

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S
WINTER 2021 STUDY

IMITATING JESUS



CHRIST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2323 OLD HICKORY BLVD, NASHVILLE, TN 37215 | (615) 373-2311 | CHRISTPRES.ORG

STUDY ROADMAP

We look forward to this season of connecting relationally and spiritually. While our hope is that these groups will allow you to do both, we recognize that some seasons afford us more bandwidth than others. We have three recommended ways for engaging with *Imitating Jesus*: **dig in**, **go deeper**, and **deeper still**. We are so glad you are saying YES to learning more about living out our calling as Jesus followers.

DIG IN

- Join your group weekly to connect relationally, discuss the video teaching, and talk through the study guide questions.
- Listen or watch the teaching video. Every Sunday, you will receive an email with the corresponding teaching video for that week. The teaching is also available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, SoundCloud, and YouTube. You can subscribe to the teaching on any of these platforms.

GO DEEPER

- Read weekly Scripture and go through the study guide questions as a way to dive deeper into God's Word. These questions can be completed throughout the week or all in one sitting. Your group discussion questions are pulled directly from the study guide.
- Read the Application Summary and any other parallel Scriptures.

DEEPER STILL

- Much of this study's content is based on the book *Learning Evangelism From Jesus* by Jerram Barrs. The book takes a look at Jesus' interactions as he models how to have spiritual conversations full of grace and truth. We recommend reading this book if you would like to learn more about practicing evangelism biblically. You can purchase *Learning Evangelism from Jesus* at local *Logos Christian Bookstore* in Green Hills or through most online book retailers.

IMITATING JESUS WEEKLY SYLLABUS

WEEK OF	CHAPTER & TITLE <i>Learning Evangelism from Jesus</i>	MAIN SCRIPTURE TEXT
Feb. 7	1: The Christian's Calling in the World	John 17:14–23
Feb. 14	12: Faith Among the Canaanites	Matthew 15:21–28, Mark 7:24–30
Feb. 21	6: An Unusual Dinner Invitation	Luke 19:1–10
Feb. 28	14: A Night Visitor	John 3:1–15
March 7	5: A Wealthy Young Leader of the Church	Mark 10, Matthew 19
March 14	8: The Two Lost Sons	Luke 15:11–32
March 21	16: Not the Most Comfortable Guest	Luke 14:1–24
March 28	3: A Woman of Samaria	John 4:7–26

IMITATING JESUS

AN INTRODUCTION

For when we have put on Christ, the garment of our righteousness and salvation, then we also put on Christ, the garment of imitation.
– Martin Luther

The Christian's call to Christlikeness spans his or her entire life and encompasses every fragment of it. It is a key theme of the Christian life: endeavoring, through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, to become more like Jesus.

The call to Christlikeness is holistic, and there is no part of our life that is untouched by that goal. For the next eight weeks, we will focus on imitating Christ as **evangelists, people who share the gospel and the good news of Jesus' love with others.**

We'll draw from Jerram Barrs' book *Learning Evangelism from Jesus* as well as the concurrent sermon series on Mark. Each week we'll focus on an encounter Jesus had with someone or a group of people who did not believe in him. We'll learn from Jesus, the first and greatest evangelist, the One who calls us to himself. We will see in deeper detail how Jesus made himself known to us, and we'll see how we can join him in his ongoing work in the world.

Before you begin each week, take a few moments to pray. Ask the Lord to bless your study, to strengthen your faith, and to make you more like Jesus every day.

WEEK ONE

THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING IN THE WORLD

True Christlikeness, true companionship with Christ, comes at the point where it is hard not to respond as he would. – Dallas Willard

Read through both translations of this passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see, and jot down what comes to mind.

JOHN 17:14–23 (ESV)

¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

JOHN 17:14–23 (MSG)

^{14–19}I gave them your word; the godless world hated them because of it, because they didn't join the world's ways, just as I didn't join the world's ways. I'm not asking that you take them out of the world but that you guard them from the Evil One. They are no more defined by the world than I am defined by the world. Make them holy—consecrated—with the truth; your word is consecrating truth. In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world. I'm consecrating myself for their sakes so they'll be truth-consecrated in their mission. ^{20–23}I'm praying not only for them but also for those who will believe in me because of them and their witness about me. The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me. The same glory you gave me, I gave them, so they'll be as unified and together as we are—I in them and you in me. Then they'll be mature in this oneness, and give the godless world evidence that you've sent me and loved them in the same way you've loved me.

GO DEEPER

Using the passages on page 9, answer the following questions. Depending on your schedule and study style, you may want to do this all in one sitting or break it up into multiple days.

1. This passage in John comes from Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, his petition to the Father the night before he died. Go back through the text and underline or highlight what Jesus prays for his people. Summarize what he prays here in your own words.

