

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS



Shepherds Global Classroom exists to equip the body of Christ by providing curriculum for rising Christian leaders around the world. We aim to multiply indigenous training programs by placing a 20-course curriculum tool into the hands of spiritual trainers in every country of the world.

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COURSE OVERVIEW

This course studies the life and ministry of Jesus as a model for life and ministry today. It is not a thorough study of the Gospels. Instead, this course looks at selected aspects of Jesus' ministry to gain lessons for ministry today. If you want to study the complete life of Christ, see the books listed in the Recommended Resources section at the back of the book.

If studying as a group, you may take turns reading the material. You should stop periodically for class discussion. As the class leader, you are responsible to keep discussion from wandering from the material being studied. It is helpful to have a time limit for each discussion period.

Discussion questions and **in-class activities** are indicated by arrow bullet points. Whenever you come to one of these, ask the question(s) that follows it and let students discuss the answer. Please take time for meaningful discussion. Without this, students may fail to connect their study of Jesus' ministry with ministry today.

Many **scripture** passages are listed throughout the course, both in the main text and in the footnotes. Passages that should be read aloud in class are also indicated by arrow bullet points. Students should read longer passages before class. Short passages should be read in class.

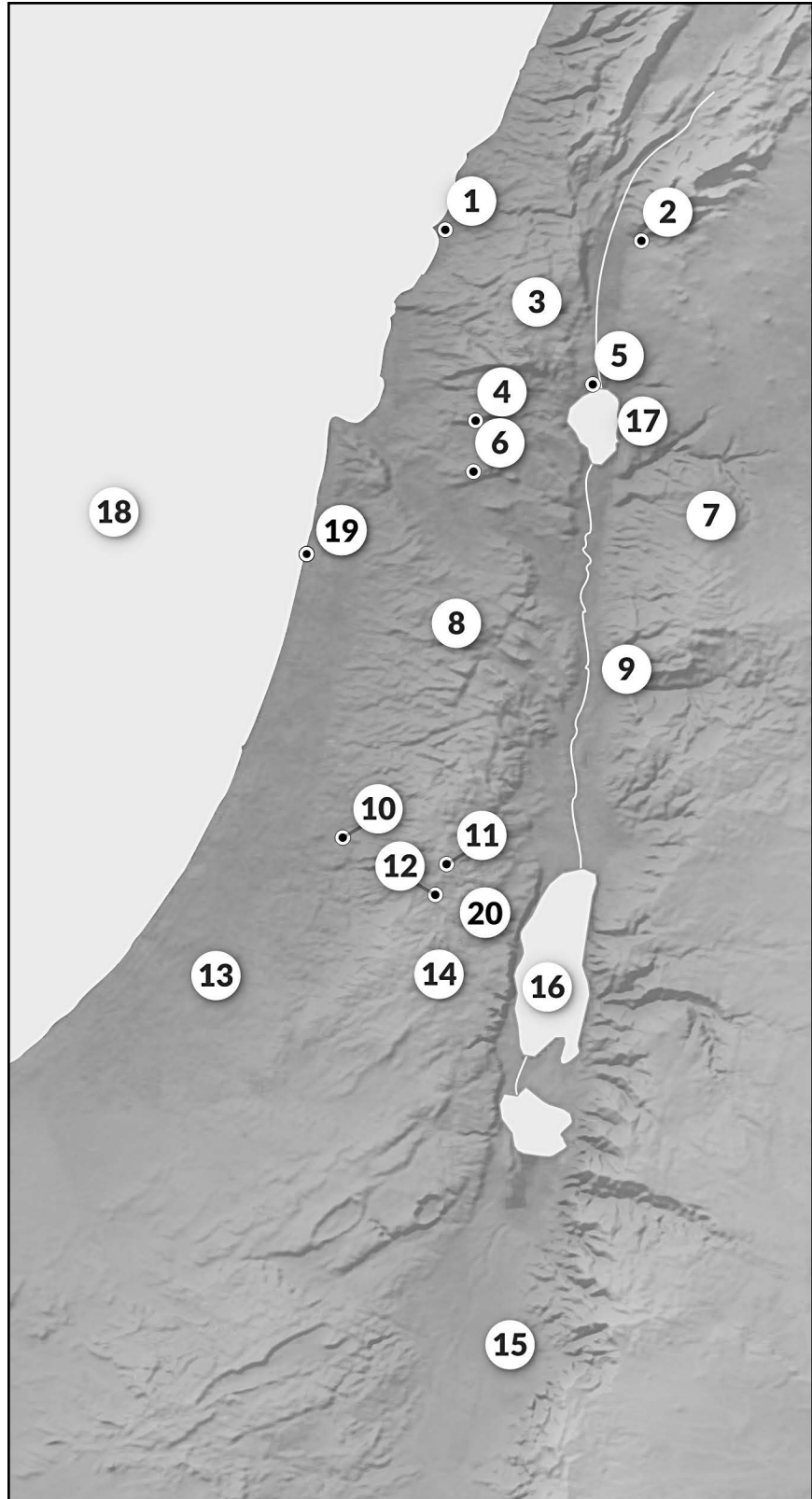
Sections entitled "**A Closer Look**" focus on special topics related to the lesson's discussion.

Each lesson will include one or two **assignments**. If students want to **earn a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom**, they should attend the class sessions and complete the assignments. A form is provided at the end of the course for recording the assignments completed.

One of the purposes of this course is to prepare students to become teachers. The class leader should give students opportunities to develop their teaching skills. For example, the class leader should occasionally let a student teach a short section of the lesson to the class.

MAP OF ISRAEL¹

- (1) Tyre (city)
- (2) Caesarea Philippi (city)
- (3) Galilee (region)
- (4) Cana (city)
- (5) Capernaum (city)
- (6) Nazareth (city)
- (7) Decapolis (region)
- (8) Samaria (region)
- (9) Jordan River (water)
- (10) Emmaus (city)
- (11) Jerusalem (city)
- (12) Bethlehem (city)
- (13) Coastal Plain (geographic region)
- (14) Central Highlands (geographic region)
- (15) Judean Wilderness (geographic region)
- (16) Dead Sea (water)
- (17) Sea of Galilee (water)
- (18) Mediterranean Sea (water)
- (19) Caesarea (city)
- (20) Judea (region)



1 "Map of Israel" was created by SGC with open data from NED, SRTM, NASA, and Bible Geocoding (CC BY 4.0), available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sgc-library/52344178339>, public domain (CC0).

LESSON 1

PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize that Jesus is our model for ministry.
2. Appreciate God's sovereignty in preparing those he calls.
3. Surrender to God's calling to the role he chooses for him.
4. Follow Jesus' steps to victory over temptation.

PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

Read Matthew 1-4, Luke 1-3, and John 1.

PRINCIPLE FOR MINISTRY

God prepares those he calls for the ministry to which he calls them.

INTRODUCTION

In *The Life and Ministry of Jesus*, we will study Jesus as a model for our ministry today. Jesus said, "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:15). Jesus' earthly life was a model for his followers.

Paul understood this principle. When he heard of conflict between Christians at Philippi, Paul pointed to the example of Jesus. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Paul knew that if these Christians followed the example of Jesus, their humility would resolve conflict in the church.

On a trip to Africa, a Jewish journalist, David Plotz, was stranded at a Malawi airport. There he met an African pastor who took Plotz to his home, fed him for two days, and testified to him about Jesus the Messiah. David Plotz later wrote, “I don’t believe anything that this man believes, but I am awed by his conviction. He feels Christ moving in him, which is why he took in a stranger, and housed him, and fed him, and clothed him.” This African pastor understood that we are called to follow Jesus’ example.

This course is not a comprehensive study of Jesus’ life. Instead, we will focus on aspects of Jesus’ life that provide a model for ministry today. We will learn to pattern our ministry on the example of Jesus.

In this first lesson, we will see Jesus’ preparation for ministry. This illustrates the principle that God prepares each person he calls for the ministry to which he calls them.

GOD PREPARED THE FAMILY BACKGROUND OF HIS SERVANT

- » Think of your family background and early life. How has God used your background to prepare you for ministry?

The genealogies in the Gospels show that a sovereign God prepared the way for his servant centuries in advance of Jesus’ birth. Long before Jesus was born, God prepared the way for his coming.

The genealogies answer the question, “Who was Jesus?” The genealogies show the importance of Abraham and David. Abraham is important in Jesus’ ancestry because God promised Abraham, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). This promise was fulfilled through Jesus of Nazareth.

David is important in the genealogies because God promised that David’s throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). At the birth of Jesus, it had been more than 500 years since a Davidic king sat on the throne. Matthew and Luke show that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise to David.

Jesus Was the Son of David (Matthew 1:1-17)

In the Greek New Testament, the first two words of Matthew’s Gospel would have reminded Matthew’s first readers of the book of Genesis (Genesis 2:4, Genesis 5:1). Just as Genesis demonstrates God’s sovereignty over creation, Matthew demonstrates God’s sovereignty over history. The genealogy in Matthew shows that all of Israel’s history was leading to the birth of the Messiah.

Matthew’s genealogy records three groups of 14 names. This was a common Jewish memory aid. Regular groups helped students memorize long lists of names. Readers of Matthew’s

genealogy would have known that this list did not include every ancestor between Abraham and Joseph. Matthew's repeated phrase, "was the father of" could refer to any ancestor. Jewish genealogies often skipped some generations. Matthew focuses on important members of Jesus' genealogy and omits other names.

Because Matthew omitted some generations, the names he includes are particularly interesting. Matthew chose these names for a purpose. For instance, Matthew lists four women. This was unusual in a Jewish genealogy. The women listed do not have the qualifications we might expect. Rahab and Ruth were foreigners. Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba are associated with sexual shame.

Similarly, some of the men in the list had suffered disgrace. Judah treated Tamar shamefully. Jechoniah's line was disqualified from the throne of Israel (Matthew 1:12, Jeremiah 22:30). Most noticeably, Matthew identifies David not with his great accomplishments, but as the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.

These names identify Jesus with sinful humanity. God brought his Son into the world not through a spotless family line, but as the descendant of ordinary sinners. Jewish leaders mocked Jesus' disreputable birth and rejected him as unworthy (John 8:41, 48). Matthew shows that God can use a person from sinful ancestors to fulfill his great purposes.

- » In our culture, what elements of a person's background could cause us to think he has low potential?

God often calls people from unexpected backgrounds for his service. No one is unusable because of their family background. The elements of a person's background that cause us to think he has little potential may not matter to God.

Jesus Was the Son of Adam (Luke 3:23-38)

Matthew traces the genealogy of the "King of the Jews" to Abraham. Luke traces Jesus' genealogy to Adam. This fits with Luke's emphasis on Jesus as the "Son of Man." Luke's genealogy emphasizes Jesus' humanity. Luke places the genealogy just before the story of Jesus' temptation. This reminds the reader that Jesus, the second Adam, succeeded where the first Adam failed.

A CLOSER LOOK: THE GENEALOGIES OF MATTHEW AND LUKE

Matthew 1 and Luke 3 give differing genealogies for Jesus. Matthew moves from Abraham through King Solomon to Joseph. Luke traces the genealogy from Joseph back through Nathan (another of David's sons) to Adam.

The genealogies are the same between Abraham and David. However, between David and Joseph, the two genealogies trace different lines. A likely explanation for the difference is that Matthew records the ancestry of Joseph and Luke records the ancestry of Mary.¹

Joseph's ancestry in Matthew is a royal genealogy tracing back through Solomon. This fits with Matthew's theme of Jesus as King. This is Jesus' legal descent—which must come through Joseph.

Mary's ancestry in Luke is a “physical” genealogy tracing back through David's son Nathan. This genealogy fits Luke's emphasis on Jesus as the “Son of Man.” To show this, Luke traces the physical genealogy of Jesus through Mary. He still begins with the phrase “son of Joseph” because Jewish genealogies used the male name, even when tracing the female's lineage.

Mary's lineage provides the blood connection to David. Joseph's lineage provides the throne rights through Solomon.

GOD PREPARED THE FAMILY BACKGROUND OF HIS SERVANT (CONTINUED)

Jesus Was the Son of God (John 1:1-18)

The Gospel of John begins with a divine genealogy; Jesus was the Son of God. “The life of Jesus did not begin... at the moment of birth. He came into the world from a preexistent state to fulfill a specific mission.”²

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel could see God's presence as a cloud above the Tabernacle. Now God lives among us in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). God's divine glory has now been revealed in human form.

The Word was eternal: “The Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The Father and the Son lived in eternal fellowship.³ Why did Jesus come into our world? To reveal the Father. No one has seen the Father, but Jesus has made him known to us (John 1:18). When we see Jesus, we see the Father (John 14:9).

Today, many people portray Jesus as a loving friend and the Father as a harsh judge. However, John 1 shows that the character of Jesus is identical to the character of the Father. When we see Jesus, we see the Father.

1 For other possible explanations, visit <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-genealogy.html>, accessed March 22, 2021.

2 J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 28

3 John 1:3 refutes the claim of the Jehovah's Witnesses that Jesus was a created being. Jesus was present at creation. “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”

GOD PREPARED HIS SERVANT THROUGH A MIRACULOUS BIRTH

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in approximately 5 B.C.⁴ Joseph had traveled to Bethlehem in response to a Roman census. The purpose of the census was to maintain tax records for the provinces under Rome's control.

Rome's usual method was to register people in the city where they lived and worked. However, to keep peace with a Jewish population that was quick to rebel, Rome allowed the Judean province to follow the Jewish method of registering in their tribal ancestral home. As a result, Joseph and Mary traveled 100 kilometers from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Although only the male head of the household was required to register, Joseph brought Mary to Bethlehem. It is likely that Joseph did not want to leave Mary with gossiping neighbors in the small village of Nazareth.

God works through world events to accomplish his purpose. God sovereignly caused a pagan emperor to "choose" a Jewish census to fulfill God's purposes. "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will" (Proverbs 21:1). As workers in God's kingdom, this should give us confidence that God accomplishes his purposes even when it appears that evil people are in control.

This tax census is one example of many showing how God prepared the world for the birth of Jesus. God worked through the cultural background of the Greek Empire, the legal system of the Roman Empire, and the religious principles of the Jewish faith to prepare our world for the Messiah. To study this background, please see Lesson 1 of the Shepherds Global Classroom course, *Exploring the New Testament*.⁵

The Visit of the Shepherds (Luke 2:8-20)

The first people to receive the announcement of Jesus' birth were shepherds outside Bethlehem. This is remarkable since shepherds were shunned by most first century Jews. Shepherds had such a low social status that their testimony was not accepted in Jewish courts. By focusing on the shepherds, Luke implies, "If shepherds are welcome, then **anyone** is welcome in God's kingdom!" The angel said to the shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for **all the people**" (Luke 2:10).

The gospel is not limited to a single nation (Israel) or a single social class; the gospel is for all people. This theme is seen throughout the Gospel of Luke. Luke gives special attention to Jesus' ministry to women, to Samaritans, and to outcasts such as Zacchaeus.

4 The Gregorian calendar was not developed until 1582. This calendar is approximate, not precise. Herod the Great died in approximately 4 B.C. Based on this date, Jesus' birth can be dated to approximately 5-6 B.C.

5 Available from <https://www.shepherdsglobal.org>

The Visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12)

The Gospel of Matthew was addressed first to a Jewish audience. While Luke focused on Jesus' message to all people, Matthew focused first on Jesus' message of a heavenly kingdom. Instead of shepherds, Matthew showed the visit of the wise men, the magi. This visit occurred after Jesus' family had moved into a permanent home, probably a few months after his birth (Matthew 2:11). This is suggested by Herod's command to kill all the male infants under two years old.

The magi were students of the sky who watched for unusual patterns. At a time when travel was dangerous, they traveled a long distance to investigate the strange sign they saw in the sky.

The magi came first to Jerusalem, the logical place to find a Jewish king. When news of a possible rival reached Herod, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him (Matthew 2:3). The phrase "all Jerusalem" foreshadows the later rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

The visit of the magi was the first presentation of the Messiah to Gentiles. In contrast to those in Jerusalem who were troubled by the sign, the magi responded in faith. Jesus came as King of all nations, not just King of the Jews.

Matthew does not report how many magi traveled to worship Jesus. The tradition of three wise men is based on the three gifts reported in Matthew 2:11. Each gift represented some aspect of Jesus' ministry.

- Gold is a gift for a king. However, Jesus would reign not from a throne, but from a cross.
- Frankincense is a gift for a priest. At the sacrifices, frankincense was used as a perfume. Jesus came as the priest who made it possible for all men to enter the presence of God.
- Myrrh was used to embalm the dead. Jesus was born to die for all mankind.

GOD PROTECTED HIS SERVANT

Before Jesus' birth, an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream to reveal God's plan. After the visit of the magi, an angel warned Joseph to flee to Egypt. The family remained in Egypt until the death of Herod (approximately 4 B.C.).

In many ways, Herod the Great was an effective ruler. He respected the Jewish people, even following the Jewish food laws. He started the remodeling of the Temple that continued throughout Jesus' life. During a famine in 25 B.C., he used his own money to buy food for the starving people of Judea.

However, Herod was insanely paranoid. He murdered one of his wives, Mariamne, and her mother, Alexandra, when he suspected them of plotting against him. Herod had three sons assassinated when they reached the age at which they could be a threat. For a man as paranoid as Herod, the slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem is no surprise. Killing a few dozen infants to protect his position would have been a minor inconvenience.

Herod's cruelty continued until his death. As he was approaching death, Herod ordered that the leading citizens of Jerusalem be arrested and killed when he died. He believed that this would guarantee that the day of his death would be a day of mourning. (Instead, Herod's widow released the prisoners, causing a day of celebration throughout Palestine.)

After Herod died, his territory was divided among three sons. Antipas was given control of Galilee and Perea; Philip was given authority over the northeast part of Palestine; Archelaus was appointed ruler over Judea, Idumea, and Samaria. Ancient historians said that Archelaus had all his father's weaknesses, but none of his father's good characteristics. He was hated by the Jews and was removed from his position in A.D. 6 because of Jewish complaints to Caesar. After this, Judea was ruled by Roman governors such as Pontius Pilate.

After Herod's death, an angel again appeared in a dream to instruct Joseph to return to Israel. However, because Archelaus was as dangerous as Herod the Great, Joseph took his family to Nazareth rather than returning to Bethlehem.

- » As a young child, John Wesley was miraculously rescued from a burning home. He believed God had protected him for a special purpose. Wesley referred to himself as a "brand from the burning" (Zechariah 3:2). Invite members of your class to share stories of how God has preserved them for ministry—either through miraculous protection or through God's providence.

A CLOSER LOOK: MATTHEW 2:23

More than any other gospel, Matthew shows that Jesus' ministry fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. Writing to a Jewish audience, Matthew demonstrated that Jesus was the promised Messiah:

- Jesus' virgin birth (Matthew 1:22-23) fulfills Isaiah 7:14.
- Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:5-6) fulfills Micah 5:2.
- The trip to Egypt (Matthew 2:14-15) fulfills Hosea 11:1.
- The killing of the infants in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16-18) fulfills Jeremiah 31:15.
- The entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-5) fulfills Zechariah 9:9.

One of the difficult examples of prophetic fulfillment is found in Matthew 2:23. Matthew writes, "And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene."

The difficulty is that there is no record of an Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. Two ideas may be behind this verse:

1. In the time of Jesus, Nazareth was a village of no importance (John 1:46). The Jewish people expected their Messiah to come from Judea, not from the commercial region of Galilee (John 7:41, 52). The fact that Jesus came from a despised area like Nazareth fulfilled prophecies such as Isaiah 49:7 and Isaiah 53:3.
2. Isaiah 11:1 prophesied that Messiah would be a “branch.” The Hebrew word for branch (*netzer*) sounds much like the word “Nazareth.” Jewish readers of Matthew would have recognized this wordplay.

GOD PREPARED THE WAY FOR HIS SERVANT WITH A FORERUNNER

John the Baptist was a cousin of Jesus. The story of John begins as his father, Zechariah, was burning incense on behalf of the nation, one of the most honored duties for a priest (Luke 1:9).

As Zechariah performed this sacred duty, an angel appeared at the right side of the altar of incense. In Jewish tradition, this was where God stood during the offering. The angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his prayers for a son were answered.

Since Elizabeth was past child-bearing age, Zechariah doubted the angel’s promise. Because of his unbelief, he was unable to speak until the birth of John. As a priest and a student of scripture, Zechariah knew the Old Testament stories of Hannah and Rachel and should have believed the promise that God would miraculously open Elizabeth’s womb.

Thirty years later, John began his ministry. Rather than serving as a priest in Jerusalem, John ministered as a prophet in the Judean wilderness. John was sent as the forerunner of the Messiah. As John preached, people asked, “Is John the promised Messiah?” He responded, “He who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (Luke 3:16). One of the lowest duties of a slave was to care for his master’s sandals, but John said, “The one who is coming is so far above me that I am not worthy even for this lowly duty.” John provides a model of humble service.

All through scripture, God used people to prepare the way for someone else. Look at the example of Barnabas and Paul. When Saul was persecuting Christians, Barnabas was already a respected leader in the church. Barnabas trusted Paul when few Christians would have trusted this persecutor of the church.

When they began the first missionary journey, Acts refers to the team as “Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 13:2). Soon, they were known as “Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:43 and following). Barnabas was the leader at the beginning, but he was willing to let Paul become the leader.

Sometimes your role may be that of John the Baptist or Barnabas, preparing the way for someone else. Wherever God chooses to use you, give your best. If God places you in a supporting role, don’t reject that ministry. You can trust God to use you in the most effective way.

We see the humility of John the Baptist when he pointed his followers to Jesus (John 1:35-37). The goal of a rabbi was to win disciples who would follow and respect their teacher. Instead, John the Baptist pointed his followers to a greater teacher. He understood that his task was to point to one greater than himself. John watched as his followers left him to follow Jesus. His goal was the kingdom of God, not his own glory. As Christian leaders, we must never forget that our goal is to point people to Jesus, not to gain success for ourselves.

A CLOSER LOOK: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REPENT?

» Read Matthew 3:1-6.

John preached a message of repentance. Today, some people say that to repent means only to change your mind. Many professing Christians show few signs of a changed life.

However, the word “repent” means much more than a mental decision. The New Testament writers used the word “repent” in the same way as the Hebrew prophets. It meant a complete change of life. In the New Testament, to repent means:

- To change your thoughts and beliefs **and**
- To change your actions and way of living.

Some years ago there was a pop singer in America who was known for his sinful lifestyle. This singer said, “I have become a Christian and have been filled with the Spirit. I continue to live like I did before, but now I am a Christian. If I die, I will go to heaven.” This man’s professed “repentance” did not include any change in his way of life. This is not true repentance.

John taught that repentance changes our pattern of life. John required candidates for baptism to have behavior consistent with repentance (Luke 3:8). Baptism must not become an empty ritual: “I believe, so now baptize me.” Baptism must be a testimony to true repentance and a changed life.

GOD PREPARED HIS SERVANT THROUGH TESTING

Jesus’ victory over temptation provides a model when we face temptation. “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1). The tempta-

tion came just before Jesus began his public ministry. Before he preached to others, Jesus demonstrated his complete obedience to the will of the Father.

Matthew places the temptation story immediately after Jesus' baptism. Our greatest temptations often follow a spiritual victory. Immediately after Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel, we find him tempted to despair and doubt while running for his life (1 Kings 18-19).

Luke places the temptation story after tracing Jesus' ancestry to Adam. Luke shows that where Adam failed, Jesus, the Son of Man, was victorious (Luke 3:38). Jesus identified himself with humanity and modeled how ordinary Christians can have victory over sin.

The Temptations

The temptation to turn stones to bread

Satan tempted Jesus to use his divine power to turn stones to bread. Satan tempted Jesus to use his power for his own benefit instead of relying on the Father. Jesus surrendered to the Father his right to food.

The first Adam disobeyed God when tempted to take food that was wrong for him. The second Adam was faithful.

The temptation to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple

Satan tempted Jesus to leap from the peak of the Temple (91 meters above the Kidron Valley). This would amaze the people while demanding that the Father fulfill his promise of protection.

Satan quoted the promise of Psalm 91:11-12 to tempt Jesus to test his Father's promises. With this test, Jesus would make the Father his servant—subject to his demands and expectations.

Jesus refused to apply the promise of Psalm 91 to a situation for which the promise did not apply. In response to Satan, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." As God's children, we cannot demand that God use his power for our purposes.

"We applaud those who say, 'I will prove my strength by asserting my rights.' But the perfect Man showed that true strength lies in the abandonment of man's will to the will of God."

**Adapted from
G. Campbell Morgan**

A CLOSER LOOK: REAL FAITH

Some Christians say, “Every promise in the Book is mine.” While every promise of scripture is true, we must always ask, “Does this promise apply to this situation?” Jesus knew that the promise of Psalm 91 was not God’s will for the situation he faced in the wilderness. How can we be sure that we are claiming God’s promises in true faith rather than trying to control God’s power?

1. We must know God’s Word.

The more we know of the context of a biblical promise and the conditions attached to the promise, the better we can measure its application to our situation.

Some promises were given to specific people in specific circumstances. In the Old Testament, God promised physical blessings if Israel was faithful to the covenant. Their land would produce much fruit, their barns would be full, and they would win military victories. New Testament promises are more often about spiritual benefits. Some people are disappointed to learn this, but we should rejoice. Material prosperity is of only temporary value; spiritual prosperity is of eternal value. Faith trusts God to fulfill his promises in his way, rather than trying to make God fulfill our own desires.

2. We must recognize the difference between specific and general promises.

When we read a general promise, we must ask if God is giving the promise for our specific situation. Some promises are general, not universal.

Psalm 103:3 praises the God “who heals all your diseases.” Some Christians have taken this as a universal promise that God will heal every disease of every believing Christian. However, scripture shows that not every physical disease is healed. Paul prayed for healing, and God said, “No” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Sometimes God chooses to heal his children of a disease; sometimes he chooses to give them grace to bear the hurt.

We should respond like the three young Hebrews. When King Nebuchadnezzar threatened to throw them into the furnace, they said, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Daniel 3:17-18). They knew that God had the power to deliver them; but if God chose a different path, they were committed to serving him faithfully.

God can deliver his children from physical suffering, but he doesn’t always choose that path. Until God makes clear that a biblical promise is for you specifically, trust God to do as he chooses. The apostle John gave this promise, “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that

he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

I should not assume that every biblical promise applies to my specific situation. Faith says, “I will ask ‘according to his will.’” I must not take every promise as a personal promise. Instead, I must ask if the promise is intended for my situation.

3. We must pray in Jesus’ name.

Jesus promised, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13). To pray in Jesus’ name means that your prayer is consistent with Jesus’ priorities, will, and character. Jesus prayed for the things that would bring God glory; we should do the same. If we have real faith, we will seek the God’s glory rather than our own will.

Praying that the Father may be glorified means that we submit to God’s ultimate purposes in our life. God promised Israel, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope’” (Jeremiah 29:11). We must remember that this promise was given to Israel as she faced 70 years of bondage in Babylon. Even slavery in Babylon would accomplish good for God’s people; in their distress, Israel would call out to God and he would hear them.

Does this promise apply to us today? Yes! God’s character has not changed; he brings good for his children. Not everything that happens will be good, but we can pray confidently in Jesus’ name because we know that God is working his purpose in all that happens in our lives.

GOD PREPARED HIS SERVANT THROUGH TESTING (CONTINUED)

The Temptations (Continued)

The offer of the kingdoms of the world

Satan’s final temptation offered **compromise**, a way to achieve Jesus’ future reign without the cross. If Jesus would bow to Satan, he could bypass the agony of the cross. Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 6:13, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve” (Matthew 4:10).

Jesus’ Victory over Temptation

To benefit from Jesus’ example in the temptation, we must remember that Jesus was fully man. He was tempted “in every respect... as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

- » Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Hebrews 4:15. What do they teach about temptation?

In 1 John 2:16, the apostle shows that temptation can come from the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and pride of life. Jesus was tempted in each of these areas.

- Satan tempted the flesh when Jesus was hungry for bread.
- Satan tempted the eyes by showing Jesus the kingdoms of the world.
- Satan appealed to the pride of life by tempting Jesus to a dramatic act that would amaze the crowds.

Jesus' victory over temptation provides a model for us in times of temptation. Notice the three tools Jesus used for victory over temptation.

The power of the Spirit

Jesus walked in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He did what the Spirit led him to do. "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness" (Luke 4:1).

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus acted in the power of the Holy Spirit. He cast out demons by the power of the Spirit (Matthew 12:28). God "anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

Jesus did his earthly ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. If we want to be strong in the face of temptation, we must live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The power of prayer

Jesus was tempted following 40 days of fasting and prayer. Prayer prepared him for spiritual battle. In a later lesson, we will see the centrality of prayer in the life and ministry of Jesus. If Jesus relied on prayer, how can we expect to win spiritual victories apart from prayer?

Satan often attacks us after we have grown careless in our prayer life. He knows that we will be weak in the face of temptation if we are not maintaining a vital prayer life.

The power of the Word

Jesus responded to each temptation with the words of scripture. How did he know these scriptures? Jewish children memorized the *Torah* as part of their childhood education. When Jesus was tempted, the words of scripture came quickly to his mind.

As Christians, we must plant God's Word in our heart. During times of testing, scripture will give us strength to face temptation.

In facing temptation, Jesus used the same tools we have. We must meet temptation as Jesus did, with the power of the Spirit, the power of prayer, and the power of the Word. Without those weapons, we will fall to Satan's onslaught.

A CLOSER LOOK: THE INCARNATION

Early Christians universally agreed that Jesus was divine. Although heretics such as Arius denied Jesus' deity, orthodox Christians taught that Jesus was divine.

Orthodox Christianity also taught that Jesus was fully man. This doctrine was often denied by heretics. Even today, many evangelicals do not take Jesus' humanity seriously. Many Christians assume that Jesus was fully divine, but that his humanity was not real. They think he borrowed a human body, but that he was not fully human.

Some sermon illustrations contribute to this false idea. Some preachers tell the legend of a king who pretended to be a peasant to travel. However, Jesus was not God pretending to be a man. He became one of us.

The doctrine of Jesus' humanity is important for our Christian experience. If Jesus was not fully man, his life is not a realistic model for us. A theologian put it like this, "If Jesus isn't really like us, then we are excused from being like him."⁶

Many people believe that we must constantly fall to willful sin. Jesus showed, in his humanity, that ordinary Christians can maintain victory over sin through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus became part of our broken humanity, if he experienced our need for the Spirit's power, and if he was tempted just as we are, then his victory over temptation shows us how to win victory in our daily lives. Through the Holy Spirit, we can live a victorious life.

- » Which is harder for you to comprehend, the doctrine of Jesus' deity or the doctrine of his humanity? Discuss how each of these doctrines is important to us in our Christian life and ministry.

CONCLUSION: GOD PREPARES HIS SERVANTS

In this lesson, we have seen how God prepared the path for the ministry of Jesus. Through his ancestry, through the Roman Empire, through a miraculous birth, through the ministry of John the Baptist, and even through temptation, God prepared the way for Jesus.

6 Cherith Fee Nordling, "Open Question" *Christianity Today*, April 2015, 26-27

We see this truth repeatedly throughout the Bible. Look at the example of Paul. Paul grew up in the Roman city of Tarsus. From childhood, he had Gentile friends. Unlike most Jews, Paul was comfortable with Gentiles.

Paul's father was a Roman citizen, so Paul had the valued rights of Roman citizenship. His mother was Jewish, so Paul received early training in the Old Testament scriptures. He had a brilliant mind and studied Hebrew theology under the great rabbi Gamaliel. With his Roman background, he studied Greek and the teachings of the Greek philosophers.

Given this background, it is no surprise that God called Paul to become a missionary to the Gentiles. From birth, God prepared Paul to be the first Apostle to the Gentiles. Think of the preparation that God provided for this ministry:

- Paul's Roman citizenship allowed him to travel freely.
- Paul's Hebrew and Greek training gave him the tools for writing the most profound books of the New Testament.
- Paul's study of Greek philosophy equipped him to speak to Greek thinkers in places like Athens.

Maybe you respond, "God didn't give me a great education like Paul. I don't have a great family background." That's fine! Look at another leader in the first century church.

Simon grew up as a commercial fisherman. He did not have the education or intellectual brilliance of Paul. In fact, Peter later said that Paul had written some things that are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). But God used Peter in a powerful way. People who would be overwhelmed by Paul's profound words could understand Peter's simple sermons.

God has prepared you for your place of service. If you surrender your training, your background, and all that God has given you, he will use you to accomplish his purpose. God prepares those he calls for the ministry to which he calls them.

LESSON 1 ASSIGNMENTS

1. In this lesson, we saw Jesus' example of victory over temptation. In the first chart below, list three biblical examples of people who maintained victory over temptation. Notice one thing that gave them strength in the face of temptation. Then list three biblical examples of people who fell to temptation. In each case, identify one factor that led to their fall.
2. Based on the examples you listed, prepare a sermon or Bible study on temptation. Include the example of Jesus as well as the examples you listed on your chart.

VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION	SCRIPTURE	WHAT GAVE VICTORY?
Joseph (sexual purity)	Genesis 39	focus on God (Genesis 39:9)

FAILURE IN TEMPTATION	SCRIPTURE	WHAT LED TO DEFEAT?
Peter (denial of Jesus)	Luke 22:54-62	overconfidence (Luke 22:31-34)

LESSON 2

PRAYING LIKE JESUS

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the importance of prayer in the life and ministry of Jesus.
2. Learn principles for prayer from Jesus' teaching.
3. Understand the importance of prayer in our ministry today.
4. Develop practical steps for becoming a person of prayer.

PRINCIPLE FOR MINISTRY

If we want to minister like Jesus, we must pray like Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

In a message on prayer, Professor Howard Hendricks made this convicting statement:

Satan does not mind if you read the Bible, *if you don't pray*, because then scripture will never transform your life. It may even give you a severe case of spiritual pride because you know it so well.

Satan does not mind if you share your faith, *if you don't pray* because he knows that it is far more important to talk to God about men than it is to talk to men about God.

Satan does not mind if you become involved in the ministry of a local church, *if you don't pray*, because then you will be active but you really won't be accomplishing that much.⁷

Prayer was central to Jesus' earthly ministry. Nothing held a greater priority than prayer. Jesus' ministry was grounded in his relationship with his heavenly Father. That relationship was maintained through prayer and intimate fellowship with God.

- » Before studying this lesson, evaluate the role of prayer in your life and ministry. Ask:
 - Is my prayer life consistent?
 - When is the last time I saw a specific answer to prayer?
 - What are the biggest challenges to my prayer life?
 - Am I growing in my prayer life?

JESUS' EXAMPLE OF PRAYER

Throughout Jesus' ministry, we see him engaged in prayer at crucial moments. The Gospels report 15 specific instances when Jesus prayed. Prayer was never secondary; prayer was central to his life.

More than any other writer, Luke highlights prayer in Jesus' ministry. Only Luke tells us that Jesus prayed all night before choosing the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12). Only Luke tells us that the transfiguration took place when Jesus had taken Peter, James, and John to the mountain for prayer (Luke 9:28). This emphasis continues in Acts as Luke writes 35 times about the role of prayer in the early church.

**"Prayer is the
gymnasium
of the soul."**

**Samuel Zwemer,
"Apostle to Islam"**

Prayer in Jesus' Daily Ministry

- » Read Mark 1:32-39.

This story from early in Jesus' ministry shows how prayer and service are related. Notice the progression of this narrative. The previous evening, people gathered outside the house where Jesus was staying, and he healed many of them.

Early in the morning, Jesus went out to a desolate place to pray. Simon Peter came to find him, saying, "Everyone is looking for you." Jesus responded, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for this is why I came out." The pattern for Jesus' ministry was **prayer accompanied by service**.

This must be the pattern for ministry. Without prayer, our service becomes spiritually exhausting. Without service, our prayer life becomes self-centered; we make no attempt to serve the needs of those around us. Jesus shows that prayer and service must be linked.

Prayer in Times of Decision

» Read Luke 6:12-16.

One of the most important decisions of Jesus' ministry was the choice of twelve apostles. Out of the thousands who listened to him preach, many were close enough to be called disciples (John 6:60, 66). 72 of his followers were close enough to represent Jesus on a preaching trip (Luke 10:1). But Jesus chose only twelve men as apostles.

The twelve apostles spent much time with Jesus. They were with him at the end of his earthly ministry. After his ascension, eleven of the apostles became leaders in the early church. The choice of the twelve was a crucial decision. Jesus did not write any books or establish any schools. His vision for the church would be fulfilled by these men.

What did Jesus do before selecting the twelve apostles? He prayed. Facing a critical decision, Jesus spent the night in prayer. If the Son of God prayed so earnestly before an important decision, how much more should prayer play a central role in our decision-making!

Prayer in the Face of Suffering

» Read Matthew 26:36-46.

A few hours before his arrest, Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray. He prepared for suffering by praying. Jesus never used his divinity to escape the hurts of his humanity. Instead, he relied on prayer for strength to face the suffering.

Jesus' prayer in the garden is a model for us today. His prayer was not artificial; Jesus faced the reality of suffering. Does it encourage you to realize that Jesus responded in a very human way to pain? Facing suffering, Jesus prayed for relief:

He did not pray in the garden, "Oh, Lord, I am so grateful that you have chosen me to suffer on your behalf." No, he experienced sorrow, fear, abandonment, and something approaching even desperation. Still, he endured because he knew that at the center of the universe lived his Father, a God of love he could trust regardless of how things appeared.⁸

In the face of suffering, we must not pretend to be stronger than we are. Like Job, we may cry in the face of our hurt. In his humanity, Jesus did the same! However, like Jesus we can remain faithful because we know that our loving heavenly Father has ultimate control.

8 Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 161

It is in prayer that we can accept the will of our Father. The key to Jesus' prayer in the face of suffering, and the key to our prayer in suffering is surrender to the Father's will: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

JESUS' TEACHING ABOUT PRAYER

Jesus not only showed the importance of prayer by his example, he devoted much of his teaching to prayer. Jesus knew that the spiritual life of his followers required a vital life of prayer. Because of this, he trained his disciples to pray.

Jesus' Teaching in the Sermon on the Mount

» Read Matthew 6:1-18.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught about three areas of spiritual activity: giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. It is clear from his teaching that Jesus expected these to be normal activities for his followers. Jesus did not say, "*If* you give to the poor..." or "*If* you pray..." or "*If* you fast..." He expected his followers to be generous, prayerful, and self-disciplined disciples.

Jesus showed that these good activities can be meaningless if they come from corrupt motives. In the ancient world, a *hypocrite* was an actor who wore different masks to play different roles in a play. It is possible to "play a religious role" in front of others.

- It is possible to give to the poor to impress people with our generosity. Jesus said, "They have received their reward."
- It is possible to pray to impress onlookers with our fancy words. Jesus said, "They have received their reward."
- It is possible to fast to impress others with our piety and self-discipline. Jesus said, "They have received their reward."

In each case, the person who gave to the poor, prayed or fasted, did it to impress other people. The people were impressed; that was his reward. So, he will receive no reward from God.

The motivation for these spiritual activities must be pleasing our heavenly Father. Whether it is giving to the poor, praying or fasting, our reward is God himself. We must not do these spiritual activities for the sake of worldly applause. Instead, we do these things out of an ever-deepening desire for God.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray in a simple and direct manner:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matthew 6:9-13).

This is not a prayer to be recited mindlessly like the empty phrases Jesus condemned in Matthew 6:7-8. Instead, this prayer models the attitudes that should guide our prayers:

Relationship

“Our Father in heaven” shows our close relationship with God. Rather than a distant deity, we recognize God as a Father who loves to give good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:11). This phrase suggests both intimacy (“Our Father”) and authority (“in heaven”). God is both majestic and personal.

Respect

“Hallowed be your name” shows the difference between us and our Father in heaven. Although God is a loving Father, he is holy.⁹ As the wise man of Ecclesiastes learned, we must enter God’s presence with reverence and awe (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Submission

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” represents our willing submission to his authority. As God’s will is accomplished perfectly in heaven, we should pray that it will be accomplished on earth.

Provision

A large percentage of people in the world must work for their food on a daily basis. “Give us this day our daily bread” suggests our daily trust in the Father. As his children, we trust him to provide for our needs.

Confession

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” In Luke 11:2-4, this same prayer is worded “Forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.” Since our sin is a debt owed to God (Colossians 2:14), the meaning is the same in both Matthew and Luke.

9 The word “hallowed” means “holy” or “set apart”

By linking our forgiveness of others to our forgiveness by God, Jesus did not teach that we earn forgiveness. Instead, we who have been forgiven willingly forgive those who have wronged us. Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant shows the relationship between our forgiveness and our willingness to forgive others (Matthew 18:21-35).

Victory

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” is a prayer for victory over temptation and testing. God never tempts his children (James 1:13), but each of us will face times of testing and temptation (1 Peter 1:6-7). In those times, God will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Jesus' Teaching about Bold Prayer

» Read Luke 11:1-13.

Luke follows the Lord's Prayer with a parable that teaches us to pray boldly to a Father who loves to give good gifts to his children. In the Middle East, it was common to borrow from neighbors to care for a guest. If a man asked boldly, his neighbor would give whatever was needed. In that culture, it was considered rude to say “No” to a request. Even if the neighbor did not want to disturb his family, he would not reject a call for help.

In an even greater fashion, God wants to give those good gifts to his children who ask boldly. Just as the man in this parable asks boldly, we can approach our heavenly Father with confidence. Why? Not because God will be ashamed to deny our request, but because we have been given permission to ask, seek and knock (Luke 11:9).

A CLOSER LOOK: HEBREW TEACHING STYLES

In Luke 11:1-13, Jesus tells the story of a man who does not want to get up from bed to help his neighbor who needs to borrow food for a guest.

To understand this parable, you should understand a Hebrew style of teaching—the lesser to greater argument. This way of teaching says, “If A (the lesser) is true, then **how much more** B (the greater) must be true.” Today, we might say, “If a person will feed a hungry stranger (A), **how much more** will a loving father feed his children (B).”

When you read the parable, do not think, “God is like the reluctant neighbor. I must persuade him to answer my prayers.” Instead, Jesus contrasts the reluctant friend with a willing heavenly Father. If an earthly neighbor will respond to a bold request, **how much more** will the heavenly Father respond to his children!

JESUS' TEACHING ABOUT PRAYER (CONTINUED)

Jesus' Teaching about Bold Prayer (Continued)

Prayer is relationship.

If God wants to answer the prayers of his children, why is his answer sometimes delayed? Ask, seek, and knock are present tense commands. They imply that we must keep asking, seeking, and knocking. Why?

One reason is that prayer is more than giving a list of requests. Prayer is an ongoing relationship with our heavenly Father. Just as Paul commands us to "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), Jesus commands us to keep asking, seeking, and knocking. Through this ongoing conversation with God, our relationship grows deeper. Prayer is more than a list of requests; prayer is relationship.

"Prayer is not about asking for things and getting what we want. Prayer is about asking for God and getting what we need."

Philip Yancey

A Parable about Persistent Prayer

In Luke 17, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. He answered that they should not be expecting spectacular signs. Instead, he told them, "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21). The kingdom of God was already present in those who were following Jesus.

Jesus then turned to his disciples and taught them about the kingdom of God. They expected Jesus to establish an immediate political kingdom, but Jesus prepared them to wait even after his death. While waiting, they must persist in prayer and not lose heart. Jesus then told a story about faithful prayer.

» Read Luke 18:1-8.

In many ancient cities, judges were dishonest. No one could gain a hearing until they paid a bribe.

This widow had no money to bribe the judge, so he refused to hear her case. However, this persistent lady refused to give up. Finally, the unrighteous judge said, "Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice."

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. Prayer is laying hold of God's willingness."

Martin Luther

This parable uses the same lesser to greater teaching style as the parable about the bold neighbor. When you read this parable, understand:

- God is not an unjust judge. Our Father wants to give justice to his elect.
- We are not the widow. She was a stranger; we are God's children.
- She could not gain access to the judge; through Jesus, we have access to God.

This is a parable of contrasts. If an unrighteous judge will answer a persistent widow, **how much more** will our Father in heaven answer the prayers of his children.

A Parable about Humble Prayer

» Read Luke 18:9-14.

Jesus' next parable about prayer was given to "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt." This parable teaches the proper attitude in prayer.

The theme of the parable is at the end: "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." The Pharisees thought prayers were answered because of their righteousness. Jesus shows that prayer is answered because of God's grace to those who have no righteousness of their own. No one deserves answered prayer; God responds to prayer because of his grace to those who deserve nothing.

APPLICATION: PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN

Christlike people are people of prayer. J.C. Ryle, the 19th century Bishop of Liverpool, studied the lives of great Christians throughout history. He said that some were rich, others poor. Some were educated; others were uneducated. Some were Calvinists; others were Arminians. Some used liturgy; some were free. "But one thing they all had in common. They all have been men of prayer."¹⁰

Throughout church history, Christlike people have been people of prayer. E.M. Bounds, a great Christian leader, prayed from 4:00-7:00 every morning. He wrote, "The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods but through men. He does not come on machinery but on men. He does not anoint plans but men—men of prayer."¹¹

George Müller operated orphanages for thousands of children. He determined that he would never ask another human being for help, but would rely on prayer alone. He received over

10 Quoted in Matt Friedeman, *The Accountability Connection*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1992), 37

11 Edward M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*. (Kenosha, Wisconsin: Treasures Media, n.d.), 2

\\$7,000,000 through prayer alone. Not only did he support his orphanages, Müller gave thousands of dollars to other ministries. George Müller knew the power of prayer.

Why Do We Pray?

We pray because we are dependent on God.

In his humanity, Jesus relied on prayer for communication with his Father. Prayer is an act of dependence on God. It shows that we do not rely on ourselves, but on God.

» Read Matthew 26:31-46.

The fall of Simon Peter shows the importance of prayer. Jesus warned the disciples, “You will all fall away because of me this night.” More directly, Jesus warned Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you” (Luke 22:31). Peter fell because of two weaknesses.

1. **Peter was overconfident.** He insisted, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.... Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” (Matthew 26:33, 35). Pride gave Peter too much confidence in his own strength.
2. **Peter failed to pray.** Because he was confident in his own strength, Peter did not rely on God. Instead of joining Jesus in prayer, Peter slept. We pray most earnestly when we realize our complete dependence on God. Dick Eastman wrote, “Only in prayer do we surrender our problems completely to God.”¹²

We pray to know God more fully.

One of the great weaknesses of the modern church is our shallow knowledge of God. Too often, our prayer requests consist only of material needs and personal fulfillment. Many of us spend more time praying, “God, please help my children find a good job” than, “God, please shape my children in your image.” We pray more earnestly for physical healing than for spiritual healing. This shows how little we understand the real meaning of prayer.

One of the primary purposes of prayer is to know God more fully. In prayer, we are attuned to God’s

“If you can do anything without prayer, is it really worth doing?”

Dr. Howard Hendricks

“We look on prayer as a means for getting something for ourselves; the Bible idea of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself.”

Oswald Chambers

heart. Prayer is not about making God do what we want him to do. Prayer gives us a knowledge of God's heart until we want what he wants.

When we reach this point, Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). Because our heart is tuned to God's heart, we will not ask from wrong motives or in opposition to God's will (James 4:3 and 1 John 5:14). This knowledge of God's heart comes through consistent prayer.

The Puritans said that we must "pray until we pray." In other words, we must pray long enough and patiently enough to get past empty words and enter God's presence. We must pray until we delight in God.

- » Tell about a time when prayer gave you a deeper knowledge of God and his will.

How Do We Pray?

By studying Jesus' example of prayer, we learn important lessons about effective prayer.

We pray patiently.

Jesus was the Son of God. One might expect his prayer life to be a simple matter of saying, "Father, what do you want me to do?" and receiving an immediate answer! Instead, we see Jesus spending all night in prayer before selecting the twelve apostles. We see him wrestling in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Prayer, even for Jesus, required patience and time. Prayer is waiting on God.

Writing about the importance of waiting in prayer, Glenn Patterson said, "What God is doing in us while we wait is as important as what we are waiting for. Waiting is part of the process of God making us what He wants us to be." As we wait on God, we learn to know him better.

Psalms 37:1-9 teaches important lessons about prayer. Look at these commands:

- Do not fret.
- Trust in the Lord.
- Delight yourself in the Lord.
- Commit your way to the Lord.
- Trust in him.
- Be still before the Lord.
- Wait patiently for him.
- Refrain from anger.
- Do not fret (again!)

These commands point to a patient trust in a God who cares for you and will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4). Through patient prayer, we become the trusting people that God wants us to be.

A model of persistent prayer

Early in his Christian life, George Müller began praying for the conversion of five of his friends. After many months, one of them came to the Lord. Ten years later, two others were converted. It took 25 years before the fourth man was saved.

Müller persevered in prayer until his death for the fifth friend. For 52 years, he never gave up praying that this friend would accept Christ! A few days after Müller's funeral, the fifth friend was saved. Müller believed in persistent prayer.

“Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons; but they are helpless against our prayers.”

J. Sidlow Baxter

We pray humbly.

Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus knew he could trust his Father's perfect will.

Prayer is an act of humility. We pray for others because we cannot help them in our wisdom; we must rely on God. We pray for ourselves because we cannot manage life in our power; we must rely on God.

Prayer recognizes our need for God's help. When we feel confident in our ability to master the problems of life, we are unlikely to pray earnestly. When we recognize that we cannot manage life in our own power, we pray with humility.

Our prayer should be done with confident humility. As we wait on God for an answer, we can have assurance and peace because we are praying to a heavenly Father who loves us and desires the best for his children. In the pressures of life and ministry, humble prayer gives us a quiet trust in God.

We pray personally.

Jesus taught his disciples to begin their prayer by addressing God personally, “Our Father.” True prayer is personal. Paul Miller wrote, “Many people struggle to learn how to pray because they are focusing on praying, not on God.”¹³ Too often, we “say prayers” rather

13 Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009)

than talking with God. This is at the heart of Jesus' warning against using "empty phrases" (Matthew 6:7).

Imagine a person who comes to the dinner table with a memorized group of speeches. He says, "I want to hold a conversation with our family, so I prepared some memorized words." This is not a genuine conversation! We expect a person to focus on the people at the table, not on the words he will use.

Prayers written by ourselves or others can help remind us of themes that should be included in prayer, but prayer focuses on God rather than on a set of memorized words. Prayer is not a system; prayer is a relationship. Prayer must be personal.

How Do We Become People of Prayer?

In the fifth century, Anicia Faltonia Proba, a Roman noblewoman, asked Augustine for advice about prayer. Proba wanted to know how to become a person of prayer. Augustine wrote a long letter with wise counsel about prayer.¹⁴ In this section, we will examine Augustine's principles for prayer.

What kind of person can become a person of prayer?

First, Augustine says that a praying person must be a person with no other resources. A praying person is a person who relies on prayer alone.

Proba was the widow of one of the most powerful and wealthy men in Rome. Three of her sons served as Roman consuls. Augustine began by telling Proba that she must "count herself desolate in this world." No matter how wealthy, powerful, or successful we are, we must recognize our helplessness before God. Otherwise, our prayers will be like the prayers of the Pharisee rather than the prayers of the publican.

What should we pray for?

Augustine gives interesting advice to Proba. He says, "Pray for a happy life." This might sound selfish, but Augustine explains that true happiness comes only from God. A person "is truly happy who has all that he wishes to have, and wishes to have nothing which he ought not to wish."

The Christian is happy because he has God, and wishes to have nothing that God would not want him to have. Like the Psalmist, we are satisfied with God's presence.

14 Philip Schaff, ed. *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Volume 1*. (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886), 459-469

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple (Psalm 27:4).

If we truly desire God's presence above all else, we can pray for happiness knowing that God will satisfy our deepest desire by giving himself to us!

How should we pray in times of trouble?

Augustine reminds Proba that Paul recognized that there would be times when “we do not know what to pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26). How do we pray when we reach a point of helplessness?

Augustine looks to three scriptures. First, he points to Paul's example when he prayed for deliverance from a “thorn in the flesh.” Rather than deliverance, God promised, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul testified, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.... For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:8-10).

Second, Augustine points to Jesus' example at Gethsemane. Jesus submitted his desires to God. Jesus prayed for deliverance: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” But he concluded, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Finally, Augustine points to Romans 8:26. When we do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit guides our hearts. The Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. When we are beyond words, the Holy Spirit brings our prayers to the Father, who receives them and makes all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:26-28).

CONCLUSION: WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO PRAY

Sometimes silence is the best you can do.¹⁵ You want to pray, but you don't know how; the prayers won't come. What do you do? One secret is to understand that Christ is our Great High Priest.

As evangelical Christians, we believe in the priesthood of all believers. This great Reformation doctrine teaches that each of us has access to the Father. However, if misunderstood, this doctrine can lead to spiritual struggle. I can be filled with doubts: “Did I pray enough? Did I really do my part?”

At a conference in 2013, Professor Alan Torrance gave this testimony about his struggles with these questions.

15 This section was adapted from Marc Cortez, *Everyday Theology*.

In January 2008, my wife Jane died of cancer. She was the most wonderful Christian woman, wife and mother. Watching her die in pain as cancer spread throughout her body was hard and seeing our children witness her suffering was extremely hard. There were times when, in my grief, I struggled to know how to pray and what to pray for. I did not know how to pray.

In that time, the priesthood of Christ became more relevant than I can begin to say. As I held Jane in my arms, the ascended priest (Jesus Christ) was interceding on our behalf. We could rest in his presence.

The prayer I held on to during that time was the Lord's Prayer. I was not left to pray on my own. "**My** Father, who art in heaven—far removed from where I am." Instead, through the Holy Spirit, I prayed, "**Our** Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done."

To discover the significance of the continuing priesthood of Christ is to discover the gospel in a manner that transforms every part of our lives and worship.

We misunderstand the priesthood of all believers when we think it means that we must reach the Father in our own spiritual strength. That's a mistake. The priesthood of all believers emphasizes that **we need no mediator other than Christ**. He is the one who intercedes for us, accepting our broken attempts at prayer, and presenting them to the Father as acceptable sacrifices. Our prayer is empowered by the Spirit and mediated by our High Priest, Jesus Christ.

When you don't know how to pray, don't despair. We have one who prays for us, kneeling by our side, interceding with the Father, saying what we cannot say.

LESSON 2 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Using a concordance or Bible search program, locate three examples of prayer in the Bible. Compare each prayer to the Lord's Prayer. Which elements of the Lord's Prayer are found in other biblical prayers? Use the table on the next page to record what you see.
2. Keep a prayer journal for one month. Record your frustrations in prayer, your victories in prayer, and God's answers to prayer. Use this journal to encourage growth in your prayer life.

BIBLICAL PRAYER	SCRIPTURE	ELEMENTS IN THE PRAYER
Nehemiah's prayer	Nehemiah 1:5-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship: "keeps covenant" • Respect: "great and awesome God" • Submission: "prayer of your servant" • Provision: "give success to your servant" • Confession: "confessing the sins of the people of Israel"

LESSON 3

LEADING LIKE JESUS

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the qualities that made Jesus a great leader.
2. Allow his God-given mission and calling to determine his daily priorities.
3. Develop a process for training future leaders and for building a ministry team.
4. Appreciate his role as a servant of the people he leads.

PRINCIPLE FOR MINISTRY

Leaders are most like Jesus when they are serving others.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a word that stirs strong feelings. When worldly-minded people think of leadership, they think of power and position. To be the leader is to be the “boss.” Ambitious leaders want to get higher positions and win the highest title. Even pastors can take on this mindset. They can focus their attention on getting bigger churches, higher positions, and greater respect.

In response to this worldly mindset, some Christians react against the term *leadership*. A pastor once said, “I don’t want to be a leader in my church. I just want to serve.” However, although his statement sounded humble, it left his church with no sense of direction or purpose. All organizations, even churches, need leaders.

Pastors must remember that the root meaning of the word *pastor* is “shepherd.” A shepherd does not have a very impressive job! A shepherd spends his days with smelly sheep. His

work includes boring duties: finding food and water, chasing lambs that wander away, and caring for injured sheep.

A shepherd has an important role. A shepherd does many lowly jobs, but a shepherd also carries the heavy responsibility of leading the flock in safety. The flock depends on a shepherd who is a leader.

Jesus provides the ideal model of a true leader. He was a shepherd who served humbly but with a deep sense of purpose. He was strong but full of compassion. He did not seek position, but he was confident in his mission. Jesus provides the model for servant-leaders.

- » Think of the most successful leader you have known personally. List three or four characteristics that made this person a good leader. Are these characteristics seen in Jesus' ministry? Are these characteristics seen in your ministry?

Jesus shows that true leadership involves humble service. Humility does not mean weakness or indecisiveness; Jesus was strong. Repeatedly, the Gospels demonstrate Jesus' authority.¹⁶ However, Jesus' gained authority not by demanding respect, but by serving. When his disciples argued about positions in the kingdom, Jesus said:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves (Luke 22:25-27).

In this lesson, we will look at characteristics that made Jesus a great leader. We will learn how to be more effective leaders by following Jesus' example.

AN EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN LEADER KNOWS HIS MISSION

A great leader has a clear mission and focuses with single-minded intensity on that mission. Jesus knew his mission. Jesus' mission is summed up in Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In his first public sermon, Jesus told his listeners that he had come to accomplish the mission prophesied by Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19, quoting Isaiah 61:1-3).

16 Matthew 7:28-29, Mark 1:22-28, Luke 4:32-36, Luke 20:1-8

Jesus' mission guided his daily decisions. As he traveled from Judea to Galilee, his mission guided Jesus' route. Jewish rabbis often traveled on the east side of the Jordan River to avoid defilement from the Samaritans. Jesus' route, however, was guided by his mission to share God's mercy with a Samaritan woman. Because of this, he had to pass through Samaria (John 4:4). As a Christian leader, your mission must guide your daily decisions.

As a leader, there is more to do than you can ever accomplish. How do you determine your priorities? You cannot do everything, and you **should not** do everything. You must evaluate opportunities by your mission. Every leader should have two lists: a "To-Do" list and a "Not-To-Do" list. The To-Do list includes the things you must accomplish. The Not-To-Do list includes things that distract you from your mission. Someone else may be called to do those things, but you are not. Your mission must guide your daily priorities.

The apostle Paul is an example of a leader who knew his mission. Paul was called to plant churches in key cities of the Roman Empire. He did not want to build on someone else's foundation, but to take the gospel to those who had not yet heard (Romans 15:20). This mission guided where Paul traveled, how long he stayed in each location, and even the message he preached. Paul's mission guided every decision.

» Discuss these questions:

- What is the mission God has given you? Summarize your mission in a few words.
- Have you communicated your mission to those who join you in ministry?
- Does your mission guide your daily decisions?

AN EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN LEADER TRAINS OTHER LEADERS

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus carefully chose and trained a group of disciples who would carry on his ministry after he returned to the Father. These disciples studied from him, spent time with him, ministered with him, and spread his message around the world. Jesus stamped these disciples with his image and then used them to build his church.

Luke wrote about the pressure of ministry. "In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first" (Luke 12:1). Jesus could not be distracted from his ministry to the disciples, even though ministry to thousands might be more exciting. He knew that to establish the kingdom, he must train his disciples to lead the church. By training disciples, we prepare the leaders for the next generation.

"Jesus never wrote any books. Instead, he wrote his message on men, the apostles."

William Barclay

Paul followed this same pattern. He preached to crowds, but he focused his attention on training a few leaders in each city. This provides a model for leaders today. Paul called pastors to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). The pastor is not responsible to do all the work of the church; the pastor is responsible to train and equip the members for the work of the church. Effective leaders train other leaders.

JESUS' MODEL FOR MENTORING DISCIPLES

A Mentor Must Carefully Choose Disciples¹⁷

» Read John 1:35-51, John 2:1-11, Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:1-11, and Luke 6:12-16.

As you read these verses, do you notice the process? During his first week of public ministry, Jesus invited Andrew and John to follow him. Andrew brought Simon Peter to Jesus. Jesus called Philip, who found Nathanael (John 1:35-51). This was the first step in their call. They acknowledged Jesus, but did not yet become permanent followers. This was a call to follow Jesus. Later, Jesus would call them to full-time discipleship.

John 2 is an important step in this process. At the marriage of Cana, Jesus revealed his glory to the disciples. The other guests did not know about the miracle; this sign was for the disciples. Jesus revealed himself to his followers so that they would put their trust in him. And his disciples believed in him (John 2:11).

Matthew 4:18-22 takes place after Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum and began preaching (Matthew 4:12-17). Walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John to follow. “Immediately they left their nets and followed him” (Matthew 4:20). After the initial call in John 1, these disciples continued their jobs as fishermen. Now, Jesus called them to service: “From now on you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10).

The next stage in this process was Jesus’ selection of the twelve apostles. From many followers (called “disciples” in John 6), Jesus selected twelve who would become his closest associates.

Jesus did not hurry when selecting the twelve apostles. It appears that the process took several months. This gave time for Jesus to spend time with each one of them. Too often, a leader is quick to select a successor without spending the time to know the person. A wise leader assigns tasks that give opportunities to evaluate a person’s leadership ability.

17 Adapted from Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963)

A Mentor Must Spend Time with His Disciples

- » Which is more exciting, reaching many or mentoring a few? Which is more important for the long-term? Why did Jesus put so much effort into twelve men?

Jesus devoted much of his time to the twelve apostles. “He appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) **so that they might be with him** and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14-15). First, they would spend time with him to learn his methods. Only then were they ready to be sent out for ministry.

Mark recorded one of Jesus’ trips through Galilee: “And he did not want anyone to know [that he was there], for he was teaching his disciples” (Mark 9:30-31). Jesus’ primary concern was not developing a program to reach the multitudes, but developing men who would lead the church.

Jesus preached to thousands, but his greatest priority was training a few people for future ministry. Jesus knew that training is more effective if it is concentrated on a small group. Robert Coleman warns, “The more your ministry grows, the more **difficult** it will be to carve out time to disciple individuals. But the more your ministry grows, the more **important** it will be to carve out time to disciple individuals.”

As you read through the Gospels, you find that Jesus rarely ministered without at least three disciples near him. Jesus and his disciples often retreated into deserted areas for training sessions. Near the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, he spent even more time with the disciples. During the last week in Jerusalem, Jesus kept the disciples with him most of the time. Training these men was one of his most important tasks.

A Jewish proverb said, “A disciple is one who eats his master’s dust.” A disciple walked so close to the master that he swallowed the dust stirred up by the master’s feet. A disciple ate what the master ate; a disciple went where the master went; a disciple was committed to the master’s teaching and example. Jesus’ followers spent time with him until they took on the character of their teacher. Later, they would become known as “Christians;” they had become like their teacher.

In the same way, Paul always had followers like Timothy, Titus, Luke, or Tychicus with him. Paul trained them for ministry by spending time with them.

Again, this provides a model for us today. As you do your ministry, you can encourage younger team members to follow you, so they learn to minister. One successful church leader said, “I never make a ministry trip without taking a younger minister with me. Training future church leaders is as important to me as the ministry I am doing.” This pastor understands that effective leaders train other leaders.

A Mentor Must Model Ministry for His Disciples

After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus said, "I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:15). Jesus taught by example. He knew that it is not enough to say, "Do this." We must demonstrate **how** to do it. Jesus did not ask his disciples to do anything until he had demonstrated it.

The disciples saw Jesus pray and then asked, "Lord teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Jesus did not simply give a lesson on prayer. He prayed. As they watched him pray, the disciples became hungry to understand prayer. When students are hungry to learn, they learn better!

The disciples heard Jesus use scripture in his preaching. Jesus referred to the Old Testament frequently. He modeled Bible preaching. Did the disciples learn this lesson? Absolutely! When Peter preached in Acts 2, he referred to Joel, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110. Peter learned from Jesus to build his preaching on scripture. Every sermon in Acts refers to the Old Testament.

Paul followed this same approach. Repeatedly he wrote, "You have seen my example. Follow my model."¹⁸ Paul taught by example. Disciples like Titus and Timothy learned to pastor by following the example of their mentor, Paul.

Today, we should model ministry to those we train. They see our successes and failures. Most of all they observe our character as we admit mistakes and learn. Disciples learn the reality of ministry by watching our example.

A Mentor Must Delegate Responsibility to His Disciples

» Read Matthew 10:5-11:1.

From the beginning, Jesus' purpose was to prepare the disciples for ministry. He called them to follow so that he could make them fishers of men (Matthew 4:19).

During most of their first year with Jesus, the disciples observed his ministry. They learned from his example. After they had observed, Jesus sent the disciples out to minister. Matthew 10 shows how Jesus delegated responsibility to the disciples.

He gave them authority (Matthew 10:1).

Before sending them out, Jesus gave the disciples authority to do the mission he was assigning them. Sometimes leaders are afraid to trust their helpers with authority. However, **responsibility without authority disables those you are training**. We must not give our helpers responsibility unless we give them sufficient authority to meet the responsibility.

¹⁸ Examples include 1 Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 3:17, Philippians 4:9.

He gave them clear instructions (Matthew 10:5-42).

Jesus gave his disciples a clear message: preach the kingdom. Their assignment was clear. They knew exactly what Jesus expected them to do.

Jesus told his disciples where they should minister: to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Later, the apostles would preach to the Gentiles, but as they were learning to minister, Jesus told them to start close to home. We should do everything possible to help our students succeed. Start with a task that is easy to accomplish. Jesus set reasonable goals.

Jesus gave his disciples instruction about persecution. Persecution would come not because the disciples failed in their ministry, but because the call to obey Jesus brings division between his followers and those who reject him.

He sent them in teams (Mark 6:7).

Jesus showed the importance of teams in ministry. He sent the disciples in teams of two. A few months later, Jesus sent out 72 of his followers in teams of two (Luke 10:1). This became the model for ministry in the early church. Peter and John ministered together. Barnabas and Saul traveled together. Paul and Silas ministered together.

A Mentor Must Supervise His Disciples

After the disciples returned from ministry, they reported to Jesus (Mark 6:30). Follow-up was an important part of Jesus' training of his disciples. It is not enough to delegate responsibility; an effective leader will evaluate the disciple's performance. Delegation without evaluation results in poor performance.

» Read Matthew 17:14-21.

Howard Hendricks taught that failure is an important part of the learning process. The disciples asked, "Why could we not cast the demon out of this boy?" Jesus answered by teaching them about faith. It was much better to fail at this early stage of ministry than after Jesus had returned to heaven!

