a passive introduction; rather, it functions as an active rhetorical and theological device that shapes the expectations of both

the immediate audience and the actual readers, introduces dominant themes, and signals the spiritual stakes of the narrative (Hagan, 2019; Morgan, 2013). In contrast, falling action and resolution do not commonly appear in either narrative type. Stories that are typically referred to as traditional stories, commonly found in the Old Testament, are shared by both Jesus (i.e., the speaker of the parables) and His live audience (i.e., the immediate audience). Given this shared background, falling action and resolution are frequently omitted. Furthermore, the concept of incompleteness, discussed by Akpan (2018), and Snodgrass (2018), confirms the distinctive nature of these biblical narratives, in which incompleteness prompts hearers to engage in further reflection on the moral teachings. In agreement with Snodgrass (2018), this incompleteness, like an open-ended question, invites multiple interpretations that allow moral lessons to resonate with diverse audiences across different periods of time. With this feature, all expressive-initiated storytelling embraces didactic purposes.

More precisely, as Craiker (2022) explains, the five components help the audience understand the story's context, introduce conflicts, and mark pivotal turning points. Regardless of narrative type, these elements are vital, as they signify that an event has happened (Phelan, 2005; Smith, 1980). Stories, particularly those rooted in historical accounts from the Old Testament, require exposition to establish the setting, time frame, and key characters. These elements are essential for ensuring a shared contextual understanding between the speaker of the parables and the immediate audience prior to the fulfillment of responses to expressive-initiated storytelling. This is evident in Example 2, where Jesus first provides an exposition detailing the historical context of Israel during Elijah's time as part of His strategy in responding to criticism. Similarly, exposition appears consistently across all parables, even though they are classified as fictional and draw on familiar life experiences (cf. Booth, 2005). Providing a brief exposition at the outset helps the speaker of the parables convey didactic purposes more effectively. In Example 4, for instance, Jesus introduces a wealthy landowner who contemplates how to store his abundant harvest to further increase his wealth, thereby setting the stage for the narrative to function as a responsive strategy to a question.

Despite these similarities, notable differences emerge in other narrative elements, particularly falling action and resolution. According to Craiker (2022), falling action guides the story toward its conclusion, whereas resolution serves as the final plot element by providing closure. The absence of falling action and resolution in some stories can be attributed to the fact that the first three elements—exposition, rising action, and climax—already establish what has happened in the stories (Phelan, 2005; Smith, 1980). As a result, the final two elements are not always necessary, since both the speaker of the parables and the immediate audience share a common cultural understanding rooted in the Old Testament. For instance, in Example 3, Jesus provides the background of the story, including events from the time of Elijah and a widow in Sidon. However, His narrative, delivered in response to criticism, omits both falling action and resolution. In contrast, 50% of the parables Jesus used to address accusations, complaints, and criticism include falling action, and 58.33% incorporate a resolution. Although the percentages for these two narrative elements in parables are higher than those in stories, the range of 28.57% to 58.33% indicates the presence of incomplete plot structures. Supported by Akpan (2018), and Snodgrass (2018), the incomplete structure of story narratives in the biblical scriptures introduces distinctive characters that invite interpretation and reflection on moral teachings that are not explicitly stated. Consistent

with Snodgrass (2018), such narrative incompleteness functions like open-ended questions, prompting multiple interpretations of the same stories, particularly when they are re-read by actual readers across time and space, especially those described as intercultural readers in the modern world.