2. Read and copy the verses below. What do you think it means that Jesus sends us the way God sent Jesus?

John 17:18

John 3:17

John 14:20

John 20:21

Yet we ought not to be surprised or shaken by the false beliefs, disinterest, or even hostility of the world. Jesus' prayer, and the whole Scripture, teaches us that this is exactly what we are to expect in the world. All through this age we will be living and working among unbelieving people: people who do not know the Lord; people who do not love him; people who believe very differently from us; people who do not walk in obedience to his laws. However it is precisely this world to which the Lord sends us. (Barrs, 14)

3. Take a few moments to think about your community. List the places you live, work, and play. Make notes and pray specifically for the Lord to reveal to you people with whom you can build life-giving relationships where you can share the gospel.
4. Highlight or underline everything Jesus says about the world in the passage above, or copy the phrases below.
5. Jesus' prayer is a call to action: to go into the world as he went into the world. When you think of "the world," what comes to mind? Is it a positive reaction, or a negative one? What has influenced your perspective on "the world"?

As we read the four Gospels we learn that Jesus is the best example of how we are to relate to those we meet, whatever their views, whatever their way of life. He is the best example of how we are to live before unbelievers and how we are to love them, serve them, and speak truth to them. (Barrs, 17)

6. What are some of your favorite stories about Jesus? What do they reveal about his heart and his mission?
7. Write (or make notes about) your own story of coming to know and love Jesus. How did Jesus call you to himself?

DEEPER STILL

Read Chapter 1 in *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*.

WEEK TWO

FAITH AMONG THE CANAANITES

*It remains true that some of the quickest to trust Christ
are those whom we might consider the least likely to believe.
Such is the wisdom of God. – Ligonier Ministries*

Read through these parallel passages several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see, and jot down what comes to mind.

MARK 7:24–30 (ESV)

²⁴And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. ²⁵But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

MATTHEW 15:21–28 (ESV)

²¹And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." ²³But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

GO DEEPER

Using the passages on page 13, answer the following questions. Depending on your schedule and study style, you may want to do this all in one sitting or break it up into multiple days.

1. Summarize the events of this passage in your own words. Note any questions you have or anything that surprises you.
2. Between the two parallel texts, we learn that the woman was a Canaanite (a generic term for the pagan people of the region) and a Syrophenician (from Syrian Phoenicia) living in the Gentile city of Tyre and Sidon. Why is this significant as context for this story?

At first, Jesus makes no response to her request. He simply listens to her. The disciples, on the other hand, try to drive her away (as they did with little children on another occasion). To put the most pleasant interpretation on [the disciples'] actions, we might say that they are trying to make sure Jesus has a respite from the business of his ministry, and it's likely that they also feel in need of a break. However that may be, it is almost certainly true that they have no time for a Gentile, even one with some knowledge of Jewish hopes, even one with the beginnings of faith. (Barrs, 181)

3. If we are honest, we often find ourselves showing a similar attitude toward certain people in our own hearts as the disciples showed the woman. When have you seen this in your own life?

The Lord's intention is to challenge and stretch [the woman's] faith. He is quite aware of [her] limits, and he is completely committed to [her], both in this life and forever... Jesus is refining her faith like gold in a furnace. Her response is exactly what the Lord desires; which is why he says, "for this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter" (Mark 7:29). The Lord is deeply moved by her faith and so, at the very instant, he delivers her daughter from the demon that has possessed her—even though the girl must be some distance away and Jesus has not seen her. (Barr, 183)

4. Were you surprised by Jesus' initial words to the woman? Why do you think he spoke to her this way?

5. Jesus states here that his ministry was first and foremost to the Jews, the "lost sheep of Israel." Yet we know from the Great Commission that his invitation is for anyone who will believe in him. Using the Scripture references below, describe how God's plan of salvation extends to all people.

John 1:9–13

Acts 28:17–28

Romans 11:1–24

6. Jesus does not always make it easy for people to respond to the gospel message. Why do you think this is? What does this passage say about how we are to engage with those outside the faith?

7. Read Mark 7:1–23 (*the passage directly before this week's study*). Contrast the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees with that of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman.

8. On the outside, the Pharisees appeared clean, with their Jewish pedigrees and observance of the law. A Gentile woman with a possessed daughter would have seemed quite "unclean" to the people of the day. How does Jesus' teaching in verses 14–23 turn these ideas upside down?

9. Put yourself in the shoes of the Syrophoenician woman. How might you have responded to Jesus?

10. Jesus says in Matthew 11:6, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” Spend some time in prayer, asking God to give you the grace to receive his Word, all of his Word, with greater humility and obedience.

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Multiple lessons seem to be at play in this story. One is that salvation is for all people who believe in Jesus. We, like our Lord, are not to discriminate based on external qualities, nor are we to deny anyone who desires fellowship in God’s kingdom.