Effective supervision of a disciple must include evaluation. When a disciple fails at a task, he is not expelled from the team. Instead, we must examine the reason for the failure and plan for future improvement.

Jesus shows this pattern in Luke 9:

- In 9:1-6, Jesus sent out the twelve disciples.
- In 9:10, they reported to him about their trip.
- In 9:37-43, the disciples failed to cast out a demon.

- In 9:46-48, Jesus taught them about greatness in God's kingdom.
- In 9:49-50, Jesus rebuked John for a bad ministry decision.
- In 9:52, Jesus sent out disciples to prepare for a visit to a village in Samaria.
- In 9:54-55, Jesus rebuked James and John for another bad ministry decision.
- In 10:1, Jesus sent out a larger group to minister.

Jesus alternated between teaching, delegation, and evaluation. He did not give up on the disciples, even when they failed. Instead, he used failure as a teaching opportunity.

Paul later followed the same pattern. He appointed Titus to lead the church on the island of Crete, and Timothy to pastor at Ephesus. He then wrote letters to give them further training. After planting churches during the first missionary journey, Paul returned on the second journey to give supervision to the churches (Acts 15:36).

This pattern for training is still effective today. Many leaders send out a young minister with no continuing supervision or accountability—and are surprised when the minister fails. We must not think, “I taught the lesson, so they will do it right.” Instead, supervision is a continuing process. If you want to train leaders, you must invest time in supervision.

Howard Hendricks listed four stages in training new workers:

1. **Telling:** Teach them the content. Jesus preached the message of the kingdom to his disciples.
 2. **Showing:** Provide a model of the ministry. Jesus demonstrated ministry to the disciples.
 3. **Practicing:** Ministry under direct supervision. Jesus sent the disciples out to minister and then evaluated their experience.
 4. **Doing:** Ministry without direct supervision. After Pentecost, the disciples ministered without Jesus' supervision.
- » What are you doing to train disciples for leadership? Of the steps we have studied, which do you do effectively? Which steps need improvement? As a group, discuss how you can be more effective in mentoring future leaders. This discussion should continue until you have a plan for developing leaders in your ministry setting.

Our Disciples Must Reproduce Other Disciples

Jesus said to his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...” (John 15:16). Jesus trained his disciples to produce more disciples.

- » Read Matthew 13:31-32.

Jesus' parable of the mustard seed showed that the kingdom of God would grow far beyond its original size. Just as a tiny mustard seed could grow into a plant far beyond its expected size, the church would grow far beyond what anyone might expect. In the Old Testament, birds lodging in a tree represented a great kingdom including many nations (Daniel 4:12 and Ezekiel 31:6). Jesus promised that as the disciples reproduced, the church would grow far out of proportion to its original size and would reach all nations.

Dr. Robert Coleman wrote that the ultimate evaluation of our ministry is in reproduction. "Here finally all of us must evaluate how our life is being multiplied. Will those persons providentially entrusted to us catch the vision of the Great Commission, and will they in turn impart it to faithful servants who will teach others also? The time will come all too soon when our ministry will be in their hands."¹⁹

A CLOSER LOOK: JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

The middle section of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer is focused on his disciples (John 17:6-19). This prayer teaches valuable lessons about Jesus' method of mentoring disciples.²⁰

1. At first, we protect those we mentor.

Jesus prayed, "While I was with them, I kept them." 20 times in the Gospels, Jesus told his disciples to beware of danger. He guarded them from error. As we train disciples, we must protect them from the dangers of their world. Our training must be practical.

- » What are dangers young ministers face in your culture? As a mentor, how will you prepare them for these dangers?

2. As they mature, we trust those we mentor.

Jesus prayed, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). Jesus knew that the disciples would face temptations, but he had confidence in those he had trained. We must learn to trust the young leaders we train. This requires us to surrender an authoritarian approach to leadership and to trust others with important decisions.

Ajith Fernando writes that there are two ways leaders can view their followers.

- Weak leaders focus on the weaknesses of their followers.

¹⁹ Robert Coleman, "The Jesus Way to Win the World: Living the Great Commission Every Day." Evangelical Theological Society, 2003.

²⁰ Adapted from Ajith Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002), 172-173

- Effective leaders focus on their followers' strengths while continuing to work on weaknesses. Effective leaders see others "through eyes of hope."

3. After they have been trained, we send our disciples out to serve the world.

Jesus prayed, "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). After Pentecost, the disciples began the great mission for which Jesus had prepared them. We mentor disciples so they, in turn, can bring the gospel to a needy world.

Jesus said, "I am glorified in them" (John 17:10). As we send out those we train, we must make sure that Jesus receives the glory. We can be tempted to take glory from those we have trained. We can be tempted to receive glory from our ability to disciple others. Instead, we must make sure that the glory goes to God alone.

APPLICATION: THE VALUE OF A MINISTRY TEAM

Jesus' example shows the importance of teams in ministry. Team ministry involves both mentoring younger coworkers and building relationships with fellow pastors. We were created for relationship with other people. Why are teams so important?

Teams Provide Balance

Jesus chose people from many different backgrounds. Peter and John were constant rivals. Matthew worked for Rome, while Simon the Zealot wanted to drive the Romans out of Judea. These men were opposites. In choosing his disciples, Jesus chose a diverse group of people.

Although we often see the difficulties of having such opposing people on a team, we should not ignore the benefits of these differing personalities. An apostle like Peter was quick to make big proclamations. He was balanced by cautious apostles like Thomas and Andrew. The early church benefited from having different personalities in leadership.

Wise leaders find team members from differing backgrounds. A strong team brings varying strengths to the church leadership. One team member may have a better understanding of financial issues; another may be strong in personal relationships; another may find deep biblical insights. All come together to provide balanced leadership for the church.

Teams Provide Wise Counsel

As he trained the disciples, Jesus knew that he was laying the foundation for the church. After Pentecost, there would be many difficult decisions facing the early church. Jesus knew that the disciples needed each other as they made these decisions.

One of the early decisions faced by the church was, “How do Gentile believers become part of the church? Are they required to follow all aspects of the Jewish law?” Although this might seem simple to us, it was a difficult decision. This was not a matter of personal preference; the food and circumcision laws were based on the Old Testament itself. This decision had long-lasting consequences. Today, you and I are affected by this decision; if the Jerusalem Council had decided differently, Gentile Christians today would be required to abide by Jewish laws.

Acts 15 shows how the early church settled this important issue. After hearing different views, they arrived at a decision. In their letter to the Gentile church, the apostles used a beautiful phrase to describe the decision, “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). The Spirit led by bringing church leaders together, allowing them to share their opinions, and then guiding the group to the right decision.

The writer of Proverbs emphasizes the value of multiple viewpoints when making a decision.

- The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice (Proverbs 12:15).
- In the abundance of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14).
- By wise guidance, you can wage a war and in the abundance of counselors, there is victory (Proverbs 24:6).

This is an important principle for church leaders. If you are unwilling to listen to others, Proverbs says that you are not wise. A fool always thinks he is right, but a wise person is willing to listen to others.

If the purpose of a team is to give wise counsel, we need people who think differently than we do. We must make sure that in choosing a team we do not look for copies of ourselves. We do not need people who always quickly agree with us.

Teams Provide Encouragement

Ecclesiastes describes the benefit of a team. “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

When the church faced opposition, the apostles encouraged one another. Luke used the phrase “in one accord” to describe the mutual support between the early church members.

The great missionary Hudson Taylor illustrates this principle. Taylor went to China with a passion for ministry, but he soon grew discouraged. Some of his supporters quit sending financial help. Established missionaries were critical of him. Even the British government opposed his work. His fiancée wrote him from England to say she was uncertain about marrying a missionary. Taylor was discouraged and ready to return home.

During this time, an older Scottish missionary named William Burns spent seven months with Hudson Taylor on an evangelistic trip to the Chinese inland. The two men traveled together, prayed together, and preached together. During that trip, Taylor regained his vision for China. John Pollock wrote, “William Burns saved Hudson Taylor from himself.”

Hudson Taylor later established the China Inland Mission and is known as one of the greatest missionaries of the modern age; William Burns is almost unknown. However, William Burns deserves some of the credit for the thousands of converts won through the China Inland Mission. Burns encouraged Hudson Taylor at a crucial moment. Teams provide encouragement.

Teams Provide Accountability

Each of us has blind spots—characteristics that we do not see in ourselves. We bring into our ministry weaknesses that come from our family background, from our life before we were a Christian, and from our personality. Those things affect our ministry.

We may not see these weaknesses in ourselves, but other team members can warn us of these areas that could destroy our ministry. The writer of Hebrews called Christians to stir up one another to good works (Hebrews 10:24). The original Greek term behind “stir up” has the idea of prodding or poking someone. At times, this is disagreeable. None of us like to be prodded, but accountability is valuable. Every Christian leader needs at least one person who can say, “This action is unwise. You should reconsider it.”

From the monasteries of the Middle Ages and the class meetings of the Wesleys to modern groups such as Promise Keepers, Christian leaders have a long tradition of accountability. Church leaders today benefit from weekly accountability. This can be done one on one, in small groups, or even by phone. This accountability can warn us of spiritual danger before we drift too far.

Good accountability requires complete honesty from each partner and total confidentiality between the partners. You can find many examples of accountability questions. One list includes these questions:

- This week, have you spent time with God on a regular basis?
- This week, have you compromised your integrity in any way?
- This week, has your thought life been pure?
- This week, have you committed any sexual sin?
- This week, what significant thing have you done for your wife (or husband)?
- This week, have you shared your faith with an unbeliever?
- Have you been truthful in each of these answers?

The accountability of a team is important in times of temptation. Writing to a young pastor, Paul gave counsel on how to build a lasting ministry. Paul warned Timothy to “flee youthful

passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, **along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart**" (2 Timothy 2:22). Paul understood that Timothy's spiritual life would benefit from joining with other God-followers who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

- » If you are part of a ministry team, share some of the benefits you gain from your team. What are some of the challenges of being part of a ministry team?

Working with a Team

Jesus molded a group of very different personalities into a unified team. Jesus took their differences and created a team who could lead the early church. The church needed Peter's bold leadership, and it needed Philip's quiet spirit. One of the great challenges for a leader is molding a group of followers into a team.

Ajith Fernando, a church leader from Sri Lanka, understands well the challenges of building a team. He writes:

Perhaps the tragedy with the evangelical church is that feelings overcome theology very often in determining the way we decide and act. The biblical Christian says, "Whatever my feelings are about this person, I will accept him because God wants me to do so. And I will ask God to give me the grace to work harmoniously with him." Our theology says that this effort at working with this person will succeed, even though our feelings may give another message. Our theology drives us to work hard at this relationship. We pray for the person and about our relationship with him. We meet him regularly. We seek to show Christian love to him and do all that we can for his personal welfare. We develop dreams for what this person could achieve through the team.²¹

1 Corinthians 12:12-25 teaches that in the body of Christ, we do not have the right to reject people simply because we do not like them. If you build a church, you will have members that you may not enjoy. As a Christian leader, you must say, "Whatever my personal feelings, I will accept this person because God has put him in my care. I will ask God for grace to work with him, and I will ask God to bless him and prosper him in ministry."

AN EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN LEADER IS A SERVANT

Someone once asked a future pastor, "Why do you want to be a pastor?" The young man replied, "At the airport, I saw someone carrying the suitcase of his pastor. I want someone to carry my suitcase!"

21 Ajith Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002), 133

Jesus' perspective was much different! This young man wanted to be served; Jesus wanted to serve. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus shows us that true leadership involves service. Jesus humbled himself, taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7).

» Read John 13:1-20.

There are many places in the Gospels where we can study Jesus' model of servant-leadership, but one of the most powerful examples is the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. In this scene, Jesus shows what it means to be a servant.

Some churches hold a foot-washing service to reenact Jesus' actions at the Last Supper. This can be a beautiful service, but it may be more powerful to realize that Jesus did not perform a special ceremony. Instead, he simply did a job that needed to be done.

Because of the dusty streets of Jerusalem, it was customary for a hired servant to wash the feet of the guests at a formal dinner. This was a humble duty assigned to the lowest servants. As Jesus joined his disciples for the Passover celebration, there was no servant in the room. None of the disciples would volunteer to do this duty; they were hoping for high positions in Jesus' kingdom. Jesus knelt and began to do the work of the lowest servant.

This scene shows Jesus' understanding of leadership. Other people sought leadership for position and power. Their goal was to get to the top of an organization. Jesus was already at the top; he was the disciples' Master. But he willingly took the lowest position.

This is what it means to be a Christlike leader. A Christlike leader takes the jobs that no one wants. A Christlike leader inspires others not through his ability to shout orders, but through his example of humble service.

Someone once said, "The test of a servant spirit is 'How do I act when I am treated like a servant?'" A leader who follows the example of Jesus is not offended to be treated like a servant. Do not forget that Jesus washed Judas' feet along with the other disciples. Can you imagine humbly washing the feet of the man who has already decided to betray you?

"Head tables have replaced the towel and washbasin as symbols of leadership among God's people... It is time to bring back the towel."

C. Gene Wilkes

When he was done washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus told these position-seeking men, "I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:15). Thirty years later, Simon Peter may have remembered Jesus' humility when he wrote, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another" (1 Peter 5:5). Just

as Jesus wrapped the towel around himself to serve the disciples, we are to wrap humility around ourselves to serve others.

As Christian leaders, we can be tempted to seek position rather than opportunities for service. Jesus showed that Christian leadership is service.

CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING OTHER CHRISTIAN WORKERS

At the end of your life, your impact as a mentor of other Christian workers may be the greatest legacy of your ministry. If you mentor only 12 other Christian workers during your ministry, your impact will be multiplied by those 12 plus the workers they mentor.

Sadly, although most Christian leaders know the importance of mentoring, few leaders invest the time required to mentor others. Why do we neglect this aspect of ministry?

One reason is the **cost** of mentoring. Mentoring takes valuable time. We often believe that time spent mentoring young leaders could be better spent ministering to large groups.

Another reason is the **disappointment** that accompanies mentoring. It sounds glamorous to say, “I am training the next generation of leaders.” The reality is often less exciting.

Many times, Jesus must have felt disappointment in the slow progress of his disciples. After three years with Jesus, Philip asked, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us” (John 14:8). A few weeks after Jesus fed 5,000, the disciples faced a crowd of 4,000. They asked, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” (Mark 8:4).

The apostle Paul experienced much of the same disappointment. John Mark quit during the first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). After months of training Demas, Paul wrote from a lonely prison cell, “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me” (2 Timothy 4:10).

Mentoring is costly and can be disappointing, but it is an important part of the leader’s work. Every mature Christian leader should be mentoring future leaders. At the same time, every Christian leader needs a mentor who provides support in times of struggle.

Howard Hendricks said that every man needs three people in his life:

1. Every man needs a Paul, a mentor who challenges you to continuing growth.
2. Every man needs a Barnabas, a friend who loves you enough to be honest with you about your weaknesses.
3. Every man needs a Timothy, a younger person to disciple and mentor in ministry.

» End this lesson by asking:

- “Who is my Paul?”
- “Who is my Barnabas?”
- “Who is my Timothy?”

LESSON 3 ASSIGNMENTS

1. In the table below, list four times when the disciples observed Jesus’ ministry. Make note of what the disciples learned from observing Jesus.
2. List two or three people you could mentor for future ministry. Write a short paragraph in which you answer two questions:
 - What qualifications do I want to see in a person I mentor?
 - What do I want to see God accomplish in the person I mentor? (Be specific.)

Begin to take steps to mentor the people you name. Ask God to show you how you can prepare them for ministry opportunities.

EVENT	SCRIPTURE	LESSON FOR THE DISCIPLES
Jesus healing a boy with a demon	Matthew 17:14-21	the power of faith

LESSON 4

TEACHING LIKE JESUS

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the qualities that made Jesus a great teacher.
2. Learn practical methods for improving as a teacher.
3. Plan assignments that will improve students' readiness for class.

PRINCIPLE FOR MINISTRY

When they are fully trained, our students will be like their teacher.

INTRODUCTION

- » This lesson does not include an assignment at the end. Instead, small assignments are included throughout the lesson, under the heading, “Put the Lesson into Practice.” Some of these will require writing or practical activities. Others are just thinking or discussion assignments. Do each assignment as you work through the lesson material.

One of the most profound statements ever made about the power of teaching came from Jesus. “The disciple is not above his master: but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). Jesus knew that when he had trained his disciples, they would reflect his own character. Because of this, Jesus devoted great energy to teaching the twelve apostles.

In some churches, Sunday school teachers are given the job with no experience and no training. Little effort is given to teaching new converts or young children.

As church leaders, we should give teaching the same priority that Jesus gave teaching. If students will be like their teacher, the task of teaching is of great importance. We should train teachers to follow the example of Jesus, the Master Teacher.

- » Think about what you already know about Jesus's style of teaching. List three or four characteristics that made him a great teacher. Now think about the best teacher you ever studied from. List three or four characteristics that made this person a great teacher. How many of the characteristics on these two lists overlap?

THE HEART OF THE MASTER TEACHER: CHARACTER

The **content** of Jesus' teaching was based on the **character** of the Teacher. Jesus' heart provided the foundation for his teaching. What is the heart of a great teacher?

Jesus, the Master Teacher, Understood the Needs of His Students

- » Read Luke 4:16-21.

School teachers prepare lesson plans for each day of class. The lesson plan shows what the teacher will accomplish in each class. A lesson plan includes something like this:

- Objective: Students will learn to add fractions.
- Activity: Students will do problems 1-20 on page 89 in the class workbook.

Jesus had a lesson plan for his ministry, but his lesson plan did not list pages in a workbook. Instead, Jesus' lesson plan focused on the needs of his students. Jesus told his listeners what he had been sent to accomplish:

- Proclaim good news to the poor.
- Proclaim liberty to the captives.
- Proclaim recovery of sight to the blind.
- Set at liberty those who are oppressed.
- Proclaim the Year of Jubilee (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus' objectives met the needs of his students. Jesus' students were not the wealthy Sadducees who controlled the Temple in Jerusalem and held political power in the Sanhedrin. His students were ordinary Jewish people who were oppressed by Rome. Some of them were blind or lame. Many of them were poor people who suffered from high taxes.

Jesus' lesson plan was simple; he would meet the needs of his students. He would deliver captives. He would give sight to blind people. In the Jewish calendar, the Year of Jubilee was a time of celebration. Debts were canceled; land was returned to its original family; slaves were freed. Jesus announced that he had come to bring a Year of Jubilee to those who were oppressed.

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus addressed the needs of his students. Jesus did not always give people what they wanted, but he gave them what they needed. The Samaritan

woman wanted water; she needed redemption (John 4:7-42). Peter wanted to catch fish; he needed a mission (Matthew 4:18-22). In each case, Jesus met the deep needs of his student.

- » Read Mark 10:17-22.

In this story of a rich young man who came to Jesus, the narrator says, “Jesus, looking at him, loved him.” The word *looking* in this verse is more than simple observation. It means to look closely and to discern clearly. Jesus saw the heart of this young man. Others might have seen only a rich young person; Jesus saw a hungry heart.

- » Read Mark 16:1-8.

Imagine Peter’s shame after he denied Jesus. Even the joy of the resurrection was lessened by his shame as he remembered the crowing of the rooster. In this situation, the angel said to Mary, “But go, tell his disciples **and Peter** that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” Jesus knew that of all the disciples, the one who most needed reassurance was Peter. Others saw a coward who denied his master; Jesus saw a fallen disciple who needed restoration.

Jesus knew that we cannot teach students if we do not understand them. If you want to win the heart of a student, you must think like the student. You must understand the hearts of those you teach. As a teacher, you must study the subject, but even more, you must study your students. You must understand the needs of your students.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Think about those you teach (either formally or informally). Focus on a student who struggles. Make a list of practical things you can do to serve the needs of this student.

Jesus, the Master Teacher, Was Patient

Jesus was patient with those who turned against him.

- » Read John 6:41-71.

This story takes place at one of the important transition points of Jesus’ ministry. During the previous year, Jesus had enjoyed great popularity. The people had been awed by his miracles and had enjoyed the bread and fishes. Now Jesus proclaimed, “I am the bread of life.” He said things that disturbed his listeners. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Jesus taught thousands, knowing that many would not accept his teaching. He taught the twelve, knowing that one of them was a devil (John 6:70). He was a patient teacher.

Jesus was patient with those who did not understand him.

- » Read Mark 8:27-33.

Jesus was patient with students who were slow to learn. Notice how many times the gospels mention the doubts and blindness of the disciples. Even when Peter recognizes that “You are the Christ,” he does not truly understand what this means. Only a few verses later, Jesus rebukes Peter for his wrong ideas.

- » Read John 3:1-21.

Jesus was patient with a Pharisee who did not understand his teaching. When Nicodemus was confused, Jesus asked in amazement, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” Nicodemus should have known that Ezekiel foretold a day when Israel would be born of water and of the Spirit. But instead of giving up, Jesus patiently taught the lesson to Nicodemus.²²

Here is a good test of patience for a teacher: “How many times am I willing to teach the lesson before giving up?” Jesus patiently taught and retaught his students. If he found students open to his teaching, Jesus continued to teach. Jesus, the Master Teacher, was patient.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Are you tempted to give up on slow students? Do you become frustrated when they don’t respond to your teaching? How can you show the patience of the Master Teacher to those you teach?

Jesus, the Master Teacher, Loved His Students

- » Read Mark 6:30-34.

Jesus took his disciples across the Sea of Galilee to find a deserted area in which they could rest from the constant pressure of crowds and ministry. Thousands of people saw where he was going and ran along the shore to meet Jesus. Jesus went ashore to find a crowd of 5,000 men, plus women and children. When he saw the crowd, “he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34). Jesus, the Master Teacher, taught because he loved his students.

22 John 3:5 points to the promise of Ezekiel 36:25-27. Ezekiel saw a day when God’s people would be washed with water (this cleanses from uncleanness and idols) and given a new Spirit (this gives a desire to keep God’s law).

Earlier in this lesson, we read the story of the rich young man who went away sorrowful because he would not pay the cost of following Jesus (Mark 10:17-22). “Jesus, looking at him, **loved him**” (Mark 10:21). The Master Teacher loved his student, even a student who would walk away.

Jesus looked with compassion at crowds, individuals, and even those who rejected him. One preacher preached a sermon titled, “Judas, the Disciple Jesus Loved.” This preacher recognized that Jesus showed love even to Judas. Knowing that Judas would betray him, Jesus loved his student to the end.

It is easy to love the student who comes to class early, who has every assignment done, and who shows an eagerness to learn. It is hard to love the Judas who betrays us, the rich young man who walks away, and the Peter who repeatedly fails to understand. Jesus, the Master Teacher, shows that we must love even students who are difficult.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Think of a student who is difficult to love. Perhaps it is a staff member who resists your leadership. Perhaps it is a church member who criticizes you. Begin to pray, “God, I struggle to love this person, but I know you love them. Please help me to see them through your eyes. Help me to love them as Jesus loved his students.”

THE HANDS OF THE MASTER TEACHER: METHODS

In “The Heart of the Master Teacher,” we saw the character of Jesus. Everything that Jesus taught was based on his character. In “The Hands of the Master Teacher,” we see the methods Jesus used. If we want to teach like Jesus, we must follow his methods.

Jesus, the Master Teacher, Communicated His Goals

- » Read Luke 5:1-11.

As Jesus was teaching beside the Sea of Galilee, the crowd pressed against him until he climbed into a fishing boat belonging to Simon Peter.²³ After teaching, Jesus turned to Simon and said, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4).

Simon was an experienced fisherman who had spent the night fishing without success. He knew that it was useless to try to catch anything at that time, but he did as Jesus commanded.

²³ Luke’s “Lake of Gennesaret,” John’s “Sea of Tiberias,” Matthew and Mark’s “Sea of Galilee,” and Moses’ “Sea of Kinnereth” (Numbers 34:11) all refer to the large lake that was important in Jesus’ ministry. Several of Jesus’ disciples were fisherman on this lake and much of his ministry took place on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

To Peter's surprise, the fishermen brought in an astonishing catch. Jesus said to Simon, "From now on you will be catching men" (Luke 5:10).

Jesus, like all good teachers, communicated clearly his goals for his students. On the day of Pentecost, Peter showed that he was ready to accomplish the goal Jesus had set for him.

Effective teachers communicate their goals. They tell students, "This is what you will learn today." At the end of the lesson, they ask, "What did you learn today?" They make sure the students see that the goal for the lesson has been accomplished.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » At your next teaching opportunity, write your goal for the lesson on a board where the students can see it. Make sure that the goal is clear and easy to understand. Introduce the goal at the beginning of the session. At the end of the lesson, ask the students, "Did we accomplish our goal?"

Jesus, the Master Teacher, Provided Opportunities for Guided Practice

Effective teaching is more than lectures. True learning requires practice.

- » Read Luke 10:1-24.

These disciples were not yet fully trained, but Jesus let them practice the lessons he was teaching. When the disciples returned from this ministry trip, they reported to Jesus. He saw that they did not understand the lessons, so he gave them more instruction. He also encouraged them, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" (Luke 10:23). Jesus guided their practice.

It is not enough to give the opportunity for practice; the practice must be evaluated and then followed by more training. A familiar proverb says, "Practice makes perfect." This is not entirely true. Incorrect practice does not result in better performance. It is better to say, "**Guided practice** makes perfect." An effective teacher will give students opportunity for practice, review the practice with the students, and then encourage and guide the students.

Paul knew the value of guided practice. He trained Timothy and Titus, and then put them in places of ministry. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul wrote Timothy and Titus to give further instruction. He guided his students as they practiced the ministry principles he had taught.

At a school in South Africa, each student memorized and recited 1 Corinthians 13 to the class. One student struggled for weeks with this assignment. He did not memorize well and

was very shy in front of other students. One day this student finally succeeded in reciting the entire chapter to the class.

As he finished, the other students stood and cheered for this young man. Why? This chapter is about love, and their teacher had taught the students that love encourages others. As they cheered their classmate, these students were putting the lesson of 1 Corinthians 13 into practice! Effective teachers encourage their students to practice the principles they are learning.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Give your students an opportunity to practice what they are learning. If you are training young pastors, provide a chance for them to preach, visit a sick person, or share the gospel with an unbeliever. After they have finished, evaluate their ministry, give suggestions for improvement, and encourage them by noticing areas where they were successful.

Jesus, the Master Teacher, Was Flexible

Think of the many places and situations where Jesus taught. He taught:

- By the seashore (Luke 5)
- During a storm (Luke 8:22-25)
- By allowing a student to struggle (Matthew 14:25-33)
- When his lesson was interrupted by visitors (Matthew 12:46-50)
- During a visit to the Temple (Matthew 24)
- When someone tore the roof off his classroom (Luke 5:18-26)

Imagine the students who returned home after the miracle in Luke 5:18-26. They never forgot this lesson they learned about the power of Jesus. Luke writes that “amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things today’” (Luke 5:26).

Jesus was flexible enough to know that a great teacher finds teachable moments when students are ready to learn. Luke gives an example of this principle. “Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’” (Luke 11:1). Jesus took this moment to teach about prayer.

Eight-year-old Abigail walked into the room for her piano lesson and began to cry, “My cat died this morning!” Abigail had no interest in playing scales or learning piano technique. However, when her teacher handed her a piece of music called “My Favorite Kitten,” Abigail decided, “I want to learn this in memory of my cat!”

As teachers, we must listen to our students and respond to their situation. Like Jesus the Master Teacher, we must be flexible in our teaching. We must be willing to adapt our lesson to the needs of our students.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Are you flexible in your teaching? Plan at least two different ways to teach a lesson. If you usually give a lecture, plan a lesson based on discussion or activity with no lecture. If you often use PowerPoint or other technology, plan a lesson that requires no electrical power. If you teach in a classroom, plan an outdoor lesson and incorporate nature into your lesson.

Jesus, the Master Teacher, Communicated Creatively

Jesus never sat down and said, “Today we will read page 212 from our textbook. Peter, you read the first paragraph for us.” Instead, Jesus found new ways to communicate creatively.

- » Read each of these examples of Jesus’ creative teaching:
 - **Luke 6:39-42.** Think of the irony of a blind man guiding another blind man. Imagine a man with a log in his eye attempting to pick a speck out of another man’s eye.
 - **Luke 18:18-30.** Is it possible to use earthly riches to gain access to the kingdom of God? Imagine squeezing a camel through the eye of a needle!
 - **Luke 9:46-48.** Jesus used a child as a living object lesson about humility.
 - **Luke 15:1-7.** How does God respond to a lost soul who comes home? Jesus pointed farmers to the value of a sheep.
 - **Luke 15:11-32.** Teaching people in a patriarchal society in which ultimate authority rested with the father, Jesus told a parable in which the father shocked onlookers by running to greet a rebellious son.

Jesus rarely answered a question directly. Instead, he responded with a story or another question. In Luke 10, a lawyer asked Jesus, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered with the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Jesus knew how to ask great questions. Jesus rarely asked questions that allowed simple “Yes” or “No” responses. Instead, he asked questions that forced the listener to open his eyes to new possibilities.

» Read these examples:

- **Luke 7:36-50.** To a Pharisee who criticized him, Jesus asked, “Who loves most, one who is forgiven much or one who is forgiven little?”
- **Mark 8:36.** Teaching about discipleship, Jesus asked, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?”
- **Luke 6:46.** To those who did not want to obey, Jesus said, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”

None of these questions allow an easy answer. Each causes us to think deeply about Jesus’ teaching.

There are two ways in which teachers fail to use questions well.

1. We ask questions that are too simple. If we want our students to think deeply, we must ask questions that are not answered with yes or no or with a fact from the textbook.
2. We do not wait long enough for an answer. Researchers say that most teachers wait less than one second before moving to another student for an answer. It takes approximately three seconds for a student to comprehend the question and begin forming an answer. To improve your use of questions, always wait seven seconds before moving to another student for an answer.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Are you creative in your teaching? Prepare a lesson on Galatians 6:7-8. Prepare questions that help students think deeply about the principle of sowing and reaping. After you have prepared your questions, look at the footnote below for additional questions that you can ask.²⁴

A CLOSER LOOK: INTERPRETING PARABLES

The parable was one of Jesus’ favorite teaching devices. Someone once defined a parable as “an earthly story with a heavenly lesson.” Jesus’ parables used familiar rural settings (farmers, shepherds, and sheep), familiar people (Samaritans, priests, publicans, and Phar-

24 Questions about the principle of sowing and reaping in Galatians 6:7-8:

What are some examples from nature or society that illustrate the principle of sowing and reaping?

Who are some Bible characters that illustrate this principle?

Do you know any personal examples of this principle?

In your personal life, are you sowing seeds that you do not want to reap?

isees), and familiar situations (a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a runaway son) to connect with the interests of his students.

The Shepherds Global Classroom course *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* includes a section on interpreting parables. Here is a summary of the principles taught in that course. When studying a parable, we should ask:

1. What question or situation inspired this parable?

The parable of the Good Samaritan answered the lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' story answers, "Any needy person in my path is my neighbor and my responsibility" (Luke 10:36-37).

Jesus told the parable of the Prodigal Son to religious leaders who criticized his friendship with sinners. "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable" (Luke 15:1-3).

- A shepherd lost his sheep. He rejoiced when he found the sheep!
- A woman lost her coin. She rejoiced when she found the coin!
- A father lost his son. He rejoiced when his son returned!

Jesus implies, "You should not be shocked when I eat with sinners. Heaven rejoices when one sinner repents!"

If our interpretation does not answer the question or address the situation that inspired Jesus' story, we have missed the point of the parable.

2. What is the primary point (or points) of the parable?

A parable will often have one main point for each main character in the story. The primary lesson of the parable will relate directly to the question or situation that inspired the parable. Other lessons come from the characters in the story.

The story of the Prodigal Son features three characters. We have already seen that the primary lesson of the story is the joy in heaven over a sinner who repents. This lesson answers the situation that inspired Jesus' story. Each character in the parable may teach lessons related to the primary message of the story. The father teaches the amazing love of our heavenly Father. The prodigal teaches both the cost of sin and the possibility of repentance. The elder brother warns that we can miss the privileges of the father's love even while appearing to be a good son.

3. What cultural details are important to the parable?

Jesus' parables often went against the norms of his culture. This is what made the parables memorable: a father runs to greet a rebellious son; a Samaritan is a hero; a powerless widow defeats a powerful judge. The better we understand the cultural setting of the parable, the better we will understand Jesus' message.

APPLICATION: SEVEN LAWS OF THE TEACHER

Dr. Howard Hendricks²⁵ taught at Dallas Theological Seminary for more than 60 years. During his career, he taught more than 10,000 students. One of his most influential books is a small book that summarizes his philosophy in seven “laws of the teacher.” These laws are based on the teaching style of Jesus. As you apply these principles, you will become a more effective teacher.

The Law of the Teacher

The Law of the Teacher: If you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow.

Dr. Hendricks asks, “Would you rather drink water from a stale pond or a running stream?” Fresh water from a running stream is better than water that has become stagnant and unappealing.

Some teachers go for years without reading a new book in their subject or without gaining any new ideas. Their teaching becomes like a stagnant and stale pond. As teachers, we should keep learning just as pastors should constantly study to gain new insights into God's Word.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Imagine that a student asked you, “Teacher, what have you learned from the Bible recently?” Will your answer come from this week, this month, this year, or from long ago? Are you growing daily in your knowledge of God's Word?