Another notable distinction lies in the role of characters in shaping the plot. In traditional stories, characters are always recognizable. For instance, in Example 2, figures from the Old Testament, such as Elijah, are clearly identifiable. These characters reflect a storytelling approach rooted in ancient traditions, as proposed by Aristotle, in which events take precedence over characters. As a result, characters in such narratives tend to be portrayed as flat or static, exhibiting minimal or no transformation. In particular, parables often feature non-specific or unnamed individuals, such as the moneylender (Luke 7:41–42), the rich man (Luke 16:19–31), the nobleman (Luke 19:12–25), and even metaphorical figures such as the mustard seed (Luke 13:19) and the leaven (Luke 13:21). Obviously, these characters lack depth and developmental progression. This limited development may be attributed to the brevity of both traditional and created stories, which average approximately 114.73 words. Bennema (2009) supports this observation by noting that well-developed, dynamic characters, who undergo growth and possess a rich inner life, are typically found in longer biblical narratives, such as those detailing the life of Saint Paul, where extended length allows for deeper character exploration. In line with Bennema's (2009) argument, while many parabolic figures lack developmental depth, some longer parables do exhibit character complexity. Notable examples include the Prodigal Son (545 words), the Rich Man and Lazarus (333 words), and the Nobleman (335 words), in which characters undergo moral transformation. Once character development is established, it typically aligns with the core teachings of Christianity, as highlighted by Booker (2004) and Hagan (2019), emphasizing themes such as resurrection and repentance. Actual readers, in particular, learn and contemplate these central theologies, which can be extracted even when Jesus, the speaker of the parables, uses storytelling to respond to accusations, complaints, and criticism. Thereby, narrowing the context to expressive-initiated storytelling provides a more thorough understanding of the role of storytelling in the *Gospel of Luke*.

CONCLUSIONS

Narrative criticism, grounded in structuralist narratology, has provided a deep understanding of Jesus' communicative intentions when He, as the speaker of the parables, responds to the accusations, complaints, and criticism. Expressive-initiated storytelling (67.85%) outnumbers directive-initiated storytelling (32.15%). Unlike previous studies that adopt narrative criticism, this study specifically investigated the literary narrative techniques of stories when they are used in response to expressive speech acts. The findings extend the analytical framework proposed by Ta and Filipi (2022), which suggests that storytelling can function as a pragmatic strategy to respond to disagreement. In responding to accusations, complaints, and criticism within an underexplored context, storytelling serves didactic functions: (i) responding to expressive speech acts, (ii) promoting contemplation on repentance, especially among the immediate audience.

The analysis of narrative types revealed that parables, structured stories designed to engage audiences and impart moral lessons, outnumber stories. The hypothetical and fabricated nature of these parables allows for more strategic and flexible embedding of illocutionary acts. Since parables are not bound by historical roots or factual references and thus lack intertextuality, their creation remains unconstrained and creatively open. On the one hand, both stories and parables share essential narrative elements such as exposition, rising action, and climax, with exposition present in every story. This consistent presence of exposition does not function as a passive introduction; rather, it ensures that both the speaker and the listener share a common conceptual ground before responding to accusations, complaints, and criticism. On the other hand, both narrative types often omit the falling action and resolution, especially in stories, since these elements are generally understood by both the speaker of the parables and the immediate audience. In parables, however, the omission of these two elements reinforces the sense of narrative incompleteness, thereby inviting both the immediate audience and actual readers to interpret the stories in various ways. Furthermore, the study highlights a key feature of characters, which are usually one-dimensional and lack development, presenting them as flat and static. However, in some longer parables, characters are transformed, reflecting more rounded portrayals that include growth and change. This development encapsulates a central teaching of Christianity: the theme of resurrection.

While the exclusive focus on the *Gospel of Luke* offers valuable insights, it may limit a broader understanding of biblical narratives, particularly in relation to the Synoptic Gospels. Future research may adopt narrative criticism to compare expressive-initiated storytelling across the Synoptic Gospels, including the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, to investigate whether different authors contributed distinct narrative literary techniques, even when addressing accusations, complaints, and criticism. Based on this study's analysis, 32.15% of the stories were found to be directive-initiated storytelling, a category that has not yet been explored in this study. Further research may examine whether narrative literary techniques differ when storytelling occurs in response to other classifications of speech acts as triggering stimuli.

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