Secondly, as followers of Christ and messengers of the gospel, we are not to ignore difficult or challenging truths of the gospel message in order to convert as many people as possible. Jesus did not do this. Rather, he sought to help people truly understand the commitment to which he was calling them.

But perhaps the most important lesson is found in the contrast between the Pharisees’ response to Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman’s response, which can offer us insight into our own hearts. The Pharisees, the esteemed religious leaders, were highly offended by Jesus’ rebuke of their hypocrisy. The disciples make a point of telling Jesus so in the passage directly before this (Mark 7:12).

And yet the Gentile woman, scorned by the Jews, responds to Jesus’ challenging statement in v. 26 with complete humility. There is no hubris in her words or her heart (and Jesus has just taught that one flows from the other). Christopher Gordon, in his book *Let the Little Dogs Come*, says her response can be summarized this way:

Lord, I know what I am; I agree with you that I am a dog. I know salvation is of the Jews. I have no claim or privilege which makes me worthy of this. I have no ethnic heritage that puts me in line to deserve this. I am like a little dog who when a master has a feast, and all his best guests have joined him at the table with the best clothes at the best places, I am like that little scavenger that comes and licks the crumbs off the master’s floor. I have no way of cleansing myself. Yet Lord, even these little dogs have to eat. Doesn’t a master feed his dogs? What I’m saying to you is: I need your help for my daughter and I come to worship you as the only way of deliverance.

This is how we are to come to the Lord’s table: in humble faith and reliance. “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (Matt. 11:6). Those whose pride does not prevent them from coming are those who receive His saving help.

DEEPER STILL

Read Chapter 12 in *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*.

WEEK THREE

AN UNUSUAL DINNER INVITATION

*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain
that which he cannot lose. – Jim Elliot*

Read through both translations of this passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see, and jot down what comes to mind.

LUKE 19:1–10 (ESV)

¹He entered Jericho and was passing through. ²And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” ⁸And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” ⁹And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

LUKE 19:1–10 (MSG)

¹⁻⁴ Then Jesus entered and walked through Jericho. There was a man there, his name Zacchaeus, the head taxman and quite rich. He wanted desperately to see Jesus, but the crowd was in his way—he was a short man and couldn’t see over the crowd. So he ran on ahead and climbed up in a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus when he came by. ⁵⁻⁷ When Jesus got to the tree, he looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today is my day to be a guest in your home.” Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good luck, delighted to take Jesus home with him. Everyone who saw the incident was indignant and grumped, “What business does he have getting cozy with this crook?” ⁸ Zacchaeus just stood there, a little stunned. He stammered apologetically, “Master, I give away half my income to the poor—and if I’m caught cheating, I pay four times the damages.” ⁹⁻¹⁰ Jesus said, “Today is salvation day in this home! Here he is: Zacchaeus, son of Abraham! For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost.”

GO DEEPER

Using the Scripture passages on page 17, please answer the following questions. Depending on your schedule and preferred study style, you may want to do this all in one sitting or break it up into multiple days.

1. What aspect of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus stands out to you most?
2. In that culture, it would have been especially undignified for a man of great wealth and power to climb a tree like a young boy. What does Zacchaeus' lack of concern indicate about his desire to see Jesus?
3. The passage indicates that Jesus had never met Zacchaeus, yet knows who he is and calls him by name. Why is this significant?

Zacchaeus would not, and could not, have invited a Jew, and especially a Jewish religious leader, into his home, for no self-respecting Jew, and certainly no rabbi, teacher, or synagogue leader in that day would have ever considered accepting such an invitation. No such person would have dreamed of ever visiting the home of such a man as Zaccheus, a tax collector—it would have been even more unthinkable than going into a Gentile's house. So, because Zacchaeus cannot invite him, Jesus invites himself—much to the amazement of Zacchaeus and everyone else. (Barrs, 183)

4. Knowing how hard it would be for Zacchaeus to initiate a relationship with him, Jesus reaches out and makes the first move. What can this show us about approaching those outside the church?
5. When the crowd saw this exchange, they grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Why do you think it is so hard for us to see mercy extended to those who do not "deserve" it?

6. Zacchaeus vows to give half of his goods to the poor and to restore anything he defrauded fourfold. This was far more than the law required in his circumstance (Lev. 6:1–5, Num. 5:5–7). There was probably not much, if anything, left over. How do you explain such generosity and abandon?

7. Read Ezekiel 34:11–16. Jesus is referencing this passage when he says that he “came to seek and to save the lost” (v. 10). How is this encounter with Zacchaeus an example of Jesus fulfilling the promise in Ezekiel?

8. Jesus says in verse 9, “Salvation has come to this house.” From that point on, Zacchaeus’ home would be a place of generosity and grace. What about your life and home indicates that salvation dwells within it?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Think for a moment about how lonely Zacchaeus’ life must have been. Though a Jew, he collected taxes for Rome and almost certainly collected extra for himself. To the Jewish people, he was both a traitor and a swindler. The only people who associated with him likely did so for personal and financial gain. Here was a man with no real friends, no place among his own people, and no peace in his heart.