The Law of Education

The Law of Education: The way people learn determines how you teach.

Jesus taught shepherds by telling stories about sheep; he taught fishermen by talking about “fishing for men;” he taught the woman at the well by talking about water. Jesus knew that an effective teacher adapts to the needs of each student.

²⁵ The material in this section is adapted from Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 1987).

Dr. Hendricks compares teaching to the job of a football coach. The coach does not play the game; the coach excites and directs the players. In the same way, the best teacher does not do all the work through lectures. The best teacher inspires each student to learn in a way that is effective for that student.

Micah was a student in Bible class. The teacher expected all students to take careful notes to prepare for the exam. Micah did not want to take notes. Instead, as the teacher was lecturing, he would draw pictures in his notebook. The teacher was afraid that Micah was not listening. Several times, he said, “Micah, please don’t draw pictures. Write what I am teaching.” Micah tried to do what the teacher asked, but he became very frustrated.

Then the teacher remembered Dr. Hendricks’ Law of Education. He said, “Micah, let’s do an experiment. You can draw if you can show me that you remember what I say in class.” The experiment was successful. Micah learned by turning words into pictures. The teacher learned to change his expectations because “the way people learn determines how you teach.”

“The ultimate test of teaching is not what you do or how well you do it, but what and how well the learner does.”

Dr. Howard Hendricks

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Do you have a student who learns differently from the rest of your class? What can you do to help the student learn more effectively?

The Law of Activity

The Law of Activity: Maximum involvement brings maximum learning.

Jesus knew that his students must practice the lessons he was teaching. He sent them on ministry trips; he had them distribute bread and fish to the crowds; he took them into the desert to pray; he gave them opportunities to apply their learning. What was the result?

**“I hear... and I forget.
I see...and I remember.
I do... and I understand.”**

Chinese Proverb

The apostles became known as the people who have turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

Psychologists say that

- We remember less than 10% of what we hear.
- We remember less than 50% of what we see and hear, but
- We remember up to 90% of what we **see, hear and do**.

Active involvement greatly increases learning.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » As you prepare for your next lesson, prepare an activity that will allow students to practice the principle you teach.

The Law of Communication

The Law of Communication: To truly teach, we must build bridges to the learner.

As teachers and pastors, we are in the business of communication. Our job is bigger than giving information; our job is communicating truth to our listeners. Communication requires finding common ground. Communication requires building a bridge to our learners.

Jesus provided a model for building bridges to learners. There were barriers between Jesus and the Samaritan woman: racial, religious, and social barriers. Jesus was Jewish; she was a Samaritan. Jesus was a man; she was a woman. Jesus was a respected rabbi; she had an immoral past. How could Jesus build a bridge across these barriers? He found common ground; both were thirsty. A physical need provided the bridge to a life-changing encounter (John 4:1-42).

Dr. Hendricks wrote that communication must involve three levels:

1. **Knowledge** - something I know. This is the simplest level of communication.
2. **Passion** - something I feel. This is a deeper level of communication.
3. **Action** - something I do. This level of communication changes our students.

Joel listened as a seminary administrator in Africa presented his vision to a wealthy donor. He asked the donor for more money than Joel could imagine! To Joel's surprise, the donor gave generously. Why? The seminary administrator communicated on three levels:

1. **Knowledge** - He knew the need for seminary training in Africa.
2. **Passion** - He was passionate about training church leaders in Africa.
3. **Action** - He has spent his life in Africa and has made many sacrifices to train church leaders. The administrator communicated what he was doing in Africa.

To teach effectively, we must have a passion for our subject. Imagine this conversation in many Sunday school classrooms:

Teacher: “Today we will study the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6.”

Student: “I have a question. The Bible says they only counted the men. Why?”

Teacher: “I don’t know. It isn’t important. Just focus on the lesson.”

Suddenly, an exciting Bible story from the Bible is boring. Children would love to know how Jesus could feed 20,000 people with a few loaves and fishes. How can we make that boring? This teacher is not communicating knowledge; he has not studied the background to understand why Jewish writers counted only the men. The teacher feels no passion for this exciting story. There is little chance that the teacher’s life has been transformed by this lesson in a way that will allow him to transform the lives of the students.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » As you prepare a lesson, think about the distance between your world and the world of your students. Take time to build a bridge to your students. Find a way to connect the lesson to the interests of your students.

The Law of the Heart

The Law of the Heart: Effective teaching is more than head-to-head; it is heart-to-heart.

When Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes (Matthew 7:28-29). Jesus’ teaching came from his heart and touched the heart of his listeners.

Repeatedly, the gospels illustrate Jesus’ compassion. The people were touched by his compassion. His heart reached their hearts. Howard Hendricks shows the elements of effective teaching.

The teacher’s character inspires confidence in the learner.

If the student trusts the teacher’s character, he has confidence in what he is being taught. As pastors and teachers, we must never destroy that trust. The hardest thing to rebuild is trust. Wise Christian leaders run from anything that could lead to moral or ethical failure. Your character must inspire confidence in your learners.

The teacher's compassion produces motivation in the learner.

When a student feels the teacher's compassion, he is motivated to learn. The disciples followed Jesus because they knew that he loved them. If you do not love your students, they will have little motivation to learn from you.

Talking to teachers of young children, Dr. Hendricks said, "If Joanne has new shoes, you must notice her new shoes, or she will never hear your new lesson!" After you show an interest in the learner (because of your love), they are ready to learn the lesson you teach.

The teacher's content brings understanding to the learner.

Only after the student is motivated to learn are you ready to teach the content. After you have gained their confidence, you can speak from your heart to the heart of your student.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Do you love your students? Just as importantly, do they **know** that you love them? How can you better communicate your heart to the students God sends you?

The Law of Encouragement

The Law of Encouragement: Teaching is most effective when the student is properly motivated.

When they hear the word *motivation*, many teachers think of candy, certificates, grades, or other ways of inspiring students. These rewards are not wrong and can help interest young people, but these rewards are unrelated to the real goal. A student who is working for a reward is less likely to be changed by the truth he is learning. It is better for the teacher to speak to the student's inner motives.

Dr. Hendricks lists some inner motives:

- **Ownership.** "This is my church. To help it grow, I will invite visitors."
- **Need.** "I need God's Word to conquer temptation, so I will memorize scripture."
- **Approval.** "I love my teacher and want to please her, so I will study the lesson."

These motivations last much longer than candy or grades. As we use these motivational tools, we encourage our students to long-term learning.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » Make a list of the motivators you could use for your students. How could you motivate them with the benefits of learning?

The Law of Readiness

The Law of Readiness: Teaching is most effective when both student and teacher are adequately prepared.

Does this sound like a normal Sunday School lesson at your church?

Teacher: “Today, we will study Ephesians 5. Please open your Bibles.”

The students think: “Why do we need to study Ephesians 5?”

The teacher spends an hour teaching Ephesians 5. She is a good teacher. By the end of the hour, the students are inspired by Paul’s message. The lesson ends, and the students go home. A week later, we could hear this:

Teacher: “Today, we will study Ephesians 6. Please open your Bibles.”

The students think: “Why do we need to study Ephesians 6?”

How much better it would be if the students studied Ephesians 6 before the class! Would the lesson accomplish more if students came to class with a list of questions? Of course! How can you accomplish this? Professor Hendricks suggests giving assignments that prepare the students for the lesson. For example:

- Give assignments that cause the student to think about the lesson they will study the following week. “Before next Sunday, read Acts 19 to learn how Paul started the church in Ephesus.”
- Give assignments that provide a background for the lesson. “Before next Sunday, read in a Bible dictionary about the temple to Artemis in Ephesus. This will help explain Paul’s emphasis on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-20.”
- Give assignments that develop the student’s ability to study independently. “Read Ephesians 6 once each day this week. As you read, write one question that you have about this chapter. Next Sunday, we will discuss your questions.”

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » At the next class you teach, give students an assignment to prepare them for the following lesson. Make sure the assignment prepares them for a better understanding of the lesson they will study.

CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEACHER'S CHARACTER

Jesus knew that “everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). His disciples demonstrate this principle. Because he was trained by the model of perfect love, John the “Son of Thunder” became John the “Apostle of Love.” Because he was trained by the model of faith, “Doubting Thomas” became Thomas, the “Apostle to India.” When they were fully trained, the disciples were like their teacher.

The first step for a teacher is to **be what you want your students to become**. Jesus could not turn unstable Peter into “the Rock” unless Jesus was a model of stability. We must be what we want our students to become.

Paul understood this principle. He told the Corinthians, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). What a bold statement! Paul implies, “If you want to live the right kind of life, copy me.” Because Paul was following Christ, it was safe for the Corinthians to follow Paul.

If my students will become like me, I must ask, “Do I show character traits that I will be ashamed for my students to copy?” If I respond to students with anger and impatience, I must not be surprised if my students “when they are fully trained” show anger and impatience towards others.

Character is central for the teacher. You cannot develop character qualities in your students that you do not model in your own life. It is far more important for a teacher to show godly character than to show his great education. We must be what we want our students to become.

Put the Lesson into Practice

- » As we end this lesson on teaching like Jesus, ask God to show you if you have character traits that you do not want your students to copy. Ask God for grace to make the needed changes so that when your students are fully trained, you will see God's character reflected in their lives.

LESSON 4 ASSIGNMENT

The assignments for this lesson were done throughout the lesson. If you completed each of the activities listed during the lesson, there are no additional assignments for Lesson 4.

LESSON 5

PREACHING LIKE JESUS

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the qualities that made Jesus an effective preacher.
2. Appreciate the role of the Holy Spirit in effective preaching.
3. Commit to faithfulness as a shepherd-pastor.
4. Prepare a sermon that follows Jesus' model for preaching.

PRINCIPLE FOR MINISTRY

Effective preaching is not the result of human effort alone; effective preaching is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Listen to the response of the crowds to Jesus' preaching.

- “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished” (Matthew 7:28-29).
- “All the crowd was astonished at his teaching” (Mark 11:18).
- “And the great throng heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37).

Jesus' preaching was powerful. Thousands gathered to hear him preach. Surely his preaching style should be a model for us today. Remember that on earth, Jesus ministered in his humanity. Do not think, “Of course Jesus was a powerful preacher; he was God.” Instead, think, “Jesus—as man—preached in a way that communicated with power and authority.

His preaching drew audiences to the truth. What can I learn from Jesus that will make me a more effective preacher of the gospel?”

- » Imagine that you lived in A.D. 30 and heard Jesus preach. What would you expect to see and hear?

JESUS PREACHED WITH AUTHORITY

- » Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

When Jesus preached in Capernaum, the people were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority (Luke 4:32). After the Sermon on the Mount, “the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29). The scribes quoted other rabbis to support their theories, but Jesus preached with authority.

As pastors, we must preach with authority. Our authority is different than the authority of Jesus. His authority was inherent in himself; our authority is given to us as representatives of Jesus Christ; our authority is derived from the message we preach.

We Preach with Authority as Representatives of Jesus Christ

Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” In the next verse, he commissioned his followers, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). We have authority because we have been commissioned as Jesus’ representatives.

In 1783, representatives of the United States and representatives of King George III met to sign the Treaty of Paris ending the American Revolutionary War. King George III did not travel to Paris to sign the treaty. George Washington did not sign the treaty. Representatives of each country had authority to sign the treaty in the name of their ruler.

In the same way, we preach as representatives of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5). Paul’s authority was not his own. He was a servant, but he was the representative of Jesus Christ as Lord.

We Preach with Authority Because of the Message We Have Been Given

Our authority is based on the scripture we preach. Paul wrote, “We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). Paul refused to do anything dishonest or anything that would weaken his message of God’s Word.

Some pastors have studied at universities that taught them not to trust the Bible. They no longer preach with authority. Instead, they are full of doubt. Why? They doubt the authority of the Bible; they rely on human wisdom alone. As God’s servants, our authority must be based on God’s Word.

There is no reason to preach God’s Word if you do not believe its message. We can preach with authority only when we trust the message of God’s Word.

Understanding that our authority derives from Jesus and from the message we preach helps us avoid two dangers for pastors.

1. The first danger is an arrogance that says, “I am the pastor. I am the boss! No one can question me.”

This arrogance drives people away from the gospel. Paul said, “What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:5). Our authority is derived from Jesus and God’s Word.

We must have the humility to admit when we are wrong. A pastor once said, “I never tell the church if I make a mistake. They will lose confidence in my authority.” This pastor forgot that our authority is not based on our own infallibility; our authority is based on God’s Word. We should point our congregation to the final authority of God’s Word. My words are not important; God’s Word is of ultimate importance.

2. The second danger is a false humility that says, “I am only a pastor. I have no authority. Professional counsellors know more about psychology; scientists know more about the origins of the earth; sociologists know more about human sexual desires. I cannot talk about emotional needs, creation, or morality because I am not an expert.”

Paul said, “We are servants, but we have authority as representatives of Jesus Christ.” As a servant, we must live with humility. But as representatives of Jesus Christ, we must preach with confidence. When we accurately preach God’s Word, we serve with the authority of the King of the universe.

JESUS'S SERMONS BROUGHT GOOD NEWS TO NEEDY PEOPLE

Jesus spoke to the needs of his audience. As Jesus traveled through Galilee proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, he had compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless (Matthew 9:35-36). The Jews were in bondage to Rome; the poor had little hope of leaving their poverty; lepers were outcasts; tax collectors were rejected by society. To each of these, Jesus offered hope.

When you speak to people's needs, you capture their attention. If I live in a desert and you say, "Today I will preach about the water of life," I will listen carefully! If I am old and feeble and you say, "Today I will preach about the God who gives you strength like the eagles," I will listen!

Jesus always remembered that *gospel* means "good news." He came to bring good news to those who needed hope. Effective preaching must bring hope to those who hear us. Like Jesus, we must ask, "Who am I preaching to? What are their needs?"

Imagine that you are in a car accident and are in danger of bleeding to death. At the hospital, the doctor shows you a full-color chart with statistics about car accidents. He explains the historical development of the stethoscope. Finally, he warns you about the danger of careless driving.

Everything the doctor says is true, but it does not meet your need. You need someone to bind your wounds and give you medicine for your pain. Preaching must do more than present facts; preaching must speak to the needs of our listeners.

It is easy to see the bad news of our fallen world. The gospel does more; it brings hope to a broken world. Jesus always brought hope to his listeners. Jesus never compromised truth, and we must never compromise truth. But Jesus knew that truth, properly preached, brings hope. An old preacher said, "You must scratch where the people itch." You must speak to the needs of those you are trying to reach.

JESUS' SERMONS WERE CONVICTING

Jesus began with the needs of his listeners, but his purpose was deeper than simply putting a temporary bandage on their wounds. Jesus' preaching convicted their conscience and changed their lives.

Jesus was not afraid to confront his listeners with a message of judgment for their sin. Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you," but he also said, "Go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11).

John tells a story from Jesus' ministry about the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda. After healing him, Jesus said, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you" (John 5:14). Jesus was not afraid to confront sin.

When Jesus preached, his audience was convicted. Unlike many contemporary preachers, Jesus preached the necessity of a righteous life. Nowhere did Jesus say, "My Father does not expect you to keep his commands." Instead, Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). Jesus' preaching brought conviction to everyone who heard him.

JESUS' SERMONS CHANGED LIVES

During the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln attended a church where Dr. Phineas Gurley was the pastor. After one service, a friend asked, "What did you think of the sermon?" Lincoln said, "It was well presented and gave beautiful thoughts."

The friend said, "So you liked it?" Mr. Lincoln hesitated and then said, "No. I believe Rev. Gurley failed tonight." The friend was shocked. "Why do you say that?" Lincoln replied, "He didn't ask us to do anything great." President Lincoln believed that a sermon should call for a response. He believed that a sermon should change lives.

» Read Matthew 18.

"The Bible was not given merely to increase our knowledge but to change our lives."

**Adapted from
D.L. Moody**

Jesus preached to change lives. His preaching was practical. Matthew 18 records Jesus' sermon on "Relationships in the Kingdom of Heaven." Jesus teaches about:

- The importance of humility (18:2-6)
- Responding to temptation (18:7-9)
- Responding to the lost (18:10-14)
- Responding to those who sin against you (18:15-20)
- The necessity of forgiveness (18:21-35)

These are practical issues of daily life. Jesus spoke to the real needs of his listeners. He preached to change lives.

To a man born blind, Jesus provided healing, then gave him the message that would change the man's life for eternity.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped him (John 9:35-38).

To people who were hungry, Jesus provided bread, then preached the truth that would change their lives for eternity. “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

Preaching that changes lives brings together the truth of God’s Word and the needs of people. Effective preaching speaks God’s truth to the needs of people.

When Jesus preached, he spoke to the mind, the emotions, and the will. All three are involved in true change.

Jesus Spoke to the Mind

When you read Jesus’ sermon in Matthew 18, you are reading the wisest teaching about relationships that has ever been given. Imagine a society in which people treat each other with humility. Imagine a society in which forgiveness is the norm. Jesus spoke wisdom to the minds of his hearers.

Jesus Spoke to the Emotions

34 times the Gospels speak of amazement, wonder, and marvel among Jesus’ listeners. The disciples on the road to Emmaus said, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). Those who heard Jesus felt joy at his gracious words, sorrow for their sins, and above all, hope for the future.

Jesus Spoke to the Will

Jesus was not satisfied merely to have listeners; he called followers. Jesus was not satisfied with external change alone; he called for transformed hearts and lives. Whether it was a Samaritan woman with a sinful past or a rich young man who carefully obeyed the Law, Jesus called his listeners to surrender their will to God. When we preach like Jesus, we will call our listeners to a new pattern of life.

A CLOSER LOOK: ARE YOU PREACHING THE GOSPEL?

A pastor preached from Romans 1 against the sin of homosexuality. He preached the truth. But something was missing... Sitting in the congregation was a young man who struggles with same-sex attraction. This young man knows homosexuality is a sin and has begun

praying for deliverance. He knows the truth of his sin; he needs to hear the good news (the gospel) that God can give victory over temptation.

A pastor quoted Jesus' warning against divorce. He lamented laws that allow easy divorce. He preached the truth. But something was missing... That week a young couple with two young children had visited a divorce attorney because they could not resolve the conflict that was pulling their marriage apart. They know that divorce is sin; they need to hear the good news (the gospel) that Jesus can bring healing to hurting marriages.

A pastor shouted that "Abortion murders an innocent baby." He preached the truth. But something was missing... In his congregation was a middle-aged lady who weeps when she remembers the day she walked into an abortion clinic as an unwed teenager. Twenty years later, she still doubts that God will forgive her sin. She knows that abortion is sin; she needs to hear the good news (the gospel) that God offers forgiveness for her past.

Jesus never compromised truth, but he never forgot to bring hope. He knew that the gospel changes lives. To a young man struggling with same-sex attraction, Jesus would say, "My grace is sufficient to give you victory over temptation." To a couple facing a broken marriage, Jesus would say, "I can restore a heart of love even for that spouse who seems so unlovely." To a lady who sinned against her unborn baby, Jesus would say, "I will forgive the sin of an abortion just as I forgive other sins. Go and sin no more."

The gospel includes a message of judgment on sin. We must preach judgment with authority. But to preach like Jesus, we must not forget the power of grace to change lives. We must bring the good news of God's grace to a broken world.

The gospel always includes two pieces of good news. First, the gospel tells us what God has done for us. It brings hope to a hopeless world.

Then, the gospel tells us what we can become through the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel never leaves us where we were; it challenges us to a deeper walk with God.

JESUS' SERMONS WERE SIMPLE AND MEMORABLE

Jesus never bored people with the truth. He knew how to preach in a simple and direct way. He communicated deep truths, but he held the interest of the most uneducated person in the audience.

The goal of an effective preacher is not to impress the audience with his deep knowledge. The goal of the preacher must be to communicate God's Word simply and powerfully and to allow the Holy Spirit to convict the listeners with the truth of God's Word.

How did Jesus make his sermons simple and interesting?

Jesus Told Stories

Those who listened to Jesus' sermons often heard these words, "Let me tell you a story." His stories captivated his audience and opened their ears to his message.

Most of us remember a story much longer than we remember a three-point outline. Good stories illustrate a sermon in a way that helps us remember the main point of the sermon. A great story summarizes the message that the preacher is trying to communicate.

- » Discuss the last story you heard in a sermon. Did it communicate effectively the preacher's message? Do you remember the purpose for the story? Would the sermon have been as effective and memorable without the story?

Jesus Used Simple Language

The better a teacher understands a concept, the more simply he can explain it to a student. A teacher who uses complicated words to teach the concept is often hiding his lack of understanding. The better you understand something, the more simply you will be able to communicate it.

Jesus knew how to translate truth into the language of his audience. He preached to farmers about sowing seed. He preached to shepherds about sheep. He preached to fishermen about fishing. Many people rejected Jesus' message, but no one was bored by his sermons.

Jesus' message could be understood by fishermen, farmers, and housewives. But it also addressed the issues of scholars, religious leaders, and political officials. His preaching spoke to every level of society. Simple does not mean shallow. Our sermons should communicate the great truths of the gospel with clarity and simplicity.

Jesus Used Repetition

A young pastor was frustrated with his congregation. He said, "They should already know this; I preached about it two years ago." His friend reminded him that Jesus preached the same message many times before his disciples understood.

The friend asked this pastor, "Do you think your preaching is better than Jesus?"

"Of course not!"

"Do you think your church members are wiser than the disciples?"

"No!"

"Then you will have to repeat truths as Jesus did."

Jesus preached the same truths repeatedly. Over and over again, he taught the disciples about his death and resurrection. He preached the message of the kingdom many times. Jesus knew that these truths were vital, so he preached the message as many times as necessary to reach his audience.

JESUS' SERMONS WERE GENUINE

Jesus' preaching was genuine. His life matched his message. Jesus did not simply preach about godly living; he lived a godly life. No one could point to a contradiction between Jesus' message and his life. Jesus lived what he preached.

Imagine that you want to learn to drive a car. You find two teachers who offer driving lessons. One teacher has never driven a car but has read many books about driving. The other teacher has a record as a safe driver for many years. Which teacher would you choose?

Now imagine that you want to learn to live the Christian life. You find two pastors. One pastor lives a sinful life, but he preaches good sermons. The other pastor lives in a way that shows his close relationship with God. Which pastor will you choose?

Our preaching must be genuine. We must live the life we preach. Many preachers have found that it is possible to fake integrity for a while. People may be deceived by a preacher who preaches honesty while stealing money from the offering. They may be misled by a preacher who preaches morality while he is committing adultery. They may be fooled by a pastor who preaches love while beating his wife. But eventually, the truth will come out. An empty heart will result in a ministry that is empty of spiritual power. God works through us when we allow him to work in us.

Never allow the glamor of preaching to hide a sinful life. Effective preaching starts with a heart that knows God.

“Jesus never said, ‘You’ll know them by the size of their ministry.’ He did say, ‘You’ll know them by their fruit’—by their obedience to the Father’s will.”

Craig Keener

APPLICATION: THE PASTOR AS SHEPHERD

» Read Mark 6:30-34.

One of the best images of a pastor is the shepherd. Jesus “saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to

teach them many things.” Jesus looked at a crowd of people and saw sheep who needed a shepherd.

- » Try to imagine who would have been in the crowd of 5,000 in Mark 6. Make a list.
 - Does your list include tax collectors who cheated the people? They were there. It would be easy to shout condemnation at these dishonest publicans, but Jesus saw lost sheep to be rescued.
 - Does your list include judgmental Pharisees who were hoping to catch Jesus in a trap? They were there. It would be easy for Jesus to embarrass them in front of the crowd, but Jesus saw stubborn sheep who needed the right path.
 - Does your list include an unfaithful husband whose heart condemned him for his adultery? He was there. Jesus saw a fallen sheep who needed correction and then healing.
 - Does your list include teenagers who were rebelling against home and had run away from school to join the anonymous crowd? They were there. Jesus saw wandering sheep who needed to be brought back to the right path before they strayed further.

Whom do you see when you preach? Do you see only the flaws of your congregation, or do you see the deep needs of your sheep? Do you see only an angry board member, or do you see a hurting sheep who hurts others? Do you see only a backslider, or do you see a sheep who is suffering because of sin? Jesus saw needy sheep.

- » Read John 10:1-18.

As pastors, we are called to be shepherds. How does a shepherd serve the sheep? John 10 provides a model.

A Shepherd Leads the Sheep

If you watch a shepherd, you will not see him with a club driving the sheep. Instead, a shepherd leads the sheep in the right direction. Jesus said, “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (John 10:3-4).

As we read the Gospels, there are many times when we might expect Jesus to hit Peter, John, or Thomas with a club! Repeatedly, they get into trouble. But instead of hitting them, Jesus uses a shepherd’s staff to pick up these weak, struggling disciples and set them on the right path.

As a shepherd, do you lead the sheep God has placed in your church or do you drive them? Are you a shepherd **leading** the sheep or a manager **ordering** the sheep to obey?

A Shepherd Cares for the Sheep

Do you sometimes think, “I would like a job that goes from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with weekends off and no phone calls after 5:00 p.m.?” That sometimes sounds wonderful! But that is not the life of a shepherd.

The shepherd cares for the sheep when they need help, not just during office hours. A shepherd cannot say to an injured lamb, “Stay there until 9:00 tomorrow when I come on duty.” The shepherd goes out into the night to rescue the lamb.

In the same way, the pastor cares for his sheep when they need help. Caring for spiritual sheep is more than preaching. It involves preaching, but it also includes counseling, visiting, listening, praying, and sometimes just sitting with a hurting lamb.

Yes, pastors, you must care for yourself. You cannot be an effective shepherd if you exhaust yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Jesus took time alone, and you must take time alone. But there were other times when Jesus knew that he must sacrifice his comfort to care for the sheep.

This balance of ministry and rest can be difficult. As a wise pastor-shepherd, you must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and wise counsel from those around you. Listen to the voice of the Spirit when he says, “It is time to withdraw for rest and renewal.” Listen to the voice of your wife or colleague who says, “You need some time away.” Return from times of renewal with a new passion to care for the sheep God has entrusted to you.

A Shepherd Protects the Sheep

Jesus contrasted a hired man who runs at the sight of danger with the good shepherd who protects the sheep even at the risk of his life. The hired man cares nothing for the sheep but the shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:13, 15).

Even in his last hours, Jesus cared for the disciples. At the Last Supper, he prepared them for the trial they would soon face. In the garden, he continued to teach Peter, James, and John. On the cross, he placed Mary in the care of John. To the end, the Good Shepherd was caring for his sheep.

Paul commissioned the elders of the Ephesian church to serve as shepherds. They were to care for the flock that had been purchased with the very blood of Jesus. In the next verse, Paul warned about fierce wolves that would attack the flock. The shepherds were responsible to protect the flock (Acts 20:28-31).

As a pastor-shepherd, do you protect the sheep God has placed in your church? Do you protect them from doctrinal error, from attacks on their marriage and family, and from other spiritual attacks? Are you a shepherd or a hired man?

Before you preach next Sunday, ask God to show you the needs of your sheep. Ask him to show you the broken hearts in your flock. As you preach, see sheep who are harassed and helpless and who need the love of a godly shepherd.

A CLOSER LOOK: “WOE!”

» Read Matthew 23:1-39.

Jesus used the phrase “woe to you” when speaking to the cities that rejected him (Matthew 11:21), to the Pharisees and scribes who misled the people (Matthew 23:13-29), and about Judas who would betray him (Mark 14:21). We sometimes read these “Woes” with a voice of anger that forgets Jesus’ love, even to those who rejected him.

There is judgment in the word *woe*, but there is also sorrow. “Woe” includes both judgment and “sorrow and pity” for the one who is judged. It expresses Jesus’ “sadness over those who fail to recognize the true misery of their condition.”²⁶ “Woe” expresses deep sorrow as well as warning.

Jesus concluded his announcement of judgment on the religious leaders by weeping over the fate of the city he loved. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” Jesus wept over the fate of the city that would soon crucify him (Matthew 23:37 and Luke 19:41).

This should be our model for preaching judgment. Our preaching must include warnings against sin and the message of judgment on those who refuse to repent. But our message must show our sorrow over sin, not anger at the sinner.

A rebellious teenager went home after a sermon on hell. His father asked, “Son, what did you think of the sermon?” He answered, “I didn’t like it. It made me angry!” The next week, the son heard another preacher preach on hell. His father again asked, “What did you think of the sermon?” The son responded, “I must serve Jesus. I never want to go to that awful place!”

The father was surprised. “Last week, a sermon on hell made you angry. This week, a sermon on hell made you repent. What is different?” The boy said, “This preacher wept when he warned me about hell.”

26 Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes*. (London: Martin Manser, 2009). See also Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. (Westmont, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

Do you weep when you preach judgment? Do you weep as you prepare a sermon on hell? Are you a shepherd who loves the sheep even when you must warn of judgment?

CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PREACHING

As preachers, we must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction to our listeners. If we use human techniques alone to generate emotional appeals, we may see quick results, but spiritual results will be lacking. The Holy Spirit alone can bring lasting change in our listeners.

» Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-16.

Paul understood that spiritual change occurs only through the power of the Holy Spirit. After he left Athens where he had debated with the philosophers at the Areopagus, he came to Corinth (Acts 17:16-18:1). In Corinth, he determined to use no lofty speech or wisdom but to preach nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. He preached “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Paul knew that the Spirit interprets spiritual truths to those who are spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:13). Paul valued education; he was a great scholar. He understood effective public speaking; he had studied the great Greek orators. He knew how to build a logical argument; Romans is a masterpiece of logical structure. But above all, Paul valued the power of the Holy Spirit. He knew that true conviction comes only through the work of the Spirit.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that “we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). The container is not the treasure! We as ministry leaders are broken pots, made of clay. But we have the wonderful privilege of carrying the treasure, the gospel, to those we serve.

This is a powerful warning to ministry leaders. It is easy to focus on the jar instead of the treasure held in the jar. We can give more attention to our presentation than to the message; we can give more attention to the jar than to the treasure. Paul reminds us that God purposely uses clay jars to show that the power belongs to God and not to us. We must not get in the way of God’s power. We must not take the glory that belongs to him alone. We must preach in the power of the Spirit.

LESSON 5 ASSIGNMENTS

1. The Gospel of Matthew includes five major sermons. Read each sermon and identify one characteristic of the sermon that makes it effective and write it in the table below. There are no right or wrong answers to this assignment. Ask, “How does Jesus convict me, inspire me, or help me to remember and apply his message?”
2. As you prepare your next sermon, review the characteristics you found in Jesus’ sermons. Use his sermons as a model for communicating effectively. Share this sermon with others in the class. Evaluate the sermon with this question, “Did I pattern my sermon after the model of Jesus?”

SERMON	CHARACTERISTICS
Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)	
Sending of the Apostles (Matthew 10)	
Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13)	
Life in the Kingdom (Matthew 18)	
The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25)	

LESSON 6

JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the meaning of the kingdom of God in the Gospels.
2. Recognize both present and future aspects of the kingdom of God.
3. Follow Jesus' principles for kingdom life from the Sermon on the Mount.
4. Properly interpret Jesus' parables on the kingdom.
5. Submit to Jesus' conditions for discipleship.

PRINCIPLE FOR MINISTRY

We minister as ambassadors who represent the kingdom of God in our world.

INTRODUCTION

The kingdom of God is a primary theme in the New Testament.²⁷ The term *kingdom* appears 54 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 39 times in Luke, and five times in John.²⁸

27 Sources used in this chapter include:

D. Matthew Allen, "The Kingdom in Matthew." (1999). Available at <https://bible.org/article/kingdom-matthew>

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994-1996)

J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981)

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959)

28 Matthew usually referred to the "kingdom of heaven" where Luke referred to the "kingdom of God." Matthew's first audience was Jewish; Jews avoided using the name of God and often used "heaven" as a euphemism for God. It appears that Matthew replaced "kingdom of God" with "kingdom of heaven" in most instances. For this lesson, I will use "kingdom of God," except when quoting Matthew.

Nearly half of Jesus' parables teach about the kingdom of God. He preaches about the kingdom. He heals and casts out demons to demonstrate the power of the kingdom. After the ascension, the early church continued to preach the message of the kingdom (Acts 8:12, Acts 28:23).

In this lesson, we will study the kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry and the impact of the kingdom on ministry today. At the end of this course is a sermon preached in Nigeria about the kingdom of God. This sermon illustrates how the message of the kingdom impacts ministry in our world.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

There are two questions that introduce a study of the kingdom of God.²⁹

1. What is the kingdom of God?
2. When is the kingdom of God established?

What is the Kingdom of God?

» Read Acts 1:1-8.

During the 40 days after the resurrection, Jesus was with his disciples speaking about the kingdom of God. Just before the ascension, the disciples asked, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The disciples expected:

1. **An immediate kingdom:** "at this time." They expected Jesus to establish the kingdom immediately.
2. **A political and geographic kingdom:** "restore." They expected Jesus to overthrow Rome and restore Israel's political authority.
3. **A national kingdom:** "the kingdom to Israel." They expected Jesus to rule the nation like the Davidic kings of the Old Testament.³⁰

Jesus responded, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

29 For a video lecture on the kingdom of God, you may watch Scot McKnight, "What and Where is the Kingdom of God?" at <https://seedbed.com/where-is-the-kingdom-of-god/> (Accessed March 22, 2021.)

