

# Figures of Speech

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A figure of speech is a literary mode of expression in which words are used out of their literal sense to suggest a picture or image.

## Simile:

- A direct comparison of two things that are essentially different. Characterized by use of: *like, as, so*

Example: James 1:10-11, Song of Solomon 2:2-3, Matthew 23:27

## Metaphor:

- An indirect comparison of two things
- Asserts that one thing is another
- Substitution of the name of one thing for another
- Like a simile but the connectives of *like, as, so* are left out

Example: Galatians 2:9 – “pillars”, Proverbs 23:27, Matthew 3:7 - “brood of vipers”

## Allegory:

- An extended metaphor that has the form of a story

Example: Literature – *Pilgrim’s Progress, Screwtape Letters*

Scripture – Galatians 4:21-31

## Analogy:

- A rather full comparison showing several points of similarity between unlike things

Example: John 15:1-9 – “vine and branches”

## Irony:

- Implies something different, even the opposite of what is stated
- Used for the effect of humor or sarcasm

Example: 1 Corinthians 4:8 and 6:5

## Personification:

- The attribution of life or human qualities to inanimate objects

Example: Proverbs 9:1-3, Proverbs 8, Galatians 3:8

## Apostrophe:

- Addressing or speaking to things, abstract ideas or imaginary objects

Example: 1 Corinthians 15:55 – “O death, where is they sting?”

### Hyperbole:

- Exaggeration, not with the intent to deceive but to emphasize and intensify an impression  
Example: Galatians 4:15 – “You would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.” Mark 9:43 – “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off...”

### Rhetorical Questions:

- These are questions posed for which the author doesn’t expect an answer  
Example: 1 Corinthians 1:13 – “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?”  
Matthew 7:16 – “Are grapes gathered from thorns?”

### Litotes:

- The use of understatement. It is the opposite of hyperbole and is often used as irony  
Example: Acts 15:2 – “no small discussion”

### Metonymy:

- The substitution of one term for another  
Example: Romans 3:30 – “Circumcision” for “Jews.” Galatians 3:19 – “Seed” for “Jesus”

### Synecdoche:

- Part of something is mentioned but the whole is meant  
Example: Galatians 1:16 – “Didn’t confer with flesh and blood.” James 4:8b

### Euphemism:

- The substitution of a mild, indirect or vague expression for a harsh, blunt one
- Used to indirectly discuss such topics as bodily functions, anatomy or unpleasant topics  
Example: Genesis 4:1, Isaiah 7:20, Deuteronomy 28:56-57

### Anthropomorphism:

- The practice of describing God in human terms as if he has hands, feet, a face, etc.  
Example: Exodus 24:10, John 10:29, Matthew 18:10

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### Types:

- Prefigures something or someone to come
- A prefiguring symbol such as an Old Testament event prefiguring an event in the New Testament: The Passover foreshadows Christ’s sacrificial death (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- It is best to have the type explicitly mentioned in the New Testament  
Example: Romans 5:14, 1 Corinthians 15:45, John 3:14-15

*Other types of figurative language*

### Symbols:

- Something that stands for another meaning in addition to its ordinary meaning
- It is usually a visual image that represents an invisible concept. In interpreting symbols one is not free to impose his own interpretation, but he must discover the author’s intention by taking into consideration the culture, principles of interpretation, the overall message of the book and in many cases the author’s own specific definition.  
Example: Revelation 1:12, 20