Yet Jesus, knowing the heart of all men, saw in Zacchaeus the seed of genuine faith, evidenced by his willingness to climb a tree in front of the crowds. When he called him by name and told of his plan to dine with him, the Scripture says Zacchaeus “hurried and came down and received him *joyfully*.” The kindness and mercy of Jesus moved Zacchaeus to repentance. The seed of faith blossomed into full faith, and Zacchaeus’ penitent heart was on display as he gave away what must have been most if not all of his fortune. His experience of the overwhelming generosity of Jesus led him to a response of overwhelming generosity toward others.

The passage also tells us that the people grumbled at Jesus’ association with such a notorious sinner. We see this happen in a handful of other gospel accounts as well. Yet, Jesus was never swayed by public opinion, for it was based on laws created by men. Rather, he came to fulfill the law of God and to seek and to save the lost. In the somewhat similar conversion story of Matthew (also a tax collector), Jesus said to the religious leaders, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus did not come into the world to keep himself apart from sinners, nor to demonstrate that his life was socially acceptable. Rather, he came in fulfillment of the promise of the Lord made in Ezekiel 34...

By quoting these verses, Jesus is announcing both his divinity and the purpose of his coming. He is making the claim that he is "the Lord"; he is the true shepherd of his people; he is the one who will seek and save the lost. God's passionate desire and purpose, which is revealed both in the Old Testament and in the coming of the Christ, is to seek and to save those who are lost, those who have strayed from him and from his ways.

This is, of course, the condition of each one of us. *In his sight all of us are unclean and outcast because of our failure to love him and because of our flagrant disobedience to his commandments. Yet he sets aside his moral and religious outrage, not counting our sins against us, but against himself, when he comes to seek and to save us who are lost without him. He calls us to have fellowship with him to be his friends.*

That is why he goes to Zacchaeus' home, to eat and to visit there, in utter disregard for the custom and law of his day. (Barrs, 89)

Part of what made it so hard for the people of that day to see mercy extended to "sinners" was their failure to recognize their own sinfulness and undeservedness. So it is with us. Too often we think we are doing well, we are not that bad, we are living in accordance with God's law. But we forget the sinful condition of our own hearts, and the way that we too stood condemned before Jesus rescued us.

When we begin to see ourselves rightly, our sin (especially our secret sin and sinful motivations) held up against God's moral perfection, we too will be moved to a more humble faith and will see the grace that was sufficient to cover our sin as sufficient for the "worst" of sinners. We too can say with Paul, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Today, spend some time praying that God would reveal the magnitude of his love and generosity to you, and that as a result, you would be moved to share that love and generosity with the lost and hurting around you.

DEEPER STILL

Read Chapter 6 in *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*.

WEEK FOUR

A NIGHT VISITOR

Is there a clearer example that a man can be religious, sincere, thoroughly decent, theologically well-educated, and yet blind, helpless, and spiritually barren? Nicodemus illustrates well why our Lord insists that the new birth must be seen as a sovereign and divine work. – Sinclair Ferguson

Read through both translations of this passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see, and jot down what comes to mind.

JOHN 3:1–15 (ESV)

¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

JOHN 3:1–15 (MSG)

¹⁻² There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, “Rabbi, we all know you’re a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren’t in on it.” ³Jesus said, “You’re absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it’s not possible to see what I’m pointing to—to God’s kingdom.” ⁴“How can anyone,” said Nicodemus, “be born who has already been born and grown up? You can’t re-enter your mother’s womb and be born again. What are you saying with this ‘born-from-above’ talk?” ⁵⁻⁶Jesus said, “You’re not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. When you look at a baby, it’s just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can’t see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit. ⁷⁻⁸“So don’t be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.” ⁹Nicodemus asked, “What do you mean by this? How does this happen?” ¹⁰⁻¹²Jesus said, “You’re a respected teacher of Israel and you don’t know these basics? Listen carefully. I’m speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don’t believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can’t see, the things of God? ¹³⁻¹⁵“No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.

GO DEEPER

Using the passage on page 21, answer the following questions. Depending on your schedule and study style, you may want to do this in one sitting or break it up into multiple days.

1. Summarize the events of this passage in your own words. Note any questions you have or anything that surprises you.
2. Nicodemus was a “teacher of Israel” (v. 10) and a member of the ruling council, the Sanhedrin; he was a man of prominence. Why do you suppose he felt the need to come to visit Jesus at night?