30 John Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Westmont, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 41

Jesus' answer shows that his kingdom was:

1. **A timeless kingdom:** “times or seasons that the Father has fixed.” Jesus' kingdom was not dependent on man's timing but on the Father's timing.
2. **A supernatural kingdom:** “power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” Jesus' kingdom was based on the power of the Holy Spirit, not on political authority.
3. **A universal kingdom:** “to the end of the earth.” Jesus' kingdom reached all nations. It was not limited to Israel.

Jesus told the disciples that they did not need to know about the timing. Instead, they must be concerned for two things: receiving the Holy Spirit and being his witnesses to the end of the earth.

When is the Kingdom of God Established?

Among theologians, there are three primary views of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom will come.

Some theologians see an end time kingdom established when Jesus rules on earth during the millennium. These writers look at scriptures such as Matthew 24-25 that emphasize the political and territorial aspects of the kingdom.

**“The Kingdom has come;
the Kingdom is coming;
the Kingdom is yet to come.”**

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The kingdom came.

Other theologians teach that Jesus' kingdom was established while he was on earth. They emphasize scriptures such as Jesus' statements that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” and “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 4:17 and Luke 11:20). This view of the kingdom focuses on the spiritual nature of the kingdom and God's rule in the hearts of believers.

The kingdom has already come but is not yet fully consummated.

Many theologians teach that the kingdom includes both present and future aspects. This view teaches that the kingdom of God was started during Jesus' earthly ministry; it continues to

spread through the work of the church; it will be fully extended when Christ returns to rule.³¹ At Christ's return, he will deliver the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:24). This is the complete establishment of God's kingdom.

- » Which of these views of the kingdom do you hold? What is the practical impact of each view for ministry?

In this lesson, we will see aspects of the kingdom that are already at work and aspects of the kingdom that remain to be fulfilled. A kingdom includes:

- **A king:** From the magi at his birth to the inscription on the cross, Jesus came as the King.
- **Authority:** Jesus demonstrated his authority through his miracles and victory over the grave.
- **Law:** Jesus summarized the law of the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount.
- **Territory:** Jesus taught that his kingdom extends to the ends of the earth and includes people from every language and every people.
- **People:** All who have been redeemed by the King and are ruled by him are citizens of Jesus' kingdom.

THE PROMISE OF THE KINGDOM

- » Read Matthew 3:1-12.

The first New Testament reference to the kingdom of God is found in the preaching of John the Baptist. As the last of the Old Covenant prophets, John condemned the hypocrisy of Israel's religious leaders. As the first New Testament messenger, he prepared the way for a new King. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). The phrase "at hand" suggests that the kingdom was quickly approaching. It had not yet arrived, but it was very near. John preached to prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah who would usher in a new kingdom.

Soon after John was arrested, Jesus began his public ministry. He traveled through Galilee proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). Like John the Baptist, Jesus proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

³¹ Commentators use the term "inauguration of the kingdom" to refer to the beginning of the kingdom during Jesus' earthly ministry. The "consummation of the kingdom" is the final fulfillment of the kingdom promises at the return of Christ.

» Read Matthew 10:5-42.

Jesus sent the twelve disciples to preach the message of the kingdom to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Like John the Baptist and Jesus, they preached, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:5-7).

The ministry of the disciples was patterned after the ministry of their Master. Like Jesus, they were to proclaim the kingdom and meet the physical needs of the people. Like Jesus, they healed the sick and cast out demons as signs that the kingdom of God was breaking into Satan’s domain. Jesus sent his representatives to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons (Matthew 10:8).

THE INAUGURATION OF THE KINGDOM

» Read Matthew 12:22-32.

The promise of a kingdom was not new. The Old Testament prophets had promised a future kingdom. However, Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom was not just a future hope, but an immediate reality. Jesus proclaimed the inauguration of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was present wherever Jesus was present.

With his power over demons, Jesus showed the authority of the King who has overcome the kingdom of Satan. After he healed a demon-oppressed man, the Pharisees claimed that Jesus cast out demons through the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Jesus responded that he was conquering Satan’s kingdom through the power of God: “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). Jesus had invaded Satan’s kingdom.

» Read Matthew 11:1-24.

Jesus’ miracles were signs of the beginning of his kingdom. The Gospel of John uses the term *signs* for Jesus’ miracles. The miracles were signs of Jesus’ deity and evidences of the new kingdom.

John the Baptist proclaimed that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He expected a political kingdom bringing deliverance to Israel. Instead, John found himself in prison facing death! He sent his disciples to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3). Jesus’ ministry did not match John’s expectations of a political Messiah who would establish an earthly kingdom.

Jesus responded by pointing to his messianic works.

Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the

poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me (Matthew 11:4-6).

Jesus reminded John of the signs predicted of the Messiah that were being fulfilled. Although Jesus praised John's strength and courage, he announced that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Why? Jesus had come to establish a new covenant with all the privileges of the kingdom. The least New Testament believer possessed privileges that the greatest Old Testament saint never saw. New Testament believers saw the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. The promised kingdom had been started.

LIFE IN THE KINGDOM: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The longest single sermon recorded in the Gospels is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The kingdom of God is a unifying theme of this sermon. This is seen in several ways:

- The first beatitude teaches that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3). The last beatitude teaches that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (Matthew 5:10). These two form an envelope around the rest of the Beatitudes showing that the primary theme of the Beatitudes is the kingdom of heaven.
- Jesus claims the authority to reinterpret the Law (Matthew 5:21-48). This is the act of a king who has authority to interpret and apply the laws of his kingdom.
- Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-13). We are called to pray for the advancement of God's kingdom on earth. When God's people live according to the Sermon on the Mount, the kingdom expands and God's authority is extended to new citizens of the kingdom.
- At the end of the sermon, Jesus taught that mighty works alone are not sufficient to enter the kingdom of heaven. Only the one who does the will of the Father will enter the kingdom (Matthew 7:21).

Principles for Reading the Sermon on the Mount

We should remember three principles as we read the Sermon on the Mount.

1. Obeying the commands of the Sermon on the Mount does not "earn" citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.

We must not think, "Live this way and you will become a Christian." Instead, we must read this sermon as a guide to life as a citizen of the kingdom: "Live this way because you are a Christian." We are saved by grace alone; then, as members of God's kingdom, we obey his commands.

2. The Sermon on the Mount is for disciples, not unbelievers.

This is not the constitution for a secular country. Do not be surprised when your unbelieving neighbors refuse to live by these principles! This is a description of life in the kingdom of God, not life in the kingdoms of man.

3. The Sermon on the Mount is for every believer.

Many people have tried to avoid the demands of the Sermon by arguing that these principles do not apply to ordinary believers. Some have said, “This law is for a future millennial kingdom.” Some have said, “This is for a few saints. Most Christians cannot follow these commands.” Some have said, “This sermon shows that we can never satisfy God’s commands. When we see that we can never meet God’s demands, we will rely on grace alone.”

However, the early church read the Sermon as a guide for every believer. The letters of James and 1 Peter repeat many of the commands of this sermon. Jesus refused to weaken the standard of God’s holiness. Instead of a lower standard than the Pharisees, Jesus held his followers to a higher standard: “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

Life in the Kingdom of God

» Read Matthew 5-7.

If Jesus started the kingdom during his earthly ministry, we now live in the kingdom of God. The Sermon on the Mount describes the character of a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Here is a brief overview of the themes of the Sermon.

1. The values of the kingdom of God are contrary to the values of this world.

No earthly ruler says that it is blessed to be poor, to mourn, to surrender our rights, or to be persecuted. The Beatitudes state the exact opposite of the values of the Roman Empire of Jesus’ day, and of our world today. God’s kingdom is different than man’s kingdom.

2. Citizens of the kingdom of God should impact their world.

The Essenes of Jesus’ day said that righteous people should withdraw from society and establish the kingdom of God in isolation. Jesus said, “No! You must be salt that preserves and seasons your world. You must be light that brings glory to your Father who is in heaven.” While the

**“The pure in heart
not only see God but
become the letters
through which
society sees Him.”**

Leon Hynson

kingdom of God is primarily spiritual, our world should benefit politically, economically, and socially from the presence of kingdom citizens.

We could list many examples of Christians who were salt and light in a secular society. William Wilberforce led Parliament to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire; the Methodist revival brought social reform to all levels of English society; William Carey fought legal infanticide and *sati* (widow-burning) in India; Christians have spread literacy, established hospitals and orphanages, and served the poor and needy in many nations.

3. Citizens of the kingdom of God go beyond the minimum requirements of the Law to show the love of the Father.

Jesus did not come to replace the Law, but to fulfill the Law. “I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). To fulfill something is to bring it to completion or to accomplish it. Jesus came not to abolish the Law but to reveal the spirit behind the Law. In a series of six examples, Jesus shows that the righteousness of kingdom citizens must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

THE LAW	KINGDOM CITIZENS
The Law forbids murder.	Kingdom citizens address the root motivation—anger.
The Law forbids adultery.	Kingdom citizens do not look with lustful intent at a woman.
The Law requires a “certificate of divorce.”	Kingdom citizens seek ways to stay in a marriage, rather than excuses to get out.
The Law forbids false oaths.	The “Yes or No” of a kingdom citizen is sufficient.
The Law limits retaliation (an “eye for an eye”).	Kingdom citizens act from love, not revenge.
The Law requires love for your neighbor.	Kingdom citizens love even their enemies. ³² They reflect the love and mercy of their heavenly Father (Luke 6:36).

32 The Old Testament *does not* command Israel to “hate your enemy.” This was a common misunderstanding of the Old Testament.

4. Citizens of the kingdom care more for pleasing God than pleasing others.

The Pharisees wanted people to see their generosity; kingdom citizens give in secret. Hypocrites wanted others to hear their impressive prayers; kingdom citizens pray simply and earnestly. Pharisees wanted others to respect them for their long fasts; kingdom citizens fast only for the Father's reward.

5. Citizens of the kingdom do not trust in their wealth or worry about their needs.

Instead, they trust their heavenly Father's provision.

6. Citizens of the kingdom do not judge others.

However, they are careful to discern the bad fruit of false teachers.

7. Citizens of the kingdom are confident in their prayers.

Citizens of the kingdom are confident in their prayers because they know that their Father who is in heaven gives good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:11).

8. Citizens of the kingdom understand that there are only two paths.

There is a wide gate and a narrow gate. There is a good tree and a bad tree. There is a wise builder and a foolish builder. Kingdom citizens are discerning.

Living by Kingdom Principles

How can we live by the principles of the Sermon on the Mount? The key is Matthew 5:48. Citizens of the kingdom are called to be like our heavenly Father. Jesus' teaching is that simple and that difficult. Only God's grace empowers us to live by Jesus' teaching. In our own power, we can never live up to the demands of the Sermon. It is only the Spirit who makes kingdom life possible.

We must understand this principle when we preach the Sermon on the Mount. If we preach the Sermon as law alone, we will leave people frustrated and discouraged. It is only when we preach the Sermon as the model for kingdom life—provided by God's grace, purchased by

“The Sermon on the Mount is a warning against loving with strings attached, loving for self-gain, or ignoring the call to true righteousness. Indeed, the sermon is a call to exhibit the type of forgiveness, giving, grateful and compassionate love that is like God.”

Darrell Bock

the Son's sacrifice, and empowered by the Holy Spirit—that the Sermon on the Mount truly becomes gospel, “good news.”

- » After reading the Sermon on the Mount and reviewing this summary, discuss:
 - Which teachings from the Sermon are most difficult for Christians in your society?
 - Which teachings from the Sermon are most difficult for you as a Christian leader?

THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM: KINGDOM PARABLES

Jewish teachers knew that we remember stories much longer than we remember propositional statements. Because of this, parables were a popular teaching form for Jewish rabbis. Jesus used parables to communicate deep truths about the kingdom of God.

Early in his ministry, the use of parables allowed Jesus to teach the disciples while avoiding direct conflict with his enemies. Later, Jesus would directly confront the religious leaders in Jerusalem; but in these early years, his focus was teaching the disciples.

Many people heard the parables but did not understand. They hear but never understand; they see but never perceive (Matthew 13:14). Why? Because they had hardened their hearts. Isaiah had prophesied:

This people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them (Matthew 13:15, quoting Isaiah 6:9).

Through parables, Jesus was able to teach those whose ears were open.

Matthew 13 presents a series of parables about the secrets of the kingdom (Matthew 13:11). These parables reveal the nature of God's kingdom to Jesus' followers, while concealing much of his teaching from the unbelieving leaders.

- » Before continuing, stop and read Matthew 13:1-52 and Luke 19:11-27. As you study each parable, summarize its primary theme in one or two sentences in the table on the next page. For each parable, find one application for ministry today. The first parable has been completed for you as an example.

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM		
Parable	Theme	Lesson for Ministry Today
The Farmer	The hearer's response to the seed determines its fruitfulness.	As I preach and teach, I must trust God with the results. I am not responsible for the harvest; I am responsible to faithfully sow the seed.
The Weeds		
The Mustard Seed		
The Yeast		
The Hidden Treasure		
The Pearl of Great Value		
The Net		
The Master of the House		
The Ten Minas		

The Parable of the Farmer (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Luke 8:5-18)

The first parable in this series of parables about the kingdom teaches that our response to the seed determines the seed's fruitfulness. In the kingdom of heaven, some will believe and bear fruit while others will refuse belief or will fall away after an initial response.

This parable could be called the parable of the soils because it is a story about different soils, not different farmers. In each example, the seed was the same and the farmer was the same; the difference was the soil. As we proclaim the message of the kingdom, we must not be shocked when some listeners are less receptive than others. We must not become discouraged. Jesus taught that some listeners will be fruitful soil while others will harden themselves against the Word.

Luke's conclusion to the parable of the farmer shows that this is a parable about listening to truth. "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away" (Luke 8:18). When a person responds positively to truth, they receive more truth. Before giving the other parables in the sermon, Jesus taught his audience how to listen as fruitful soil.

The Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

The Jewish people expected the kingdom of God to bring immediate judgment on the wicked. Jesus prepared his disciples for a period during which both believers and unbelievers will live together in the world. In this story, the field is the world (Matthew 13:38). Only at the end of the age will angels gather the weeds and burn them with fire (Matthew 13:40). The kingdom of God will develop in God's timing, not man's timing.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32)

No one watching Jesus' earthly ministry could have predicted the spread of the church around the world. The disciples were uneducated, poor, and fearful. They lacked charisma, social status, or political power. They were like the tiny mustard seed. But just as a tiny mustard seed grew to a large tree or bush, the kingdom of God would reach around the world.

Jesus' audience would have been shocked to hear Jesus compare the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. Jewish rabbis expected God's kingdom to come in power and glory. They expected a display of judgment on sinners; they expected a military revolt against Rome; they expected social upheaval as the new Jewish kingdom was established. Instead, Jesus prepared his disciples for an unimpressive beginning to the kingdom.

When we read the New Testament, we may forget the insignificance of Judea in the first century. Judea is the center of the New Testament, but it was far from the center of the first century world. Think of the capital city in your country. This was not the role of Judea in

the first century; that role belonged to Rome. Think of a city with a great university and educational system. This was not the role of Judea in the first century; that role belonged to Athens or Alexandria.

In relation to other nations of the world, Judea was not important politically; it was not important economically; it was not important socially. Think of one of the most insignificant regions in your country; that was Judea's place in the Roman Empire.

The parable of the mustard seed showed the growth of the kingdom of God from a small group of men from a back corner of the Roman Empire into a tree that reached all nations.³³ Jewish rabbis taught that the kingdom of God would be limited to the Jews alone; Jesus taught that the kingdom of God would reach to the ends of the earth.

The Parable of the Yeast (Matthew 13:33)

The parable of the yeast also illustrates the supernatural growth of the kingdom. Jesus used yeast as a symbol of the spread of the kingdom. Three measures of flour would produce bread for 100 people. Despite its insignificant beginning, the kingdom would grow into a mighty power.

The parable of the yeast shows the steady growth of the kingdom. Yeast is not dramatic; it doesn't explode like dynamite; it quietly works its way through the loaf of bread. Jewish rabbis taught that the kingdom of God would be introduced with worldwide signs; Jesus showed that the kingdom would grow slowly, but steadily, until it reached around the world.

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value (Matthew 13:44-46)

These two parables are about the joy of the kingdom. In both, a man found something of such great value that he sold all that he had and bought it. The focus of the parables is not the man's sacrifice, but his joy in finding something of such value. In his joy he goes and sells all! True disciples rejoice to give all to follow Christ.

These parables show the supreme value of the kingdom. The kingdom of God affects our attitude towards all of life. In another place, Jesus said, "If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell" (Mark 9:47). Entrance into the kingdom of God is worth any earthly sacrifice.

33 In Daniel 4:12 and Ezekiel 31:6, birds lodging in a tree represented a great kingdom reaching to many nations.

The Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50)

Fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee would drag a large net, trapping both edible fish and inedible. After returning to shore, the fishermen would separate the good fish from the bad.

Like the parable of the weeds, this parable reminded the disciples that judgment will come at the end of the age. Instead of expecting immediate judgment, they must preach the kingdom knowing that God, in his timing, will judge the evil and the righteous. There will be a final judgment that separates the good from the evil, but we must leave the timing to God.

The Parable of the Master of the House (Matthew 13:51-52)

Jesus began this series of parables by teaching the disciples that they should be fruitful soil. He ended the series by teaching them their responsibility to share with others. Every scribe who has been trained must bring out of his treasure of knowledge something to teach others. We do not learn for our benefit alone. The disciples were trained so they could train other disciples.

The Parable of the Ten Minas³⁴ (Luke 19:11-27)

» Read Luke 19:11-27.

This parable comes from Luke, but Matthew includes a similar parable given during Jesus' Olivet Discourse. Jesus gave the parable of the ten minas when he was near Jerusalem, because the people supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately (Luke 19:11).

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, the people grew increasingly enthusiastic in their expectation of a political Messiah. Jesus gave this parable to teach his disciples to remain faithful while they waited for the kingdom. They were not to cautiously hide what the Master had given them; instead, they were to use their resources for the progress of the kingdom.

THE COMPLETE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM

» Read Matthew 24-25.

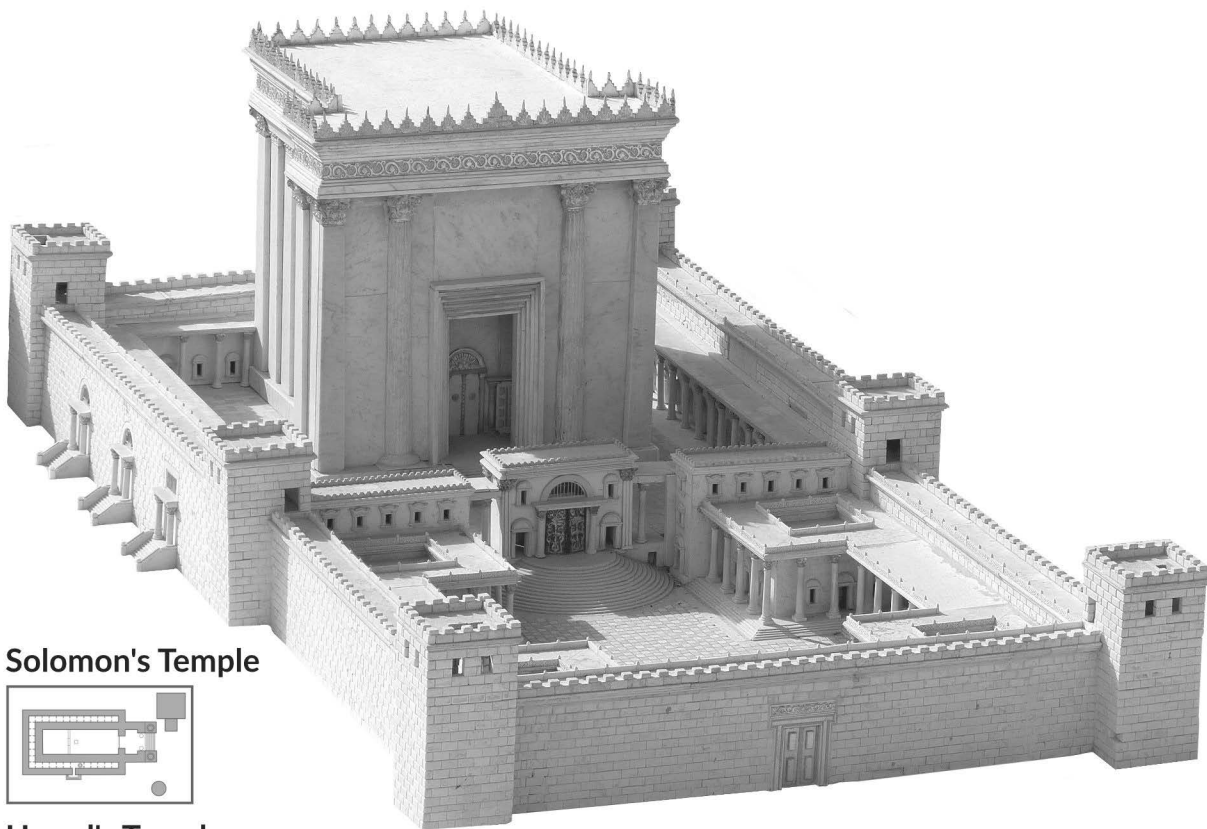
Much of Jesus' early teaching focused on the immediate beginning of the kingdom. As he approached the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus spoke more about the future complete establishment of the kingdom. The Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25 is Jesus' most extended teaching about the future fulfillment of the kingdom promises.

34 A "mina" was a unit of money. It was equivalent to about three months' wages for a laborer.

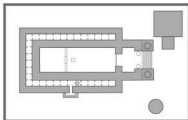
A CLOSER LOOK: HEROD'S TEMPLE

In 19 B.C., Herod the Great began a major renovation of the Temple.³⁵ This Temple, completed in 516 B.C. by Zerubbabel, was smaller and plainer than Solomon's original Temple. Herod intended to restore the Temple to its earlier beauty. He started a construction project that lasted for more than 80 years. Herod appointed 10,000 skilled workers for the construction and trained 1,000 Levites to work on sections of the Temple that only the priests could enter.

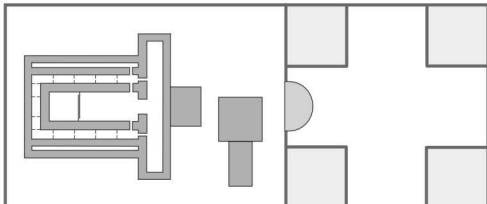
Herod hoped to be remembered as the builder of the greatest temple in the world. By the time of Jesus' ministry, work had been continuing for 46 years (John 2:20). The entire



Solomon's Temple



Herod's Temple



35 "Temple Comparison" was created by SGC with a photo by Ricardo Gandelman (CC BY 2.0) and temple plans from EB Vol. IV and Gal m, available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sgc-library/52345523784>, public domain (CC0).

Temple would not be complete until 63 A.D. and would be destroyed only seven years later following the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus in 70 A.D.

Herod's temple was more than double the size of Solomon's temple, with plenty of space for the thousands of Jewish pilgrims that came to Jerusalem for the feasts. It was one of the great wonders of the Roman Empire.

THE COMPLETE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM (CONTINUED)

During Jesus' last week in Jerusalem, the disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the Temple. Since the construction of the Temple was still ongoing, they were probably pointing out a feature that had been changed since their previous visit to the Temple.

Jesus responded with a prophecy about the destruction of the Temple. "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." The disciples then asked, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:2, 3).

The disciples' question was in two parts; Jesus' answer was in two parts. Just as Old Testament prophecies included both near and far aspects, Jesus' prophecy included some events that would happen soon and some that would come at the end of the age.

- The disciples asked, "When will these things be?" "These things" (the destruction of the Temple with not one stone left upon another) took place in 70 A.D.
- The disciples asked, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus spoke of the future return of the "Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30).

Jesus showed that the kingdom will include people from all nations, both Jew and Gentile. He showed that the inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom was God's plan "from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). The kingdom of God was God's eternal plan for his people.

Two of the parables in the Olivet sermon teach that we must be faithful while we wait for the kingdom. The five foolish bridesmaids waited, but without proper preparation. The servant with one talent waited, but did not faithfully manage it. As kingdom citizens, we are called to faithfulness and perseverance in service to the King.

At the final judgment, the separation of the good and evil promised in Matthew 13 will take place. The primary lesson is not about when and how this judgment will take place. Instead, Jesus' teaching is about how kingdom citizens must live today in preparation for the final judgment. On that day, the King will say, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least

of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). We must live in constant readiness for the King’s return. We must be found faithful when he returns.

APPLICATION: THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

» Read Luke 9:21-27.

Citizenship in the kingdom of God is by grace alone. We do not become citizens of the kingdom by good works. However, this does not mean that there is no cost to a life of discipleship. In Luke 9, Jesus taught his followers about the cost of discipleship.

Dallas Willard wrote, “Grace is not opposed to effort; grace is opposed to earning.”³⁶ The effort we make as disciples is not opposed to grace. In fact, the only way we have the power to pursue discipleship is *because* of God’s grace.

Please notice the pattern of Jesus’ teaching: **the cross and then glory**.

- Jesus prophesied his death and resurrection (Luke 9:21-22). This was the price Jesus paid to provide our citizenship in the kingdom.
- Jesus told his followers what it would cost to be his disciples (Luke 9:23-25). “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Jesus suffered on the cross to establish the kingdom; we must take up the cross if we want to live in the kingdom.
- Jesus talked about the kingdom of God (Luke 9:26-27). “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”

We cannot share in the glory of the kingdom without sharing in the cross. Jesus “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **Therefore**, God has highly exalted him...” (Philippians 2:8-9).

As God’s children, we follow the same pattern. “And after you have **suffered** a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his **eternal glory** in Christ will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10). This is the shape of life in the kingdom. Christ suffered the cross before being exalted to glory. His followers must take up the cross before enjoying his eternal glory.

Jesus looked for committed disciples. He did not require his disciples to have brilliant minds; he did require them to have loyal hearts. What does it cost to be a disciple? “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

36 Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. (New York: HarperOne, 2006)

1. **The disciple must deny himself.** To say “No” to self is a difficult thing to do.
2. **The disciple must take up his cross.** Jesus’ followers understood that a cross means death. The cross represented suffering and shame. But the early Christians knew that discipleship required a cross. As Ignatius traveled to Rome to die as a martyr, he said, “I am beginning to be a disciple.” Discipleship requires a cross.
3. **The disciple must *keep on* following Jesus in character and conduct.** The verb *follow* is present tense.

Is discipleship worth the cost? Jesus gave three reasons to be a disciple. Ironically, these are the very reasons that many people avoid discipleship. Why should we pay the price of discipleship?

1. **Safety.** One who tries to save his life by avoiding the cross will perish (Luke 9:24).
2. **True riches.** One who refuses to identify with Christ will lose everything (Luke 9:25).
3. **Reward.** Only those who follow Christ will be welcome in the kingdom (Luke 9:26-27).

» Read Luke 14:25-33.

Jesus later expanded his teaching on discipleship. His instruction breaks into three sections:

1. The cost of discipleship (Luke 14:26-27)
2. The folly of becoming a disciple without counting the cost (Luke 14:28-32)
3. A reminder of the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:33)

If you go to buy a car, the salesman will sometimes try to hide the final cost. He will say, “Look at this beautiful car!” “Feel the power of this car!” Only after you have fallen in love with the car does he tell you the price.

Jesus never offered his followers an easy route to the kingdom. He started with the price tag:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26-27).

In this passage, to hate something is to love it less than something else. Jesus is saying, “You cannot be my disciple unless you love me more than your own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, even your own life!”

How much does it cost to be a disciple? Everything! Being a disciple of Christ is more than sharing in the joy of the messianic promises; it requires sharing in the cross.

- » The Gospel of John gives three additional conditions for discipleship. Read John 8:31, John 13:35, and John 15:8. Based on the conditions for discipleship in Luke and John, are you making disciples in your ministry?

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

Until Christ returns, we will not understand all the details of his teaching about the kingdom. However, the Gospels show many characteristics of the kingdom of God:

- The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom. “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). The new birth delivers us from Satan’s power and makes us part of the kingdom of God.
 - The kingdom of God will include a physical, political reign at the end of time.
 - The kingdom of God is universal; it is not limited to the Jewish nation.
 - The kingdom of God is God’s power at work in the world. The kingdom is not a physical dominion. In the parable of the 10 minas, a kingdom was the authority to rule, not a geographic location (Luke 19:11-12).
 - The kingdom of God is supernatural. Man sows the seed; he cannot make it grow. The kingdom grows through the power of God.
 - The kingdom of God is more than a vague future hope; it is a present reality that demands an immediate response.
 - The kingdom of God was started through the ministry of Jesus. His power over demons demonstrated the victory of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of Satan.
 - The kingdom of God continues to advance through the work of the church. The Sermon on the Mount shows how believers are called to live in the present age.
 - The kingdom of God will be completely established in Christ’s final return to reign in glory. Satan’s power will be broken, and God will reign eternally.
- » At the back of this course is a sermon entitled “The Gospel of the Kingdom.” Read this before continuing with Lesson 7.

LESSON 6 ASSIGNMENT

Prepare a series of three sermons based on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The theme of your sermons should be "Life in the Kingdom of God." Show how we are to live today as citizens of the kingdom of God. Be sure you preach the Sermon as good news. Show how God's grace empowers us to live as citizens in the kingdom of God.

LESSON 7

LOVING LIKE JESUS

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the centrality of love in the life and ministry of Jesus.
2. Understand that love for God involves relationship with God, knowledge of God's Word, and trust in God's will.
3. Imitate Jesus' love for people in ministry.
4. Appreciate the importance of ongoing surrender to God.
5. Show the character of Jesus in daily life.

PRINCIPLE FOR MINISTRY

Christlike love is the motivation for Christlike ministry.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus' entire life and ministry was motivated by love. Repeatedly, he showed that love for God and love for others was at the center of his life and ministry. If we follow Jesus' example, love must be at the center of our life and ministry. Nowhere is this clearer than in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

» Read Luke 10:25-37.

Just before giving this parable, Jesus said that God had "hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children" (Luke 10:21). This teaches an important lesson about spiritual understanding. Understanding spiritual truth requires more than intellectual study; it requires spiritual revelation. God's truth is simple enough

for a child to understand with the help of God's Spirit, but it is too profound for a scholar to understand with mental ability alone.

How can this be? Does God hide truth from those who desire it? The answer involves two principles.

1. **Spiritual truth is revealed only through the Holy Spirit.** Paul wrote that "no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." Because of this, we must be "taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:11, 13).
2. **Spiritual truth is revealed only to receptive listeners.** Paul continued, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The parable of the farmer shows that the attitude of the listener determines the fruitfulness of the seed (Matthew 13:1-23). Only those who are receptive to truth will understand the truth they hear.³⁷

The lawyer in Luke 10:25 is a real-life illustration of this second principle. The lawyer's question did not come from a hunger for truth, but from a desire to entrap Jesus; he wanted to put him to the test. After he heard Jesus' answer, the lawyer's response was not the response of fruitful soil. Instead, he asked another question desiring to justify himself (Luke 10:29).

Jesus answered the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer was written in the Law, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

This is the heart of Jesus' example for us. To live and minister as Jesus did, we must love God and love our neighbor as Jesus loved. Without Christlike love, none of the other lessons in this course really matter. Prayer, leadership, teaching, and preaching—without love, none of it truly matters.

Perhaps this seems too simple. You might say, "Of course, we are supposed to love God and love people. I already know that!" But in the day-to-day burden of ministry, we can lose a heart of love. It is possible to serve our church members without loving them. It is possible to serve our families without loving them. It is possible to do Christian work without loving God. Our motivation for Christian ministry must be Christlike love.

37 Note especially Matthew 13:12. The one who accepts truth receives more truth: "to the one who has, more will be given." The one who rejects truth is blinded even to truth he has already heard: "from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

LOVING GOD AS JESUS LOVED

Jesus' service to mankind was motivated by his love for the Father. To avoid burnout and frustration in ministry, our service to people must be inspired by love for God. Ministry without love for God will soon become empty and barren of fruit.

Three aspects of Jesus' love for the Father should serve as a model for us: relationship, knowledge, and trust.

Jesus Maintained an Intimate Relationship with His Father

Repeatedly, the Gospels show Jesus' close relationship with his Father. This is seen in:

- Jesus' statement to his parents, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).
- Jesus' intimate prayer of John 17.
- Jesus' cry of anguish on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus addressed God using the intimate language of a family, "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36). This was the language of a Son who was secure in his relationship with his Father.

Traditional Jewish prayers used many names for God: God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God of our Fathers; Blessed One; Mighty One; Redeemer of Israel. Jesus used the intimate name *Abba*. Jesus lived in intimate relationship with his Father.

Kenneth E. Bailey spent many years teaching in the Middle East. He writes that *abba* is the first word children in the Middle East learn. *Abba* is the name a child uses for his father.

Paul tells us that as God's children, we too have the privilege of crying, "*Abba!* Father!" (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6). We do not worship a God who remains distant. Instead, like Jesus we live securely and comfortably in our Father's love.

As pastors, we may be tempted to measure ourselves by our ministry success. If our value comes from the size of our church, the approval of our congregation, or the recognition of our peers, we will be tempted to sacrifice integrity for success. We will be discouraged when our efforts fail. However, if we are confident that our *Abba* loves us regardless of our success, we can leave the results to him. His love does not depend on our performance.

Jesus Knew His Father's Will

At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus testified, "I have accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (John 17:4). Jesus knew what his Father sent him to accomplish, and he dedicated his life to accomplishing that mission.

In his humanity, Jesus learned the Father's will through prayer and through the Word. Through prayer, Jesus found the will of the Father.

Jesus also learned the Father's will through the Word. At Capernaum, Jesus summarized his mission as the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah (Luke 4:18-19). When he answered the messengers from John the Baptist, Jesus used the words of Isaiah as evidence for his messianic ministry (Matthew 11:4-5). Jesus knew the Word.

Throughout the New Testament, we find Christians referring to scripture in response to difficulties. Facing martyrdom, Stephen's final sermon consisted primarily of Old Testament scriptures and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Acts 7:1-53). When the Jewish leaders ordered the Christians to quit proclaiming the message of Jesus, the church met together for prayer. Their prayer contains a long quotation from Psalm 2 (Acts 4:24-30, Psalm 2:1-2). The early believers knew the scriptures. It was their natural language for preaching and for prayer.

Throughout church history, preachers who have changed the world have been men of the Word. Martin Luther testified at the Diet of Worms, "I am bound by the Scriptures and my conscience is captive to the Word of God." John Wesley described himself as a "Man of One Book." Charles Spurgeon said that preachers should feed on the Word until "the very essence of the Bible flows from you." Hudson Taylor spent so much time in the Word that one writer wrote, "The Bible was the atmosphere in which Taylor lived." These men changed their world because they preached the Word with authority.

If we are to minister like Jesus, the early Christians, and great preachers of history, we too must shape our attitudes and thinking with the Word of God. Scripture was the supreme authority for Paul's ministry (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Jesus prayed that his disciples would be sanctified, or set apart, for service. This would be accomplished through the Word: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). The Word made the disciples effective in ministry; the Word makes us effective in ministry.

**"Never let good books
take the place of the Bible.
Drink from the well!"**

Amy Carmichael

Ajith Fernando has spent his life ministering in Sri Lanka. He writes that he has made a practice to never make any major statement in preaching without basing it on scripture.

This keeps his preaching grounded on the Word. As Christians, we know God through his Word. As ministers, we build strong churches through a ministry grounded on God's Word.

Jesus Trusted His Father

Jesus' relationship with his Father during his earthly ministry can be summed up in the words of his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). This is the language of absolute trust and submission.

It is difficult to yield completely to the will of someone we do not trust. We may be forced to yield outwardly, but our hearts resist surrendering control to a person we do not trust. Jesus yielded to the will of the Father because of his complete trust in the Father's love and goodness.

» Read John 5:1-47.

Jesus' entire ministry shows this attitude of absolute reliance on the Father. When the Jewish leaders opposed Jesus for healing a lame man on the Sabbath, he responded:

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.... I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me (John 5:19, 30).

Jesus had already claimed to be divine: "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17). But although he was fully divine, Jesus willingly submitted to the subordinate role of his earthly mission. He and the Father are equal, but he submitted to the Father's will.

When the scribes and Pharisees opposed Jesus a few months later, he again defended his actions by pointing to the authority of his Father: "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me" (John 8:28). Because he trusted fully the Father, Jesus could yield willingly to the Father's will.

Church leadership requires a difficult balance. Many pastors and church leaders have strong leadership skills. As leaders, they have strong opinions and personalities. This can be a valuable strength for a leader. However, this strength must be balanced with willing submission to God. Unless we yield to God in trust, we will tend to force our own way instead of yielding to God's way.

Perhaps the best biblical example is Moses. Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3). Moses was strong, but he was also meek. He faced Pharaoh, the most powerful man in Egypt. He led the stubborn people of Israel through the desert. Moses was a strong leader. But at the time, he was yielded to God.

Effective church leadership requires that our natural strength be yielded to God. This is possible only as we walk with God in a life of faith and trust.

- » Of these three aspects of love for the Father (relationship, knowledge of his Word, and yielding based on trust) which is the greatest challenge for you personally?

A CLOSER LOOK: DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE GOD?

False cults such as Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as non-Christian religions such as Islam deny that Jesus was truly God. They will recognize Jesus as a great teacher or prophet, as the first created being, and even as Messiah. But they deny that he was truly God.³⁸

The followers of these religions will often claim, "Jesus never claimed to be God. He said he was a son of God in the same way that each of us are sons of God."

Did Jesus claim to be God? Yes. The people who heard Jesus understood his claims. When Jesus referred to God as "My Father," the Jewish leaders tried to kill him. Why? "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

In one of Jesus' clearest claims to be God, he said to the Jewish leaders, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). These were the words that God used to reveal himself to Moses at the burning bush: "Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you" (Exodus 3:14). With these words, Jesus was claiming to be the God who appeared to Moses. The Jewish leaders knew exactly what Jesus meant by his words. In response, they picked up stones to kill him. This was the proper punishment for blasphemy—falsely claiming to be God (Leviticus 24:16).

At Jesus' trial, Caiaphas asked, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus' answer was definite: "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." With this answer, Jesus claimed to be the one who sits at the right hand of God and to be the Son of Man prophesied by Daniel who would come to judge the world (Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14). Caiaphas knew that Jesus was claiming to be God. He tore his robes and said, "You have heard his blasphemy" (Mark 14:61-64).

You can refuse to believe Jesus' claims, but you cannot read carefully through the Gospels without admitting that Jesus himself claimed to be the Son of God. His listeners heard his claims and were forced to either accept him as God or kill him as a false prophet and blasphemer.

38 To study the teachings of these false religions, please study the Shepherds Global Classroom course, *Faith Traditions of the World*.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS JESUS LOVED

As Jesus was teaching, he often drew an audience of tax collectors and sinners. Not only did Jesus teach these people, he ate with them. When the Pharisees saw Jesus willingly eating with sinners, they began to criticize him. Jesus responded with three stories. When you read these stories, you should realize two important bits of background.

1. In Jesus' day, to eat with a person meant that you were establishing a relationship.³⁹ When Jesus ate with sinners, it meant that he deliberately associated with them. Jesus showed that God does not wait for people to come to him; instead, God actively seeks those who are lost.
2. The Jewish people of Jesus' day expected a righteous person to avoid contact with sinful people. The rabbis taught that when Messiah came, he would avoid all association with the wicked and would eat only with the righteous.

» Read Luke 15:1-32.

This is one large parable in three parts: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. In each case, the theme of the parable is the joy of the one who finds that which was lost. Jesus shows the joy in heaven when sinners are brought to repentance.

The rabbis had a popular proverb: "There is joy in heaven when a sinner is destroyed before God." Jesus turned this around: "There is joy in heaven when a sinner repents." What was the difference between Jesus and the other rabbis? Love. Jesus showed what it means to minister from a heart of love.

When we minister without love, status and position become more important than people. However, when we minister from a heart of love, we are willing to sacrifice status for the sake of the lost. Jesus was willing to suffer the criticism of religious leaders for the sake of showing love to those who most needed love.

- » If we ask, "Would you show love to the Prodigal Son?" all of us would answer, "Yes." We know the correct answer! Instead, ask, "Who was the prodigal who last came across my path? How did I show love to that person?"

"These parables show that the gospel is not for those who have everything right. The gospel is for those who know that they do not have everything right."

Samuel Lamerson

³⁹ This is illustrated in the book of Proverbs. Lady Wisdom invites the "simple" to eat at her table (Proverbs 9:1-6). Through relationship with Lady Wisdom, the simple will become wise.

Jesus Showed Love Through His Compassion for the Hurting

Reading the Gospels, have you noticed that sinners who ran *away* from other religious leaders ran *towards* Jesus? What caused sinners to seek Jesus' presence?

It is not that Jesus ignored their sin; he demanded a higher standard of righteousness than any Pharisee (Matthew 5:20). Sinners ran to Jesus because he was a man of compassion. He did not excuse sin, but he felt compassion for the person who was captive to sin.

We see this in Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery. After her accusers left, Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). Jesus did not excuse sin; he required this woman to abandon her life of sin. But he showed compassion rather than condemnation.

The Gospel of Luke gives special attention to Jesus' compassion. Luke tells the story of Zacchaeus, a tax collector who would have been despised by other religious leaders. To the shock of onlookers, Jesus invited himself to be the guest of a man who was a sinner (Luke 19:7).

» Read Luke 5:12-16.

In reporting this healing, Luke gives a detail that would have shocked the crowd. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. No one in the ancient world touched a leper! It was dangerous medically because of the possibility of contagion. And for a Jew, it caused a person to become ceremonially unclean.

Why did Jesus touch this leper? He felt compassion. "Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him" (Mark 1:41). This leper needed physical healing, but he also needed emotional healing. Lepers were required to stay away from other people. After contracting leprosy, this man had not felt the touch of another human. Jesus could have healed the disease without touching this disfigured man, but he knew the leper needed the touch of another person. Jesus felt compassion.

"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Theodore Roosevelt

If we want to minister like Jesus, we must have hearts of compassion like Jesus. When sinful people looked in Jesus' eyes, they saw loving compassion. When sinful people look in your eyes, what do they see?

Jesus Showed Love Through His Service to the Needy

It is easy to say, “I feel pity for the needy;” it is more difficult to serve their needs. Jesus showed love by serving the needs of those around him. Jesus’ entire ministry was one of service. Paul wrote that Jesus emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). Jesus told his disciples, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Jesus’ miracles show his service to others. The miracles were signs of his messianic mission, but they were also a means of meeting human need. Sometimes the miracles were done for only a small number of people. Sometimes they benefited people with no power or influence. Sometimes his miracles (on the Sabbath) brought him further rejection.

Jesus did not perform miracles to win favor with the powerful; he performed miracles to serve the needy. Scripture records two times that Jesus refused to do miracles. The Pharisees argued with him, “seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him” (Mark 8:11). Jesus refused to give a sign. Then at Jesus’ trial, Herod was hoping to see some sign done by him (Luke 23:8). Jesus refused even to answer Herod. Jesus would not do miracles on demand or for the sake of impressing a skeptical audience.

Although Jesus refused to perform a miracle for Herod Antipas, he healed a fisherman’s mother-in-law, lepers, blind beggars, and demoniacs who could never do anything to repay him. He fed 5,000, who would show their lack of gratitude by forsaking him and he healed the servant of the high priest who had come to arrest him. Jesus served the needy through his miracles.

As pastors and church leaders, it is easy to rationalize our decision to help those who can help us. When we spend more time with the wealthy than with the poor, we may say, “The businessman can support the ministry of the church.” When we cancel a visit to a widow to visit an influential official, we may excuse it, “He has influence and can help the work of God.” Jesus never did this. If we want to minister like Jesus, we must become a servant like Jesus. Like him, we must seek not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28). Paul wrote, “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Some pastors feel, “I have a good education. I am not the servant of a farmer in my church!” Paul never felt this way. Paul had the finest education, but he became the slave of the Corinthians for Jesus’ sake. He could have said, “Look at my education; I am trained in Jewish literature, Greek philosophy, and Christian theology. I can speak in the Sanhedrin, the Greek Aeropagus, and the Roman Senate.” Instead he said, “I am the servant of the least-educated man in Corinth for the sake of Jesus, my master.”

If we want to minister like Jesus, we must have the humility to live like a servant. As servants, our lifestyle is not the grand lifestyle of a governor. If we wish to love like Jesus, we must be humble servants.

Jesus Showed Love Through His Mercy on His Enemies

» Read Matthew 5:43-48.

Jesus taught his followers that to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect means to love like your heavenly Father loves. It means to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. When you show that kind of love, the world will know that you are sons of your Father who is in heaven.

About 200 years before Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, a Jewish scribe wrote a collection of teachings called the *Sirach*. Listen to how he taught his followers to treat people who did not deserve help:⁴⁰

- When you do a good deed, make sure you know who is benefiting from it; then what you do will not be wasted.
- Do good to humble people, but don't give anything to those who are not devout.
- Don't give them food, or they will use your kindness against you. Every good thing you do for such people will bring you twice as much trouble in return.
- The Most High himself hates sinners, and he will punish them.
- Give to good people, but do not help sinners.

The writings of Ben Sira were considered scripture by the Jews of Jesus' day. When Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,'" (Matthew 5:43) this is the writing to which he may have referred. The *Sirach* said, "Do good only for the righteous. Don't waste good deeds on the wicked."

» Now read Matthew 5:43-48 again. Do you see why Jesus' teaching shocked his listeners?

In the Old Testament, God taught his people to love their enemies. This was not new. Here is a test question one college professor gave his students in a class on the Old Testament.

Your neighbor is an enemy of the church. When you pass, he curses you. He tries to cheat you and even steal your cattle. One day during a rainstorm, you see your neighbor's cow has broken loose and is running away. What is your responsibility to your neighbor?

40 Sirach 12:1-7, Good News Translation

1. *Do you take a whip and drive the cow further away?*

The students know this is not the correct answer!

2. *Do you ignore it and say, “That’s not my problem”?*

Many students choose this option. They say, “It is the neighbor’s cow, not my cow. I will mind my own business. Besides, the neighbor does not like me; he will not appreciate my help.”

3. *Do you obey Exodus 23:4? “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him.”*

Even in the Old Testament, God’s people were called to love their enemy. But by Jesus’ day, people were less likely to quote Exodus 23 than *Sirach*. They liked the teaching that allowed them to love their neighbor and hate their enemy! Jesus said, “You must love your enemy because your heavenly Father loves both the evil and the good.”

How does this look in real life? Imagine this scenario in your ministry:

A group of people who appear to share many of your beliefs repeatedly oppose you in public. They ask questions that are intended to trap you; they tell your members that you are a false teacher; they hope you will do something that will get you in trouble with your followers. How will you treat them?

1. *Drive them away and tell them to never return?*
2. *Treat them like they treat you?*
3. *Be honest about their errors, but answer them with love?*

The Pharisees tried every way possible to oppose Jesus. He was honest about their errors; he tried to teach them truth; but he always treated them with love.

If we want to minister like Jesus, we must love our enemies. That is one of Jesus’ most demanding teachings. To the one who betrays us, to the one who turns away from our message, to the one who persecutes us, we must show the unconditional love of Jesus.

APPLICATION: THE CHARACTER OF JESUS IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN

It is easy to write about loving God and loving our neighbor. It is much harder to show that love in daily life. It is only as we cultivate the character of Jesus in our own lives that we are prepared to share him with our world.

Is it possible for us to have the character of Jesus? Scripture teaches that God can enable his people to think as he thinks. He wants to give his people a new spirit that causes us to want

what God wants and to live willingly as he calls us to live (Ezekiel 36:26-27). God wants to develop in us the character of his Son.

Listen to what Oswald Chambers said about faithfulness in daily service:

When you have no vision from God, no enthusiasm left in your life, and no one watching and encouraging you, it requires the grace of Almighty God to take the next step in your devotion to Him... It takes much more of the grace of God, and a much greater awareness of drawing upon Him, to take that next step, than it does to preach the gospel.

The thing that really testifies for God and for the people of God in the long run is steady perseverance, even when the work cannot be seen by others. And the only way to live an undefeated life is to continually look to God. Ask God to keep the eyes of your spirit open to the risen Christ...⁴¹

How can we maintain this faithfulness in ministry? How can we continue to love God and love our neighbor week after week, year after year? We must cultivate the character of Jesus in our daily lives. This requires that we have the mind of Christ.

A Description of the Mind of Christ

» Read Philippians 2:1-16.

Paul's instruction to the church at Philippi is a powerful guide to what it means to have the character of Jesus Christ. To a church divided by personal conflict, Paul wrote, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4).

How could they achieve this? Only if they obeyed Paul's instruction to "have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Paul listed four characteristics that are alien to the Christian life.⁴² These characteristics damage Christian witness and destroy the effectiveness of a Christian minister. Paul said:

1. Do nothing from selfish ambition (Philippians 2:3).

Selfish ambition asks, "What is in it for me? How will I benefit from this?" Can you imagine Jesus asking, "How will I benefit?" before healing a leper or facing the cross? Of course not!

41 Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (March 6 entry). Accessed from <https://utmost.org/taking-the-next-step/> on March 22, 2021.

42 This section is adapted from Dennis F. Kinlaw, *The Mind of Christ* (Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press, 1988), 101-107.

Paul says, “If we have the mind of Christ—if we think like Christ did—we will do nothing from selfish ambition.” Our attitude will be the attitude of a servant. We will ask, “How can I serve?” not “How can I be served?”

2. Do nothing from conceit (Philippians 2:3).

Conceit asks, “How does this make me look? Will people be impressed?” Again, can you imagine Jesus asking, “Will people be impressed?” before visiting with the Samaritan woman at the well? Of course not!

Paul says, “If we have the mind of Christ—if we think like Christ did—we will do nothing from conceit.” We will look for opportunities to show Christ, not for opportunities to gain status.

3. Do all things without grumbling (Philippians 2:14).

Grumbling says, “I deserve better than this!” Can you imagine Jesus saying, “I should not have to wash the disciples’ feet. I’m the teacher. I deserve better.” Of course not!

Paul says, “If we have the mind of Christ—if we think like Christ did—we will minister without grumbling, even in the most difficult circumstances.” We will realize that we deserve nothing. When we remember that everything we have is a gift of God’s grace, it changes our view of the challenges of ministry.

Helen Roseveare was one of the great missionaries of the twentieth century. She was a medical doctor trained at Cambridge University. While serving as a missionary doctor in Zaire, she wanted to build a hospital. Because there were no materials, the first step was to make bricks. Dr. Roseveare worked alongside the African workers making bricks in a kiln.

As she worked with the bricks, her soft hands began to bleed. She began to grumble, “God, I came to Africa to be a surgeon, not to make bricks! Surely there are other people to do this lowly work.”

A few weeks later, one of the African workers said to her, “Doctor, when you are in the surgery room, you terrify us as a doctor. But when you are working with the bricks and your fingers drip blood like ours, you are our sister and we love you.” Dr. Roseveare suddenly realized, “God did not send me to Africa to be a surgeon only; He sent me to show the love of Christ.”

4. Do all things without disputing (Philippians 2:14).

Disputing says, “Yes, Lord, but.... I’m willing to obey, but....” Again, can you imagine Jesus saying, “Father, I am here to serve you; why do you make it so difficult?” We can’t imagine Jesus disputing with the Father.

Paul says, “If we have the mind of Christ—if we think like Christ did—we will not argue and seek an easier path.” We will not compromise the will of God in our lives by bargaining for an easier way. Our answer to God will be “Yes, Lord.” We will have the mind of Christ.

Since Paul called the Philippians to have the mind of Christ, he clearly believed it was possible. He knew that they could have the humble, obedient spirit that marked the life of Jesus. How do we gain this mind of Christ?

Our Minds are Transformed Through Scripture

Earlier in this lesson, we saw how scripture teaches us the will of God. Jesus knew God’s Word. The apostles knew God’s Word. Every lasting revival in church history has started with the study of God’s Word.

Paul challenged the Philippian believers to hold fast to the word of life (Philippians 2:16). Their confidence in and commitment to the gospel would make them lights in their world.

It is through thorough study of God’s Word that we begin to think like Jesus, to have the mind of Christ. That does not mean that you must know Greek and Hebrew to understand scripture; it does not mean that you must have a large library of Bible commentaries; it simply means that you must spend time in the Word of God. It must be part of your daily diet.

As Christians, God’s Word should be our daily food. It should be a joy, not simply a duty. No one says to a healthy person, “You are required to eat today! If you don’t eat, you will be unhealthy.” All you must do is make good food available, and the healthy person wants to eat! God’s Word should be the food for every hungry Christian.

As we feed on God’s Word, our minds are transformed into the mind of Christ. Many Christians have been born again, but they continue to think the same way they thought as unbelievers. Their minds have not been transformed into the mind of Christ. Why?

As new believers, we must reprogram our mind to think like Christ. Before you were a Christian, you thought first about your own needs. Perhaps you saw a poor person, but you thought, “I may need money myself. I can’t give to that man.” As a Christian, you read in God’s Word, “Whoever gives to the poor will not want” (Proverbs 28:27). You hear the words of Jesus, “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38). You begin to think about money like Christ thought about money. You are gaining the mind of Christ through God’s Word.

Before we were Christians, we tried to hurt those who hurt us. When someone was harsh toward us, we lashed out in anger. But as Christians, we read, “Put on compassionate hearts” (Colossians 3:12). We read, “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the

contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9). We begin to respond towards others like Christ responded to those who hurt him. We are gaining the mind of Christ through God’s Word.

Our Minds are Transformed Through Daily Surrender

Paul told the Philippians to have the mind which was in Christ Jesus. He described this mind and then he told them how this could happen in their lives. They must continue to work out their salvation with faithful obedience *not to earn their salvation*—but because God was already at work “both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). As they humbly surrendered to God, he would give them the desire (“to will”) and the power (“to work”) to live godly lives.

As we live a surrendered life, the Holy Spirit cultivates in us the same characteristics that we see in the life and ministry of Jesus. We do not find the mind of Christ through our efforts; we find the mind of Christ through surrender.

This must be a daily surrender. Paul called us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). A living sacrifice is not dead; it continues to live. There is **a surrender** in which we surrender our will completely to God’s will, but there are also **many surrenders** in which we continue to submit daily to his will.

Nancy Leigh DeMoss gives a picture of the surrendered life.⁴³ As you read these descriptions, ask, “Am I living in daily surrender in this area? Am I showing the mind of Christ in this area?”

- When your flesh wants to repeat critical words, the Spirit says, “Speak evil of no one” (Titus 3:2). The surrendered heart says, “Yes.”
- When your flesh wants to complain about difficulties, the Spirit says, “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The surrendered heart says, “Yes.”
- When your flesh wants to resist an unreasonable boss, the Spirit says, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13). The surrendered heart says, “Yes.”

“The secret of a holy life lies not in imitating Jesus, but in letting Jesus manifest Himself in my life.... Sanctification is not drawing from Jesus the power to be holy; it is drawing from Jesus the holiness that was manifested in Him.”

Oswald Chambers

43 Adapted from Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Surrender*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 223-224.

As we surrender, the same Spirit who lived in Christ lives in us. Through the Spirit—not through our own good intentions—we are empowered to react like Christ to the frustrations of daily life, to the disappointments of ministry, and to the temptations of Satan.

- » Share a recent time when fleshly desires conflicted with the will of God. How did you live in daily surrender when faced with this temptation? Is there a current temptation in which you must surrender again to God's will? As a class, pray for each other in these areas.

CONCLUSION: GOD WORKS THROUGH CHRISTLIKE LOVE

We live in a troubled world. Many who read these lessons live in situations where the church is threatened by government, false religions, or social pressures. Is it reasonable to think that we can truly change our world by loving our enemy? How can we love our enemy when our enemy is trying to kill us?

A reporter talked to an Iraqi Christian living in Baghdad.⁴⁴ As the reporter talked to this man, ISIS soldiers were within 40 minutes of his home. The reporter asked, “Is your church still meeting for worship?” The Christian answered: “Yes! In fact, we have started two new prayer groups at our church—one to pray for our persecuted brothers in the north, and one to pray for our enemies.”

The members of St. George's Church in Baghdad pray for their enemies. They give food parcels to Muslim widows. They love their enemies because they believe that they are called to follow the example of Jesus.

This article reminds us of the truth that is seen throughout church history. God's way of working is always contrary to man's way. Man works through the military Crusades against the Muslims during the Middle Ages; God works through a Raymond Lull who died at the age of 82 during his last of many missionary trips to the Islamic world. Man works through military force; God works through a Hudson Taylor giving his life to evangelize the Chinese interior. Man works through strength; God often works through weakness.

God's way is never man's way. But ultimately, God's way is victorious. Our world is changed for eternity as Christians love like Jesus. The change is slow and often painful, but it is God's way of doing his work in our fallen world.

Ministering like Jesus requires that we love like Jesus. An old evangelist was asked the secret of his ministry. He said, “The only way people will know how much God loves them is to see how much **you** love them.” This evangelist understood that as Christ's love shines through us, we draw the world to God. That is what it means to love like Jesus.

44 Mindy Belz, “How Does the Church Move the World?” *World Magazine*, May 27, 2017

LESSON 7 ASSIGNMENT

In this lesson, we have seen how Jesus loved. This assignment asks you to find ways in which you can follow the example of Jesus in loving your neighbor. It should not take long to do the assignment; it may take much longer to put it in practice! Don't fail to put it into practice. We are called to love as Jesus loved.

From the Gospels, give three specific examples of Jesus' love for people. Then give three specific applications for your life. How will you follow Jesus' example? This assignment is for you; be as specific as possible.

JESUS' EXAMPLE	MY APPLICATION

LESSON 8

THE CROSS AND THE RESURRECTION

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the different responses to Jesus' ministry during Passion Week.
2. Understand the cursing of the fig tree as a living parable.
3. Recognize the weaknesses that led to Peter's failure.
4. Appreciate the cross and the resurrection as the foundation for Christian life and ministry.

PRINCIPLE FOR MINISTRY

All effective ministry is done in the power of the cross and resurrection.

INTRODUCTION

The climax of the Gospels is the passion story. 30 of the 89 chapters in the Gospels are devoted to the week between the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the resurrection. Nearly half of John is given to this week. This is the climax to which Jesus' entire life and ministry pointed. In this lesson, we will study the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry to learn lessons for our life and ministry.

- » Before continuing the lesson, discuss two questions:
 - What does the crucifixion mean to me, theologically and personally?
 - What does the resurrection mean to me, theologically and personally?

RESPONSES TO JESUS: THE FINAL WEEK OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY

One of the primary emphases of the evangelists is the response of those who encountered Jesus. For instance, at the beginning of Jesus' life, Matthew contrasts the worship of the magi with the response of Herod, who tried to kill this rival King. John contrasts the questioning response of Nicodemus, a Jewish rabbi, with an unlearned Samaritan woman at the well.

» Read Matthew 10:32-39.

No one can remain neutral regarding Jesus' message; we either accept his claims or we reject him. Jesus described his ministry as a sword that divides these two groups. Families were divided by their response to Jesus; even Jesus' own family faced this test (John 7:5, Mark 3:21). No one could remain neutral.

The contrasting responses to Jesus become even more dramatic in the final week of his public ministry. This contrast continues to the cross itself, with the two thieves responding in very different ways to Jesus.

Responses to the Raising of Lazarus

» Read John 11:1-57.

Even before the raising of Lazarus, the religious leaders opposed Jesus. When Jesus visited the Temple during the Feast of Dedication earlier in the winter, Jewish leaders accused him of blasphemy and tried to stone him. Because it was not yet time for his sacrifice, Jesus escaped and traveled across the Jordan away from the religious center of Jerusalem (John 10:22-42).

When news came of Lazarus' death, the disciples knew it was dangerous for Jesus to return to Judea. Readers often mock Thomas' doubt and pessimism, but he had loyalty to his Master. He assumes (correctly) that Jesus will be killed in Judea, but Thomas is loyal. When Jesus insists on returning to Judea, Thomas says to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Regardless of Thomas' later doubts, we should not forget the loyalty of this fearful disciple. Is it any surprise that after the resurrection, Thomas died a martyr's death taking the gospel to India?

In a small village like Bethany, the raising of Lazarus could not be hidden. There was no way for the religious leaders to hide such a dramatic event. John shows the different responses to this miracle.

The response of the crowd

As news spread of the raising of Lazarus, the public was convinced that Jesus would overthrow Rome and reestablish the throne of David in Jerusalem. They were convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah. “Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him” (John 11:45 and 12:11). So many people believed Jesus that the Pharisees said, “Look, the world has gone after him” (John 12:19). This inspired the enthusiasm of the crowds when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey.

The response of the religious leaders

The raising of Lazarus destroyed any chance for the religious leaders to ignore Jesus’ claim to be Messiah. With the crowds turning to Jesus, the religious leaders had only two options:

1. **Admit that Jesus was who he claimed to be.** However, this would require them to surrender their ambition for power. Jesus had already condemned their hypocritical behavior. If they admitted that Jesus was Messiah, they would lose their positions as leaders of the Jewish people.
2. **Arrest and kill Jesus.** If they refused to accept Jesus as Messiah, they must kill him.

The religious leaders defended their decision to kill Jesus as being best for the nation. Like weak leaders throughout history, they tried to excuse their decision. “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (John 11:47-48). They were afraid that Jesus would lead a revolution against Rome. They did not understand that his kingdom was spiritual.

“Our place” probably refers to the Temple, and “our nation” refers to the freedoms that Rome allowed the Jews (see Acts 6:13 and Acts 21:28). Although Judea was under the control of Rome, the Jews were allowed to worship in the Temple, observe religious laws, and, through the Sanhedrin, maintain some civil government. All this would be lost if Rome crushed a rebellion.

Caiaphas assured the Sanhedrin that it was better for one man to die than for the entire nation to suffer (John 11:49-50). Ironically, after killing Jesus, the fears of the Sanhedrin came to pass. Forty years after Jesus was killed, the Romans crushed a Jewish rebellion by destroying the Temple, taking away the rights of the Jewish people, and doing everything that Caiaphas tried to avoid.

Since they could not hide this miracle without destroying all evidence, the Sanhedrin decided to murder both Jesus and Lazarus to protect the nation (John 11:53 and John 12:10). Miracles do not necessarily convince unbelievers. We often think, “If only God would ‘prove’ himself

by a miracle, everyone would believe.” However, a miracle may only harden the skeptic in his unbelief.

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (not the Lazarus Jesus raised), the rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers. Abraham said, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31). Scripture itself is sufficient testimony to truth. If we reject scripture, other evidence will not convince us.

Responses to Jesus: Mary

» Read Matthew 26:6-13 and John 12:1-11.

Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry, Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, was one of his most devoted followers. In an earlier story, Martha complained because Mary sat listening to Jesus while Martha served. In that story, Jesus commended Mary who “has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

Less than a week before his death, Jesus and his disciples visited the home of Simon the leper. Lazarus and his sisters were invited to join the group. During the meal, Mary poured an expensive flask of ointment over Jesus’ head and feet. This ointment cost 300 denarii, about a year’s wages. In a day when there were no banks, this probably represented Mary’s savings.

The disciples were angry that Mary had wasted so much money (Matthew 26:8, Mark 14:5), but Mary cared only for the opinion of one person, Jesus. She acted out of a love that blinded her to the opinions of everyone else. She did not care how much the ointment cost, and she did not care what others thought. She was worshipping her Master, and nothing else mattered.

When the disciples protested Mary’s actions, Jesus reprimanded them: “Leave her alone... She has done a beautiful thing to me” (Mark 14:6). Knowing that a cross lay only a few days ahead, Jesus recognized the symbolism of Mary’s action: “She has done it to prepare me for burial” (Matthew 26:12). Jesus honored this woman who gave her best in a selfless act of loving worship.

As we read the story of Mary anointing Jesus, we should ask, “How much do I love Jesus? Do I care more for him or for the opinion of onlookers?” Mary truly loved Jesus.

Responses to Jesus: The Triumphal Entry

» Read Matthew 21:1-11 and John 12:12-19.

On Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. On an ordinary day, there would be nothing unusual in this event; a Galilean teacher accompanied by a small band of followers riding into Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. But this was no ordinary time. The raising of Lazarus changed this Passover pilgrimage into a religious and political statement.

Matthew highlights the religious implications of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Matthew shows that Jesus' entry fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah. The words of the crowds came from Psalm 118, a Passover psalm that describes a triumphal procession into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:4-11, Zechariah 9:9, Psalm 118:26).

This procession was filled with political implications:

- Crowds spread cloaks on the road to represent submission to a king (Matthew 21:8, 2 Kings 9:13).
- From the Maccabean period, palm branches symbolized victory over a military enemy (John 12:13, 1 Maccabees 13:51).
- “Hosanna!” meant “save us,” a cry for deliverance.
- “Son of David” was a royal and messianic title.

The people believed that Jesus was entering Jerusalem to overthrow Rome and establish his kingdom. The long wait for a Davidic king was over. The promises made by the prophets would soon be fulfilled.

Only a few days later, many of these same people would shout, “Crucify him!” Why? Because they were cheering Jesus for the wrong reasons. They believed he would overthrow Rome, but he had no intention of leading a military revolt. They were seeking a political kingdom, but he was bringing a spiritual kingdom. In their disappointment, this crowd would soon turn against Jesus.

The politically powerful and socially elite members of the Sanhedrin had already decided to kill Jesus; the powerless would soon turn against him. Knowing what lay ahead, Jesus wept over the fate of the city that would reject him (Luke 19:41-44). Jesus knew that his triumphant procession led to the cross. The crowds quoted Psalm 118:26, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Jesus knew the next verse of the psalm, “Tie the offering with ropes to the horns of the altar!” (Psalm 118:27, *New English Translation*). Jesus entered Jerusalem as the sacrifice who would soon be tied to the “altar,” a Roman cross.

A CLOSER LOOK: JESUS CURSES THE FIG TREE

» Read Mark 11:12-25.

Each of the Synoptic Gospels includes the story of Jesus cursing a barren fig tree during his last week of public ministry. Jesus cursed the fig tree on Monday as he came to Jerusalem after spending the night in Bethany. On Tuesday, the disciples saw that the tree had withered in only 24 hours.