Jesus is trying to tell Nicodemus that entrance into God’s kingdom cannot be had simply by being born as an Israelite; nor can he gain entry to the kingdom by being a teacher of God’s Word, by his obedience to the commandments of the law, or even by seeking entry. Instead, entrance to the kingdom requires a mysterious new beginning to life. Nicodemus needs a radical renewal which seems impossible for one to accomplish for oneself. (Barrs, 206)

3. The phrase “born again” is common in Christian circles, and we tend to use it without defining what is meant by it. Nicodemus’ response to Jesus clearly shows he didn’t understand what the phrase meant. From this reading, what does it mean to be born again?
4. Do you notice any comparisons between a physical human birth (born of water) and a new birth accomplished by the Spirit?

[Nicodemus would have been] immediately familiar with the passage in Daniel 7 that describes the heavenly figure of the Son of Man to whom the task of judgment over all people is given. The Son of Man is granted divine authority and dominion over all nations. He shares the glory of God, and God’s everlasting kingdom is described as the Son of Man’s kingdom. (Barrs, 208)

5. What exactly is Jesus claiming when he tells Nicodemus, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”? Why is this important and relevant to this conversation?
6. Jesus wants Nicodemus to understand that his only hope of new birth doesn’t lie within his ability, race, or social standing. Instead, something of heaven must condescend and bring it about. Jesus then refers to Numbers 21:4–9, where God judged the people of God with death for their unbelief, and their only hope of salvation was to look at the image of a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole. What is the parallel that Jesus is making here when he refers to this passage in Numbers and says, “so must the Son of Man be lifted up”?
7. Why is Jesus likened to—of all things—a serpent?
8. In this passage, it is not evident that Nicodemus walks away from this encounter as a disciple of Christ. Based on other passages (John 7:50–52 and John 19:39), it would seem that Nicodemus eventually did become a follower of Christ. How should this inform our relationships with non-believers?
9. It is clear that Jesus intends to send Nicodemus back to the Scriptures to think about how Jesus answered his questions. Nicodemus might have even tried to think of passages in the Old Testament which might have alluded to a new birth. Read Ezekiel 37:13–14 (the valley of dry bones) and write down how this passage might work along with John 3:1–15. Are there any other Old Testament passages you can think of that might complement John 3:1–15?
10. What does John 3:1–15 tell us about God’s role in the process of salvation as compared to our role?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, we find Jesus challenging the Jewish leaders and their understanding of what it meant to be in a right relationship with the Lord. Most often, we see the Pharisees drawing the ire of Jesus; however, in this encounter with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, we find Jesus challenging him towards an unlikely end as compared to other Pharisees. What does this encounter teach us?

First, Jesus explains to us that it is only the Spirit that can save. If there ever were a person who had all the right “credentials,” it would have been Nicodemus—a Pharisee, an expert in the scriptures, an ardent follower of the law. Yet Jesus explains to him that it is only the Spirit who can give us new life. There is far more to becoming a Christian than gaining new knowledge; Nicodemus has all the knowledge. What he lacks is the touch of the Holy Spirit.

This passage also teaches us that showing honor alone to Christ doesn’t bring about newness of life. Nicodemus comes to Jesus showing tremendous respect, heaping praises upon him; “We know that you are a teacher come from God,” yet it’s not words like these that put Nicodemus in a position of favor. Similarly, most of our contemporaries have some respect for Jesus; they call him a great teacher or a prophet of God, but none of these offerings of recognition are sufficient. Jesus is both God and man, the only one who has come from heaven, and the only one who is qualified to stand in our place as both our perfect substitute and our intercessor—the only one who is qualified to be the bridge between God and man.

Lastly, this encounter with Nicodemus teaches us about the centrality of the cross. The gospel of Jesus Christ is incomplete without the suffering of Christ. The only way people can stand before God acceptable in his sight is if God himself provides the sacrifice of himself. Jesus, as the serpent on the pole pointed to, had to be “lifted up” and absorb sin’s curse. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (1 Corinthians 5:21). As R.C. Sproul states,

This statement parallels the situation of the Israelites in the wilderness. The people who had been bitten by the poisonous snakes were going to die, so God gave them a remedy to preserve them from certain destruction. Jesus told Nicodemus that we, too, are in this state; that apart from Christ, apart from the cross, we are as exposed to death and destruction as those people who had been bitten by deadly snakes. Looking to Jesus in His lifted-up state would effect a cure, just as looking to Moses’ bronze serpent did, but the cure to be obtained by looking to Jesus would be deeper and better. Looking to Jesus would cure the problem of spiritual deadness wrought by sin, and it would do so for eternity. (R.C. Sproul, St. Andrews Expository Commentary: John)

Thank God for the provision he made for us, not because of anything we’ve done or are, but because of who he is and what he has done for us.

DEEPER STILL

Read Chapter 14 in *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*.

WEEK FIVE

A WEALTHY YOUNG LEADER OF THE CHURCH

The law justifies him who fulfills all its commands, whereas faith justifies those who are destitute of the merit of works and rely on Christ alone. – John Calvin

Read through these parallel passages several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see, and jot down what comes to mind.