Although it was not the season for figs (Mark 11:13), the leaves meant that green figs should have been on the tree. The fruit of a fig tree appeared only a short time after the leaves. When a tree had leaves without any early figs, the tree would not bear fruit that year.

This story is a living parable about Israel's failure to bear fruit.⁴⁵ Israel had been chosen by God to bless the nations (Genesis 12:3). Instead, Israel had shamed the name of Jehovah.

The Temple was to be a place of prayer for all peoples (Isaiah 56:7). Instead, the Temple had become a den of robbers, where the powerful chief priests cheated the poor.

The fig tree was barren; Israel was barren. The fig tree was rejected; Israel would soon be rejected.

The cursing of the fig tree is one of a series of judgment messages during Jesus' last days of public ministry:

1. The living parable of the barren fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25).
2. The cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:15-19).
3. The parable of the unfaithful tenants (Mark 12:1-12).
4. The controversies with the religious leaders (Mark 12:13-40).
5. Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:1-37).

RESPONSES TO JESUS: THE FINAL WEEK OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY (CONTINUED)

Responses to Jesus: The Religious Leaders

» Read Matthew 21:23-22:46.

After the raising of Lazarus, the religious leaders were determined to kill Jesus. However, his popularity with the common people made it difficult. They wanted to find some way to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the crowd. On the days after Jesus' triumphal entry, the religious

⁴⁵ In the Old Testament, a fig tree often represents Israel (e.g. Jeremiah 8:13, Hosea 9:10, Joel 1:7).

leaders engineered a series of confrontations in the Temple. They were trying to trap Jesus, but they failed repeatedly. Instead, the crowds watched as Jesus repeatedly embarrassed the religious leaders with his wisdom and wit.

First, the chief priests and elders challenged his authority to clear the Temple and to teach publicly. Jesus responded by trapping them with a question about John the Baptist.

Jesus then gave three parables that condemned the religious leaders. The parable of two sons showed that obedience, not just profession, proves relationship in the kingdom of God. The parable of the wicked tenants illustrated the consequences of rejecting Jesus as Messiah. Finally, the parable of the wedding feast implied that the religious leaders who had been invited to the feast were now rejected in favor of others who appeared less worthy, but who had responded to the invitation.

Determined to discredit Jesus, the religious leaders brought a series of questions to try to trap him. Their purpose was not to learn truth; their purpose was to destroy Jesus. Jesus knew that they did not desire truth, so he did not give direct answers to their questions.

After failing to trap Jesus, the leaders gave up. Matthew finishes this section showing their failure: “And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:46). Mark ends by noting the joy of the common people who watched these confrontations, “And the great throng heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37).

- » As a pastor or Christian leader, you will often be faced with difficult questions. How can you discern between sincere questioners and those who want to trap you? How should your responses to these two types of questioners differ? (See Proverbs 26:4-5 for an example of this contrast.)

THE TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION

- » Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.

Twenty years after Jesus’ ascension, Paul planted a church in Corinth. This church was made up of converts from many different backgrounds. The church included both Jews who knew the Hebrew scriptures and Gentiles who had known nothing of the true God.

The church at Corinth was torn by conflict and threatened by false teachings. Responding to these problems, Paul reminded the Corinthians of the message he first preached. Paul’s first messages in a largely pagan city focused on four historical events:

- Christ died for our sins.
- He was buried.
- He was raised on the third day.

- He appeared publicly—to Cephas, the twelve, 500 brothers at one time, to James, to all the apostles, and finally to Paul.

The first part of Paul's message at Corinth was about the cross: "Christ died for our sins." The message of the cross is central to the Christian faith.

In the Old Testament, the person who brought a lamb for sacrifice laid his hand on the head of the lamb to identify with the sacrificial death. By laying his hand on the head of the lamb, the worshipper said, "This lamb is dying in my place. I deserve death for my sin." In the same way, we deserved death for our sin, but Christ died in our place. We deserved death; he died so that we could live.

THE REASON CHRIST SUFFERED

Was he scourged?

It was that by his scourging we are healed.

Was he condemned, though innocent?

It was that we might be acquitted, though guilty.

Did he wear a crown of thorns?

It was that we might wear the crown of glory.

Was he stripped of his clothing?

It was that we might be clothed in everlasting righteousness.

Was he mocked and reviled?

It was that we might be honored and blessed.

Was he reckoned a malefactor and numbered among transgressors?

It was that we might be reckoned innocent and justified from all sin.

Was he declared unable to save himself?

It was that he might be able to save others to the uttermost.

Did he die at last, and experience the most painful and disgraceful of deaths?

It was that we might live forevermore and be exalted to the highest glory.

- J.C. Ryle⁴⁶

46 J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary*, Updated ed. (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2020), 331

THE TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION (CONTINUED)

The Arrest

» Read Matthew 26:1-5, 14-56.

On Wednesday of Passion Week, Jesus predicted his death after two days. The Sanhedrin was planning to arrest Jesus after the Passover crowds left the city, at least nine days from the time of this prediction. However, when Judas offered to betray his Master, they decided to arrest Jesus while they had the cooperation of one of his followers.

Why did the chief priests need Judas? They needed to arrest Jesus when he was away from the crowds. Because of his popularity, there would have been rioting if they had arrested him in public.

After sharing the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. Facing the physical torment of the cross and the spiritual agony of separation from the Father, Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). Even in this supreme trial, Jesus submitted to the will of the Father.

“Jesus did not seek relief in his deity from human suffering; he took refuge in prayer.”

**Adapted from
T.B. Kilpatrick**

Later that evening, Judas came with a great crowd to arrest Jesus.⁴⁷ After Judas identified Jesus with a kiss, Jesus spoke to the soldiers. “When Jesus said to them, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground” (John 18:6). This large group of soldiers was afraid of a man who held power over death. Jesus, not his enemies, was in charge. Octavius Winslow, a 19th century preacher, wrote, “Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money. Not Pilate, for fear. Not the Jews, for envy. It was the Father, for love!”⁴⁸

The Trial

» Read Matthew 26:57-27:26, Luke 22:54-23:25, John 18:12-19:16.

The trial of Jesus included both a Jewish trial and a Roman trial. Jewish law was the most humane of ancient legal systems; Jewish law did everything possible to preserve life. Roman

⁴⁷ John 18:3 identifies this group as a “band” or “cohort” of soldiers. A Roman cohort usually consisted of 600 men.

⁴⁸ Quoted in John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Westmont, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 255.

law was known for its strict rules and comprehensiveness. These were the two best legal systems of the ancient world, but they did not prevent sinful men from killing the Son of God.

During the hours after his arrest, Jesus was subjected to six legal hearings or trials. This included both Jewish religious trials and Roman civil trials. Historians have shown that the Jewish trial was illegal according to Jewish law. In their rush to convict Jesus, the Sanhedrin:

- Held a night trial (illegal)
- Did not make formal charges before arresting Jesus (illegal)
- Did not allow Jesus to call witnesses for his defense (illegal)
- Rushed the trial more quickly than Jewish law allowed (illegal)

Ironically, all this happened so that they could have Jesus crucified and his body removed before the Passover. They killed the Lamb of God so that they could eat the Passover lamb on the proper schedule!

The sequence of trials

1. Jewish hearing before Annas (John 18:12-14, 19-23)

Annas had been appointed high priest for life. Even after the Romans replaced Annas with his son-in-law Caiaphas, most Jewish people continued to call Annas by the title “High Priest.” This first hearing before Annas was unofficial. It included no charges or witnesses.

2. Jewish hearing before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:57-68)

The first hearing before the full Sanhedrin may have been held as early as 2:00 a.m. Although they could not hold a legal trial before sunrise, the Jewish leaders wanted to move quickly. Although a formal night trial was illegal, the Sanhedrin held an informal hearing that condemned Jesus for blasphemy and determined that he was worthy of a death sentence.

3. Formal Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66-71)

When day came, the Sanhedrin held a formal trial. At this trial, the Sanhedrin officially condemned Jesus for blasphemy.

4. First Roman trial before Pilate (Luke 23:1-5, John 18:28-38)

Rome did not give the Sanhedrin authority to execute criminals (John 18:31). To gain Pilate’s sentence of death, the Jewish leaders changed their accusations from the religious charge of blasphemy to a political charge of rebellion. They accused Jesus of “misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2).

During the Passover season, Jewish people would not enter any Roman buildings for fear of becoming defiled and prevented from eating the Passover meal. Because they would not enter the palace, Pilate held the hearing on the pavement outside the door of the palace.

5. Roman trial before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12)

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, but he did not want to anger the Jewish leaders. When he heard that Jesus “stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place” (Luke 23:5), Pilate decided that he had an escape from his dilemma. During Passover Week, Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, was in Jerusalem.⁴⁹ Since Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate hoped Herod would serve as judge for this case. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, but Herod refused to intervene.

6. Final Roman trial before Pilate (Matthew 27:15-26, Luke 23:13-25, John 18:39-19:16)

When Jesus was returned to his court, Pilate looked for another solution. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent: “After examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him” (Luke 23:14). Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus, an innocent man.

When the leaders threatened to report him to Caesar for disloyalty, Pilate gave in to their demands. Pilate was a weak ruler. In an earlier conflict, Pilate allowed soldiers to enter Jerusalem carrying the image of the emperor. A Jewish crowd protested outside Pilate’s palace for five days. When he threatened to kill the protesters, they announced that they would die rather than tolerate the image of Caesar in the Holy City. Pilate was forced to back down.

Because of this experience, Pilate was afraid of the Jewish people. Further, his superior officer in Rome, Sejanus, did not trust Pilate’s ability to control the people of Judea. When the leaders threatened to complain to Caesar if Pilate released Jesus, Pilate delivered him over to them to be crucified (John 19:16). Pilate condemned Jesus to death not because he believed Jesus to be guilty, but because of his own weakness.

During the trial, Peter denies Jesus.

During the Passover meal, Jesus had warned Peter, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times” (John 13:38). Now, during Jesus’ trial, Peter denied Jesus three times.

As we read of Peter’s shameful fall, we should remember that Peter was not the only one who failed Jesus that night. Only Peter and John attended the trial. The other disciples ran in fear.

49 During Passover week, every Roman official in Palestine came to Jerusalem to help in case of a revolt.

Clearly, Peter loved Jesus. So why did he fall? Earlier, we studied Jesus' temptation to learn lessons for facing temptation. From Peter's fall we can see warnings to help us when we are tempted. At least two characteristics contributed to Peter's fall:

1. Overconfidence

When Jesus warned of Satan's attack, Peter boasted, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" (Matthew 26:35). When we become overconfident, we are in danger of falling. We live a victorious Christian life only through the power of the Spirit. Overconfidence is a first step to spiritual failure.

2. Prayerlessness

In the Garden, Jesus warned the disciples, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:40). Instead of praying for strength to face the coming test, Peter slept.

Prayerlessness inevitably leads to spiritual failure. It is impossible to maintain a victorious Christian life apart from a vibrant prayer life. Satan tries to get Christian workers involved in many activities until we have no time for prayer. He knows that if we are too busy to pray, we will soon fall.

- » Look back across your Christian life and ministry. Think of the places where you fell to temptation, or where you came close to falling. What factors contributed to the fall? Were you experiencing ministry success that led to overconfidence? Were you unusually busy and failing to spend enough time in prayer? Are there other factors that can serve as warning signs for the future?

During the trial, Judas commits suicide.

Immediately after the account of Peter's denial, Matthew tells the story of Judas' suicide. Seeing the results of his betrayal, Judas changed his mind and brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" (Matthew 27:3-4). Judas threw down the silver that he had been paid for his betrayal and went and hanged himself (Matthew 27:5). Judas chose suicide rather than a lifetime of guilt.

Matthew's account places Peter's repentance and Judas' remorse side by side. Both Peter and Judas regretted their actions. However, for Judas, Matthew uses a word that expresses the idea of changing one's mind, not the usual word for true repentance. This difference is important for understanding people's response to conviction for sin.

Paul wrote about the difference between remorse (sorrow for the results of sin) and repentance (sorrow for the sin itself and a change of direction). The apostle wrote: "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Godly sorrow brings true repentance, which leads to salvation and life. Worldly sorrow brings remorse, which leads only to guilt and death. Both Peter and Judas were sorry, but only Peter truly repented.

Judas saw the result of his treachery and chose death over shame and guilt; he felt remorse, but did not repent. Peter saw the result of his failure and chose true repentance. The result of Judas' remorse was death; the result of Peter's repentance was a lifetime of fruitful ministry.

- » Have you seen people who felt remorse for sin, but did not truly repent? What was the result? In our preaching, how can we bring people to a place of true repentance?

The Crucifixion

- » Read Matthew 27:27-54.

Judea was a terrible post for a Roman soldier. The people hated the Roman soldiers, and Zealots plotted to assassinate them. During Passover, the army was put on constant alert for riots. There was no worse assignment for a soldier. When a Jewish prisoner was condemned to death, the soldiers took out their hatred on the condemned man.

The treatment of Jesus—the beating, mockery, the crown of thorns—shows the cruelty of hardened soldiers who hated their assignment, who hated the people around them, and who delighted in punishing someone who could not fight back. Jesus suffered all this without a word of anger towards these soldiers.

Many writers have studied the crucifixion story by looking at the seven statements of Jesus from the cross. A person's last words show what is important to that person. As he faced death, what did Jesus say?

Words of forgiveness

As they nailed him to the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). To the end, he demonstrated love and forgiveness.

To a thief who deserved death, Jesus promised, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Words of compassion

Jesus commissioned John to care for his mother when he said, "Woman, behold, your son!" and to John, "Behold, your mother!" (John 19:26-27). Earlier, Jesus had taught that the deepest family ties are spiritual. "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:49-50).

At the time of his death, Jesus' physical half-brothers were unbelievers; they were not part of his spiritual family. So, Jesus put his mother in the care of a spiritual brother, John the Beloved.

Words of physical torment

Being the Son of God did not release Jesus from the physical torments of the cross. He suffered all the physical agony of a condemned criminal. After hours without water in the brutal heat, Jesus cried, "I thirst" (John 19:28).

Words of spiritual agony

Matthew and Mark record the most heart-breaking words Jesus uttered on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, quoting Psalm 22:1).

In his humanity, Jesus felt the same sense of abandonment that David had felt. Just as people had mocked David and wagged their heads at him (Psalm 22:7), they derided Jesus, wagging their heads (Matthew 27:39). And just as David had emotionally felt abandoned by God in this moment, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

However, David found that God had not truly forsaken him. Later in this Psalm, David testifies, "For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him" (Psalm 22:24).

In the same way, Jesus found that God had not forsaken him. Jesus' next words from the cross were a cry to his Father. Knowing that his Father had not abandoned him, Jesus prayed, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46).

In his humanity, Jesus experienced the same sense of desolation we feel when it seems like God does not hear our prayers. But Jesus also experienced the reality that our heavenly Father never abandons His children. Even when we do not feel His presence, we can cry out to Him, knowing that He hears us.

Words of resignation

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). Throughout his life, Jesus lived in faithful submission to the Father. Facing the cross, he prayed, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). Now he gave this final statement of submission to the Father's will.

Words of triumph

"It is finished" (John 19:30). With this cry of victory, Jesus proclaimed that he had accomplished the work the Father had sent him to do. The penalty for sin was paid; Satan was

defeated. The atonement foreshadowed by the Old Testament lambs and promised in Isaiah 53 was accomplished.

On the cross, God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). In Isaiah 53, the prophet spoke of the suffering Servant who would bear our sins (Isaiah 53:4-12). Paul shows that this substitutionary atonement was accomplished on the cross.

Jesus became sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). We no longer live in bondage to sin; through Christ's death, we have been made righteous. Paul does not simply say that in him we are called righteous. Rather, in him we may actually become the righteousness of God. Through Christ's work on the cross, a real transformation takes place. Christ became sin that we might become righteous.

O LOVE DIVINE, WHAT HAST THOU DONE!

O Love divine, what has thou done!
The immortal God hath died for me!
The Father's co-eternal Son
bore all my sins upon the tree.
The immortal God for me hath died:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Is crucified for me and you,
to bring us rebels back to God.
Believe, believe the record true,
you all are bought with Jesus' blood.
Pardon for all flows from his side:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Behold him, all ye that pass by,
the bleeding Prince of life and peace!
Come, sinners, see your Savior die,
and say, 'Was ever grief like his?'
Come, feel with me his blood applied:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

- Charles Wesley

THE TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION (CONTINUED)

The Burial

» Read Matthew 27:57-61.

In Paul's message at Corinth, he preached that Jesus died for our sins and that he was buried (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). For Paul and the early church, the burial was important.

Many Passion Week observances today move directly from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. But for much of church history, "Holy Saturday" was recognized as an important part of the Easter Vigil. What is the significance of the burial?⁵⁰

Historical significance

The burial shows that Jesus was truly dead. Contrary to Islamic claims that Jesus was in a swoon from which he later awakened, the burial shows that he was truly dead. The Romans knew well how to kill a condemned prisoner. There was no chance that they would take a man from the cross before he was dead.

Further, the heavy stone and the guards guaranteed that no one could escape from the grave. Even if the Roman soldiers had mistakenly buried Jesus before he was dead, it is inconceivable that a man who had suffered hours of agony on the cross could break out of the burial shroud, push away the heavy stone, and overpower a company of professional guards. The burial confirms the historical truth that Jesus of Nazareth was dead.

Prophetic significance

Writing about the lamb led to the slaughter, Isaiah prophesied, "They made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death" (Isaiah 53:9). Jesus' burial fulfilled messianic prophecy.

After Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate for the body. Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, but he did not agree to the condemnation of Jesus. Even after most of the leaders had turned against Jesus, some were looking for the kingdom of God. Joseph was one of these secret disciples. He and Nicodemus buried Jesus' body in Joseph's tomb (Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:42-46, Luke 23:50-54, John 19:38-42).

Think of the courage this took. After even the disciples had abandoned Jesus, Joseph stepped forward to identify with a condemned criminal. This public stance endangered Joseph's

50 Adapted from James Boice, "The Burial of Jesus." Accessed at <https://www.alliancenet.org/tab/the-burial-of-jesus-christ-part-one> on March 22, 2021.

position on the Sanhedrin and his standing in the community. Further, Joseph risked Pilate's anger. Roman officials rarely permitted friends or relatives to bury the bodies of those condemned to crucifixion. The bodies were left in public view as a warning to other criminals. Pilate's permission is one more evidence that Pilate knew Jesus was innocent of any crime.

Theological significance

Paul equated our baptism with Jesus' burial:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

Burial was a public confirmation of Jesus' death. In the same way, baptism is a public testimony to our participation in Jesus' death. In baptism, we are pronounced dead to our old way of life.

Burial is the final step in recognizing a person's death. In the West, mourners toss dirt onto the buried casket to recognize the finality of the "goodbye" on this earth. Paul emphasizes the finality of our death to sin. As Christ was dead, we are dead to sin. Returning to sin after we have been buried with Christ is like digging up a dead body.⁵¹ We are buried with Christ; we are no longer alive to sin.

THE RESURRECTION

Paul preached at Corinth about the cross; Christ died for our sins and was buried. Then, Paul preached about the resurrection; Christ was raised on the third day and appeared to multiple witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). The resurrection is central to the Christian faith.

» Read Matthew 27:62-28:15.

When the religious leaders asked Pilate to change the inscription on the cross, he refused. He crucified Jesus under a sign that said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19:19). By using this title for a condemned criminal, Pilate was mocking the Jews whom he resented.

After the crucifixion, the religious leaders again came to Pilate, asking for a Roman guard to secure the tomb.

⁵¹ Adapted from James Boice, "The Burial of Jesus." Accessed at <https://www.alliancenet.org/tab/the-burial-of-jesus-christ-part-one> on March 22, 2021.

Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, “After three days I will rise.” Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, “He has risen from the dead,” and the last fraud will be worse than the first (Matthew 27:63-64).

With Pilate’s permission, they sealed the tomb and posted guards from the company that had arrested Jesus in the garden. Suddenly:

There was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men (Matthew 28:2-4).

Jesus was risen!

» Read John 20:1-29.

The Gospels record multiple post-resurrection appearances by Jesus. He appeared to many people in many different settings.

Skeptics sometimes argue, “The women at the tomb were hallucinating. They saw what they expected to see.” However, these witnesses did **not** expect to see Jesus alive; they knew he was dead! They did not yet understand the prophecies of his resurrection (John 20:9). Even when the first witnesses said that they had seen Jesus, the rest of the disciples doubted (Mark 16:13). They did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead.

Gradually, through appearances to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), two disciples walking to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32), the eleven apostles (John 20:19-31), and even a group of 500 (1 Corinthians 15:6), Jesus’ followers realized that he was truly risen. The early church began worship with these words, “He is risen. He is risen indeed!”

APPLICATION: MINISTRY IN THE POWER OF THE CROSS AND THE RESURRECTION

Many liberal theologians have tried to pass off the resurrection as a myth. However, the apostles’ faith was grounded not on a beautiful story about the lasting impact of Jesus’ life, but on the solid facts of his death and resurrection. The apostles knew that Jesus had died and that he had risen from the dead. This gave them confidence to face persecution and even death. How does the death and resurrection of Jesus speak to ministry today?

Ministering in the Power of the Cross

» Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5.

On his second missionary journey, Paul traveled to Corinth from Athens where he had preached at the Areopagus. It appears that Paul saw only limited results from his ministry in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). He did not plant a church in Athens, and the philosophically minded Athenians mocked his message of the resurrection. From Athens, Paul traveled 75 kilometers west to Corinth, the most influential city in the province of Achaia.

Paul came to Corinth after opposition in three successive cities: Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. Perhaps this is why he said, “I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling” (1 Corinthians 2:3). Although Greek audiences looked for eloquence and intellectual brilliance, Paul determined to preach only the cross. The power in his message came not from his eloquence but from the cross itself. Paul preached “not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1 Corinthians 1:17).

In Corinth, Paul said, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul knew that the message of the cross would offend many.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).

This message was a stumbling block or scandal to the Jews. They looked for signs that authenticated the Messiah. In their minds, the idea that a crucified man might be the chosen Messiah was absurd. The Law said, “a hanged man is cursed by God” (Deuteronomy 21:23). To claim that the crucified Jesus was Messiah was scandalous to a Jewish audience.

The message of the cross was folly to the Gentiles. The Greeks respected the noble death of a martyr. If Jesus had been killed in battle against the Romans, Greek thinkers would have honored him for his bravery. But crucifixion dishonored the victim; this was not a noble death. Victims of crucifixion were usually denied proper burial. Their flesh was eaten by birds or rats, and the bones were dumped into a common pit. To claim that a crucified Jewish peasant was “Lord” was absurd to a Gentile audience.

The cross was a scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but Paul preached the message of the cross without hesitation. Paul’s example serves as a model for us. Today, as in the first century, the cross will offend some and seem like foolishness to others, but it is the message we must preach.

Our confidence as ministers and church leaders comes not from our ability; our confidence is based on the message of the cross. Paul had a wonderful education, a brilliant mind, and could argue with the greatest intellects of his day. But his ultimate confidence was in the cross. When we win people by arguments alone, their faith may rest in the wisdom of men; but when we point them to the cross, their faith rests in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5).

Ministering in the Power of the Resurrection

» Read Acts 2:22-36.

Acts shows that the resurrection was the central topic of early Christian preaching. At Pentecost, Peter pointed to the resurrection as evidence that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises made by the prophets.

Defending himself before Agrippa, Paul said, “I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain.” What was this promise? The resurrection. “Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?” (Acts 26:6-8).

» Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-34.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul shows that his ministry is grounded not only in the power of the cross, but in the power of the resurrection. Paul insists that apart from the resurrection, his ministry is meaningless. “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14). Without the resurrection, Jesus is no more than another failed Messiah. Apart from the resurrection, Jesus might be a tragic martyr, but he is not the promised Messiah.

The resurrection is the basis of our Christian faith. “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). On the cross, Christ provided atonement for our sins, but it was the resurrection that proved Christ’s power over death and sin. If there is no resurrection, Paul says, your faith is empty and you are still in bondage to your sins.

The resurrection is the basis of our Christian hope. “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). Paul assured the Corinthians that they had hope of resurrection because Christ was risen from the dead.

In the second century, Lucian, a Greek novelist, mocked Christians for their belief in the resurrection. He said, “The poor wretches are persuaded that they will live forever. Because of that, they despise death and are willing to sacrifice their lives for their faith.” Lucian was mocking Christians, but his words are true. As Lucian said, Christians of the second century did believe that they would live forever. Because of that belief, they were willing to die for the faith.

This must still be true for us today. If we truly believe that Christ is risen from the dead, it should give us confidence in the face of persecution and even death. The resurrection is the basis for our Christian hope.

The resurrection is the basis of our Christian life. Paul makes an astounding practical application of the doctrine of the resurrection. “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ ...Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning” (1 Corinthians 15:32, 34). According to Paul, the resurrection gives us an important reason to live godly lives. If there is no resurrection, we might live like the Epicureans who said, “Eat and drink because we will die soon.” There is no reason to live for eternity if there is no resurrection. But, Paul continues, since there is a resurrection, wake up and live a life free of sin. Our victory over sin is inspired by our confidence in the resurrection.

The story of the resurrection should convict us for our lack of faith in the face of ministry challenges. How many times do we expect prayers to go unanswered? Why? Because we forget the power of the resurrection! How many times do we face temptation with little confidence of victory? Why? Because we forget Paul’s promise: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11).

If Christ lives in us, we no longer live in the flesh; we are no longer prisoners to sin. This is life in the power of the resurrection. The power that raised Jesus from the grave gives us daily victory over sin. This is what it means to live and minister in the power of the resurrection.

CONCLUSION: THE MARKS OF A CHRISTLIKE LIFE AND MINISTRY

Does Your Life Look like Christ?

Luke wrote, “And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26). As people watched believers in Antioch, they began to say, “Those people act like Christ. We should call them ‘Christians.’” When you read this verse, ask yourself, “Would my neighbors come up with the name ‘Christian’ by watching my behavior, words, and attitudes? Do I look like Christ?” Believers at Antioch lived in a way that reflected the character of Jesus Christ; they were Christians.

After many years as a pastor, Dr. H. B. London now serves as a mentor to young pastors. He warned about the spiritual dangers pastors face. “One can be near holy things without being holy. It is possible to preach about forgiveness and not forgive. Ministers can give so much effort to ministry that they neglect their soul’s health.”⁵² It is possible to preach to others and then become disqualified yourself (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Dr. London suggested some practical tips to help pastors avoid spiritual failure while leading others. These are areas that can help us maintain a Christlike life. He wrote:

52 H. B. London, *They Call Me Pastor*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 145

- **Live what you preach.** Never preach to others what you have not first applied in your own life.
- **Care for your soul.** Some medical doctors are unhealthy. They care for others, but ignore their own health. Some pastors are spiritually unhealthy. As a pastor, take time to care for your spiritual welfare.
- **Humble yourself.** Remember that a pastor is a shepherd, not a bank president. Be a servant.
- **Grow through disappointments.** You will be disappointed in ministry. Someone you mentor will go astray. A close friend will turn against you. Church members will reject you. Don't let the disappointment cause you to lose hope. Judas betrayed Jesus. Demas deserted Paul. Through the tears, keep growing and keep shepherding the flock.

Does Your Ministry Look Like Christ?

In these lessons on the life and ministry of Jesus, we have seen many characteristics of Jesus' ministry. Are these characteristics seen in your ministry?

Here are some questions to ask in evaluating your ministry:

- Are sinners being saved? When Jesus preached, people received new life. Are you bringing people to the new birth?
 - Are believers being filled with the Spirit? Jesus promised to send the Spirit to his children. Is this promise being fulfilled among those you serve?
 - Is Satan being defeated? Are Satan's strongholds being broken? Jesus' ministry was marked by spiritual authority.
 - Are hurting people finding healing? Are broken families finding reconciliation? Are broken lives being made whole? Are broken relationships restored? Jesus healed those who suffered physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds.
 - Do people see grace and truth? Am I drawing people to Jesus or driving them away from Jesus? Jesus preached truth with conviction and with grace.
- » As you discuss these questions, look for areas in which your ministry can grow in Christlikeness. Remember that every minister has room to grow, so take this list as a challenge for growth rather than a tool for self-condemnation.

LESSON 8 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Prepare a sermon or Bible lesson on the “Seven Sayings on the Cross.” Stress the message of these words of Jesus for Christians today.
2. Prepare a sermon or Bible lesson on the meaning of the resurrection for daily Christian life. Use both the resurrection story from the Gospels and Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:15-17 in your preparation.

LESSON 9

LEAVING A LEGACY

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Understand Jesus' final legacy to his disciples and the church.
2. Appreciate the importance of mission in Jesus' legacy.
3. Recognize the ongoing impact of Jesus' ministry through his disciples in Acts.
4. Develop practical steps for leaving his own ministry legacy.

PRINCIPLE FOR MINISTRY

The test of our ministry is what we leave behind when we are gone.

INTRODUCTION

Timothy was nearing retirement after many years as a respected pastor. Someone asked him, "How are you preparing the church for your retirement? What is the church's vision for the next 10 years?" Tim answered, "I won't be here, so I don't care what happens after I'm gone." This pastor did not understand an important principle for ministry: the ultimate test of our ministry is what happens after we are gone.

Contrast this pastor with Nathan. Nathan died suddenly after 25 years of ministry. During those years, Nathan had led several ministries in his local church. He had developed a ministry to homeless people, a drug rehabilitation program, and an outreach for business leaders. At Nathan's funeral, the leader of the drug rehabilitation ministry said, "Last month, Nathan and I met to discuss next year's budget." The leader of the homeless ministry unveiled a sketch of a new building to provide temporary housing for families. Nathan had carefully planned for the ministry's future. He left a legacy.

In this final lesson, we will study Jesus' final teachings for the disciples, his final commission to the disciples, and the ministry of the disciples after the ascension. We will learn lessons about leaving a legacy.

- » If you were to die tonight, what legacy would you leave?
 - What is your legacy for your family?
 - What is your legacy for your community?
 - What is your legacy for your ministry?

JESUS' FAREWELL DISCOURSE

John 13-16 can be compared to Old Testament “farewells” by Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and David.⁵³ Jesus' “Farewell Discourse” gives some of his most profound and intimate teaching.

John 13:1 gives the setting of this farewell teaching: “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father.” If you knew that you would die within 48 hours, what would you say to those who would continue your ministry? Those words would represent what you believed to be most important for your followers.

At this Last Supper, Jesus showed his complete love for the disciples both through his actions (washing their feet) and with his words. Jesus had “loved his own who were in the world.” Now, he loved them to the end (John 13:1). “To the end” carries two ideas:

1. It means that Jesus loved them to the end of his time with them.
2. It means that Jesus loved them to the uttermost. Jesus loved them completely.

- » Read John 13:31-14:31.

Commands and Promises in Jesus' Farewell Discourse

A command: Love one another (John 13:34).

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” To a group of disciples known more for their bickering than for their love, this was a difficult command.

How was this a new commandment? Even the Old Testament commanded God's people to “love your neighbor.” There are two new aspects to Jesus' teaching about love.⁵⁴

53 Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 32-33, Joshua 23-24, 1 Chronicles 28-29

54 Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 498

First, Jesus provided a **model** of the love that he commanded. They were to love as he loved. After humbly washing their feet, Jesus said, “In the same way I loved you, you are to love one another.” He incarnated a love that is expressed in humble service. Disciples, then and now, must love as Jesus loved. This love takes up the towel to serve. This love serves even the betrayer. This love perseveres to the point of death.

Second, the love between Christians was to be a unique **witness** to the truth of Jesus’ message. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Later, Jesus prays “that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me” (John 17:23). The love and unity of the church is to be a witness to Jesus’ message.

Many Christians have discovered that it is easier to love an unbelieving neighbor than to love a Christian brother who is full of personality flaws. But as Christians, we are commanded to love one another. Fifty years later, John reminded the church of this message:

If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:20-21).

Jesus began his farewell message with the commandment to love one another. This command is the foundation for everything else he proclaimed in this message.

A command: Don’t be troubled; Believe (John 14:1).

As he often did, Peter interrupted Jesus to ask, “Lord, where are you going?” In his answer, Jesus predicted Peter’s denial. Then, Jesus continued with a message to Peter, to the rest of the disciples, and to us today. “Let not your hearts be troubled.”

Because there is a chapter break after John 13:38, we often read John 14:1 as if it were starting a new message. John 14:1 is part of the answer to Peter. Read it this way:

Peter, you will deny me three times. You are much weaker than you think. But, don’t despair; I have a message of hope for you, Peter, and for all of you who will soon run in fear at my arrest. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

Peter needed to know that despite his failure, Jesus had a message of hope. The disciples needed to know that despite their fear, Jesus had a message of hope. “Let not your hearts be troubled” is in present tense. Given Jesus’ warnings and the opposition of the religious leaders, the disciples were already afraid. Jesus says, “Stop being troubled.... Believe in God; believe also in me.”

The only way we can avoid being troubled by the stresses of ministry is to believe. On any Monday, there are pastors around the world who are discouraged. Yesterday, you preached faithfully—and one of your members became angry. You preached a message of repentance—and no one responded. You invited unbelievers—and no one came.

In some countries, the church is threatened by government opposition. In some countries, the church is threatened by Islamic militants. In some countries, the church is threatened by social indifference—no one cares. Jesus says, “Stop being troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

A promise: I am the way (John 14:6).

Jesus encouraged his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them. Now Thomas interrupted, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus’ response teaches an important principle for the Christian life. Jesus did not say, “Here is where I am going.” Instead, he said, “I am the way.” Jesus did not point to a path or direction; he pointed to himself. There is no clearer statement in scripture that the only way to the Father is through Christ. Contrary to the claims of liberal theologians, Jesus clearly stated that he is the only path to God.

A promise: You will do greater works (John 14:12-14).

Jesus promised that “whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” These works will be greater not because they are more amazing, but because they have a wider reach. During his earthly ministry, Jesus’ works were limited to one geographic area. Now, because Jesus was sending the Spirit, the works done by the church would reach the world.

Jesus continued, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” There are two conditions attached to this promise.

1. “Ask in my name.”

This is more than adding “in Jesus’ name” to the end of a prayer. It is not a magic phrase that forces Jesus to grant our requests. Throughout the Bible, God’s name represents his character. To “pray in Jesus’ name” means to pray in a manner consistent with Jesus’ character and his will.

To pray in Jesus’ name may also mean to come to the Father through the authority of the Son. When Moses came to Pharaoh to speak in the name of the Lord (Exodus 5:23), he came in the authority of God who had sent him. To pray in Jesus’ name means to pray with his

permission and authority. We approach the Father through the intercession of the Son who “always lives to make intercession” for us (Hebrews 7:25).

2. “...that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

Our prayers must be for the glory of God. James warned those who “ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:3). When we claim Jesus’ promise, we must be sure that we pray for God’s glory, not our own purposes.

A command: Keep my commandments (John 14:15).

Jesus gave a standard by which we can measure our love for him. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John remembered this statement when he wrote his first epistle: “Whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected” (1 John 2:5). Contrary to the teaching of some modern preachers, Jesus never taught that his disciples could live in willful disobedience to his commands. Love is seen in willing obedience.

A promise: He will give you a helper (John 14:16).

The word translated “Helper” in John 14:16 refers to an advocate who comes to one’s defense. It refers to a helper or a comforter who offers consolation in times of trouble.

Jesus said that the Father “will give you **another** Helper, to be with you forever.” This indicates that the ministry of the Holy Spirit would be like the ministry of Jesus. The Spirit came not as an impersonal force, but as a person, just as Jesus was a person.

The Helper is the Holy Spirit of truth who will dwell “with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). He “will teach you all things that I have said to you” (John 14:26). His ministry will be so powerful that Jesus asserted, “it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you” (John 16:7).

How could it be to the disciples’ advantage if Jesus went away? Robert Coleman explained:

While He was with them in bodily form, [the disciples] saw little need to rely upon the Spirit, and hence they had not come to know intimately the deeper reality of His Life. In His absence, however, they had no visible support. To survive they had to learn the secret of His inner communion with the Father. Out of their necessity, they would experience greater fellowship with Christ than they had ever known before.⁵⁵

55 Robert Coleman, *The Mind of the Master* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2000), 29

Life in the Vine

» Read John 15:1-16:37.

Jesus continued with one of his most powerful images. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.” The Old Testament repeatedly refers to Israel as a vine.⁵⁶ However, because of her sin, the nation of Israel failed to accomplish God’s purpose for the beautiful vine that he planted. Instead, as Israel prospered materially, she built altars to false gods (Hosea 10:2). Instead of bearing fruit that would bless other nations, Israel bore wild grapes⁵⁷ (Isaiah 5:2). Israel became so sinful that God could do nothing with this vine except burn the wood for fuel (Ezekiel 15:1-6). Jesus came as the true vine who would fulfill Israel’s calling to be a blessing to the nations.

Jesus came as the true vine. He came to accomplish what the nation of Israel had failed to do; he came to fulfill the calling of Israel to be a blessing to the nations.

Jesus told the disciples that he was the vine and they were the branches. Jesus’ message was clear: fruitfulness depends entirely on our willingness to abide in him.

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5).

Apart from the vine, the disciples could do nothing; apart from the vine, we can do nothing today. When we attempt ministry in our own strength, we are doomed to frustration and powerlessness. Why? Because we were never intended to bear fruit on our own.

Our spiritual life itself derives from our continuing relationship to the vine. If anyone does not abide in the vine, “he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (John 15:6). While this verse is a warning, it is also a great encouragement. Apart from the vine, we are useless and worthless. But if we continue in the vine, we have life and fruitfulness. Our spiritual life does not depend on our own strength; we live “in the vine.”

This theme is seen again in Hebrews. Our great high priest, Jesus, “always lives to make intercession” for those who draw near to God (Hebrews 7:25). Howard Hendricks encouraged struggling pastors who felt isolated: “If you don’t have anyone to pray for you, never forget Christ is praying for you.” He is our intercessor; he is the source of our spiritual life.

Jesus reminded his disciples that they must abide in the vine. This is still true today. As pastors and church leaders, you do not minister in your own strength. You live in the power

⁵⁶ Psalm 80:8-9, Isaiah 5:1-7, Isaiah 27:2-6, Hosea 10:1-2

⁵⁷ “Wild” has the idea of a “sour” taste instead of the sweet flavor of a cultivated vineyard.

of the vine and in the power of the great high priest who intercedes for you when you have no strength to intercede for yourself.

Through the rest of Jesus' last discourse, he taught the disciples again that they must love one another. He prepared them to face the hatred of this world. The world hated Jesus; the world would hate Jesus' true followers.

Then Jesus explained more about the work of the Holy Spirit. Earlier in the discourse, he had promised to send the Spirit. Now he taught them more about the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would convict the world; he would guide the disciples into all truth; he would glorify the Son.

He again explained to them about his departure in a little while. And, he spoke to them again of peace in trouble. Early in this discourse, Jesus commanded, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me" (John 14:1). He ended the discourse with a parallel encouragement: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Note that in both instances, our hope is in Christ alone. We are not to be troubled if we believe in Christ. Rather, we are to take heart because Christ has overcome the world! Life in the vine is a life of confident peace. Our confidence is not based on earthly circumstances; our confidence is based on Christ and his victory over the world.

A CLOSER LOOK: THE LAST SUPPER

The *Mishnah* is a record of ancient Jewish traditions. One section of the *Mishnah* shows how the Jews observed the Passover meal.⁵⁸ At the Last Supper, Jesus and the disciples probably followed this pattern which is still followed 2,000 years later.

The first cup of wine mixed with water is served. The blessing over the cup includes this promise from the Exodus: "I will bring you out."

A second cup of wine is mixed but not yet served. The youngest son asks, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" The father answers with the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

After the story, the family sings the first *Passover Hallel*, Psalms 113-114. They drink the second cup with this promise: "I will free you from being slaves to them."

After a blessing, the meal is served. The meal includes bitter herbs, unleavened bread, lamb, and a sauce of fruit seasoned with spices and vinegar. The father washes his hands,

58 You can watch a video about a Messianic Jewish Passover meal at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Gjf1v6Xmhs>, accessed July 29, 2025. You can read more at <http://www.crivoice.org/haggadah.html>, accessed March 22, 2021.

breaks and blesses the loaves, takes a piece of the bread, wraps it in bitter herbs, dips it in the sauce, and eats. He then gives thanks and eats a piece of lamb. Each member of the family then eats.

The third cup is blessed with the Passover promise: “I will redeem you.”

The fourth cup is blessed with the Passover promise: “I will take you as a nation.”

The family sings the final *Passover Hallel*, Psalms 115-118.⁵⁹

At the Passover meal, the Jewish people remembered that God had delivered Israel from bondage. Even more importantly, they looked forward to a complete fulfillment of God’s promises when Messiah would deliver them from bondage once and for all.

The day after the Last Supper, Jesus would die as the perfect Passover Lamb. On the cross, the promise of deliverance was fulfilled.

THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

» Read John 17.

Jesus’ last recorded prayer with his disciples is important for understanding his legacy for the disciples and for the church today. This prayer has been called the “Holy of Holies of Jesus’ prayers.” It is his most intimate prayer.

Jesus Prayed for Himself (John 17:1-5)

Jesus prayed to his Father, “glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” While the disciples did not understand this prayer, they would soon learn the shocking truth that this prayer would be answered on a Roman cross.

On Monday of Passion Week, Jesus said, “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” John explained, “He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die” (John 12:32-33). Jesus was glorified not through victory, but through apparent defeat. Jesus was glorified through a cross.

Jesus Prayed for His Disciples (John 17:6-19)

Jesus prayed for three things for his disciples. He prayed that the Father would keep them in his name. He prayed that they would be kept from the evil one. And he prayed that the Father would sanctify them in the truth.

⁵⁹ This was the last Psalm that Jesus sang with his disciples before going to Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30).

Jesus Prayed for All Believers (John 17:20-26)

Jesus prayed for all those who would believe in him in the future. He prayed that they would all be one. This unity is a testimony to the world: “that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

Jesus did not pray for the world: “I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me” (John 17:9). He prayed for those who believe on him. Jesus prayed that we will be a testimony to the world through our unity and faithfulness.

Jesus’ legacy was a group of believers who would accomplish his purpose in the world. In the Old Testament, Israel was blessed by God in order to be the vehicle of blessing for all nations (Genesis 12:1-3). In the New Testament, the church was blessed by God in order to be the vehicle of blessing for all peoples. Jesus prayed that we will fulfill our mandate to be a blessing to all people.

JESUS’ FINAL COMMISSION TO THE DISCIPLES

» Read Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:44-49, and Acts 1:6-11.

The lasting influence of a leader is determined largely by his ability to share his vision with others. Jesus provides a model for describing a vision in a way that inspires committed followers. Because of his vision, the disciples devoted their lives to spreading the message of the kingdom of God throughout the Roman Empire.

The Gospels include three statements of Jesus’ commission. Each statement focuses on a different aspect of the commission. Matthew highlights the authority necessary for the mission. Mark notes the reach of the commission: “to the whole creation.” Luke summarizes the contents of the message the apostles will preach.

The most complete statement of Jesus’ final commission is in Matthew 28:18-20.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

The primary command in this commission is “make disciples.” Accomplishing this command requires us to go, to baptize new converts, and to teach young believers. These activities support the central command, “make disciples.” Evangelism, social work, education, and all other aspects of ministry are guided by this central priority: we are commissioned to make disciples.

The Purpose of Pastoring

Ed Markquart, an American pastor, ate dinner with Richard Wurmbrand, a Romanian pastor who spent many years in a communist prison. During the dinner, Wurmbrand turned to a member of Markquart's church and asked, "Is your pastor a good pastor?" The member said, "Yes."

Wurmbrand asked, "Why is he a good pastor?" The member answered, "Because he preaches good sermons."

Wurmbrand then asked, "But does he make disciples?" Pastor Markquart said that this question changed the direction of his entire ministry. He said:

The purpose of God for all pastors... is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. People who love Jesus Christ, who follow Jesus Christ, who call Jesus Christ their Lord. That is what we are called to be: to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Not make church members. Not make Sunday schools. Not make buildings.... We are to make disciples of Jesus Christ. That is what it is all about.⁶⁰

A CLOSER LOOK: JESUS' MISSION

The events of Jesus' last week of ministry show his mission to create a kingdom composed of all nations, races, and peoples. Scenes from Jesus' last week of ministry illustrate his mission to all nations.

- Jesus entered the city on a donkey. Matthew and John quoted Zechariah's prophecy, "Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey." Zechariah described the reign of this king. "He shall speak peace **to the nations**; his rule shall be from sea to sea" (Matthew 21:5, Zechariah 9:9-10).
- When he cleansed the court of the Gentiles, Jesus quoted Isaiah: "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer **for all the nations**'?" (Mark 11:17, quoting Isaiah 56:7). The Jewish leaders had converted the court where Gentiles gathered to pray into a marketplace for money-changers and those who sold pigeons.
- When the disciples criticized Mary for wasting precious ointment, Jesus responded: "And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed **in the whole world**, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mark 14:9).
- In the Olivet sermon, Jesus prophesied a day when the "gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony **to all nations**, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). To these Jewish disciples who thought the kingdom

⁶⁰ From a sermon by Edward Markquart, entitled "Pentecost: Go, Go, Go, Go, Go", available at https://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/pentecost_go_go_go_go_go.htm, accessed Nov 17, 2022.

was for the chosen people alone, Jesus said that the gospel would be proclaimed to all the world.

The Old Testament prophets had shown that the Messiah would come for all nations. In his last week of public ministry, Jesus taught his disciples that the kingdom of God would include people from all nations. The promise of the prophets was to be fulfilled through the church.

JESUS' LEGACY: THE CHURCH IN ACTS

Many books on the life of Christ end at the ascension. However, Jesus' ministry led not just to the cross or even to the empty tomb; his ministry led to Pentecost. Jesus promised to send another Helper to be with them forever (John 14:16). This promise was fulfilled in Acts. Two scenes in Acts show the fulfillment of Jesus' legacy.

The Church at Pentecost

» Read Acts 1:4-11 and Acts 2:1-41.

Just before the ascension, the disciples asked, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” They expected Jesus to establish an earthly, political kingdom. In their minds, the resurrection reinforced the possibility of an earthly kingdom. All that Jesus needed to do, they thought, was to use his power to overthrow the Romans. Jesus responded,

It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:7-8).

“The timing of the kingdom is not your responsibility,” Jesus implies. “Instead, you must accomplish the mission I have given you: serve as my witnesses to the ends of the earth. But before you go, you must wait.” In Luke, Jesus said, “But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

Fifty days after Passover, as 120 disciples gathered in the upper room, the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled. They began to speak in the languages of the people gathered from other nations for the Jewish Festival of Pentecost (Acts 2:4, 6-11). This symbolized the fulfillment of Christ's plan to form his church from all nations.

The list of nations in Acts 2 reminds us of the list of nations in Genesis 10. In Genesis 11, God judged man's attempt to set up a universal kingdom at Babel by confusing their languages. In Acts 2, God began building his kingdom by reversing the confusion of languages.

Pentecost was the beginning of the “greater works than these” that Jesus promised (John 14:12). The fulfillment of Jesus’ legacy had begun. The promised Holy Spirit was now active in the ministry of the apostles. From this time, the church would begin to accomplish God’s great purpose of forming his kingdom. As Peter’s sermon made clear, the promises of the Old Testament were now being fulfilled through the church.

John Stott explained four aspects of the Day of Pentecost.⁶¹

- The Day of Pentecost was the final saving act of Jesus on earth.
- The Day of Pentecost equipped the apostles for the Great Commission.
- The Day of Pentecost began the new age of the Spirit. Throughout the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit empowered God’s servants at special times of ministry. After Pentecost, Christians at all times and in all places benefit from his ministry.
- The first Christian revival started at Pentecost.

The effects of Pentecost are seen throughout the rest of the book of Acts. The signs at Pentecost were special. The joy, fellowship of believers, freedom in worship, boldness for witness, and power for ministry were to be normal evidences of ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Daily Life in the Early Church

- » Read Acts 2:42-47.

The second scene showing the fulfillment of Jesus’ legacy is at the end of Acts 2. This scene shows the daily life of the early church.

In his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed for the unity of his followers. He prayed that “they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:22). The answer to this prayer begins in Acts 2. “All who believed were together;” they were “attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes;” God was adding “to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

In Acts, the phrase “one accord” represents the unity of the early church. Despite the difficulties of forming a church of both Jews and Gentiles, persecution from Jewish leaders, and personal conflicts between apostles, the church remained one. Against all odds, Jesus’ prayer “that they may be one” was fulfilled.

- » Does the picture of the church in Acts 2:42-47 look like your church? Are you ministering in the power of the Spirit? If not, what roadblocks are hindering the work of the Spirit in and through your ministry? Is it disobedience? Prayerlessness? A

⁶¹ John W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Westmont, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 60-61

lack of faith? A lack of unity? How can you see a new outpouring of the Spirit in your ministry?

APPLICATION: LEAVING A LEGACY

Retired ministry leaders have shared the following points about their legacy, their preparation for leaving leadership, and lessons for transition.⁶²

1. Leaders who leave a legacy plan for the future.

Imagine asking a builder, “What are you building?” You would be shocked if the builder answered, “I don’t know yet. I’m waiting to see what happens.”

Before he begins the building, the builder plans for the final product. Leaders who leave a legacy know what they want to leave behind.

Leaders who finish well know the legacy they want to leave behind. They do not go through ministry blindly. These leaders believed, “This is what God has called me to accomplish in my place of ministry.”

Jesus’ legacy was a group of disciples prepared to lead the church. From the beginning of his ministry, he gave sufficient time and energy to prepare these men as his legacy.

If you want to leave a legacy, you must plan for the future. Sadly, many people build a life with no attention to the goal. If you asked them at age 30, 50, or even 70 years old, “What are you building with your life?” the answer would be, “I don’t know. I’m waiting to see what happens.”

“You build your legacy every day, not at the end of your life.”

Alan Weiss

2. Leaders who leave a legacy prepare carefully for transition.

Imagine visiting a builder nearing the end of a major construction project. The walls are done; the roof is complete; it is almost time for occupancy. Ask, “What are the remaining steps before the building is done?”

⁶² The interviews for this section included the following leaders:

Dr. Michael Avery, former president of God's Bible School and College, Cincinnati, OH

Rev. Paul Pierpoint, former pastor of Hobe Sound Bible Church and president of FEA Missions, Hobe Sound, FL

Rev. Leonard Sankey, retired pastor and leader of multiple mission organizations

Dr. Sidney Grant, former president of FEA Missions, Hobe Sound, FL

You would be shocked if he answered, “I don’t know! I don’t spend time thinking about those final steps.” No! The builder is leaving something that will outlive himself. He plans carefully for each step. He can tell you, “This is the day we will finish the building. This is when the owner will move in.” Everything is planned for the transition.

Leaders who leave a legacy prepare carefully for transition. When possible, they plan their resignation in advance, allowing the organization to choose a successor, and allowing their successor to prepare for new responsibilities. In some cases, the outgoing and incoming leaders share a period of time in which the new leader begins to make decisions while the previous leader is available for counsel and advice.

Leaders who leave a legacy prepare the ministry they lead for transition. Effective outgoing leaders communicate confidence in God’s provision for the future. They prepare people to function well under the next leader. They make sure that the people in the organization feel secure in the transition. One leader wrote, “My goal was to make it so smooth that the employees would not even recognize my departure.”

3. Leaders who leave a legacy know when to leave.

Leaders must be willing to turn responsibility to their successor and walk away without regrets. Former leaders should be available for counsel, but only when asked by their successor.

In this course, we have seen how Jesus prepared the disciples to take leadership of the church. Early on, he gave them careful training. Later, he sent them out to minister and then return for evaluation. At the Last Supper, he gave them final instructions for ministry. Just before the ascension, he gave them a final reminder of their greatest commission. Jesus prepared carefully for transition.

Sadly, many Christian leaders give little attention to transition. They assume, “I will do my job until I am replaced. After that, it is someone else’s problem.” Of course, there are times when sudden illness, death, or a major ministry change makes it impossible to prepare adequately for transition. But whenever possible, we should plan carefully for a transition to the next leader. This is one of the most important steps in preserving a legacy for the future.

LESSON 9 ASSIGNMENT

Write a 3-5 page essay based on these instructions:

1. Think of a ministry leader or family member who has left a legacy that influenced your Christian life and ministry. In one page, summarize their influence in your life. Answer two questions.
 - What was their influence on your life?
 - What did they do or say that had such an important impact?
2. What legacy do you want to leave behind when you die? Be specific in your response. Answer in 1-2 pages.
 - What legacy do you want to leave for your family?
 - What legacy do you want to leave for your community?
 - What legacy do you want to leave for your ministry?
3. For each of the three items in answer 2, identify specific practices you must follow *now* to leave the legacy you wish to leave. Answer in 1-2 pages.

Keep this paper and review it weekly for the next six months. Use it to begin planning your legacy for the next generation.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM (A SERMON)

Professor Danny McCain (University of Jos, Nigeria)

Some years ago, the Emir of Gombe invited me to a visit. A few months later I went to the palace. An official explained the rules you must observe when you are meeting with the Emir. You must remove your shoes when you go in the palace. You cannot shake hands with the Emir because he does not shake hands with common people. You cannot sit on the same level with the Emir. You must address the king as “his royal highness” or “his royal majesty.”

Every kingdom has its own characteristics, rules, and leaders. If you are part of that kingdom, you need to understand the kingdom and its rules. I will begin with two scriptures which will serve as the foundation for this sermon.

Matthew 6:9-10:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Luke 9:1-2:

And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

In this message, I want to give a big picture of the kingdom of God and to show how this truth can be practical in our lives.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: THE BIG PICTURE

When I was a child, I thought the “kingdom of God” was **the eternal home of God—heaven**. Many kingdom verses seem to refer to our eternal home. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

As I studied more, I began to understand the kingdom was more than the eternal home of God. For some time I believed that the kingdom was somewhat equivalent to **the church**.

Parables like the fish in the net demonstrated that some references to the kingdom are not about heaven.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:47-50).

This must refer to the church. There are real believers and hypocritical believers in our churches. However, at the end of the church age, God will sort them: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

The more I studied, the more I discovered indications that the kingdom of God is even **broadier than the church**. Jesus said, “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). If the church was born on the Day of Pentecost and the kingdom had already come, then the church and the kingdom must not be the same.

These thoughts forced me to look at the kingdom from a holistic point of view. That is what I want to do now.

GOD’S KINGDOM IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

During creation, God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26). When God created human beings he made them to be like him in some way.

It seems reasonable that God would create a place for humans to live that would have the most important characteristics of the environment in which God himself lived. What was the Garden of Eden like?

- There was no sin or moral fault there; it was like heaven.
- There was no sickness or death or sorrow there; it was like heaven.
- There was nothing unpleasant there. It was a place of perfection like heaven.
- There was no disorder there. Everything was functioning exactly as it was created to be; it was like heaven.

The Garden of Eden was God’s kingdom on earth at that time. “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). This was the first comment

about God's new kingdom on earth. When something is good, everything is in its proper place and proper order. Everything on the earth was the way God wanted it. This reflected the order, beauty and perfection that characterized God's home in heaven.

THE LOSS OF GOD'S KINGDOM IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

God gave careful instructions about the way to maintain and preserve God's kingdom on earth. Unfortunately, man violated God's sacred trust and sinned against God. This resulted in two serious conditions.

First, sin entered the world and caused the image of God in man to be distorted. Second, because humans had partially lost the image of God, they were no longer qualified to live in the perfect place. Eden was no longer appropriate for man.

Therefore, God removed them from that place and cursed the earth just as he had cursed the man and woman. God cursed the ground so that it produced thorns and thistles. The earth lost much of its beauty, comfort, productivity, and security. Just as humans are only a shadow of their once holy selves, so the earth is only a shadow of what God created it to be. To put this in terms consistent with this sermon: The kingdom of God on earth collapsed.

- That which God had built was spoiled.
- That which God had made beautiful was now ugly.
- That which God had created to be comfortable was now painful.
- That which God had designed to be sacred was now sinful and corrupt.
- That which God had planned for humanity and the earth would not come to pass.

However, God is not a loser. He cannot be defeated. "No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord" (Proverbs 21:30). The devil tried but he can never overcome God.

- Who can undo what God has done?
- Who can say no when God has said yes?
- Who can destroy that which God has created?

God will not accept defeat. God is able to reverse and restore things that have gone wrong. God is the master redeemer.

God put in place a plan to restore his kingdom on earth.

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this (Isaiah 9:7).

Even before Adam and Eve fell into sin, God had a plan to restore and rebuild his kingdom on the earth. One of the most important purposes of the Bible is to describe the restoration of God's kingdom on earth to be like it is in heaven. The process of restoration is still on-going. We see the process beginning in Genesis 12:1-3.

GOD'S KINGDOM AND ABRAHAM

Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees when he received this message:

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will **make of you a great nation**, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed** (Genesis 12:1-3, emphasis added).

Although the word *kingdom* is not used here, we believe God was beginning to restore his kingdom on the earth because of two promises in this statement.

God Promised to Make a Great Nation Out of Israel

It is interesting that about the next third of the Old Testament is spent describing the building of this nation.

In the building of this nation, we see God using two principles that he seems to use in his projects.

1. When God works on this earth, he always works through human beings. God does not normally send angels to do the work he wants done on this earth.
2. When God works on this earth, he works the hard way, the slow way, the difficult way, the progressive way, the way that is the opposite of the way we would do things. The building of the nation was filled with many obstacles. However, it eventually became a reality.

I do not think that the nation was the complete fulfillment of God's restoration of his kingdom on the earth. However, it was a step in that direction. The kingdom demonstrated that God could rule his people on earth. Unfortunately, because of the human factor, it was only partially successful.

God Promised That Abraham's Descendants Would Be a Blessing to All the Peoples of the Earth

“...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). This promise was fulfilled with the coming of Jesus.

GOD'S KINGDOM AND JESUS

The first story Luke tells about Jesus after his baptism and temptation is his visit to the synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus went to his home synagogue and volunteered to read the scriptures. The reading for the day came from Isaiah 61.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:18-21).

In the early days of his ministry, Jesus gave a strong hint that he was there to continue the renovation process that God had been doing for hundreds of years.

- Because of the consequences of sin, the world had become poor both in a spiritual and a literal sense. However, Jesus declared that he had been anointed to “proclaim good news to the poor.”
- Because of the fall, the human race had become a prisoner to sin. However, Jesus said he had come to “proclaim liberty to the captives.”
- Because of the fall, the human race had become spiritually blind, which means people could not understand the truth. Some people had become physically blind. However, Jesus had come for “recovering of sight to the blind.”
- Because of the fall, the devil and the devil's agents had oppressed people in many ways. However, Jesus said that he had come to “set at liberty those who are oppressed.”

Jesus was saying that his purpose was to reverse many of the curses that had been placed upon the earth because of sin. To say this another way, Jesus had come to the earth to continue the process of building God's kingdom on the earth. And to say it still another way, Jesus had come to this earth to fulfill God's second promise to Abraham—to be a blessing to all the people of the earth. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15). The kingdom was central to Jesus' teachings throughout his ministry.

GOD'S KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

The channel through which God worked in the Old Testament period was the nation of Israel. In the New Testament, the church became God's channel of operation. The church was an advance over the Old Testament for several reasons:

- The church included all people of the world, not just the Jews.
- The church provided access to the Holy Spirit to everyone whereas in the Old Testament period only the spiritual giants had such access.
- The church provided a new emphasis of a personal relationship with God.
- The church emphasized worship **in spirit and in truth** rather than through animal sacrifices and rigid ceremony.

LESSONS FROM JESUS ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

There are some lessons we can learn about the kingdom from Jesus' life and teachings.

1. **God's kingdom does not have geographical boundaries but exists wherever the King is.**

- When Jesus visited a wedding, he provided the wine because his kingdom had spread to that place by his presence.
- When Jesus met sick people, he healed them because his kingdom extended to sickness and disease.
- When Jesus met hungry people, he provided food for them because his kingdom was concerned for the basic needs of people.

Jesus wants to expand his kingdom today to include any place his followers go. It becomes part of his kingdom because the king's people are there. That is our responsibility as part of the royal family. We must make sure the rule of Jesus extends to our particular domain, the area of the world over which we have influence.

- We must establish God's kingdom over our families.
- We must establish God's kingdom over our communities.
- We must establish God's kingdom over our jobs and working places.
- We must establish God's kingdom over our local and national governments.
- We must certainly establish God's kingdom over our churches and Christian organizations.

Wherever a subject of the king lives, the kingdom must be established. Thus, our houses and our offices represent God's kingdom. Our relationships with colleagues represent the kingdom. Peter wrote,

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:11-12).

God wants non-citizens of the kingdom to see the kingdom in us. They can only see the kingdom in our lives if we live by the principles of the kingdom. Can people see the kingdom of God in you?

2. God's kingdom is not for a specific group of people but for all who follow him.

When Jesus healed the servant of the Roman (Gentile) soldier, he said,

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in **the kingdom of heaven** (Matthew 8:11, emphasis added).

The kingdom was for all people, regardless of race, language, or ethnic background. Because Jesus chose people from all kinds of backgrounds, we should accept people from all kinds of backgrounds who are followers of Jesus. Racism and factionalism are not a part of the kingdom of God.

3. God's kingdom is not associated with expensive palaces and exotic clothing but with positive social values.

When we think of kingdoms, we often think about the home of the king—the palace. The palace says something about the king. However, Jesus said, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). Jesus' kingdom is not characterized by a display of wealth or elaborate buildings or fancy clothes or exotic jewelry. Jesus' kingdom is characterized not by these external things but by positive values.

4. God's kingdom is not characterized by evil and manipulation but righteousness and truth.

Jesus taught, “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). Righteousness here is not a theological concept but a practical goodness. The Pharisees had an external righteousness designed to impress people and gain respect. Real righteousness must go much further than that to justice and goodness. The kingdom of Jesus is characterized by those who do the right thing. God's kingdom can thrive where there is abundance. God's kingdom can thrive where there

is not so much. This is true because God's kingdom is not a physical, material kingdom but a kingdom of values and virtues.

5. God's kingdom is not characterized by pride and ceremony but by humility and service.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). The phrase "poor in spirit" refers to humility. Humility is not normally associated with earthly political leaders. Politicians must tell others why they are better than their opponents. However, Jesus' kingdom is characterized by humility and selflessness and the promotion of others.

Royal persons are often pampered and praised so much they become proud and think that they are more important than others. They can become arrogant in their attitudes. However, Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but **to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28, emphasis added). The King took these people everywhere he went and taught them what he knew. This King was even willing to wash his disciples' feet. We demonstrate the nature of this kingdom through humility and simplicity, not with elaborate and exotic things.

6. God's kingdom grows not through natural births but through the activities of Jesus' followers.

Jesus said, "I will give you **the keys of the kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19, emphasis added.). When the kingdom that God created fell into sin and darkness and disrepair, God had to restore the earth. God gave to humanity the responsibility of bringing people into his kingdom and of building up his kingdom in all other parts of society. God will not send angels to build up his kingdom. He uses you and me to do this job. It is the responsibility of the people who are part of the kingdom to:

- Bring other people into the kingdom.
- Build up the kingdom wherever they are.
- Implement kingdom principles in all parts of the society.

This is our responsibility and our privilege. Let us be active in bringing people into God's kingdom.

PRACTICING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM IN ACTS

We will now look at how the early church tried to fulfill Jesus' prayer to see the kingdom established on earth as it is in heaven. Note these examples:

Serving the Needy

God has always cared deeply for the needy in society, including widows, orphans, and the poor. It is not surprising to see Jesus' followers engaging in practical works to build up God's kingdom on this earth.

In Acts 6, we see early believers taking care of the widows. A Christian lady named Dorcas was "full of good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36). Paul and Barnabas took money and relief supplies to Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering from a famine (Acts 11:29). Later in Acts, Paul took up offerings from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia for the needy in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17).

God's kingdom principle about our needs is summarized in Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15:

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

There are many ways we can help the needy that do not require supernatural ability. We should not wait for God to provide us with supernatural means before we attempt to address the sick conditions of our society.

Upholding Justice

One important part of God's kingdom is justice. How did the early church address the issue of justice in society? When Peter and John were told that they could not preach in the name of Jesus, they politely informed the Jewish leaders that they would be practicing civil disobedience because they had been instructed to preach the gospel. They told these leaders, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

When Paul was detained and beaten illegally in Philippi, he refused to leave the jail until the officers who had put him there came and asked him to leave. This was not an act of evangelism. He was not trying to get these people to come to Christ. This was an act of justice. Paul was trying to get these leaders to live by the principles of justice in society.

Paul did not see his only job as doing evangelism and church planting. He lived in a sick society, and he used every opportunity to heal a bit of that sickness, including the sickness of injustice.

Restoring Health

Paul, like his Master, was able to provide supernatural healing for some people. However, that was not the only means he used. Paul wrote to Timothy, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Timothy 5:23). Wine made from grape juice has a lot of iron in it. Taken in moderation, it can be good for the blood. Paul prescribed this natural means of helping Timothy recover from his sicknesses.

After Jesus had sent out his disciples on a teaching trip, he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). Jesus recognized that rest was required to enjoy good health.

James made an interesting statement about healing.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven (James 5:14-15).

There are two Greek words for anointing. One word is used to refer to ceremonial anointing and the other for medicinal or cosmetic use of oil. Oil was the layman’s first aid medicine in the ancient world. When the Good Samaritan found the man injured by the armed robbers, he poured oil in his wounds. God may choose to heal the person supernaturally in answer to prayer. However, he may also choose to heal the person through natural means using medicine.

Conclusion

God wants to establish his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. The kingdom is governed by principles, not geographical or linguistic or political characteristics. To the extent that we teach and implement God’s kingdom principles, we have established God’s kingdom in that area of life.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

This course studies the life and ministry of Jesus as a model for life and ministry today. It is not a thorough study of the Gospels. Instead, this course looks at selected aspects of Jesus' ministry to gain lessons for ministry today. To study the complete life of Christ, recommended books are listed below. These books are the primary sources for this course.

Jesus According to Scripture by Darrell Bock and *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* by J. Dwight Pentecost are complete **studies of the life of Christ**. Ajith Fernando's *Jesus Driven Ministry* and Robert Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism* are highly recommended for understanding **Jesus' ministry style**.

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