MARK 10:17–31 (ESV)

¹⁷And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” ²⁰And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” ²¹And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²²Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. ²³And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” ²⁸Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

LUKE 18:18–30 (ESV)

¹⁸And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ²⁰You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” ²¹And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” ²²When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²³But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” ²⁸And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.” ²⁹And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

GO DEEPER

Using the Scripture passages on page 25, please answer the following questions. Depending on your schedule and preferred study style, you may want to do this all in one sitting or break it up into multiple days.

1. What about this story stands out to you most? Was there anything you found confusing or troubling?
2. The rich young ruler seems to be sincere in his question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Why do you think Jesus does not answer him directly?
3. Jesus asks the young man, “Why do you call me good?” and follows with “No one is good except God alone.” It seems unlikely that Jesus is denying his own goodness. What do you think Jesus might be trying to reveal by asking this?
4. Jesus goes on to summarize the second half of the Ten Commandments, and the young man confidently replies with, “All these I have kept from my youth.” Why is his answer problematic? What does it reveal about his understanding of the law?

*The law of God demands perfect, painstaking obedience 24/7 all the days of your life from birth to death **with a perfect attitude of joy, gratitude, submission, and fear of the Lord**, as you meticulously ensure that you do not violate a single aspect of the law, by fulfilling every jot and tittle of the law, and by managing to never transgress any part of the law—no matter how minuscule. – David Filson*

5. Read Matthew 5:17 through the end of the chapter. Jesus is saying that our obedience has just as much to do with our thoughts, intentions, and motives as it does with our external actions. Why do you think God cares so much about these things?

6. Read Matthew 5:17–20. Jesus is the only one who can fulfill the law and its requirements perfectly, and he does so on our behalf. How does this change your reading of today's passage? Of Dr. Filson's quotation?
7. Jesus does not directly refute the young man's claim of goodness. Rather, he asks him to give away his possessions and follow him as a disciple. Is Jesus telling him that salvation can be earned through giving wealth away? If not, then what *is* he telling him, or trying to help him understand?
8. Why do you think Jesus' gentle and indirect questions were more effective than if he had told the young man plainly of his sin and idolatry? How should this inform the conversations we have with people who do not know Jesus?
9. The young man walks away sad, demonstrating that his wealth meant more to him than loving and obeying God. Put yourself in his position for a moment. Imagine being asked to surrender everything you own for the sake of following Jesus. What response does this elicit in your heart?
10. How does understanding the character of God and his holiness help us to see ourselves more clearly? Today, spend some time in prayer asking that God would reveal to you more of himself and his infinite goodness.

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Told by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this gospel account is one that many Christians find troubling. Jesus makes some statements that, on the surface, may seem confusing and even contradictory to his overall message. But a closer look reveals that something different is happening in this story.

The rich young ruler, or as Jerram Barrs calls him, “a wealthy young leader of the church” seems like an upstanding, respectable, and sincere young man. He is eager to know how to inherit eternal life. Why does Jesus not give him a straight answer?

When Jesus asks the young man, “Why do you call me good?” and states that “No is good except God alone,” he is not denying his own goodness or divinity. He is God, after all. When he summarizes the commandments, he is not saying that salvation can be earned by keeping the law. Rather, he is creating conversation that will reveal the young man’s understanding of what it means to be “good” and to keep the law of God.

When the young man confidently states he has kept the commandments from his youth, it shows that not only does he not see himself clearly, he does not see God clearly. To think that one could earn salvation by keeping the law is to seriously misunderstand God’s holiness and character. The young man does not understand that the law requires more than external obedience—it also requires complete and utter perfection in our thoughts, attitudes, and motives. He does not see his inability to keep it and his desperate need of God’s mercy. Apart from God enlightening our hearts, the same is true for us.

But Jesus does not go after this. Rather, he exposes the one area in which the young man cannot even pretend to be obedient. “One thing you still lack,” he begins. “Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” What is Jesus getting at?

Jesus wants him to come to the point where he can say, “I see now that I have not kept the commandments from my youth. In fact, I see that I have not kept them one single day of my life. There is nothing I can do that will qualify me for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. My heart is torn between devotion to God and to my wealth. I know that I am a selfish man who is sometimes kind to the poor, but so much more often I am kind only to myself. My treasures are mostly here on earth. How did you see into my heart? How are you able to tell me everything I ever did? Lord, help me!” This is the cry that should have come from his sorrowing heart. But instead, the young man says nothing. (Barrs, 75–76)

By walking away, the young man demonstrates that his wealth holds the place of priority in his heart. It is the idol he refuses forsake in order to follow God. It is, in essence, what he worships. Moreover, he is still not willing to admit that he is not so good after all, and that he is in need of God’s saving help.

Seeing all this, the disciples ask “Who then can be saved?” What Jesus says next should humble us to our core: “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” Salvation is a divine act of mercy, and it is completely of God. Earning it by human effort is as likely as fitting a camel through the eye of a needle. It is literally impossible. As Jonathan Edwards said, “You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.”

May God give us all a greater sense of his holiness, of our need, and of the depth of his salvation. May he also reveal this to our friends and neighbors who do not yet know him, and give us greater wisdom to share his gospel with empathy and gentleness.

DEEPER STILL

Read Chapter 5 in *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*.

WEEK SIX

THE TWO LOST SONS

*Let this boundless mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ be graven deeply in our memories, and sink into our minds.
Let us never forget that He is One "that receiveth sinners." – J.C. Ryle*

Read through these parallel passages several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see, and jot down what comes to mind.

LUKE 15:11–32 (ESV)

¹¹And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" ²⁰And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. ²⁵"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

LUKE 15:11–32 (MSG)

^{11–12}Then he said, “There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, ‘Father, I want right now what’s coming to me.’ ^{12–16}”So the father divided the property between them. It wasn’t long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corn cobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any. ^{17–20}”That brought him to his senses. He said, ‘All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I’m going back to my father. I’ll say to him, Father, I’ve sinned against God, I’ve sinned before you; I don’t deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.’ He got right up and went home to his father. ^{20–21}”When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: ‘Father, I’ve sinned against God, I’ve sinned before you; I don’t deserve to be called your son ever again.’ ^{22–24}”But the father wasn’t listening. He was calling to the servants, ‘Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We’re going to feast! We’re going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!’ And they began to have a wonderful time. ^{25–27}”All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day’s work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. He told him, ‘Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast—barbecued beef!—because he has him home safe and sound.’ ^{28–30}”The older brother stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn’t listen. The son said, ‘Look how many years I’ve stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!’ ^{31–32}”His father said, ‘Son, you don’t understand. You’re with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he’s alive! He was lost, and he’s found!’”

GO DEEPER

Using the passages on pages 29 and 30, answer the following questions. Depending on your schedule and study style, you may want to do this in one sitting or break it up into multiple days.

1. Summarize the events of this passage in your own words. Note any questions you have or anything that surprises you.
2. Early in the parable, we find the younger son asking his father for his share of the inheritance, which would have been extremely unusual, seeing that his father had not yet passed. What underlying message is the younger son communicating to his father with this request?

No one would ask for their inheritance while their father was alive. It would be like saying, "Dad, I wish you were dead. I can't wait for you to die, so give me what's coming now!" Everyone listening to Jesus would be appalled by the son's demand. They expect the next line to be, "So the father disinherited his son and drove him away from his home." The father does not even rebuke his son for his unthinkable request; rather, he accedes and, in fact, gives both of his sons their inheritance. (Barrs, 118)

3. The fact that the father obliges the younger son's request tells us something about the father's character. What are some things we can deduce about the father based on this response? At what cost does this decision come to the father?

The father is clearly longing for his son's return and always watching for him. He sees him while he is still a long way off and runs out to meet him. He runs to his son to be the first to meet him, but this meant picking up his full-length robes and tying them around his waist so that he was able to run. However, men of his age did not show their legs, and they did not run. The father is publicly humiliating himself for his son's sake. (Barrs, 119)

4. Go back through the passage and underline the father's response to his younger son. Rewrite the scene in your own words. Imagine being the younger son, and jot down any words that come to mind for what he would have been feeling when he returned.

5. What does the response of the elder brother reveal about his heart and motivations? How did the father respond to the elder son?

Everyone listening expects a sharp rebuke from the father to the elder son, for he is dishonoring his father by refusing to come in to the party. But there is no rebuke. Instead the father pleads with his son (with a crowd of listeners around) and begs him to come in. For those listening to Jesus tell this story, such pleading by the father would be understood as completely humiliating. (Barrs, 120)

6. How is the elder brother's behavior different from the younger brother's? How is the elder brother's behavior the same as the younger brother?

7. What does this parable teach us about the different ways people can be lost?

8. What does Luke 15:11–32 tell us about how we should interact with people who haven't come to a saving knowledge of Jesus?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Many English Bibles have a heading before Luke 15:11 that reads, “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.” This label might lead people to believe it’s an account that centers around the behavior of one son who is lost and comes back home. However, as Barrs notes, this is a story that is full of surprises.

The story begins with an unthinkable surprising request—a son asking for his inheritance while his father is alive and well. This request is the equivalent of saying, “Father, I’d rather you were dead. I can’t wait for you to die, so give me what’s mine now. After all, I love your possessions, not you.” But what’s more surprising is that the father—who is under no obligation even to entertain such a request—obliges the younger son’s demands.

With his inheritance in hand, it doesn’t take long for the son to irresponsibly burn through all the money his father gave him. Destitute during a severe famine, the son takes a job looking after pigs—an “unclean” animal the Jew would have otherwise had no part in handling. He becomes so hungry that he eats the food reserved for the unclean species. The younger son hits bottom and finally comes to his senses and resolves to return home to his father. He plans to beg his father for a place among their servants.

In yet another surprising turn of events, we find the father longing for his son’s return as he watches for him. As he spots him in the distance, the father runs to his son. This means the father would have had to pick up his full-length robe and tie it around his waist, so he was able to run—an act which was contrary to all proper decorum. The father humiliated himself for the sake of his son. Before his son can complete his words of repentance, the father calls for a new robe, a ring, shoes, and the fatted calf: he’s throwing his returning son a party.

But this isn’t the end of the surprises. The elder brother—the one who never left, stayed with his father, and didn’t ask or squander an inheritance—leaves the house in disgust. This behavior prompts the father to respond similarly to how he responded to the younger son, leaving the house to pursue the elder brother.

This parable suggests to the listener that there are at least two kinds of “lost.” The younger son, who left in open betrayal appreciating the father only for what he has, not for who he is, shows us the first variety of lost. The elder brother—who also left the home in disgust—objects to his father by saying, “yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends,” shows us he appreciates the father only for what he has, not for who he is. In both cases, the only hope for either son is the pursuit, forgiveness, and grace of the father.

The reader should walk away from this lesson understanding that there are all kinds of lost people. Some lost people might indeed appear lost, turning their backs on the love of the Father in an obvious manner. Other lost ones might be those who have gone to church their whole life, done all the right things, and by all appearances “look” saved, but eventually are put to a trial and reveal where they have placed their faith all along—in their ability to be good.

The Christian’s job is to be God’s instrument in extending grace to all types of lost people, being sensitive to their background and station in life. Pray that the love of the Father would draw in the lost, wherever they are, and bring them home to the feast.

DEEPER STILL

Read Chapter 8 in *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*.

WEEK SEVEN

NOT THE MOST COMFORTABLE GUEST

Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. – C.S. Lewis

Read through both translations of this passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see, and jot down what comes to mind.

LUKE 14:1 – 24 (ESV)

¹One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ²And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" ⁴But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" ⁶And they could not reply to these things.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast

⁷Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸"When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, ⁹and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Parable of the Great Banquet

¹²He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." ¹⁵When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' ¹⁹And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' ²⁰And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' ²²And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' ²³And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

LUKE 14:1–24 (MSG)

^{1–3}One time when Jesus went for a Sabbath meal with one of the top leaders of the Pharisees, all the guests had their eyes on him, watching his every move. Right before him there was a man hugely swollen in his joints. So Jesus asked the religion scholars and Pharisees present, “Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath? Yes or no?”

^{4–6}They were silent. So he took the man, healed him, and sent him on his way. Then he said, “Is there anyone here who, if a child or animal fell down a well, wouldn’t rush to pull him out immediately, not asking whether or not it was the Sabbath?” They were stumped. There was nothing they could say to that.

Invite the Misfits

^{7–9}He went on to tell a story to the guests around the table. Noticing how each had tried to elbow into the place of honor, he said, “When someone invites you to dinner, don’t take the place of honor. Somebody more important than you might have been invited by the host. Then he’ll come and call out in front of everybody, ‘You’re in the wrong place. The place of honor belongs to this man.’ Red-faced, you’ll have to make your way to the very last table, the only place left.” ^{10–11}“When you’re invited to dinner, go and sit at the last place. Then when the host comes he may very well say, ‘Friend, come up to the front.’ That will give the dinner guests something to talk about! What I’m saying is, If you walk around with your nose in the air, you’re going to end up flat on your face. But if you’re content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.”

^{12–14}Then he turned to the host. “The next time you put on a dinner, don’t just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors, the kind of people who will return the favor. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You’ll be—and experience—a blessing. They won’t be able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God’s people.”

The Story of the Dinner Party

¹⁵That triggered a response from one of the guests: “How fortunate the one who gets to eat dinner in God’s kingdom!” ^{16–17}Jesus followed up. “Yes. For there was once a man who threw a great dinner party and invited many. When it was time for dinner, he sent out his servant to the invited guests, saying, ‘Come on in; the food’s on the table.’” ¹⁸Then they all began to beg off, one after another making excuses. The first said, ‘I bought a piece of property and need to look it over. Send my regrets.’ ¹⁹Another said, ‘I just bought five teams of oxen, and I really need to check them out. Send my regrets.’ ²⁰And yet another said, ‘I just got married and need to get home to my wife.’ ²¹“The servant went back and told the master what had happened. He was outraged and told the servant, ‘Quickly, get out into the city streets and alleys. Collect all who look like they need a square meal, all the misfits and homeless and wretched you can lay your hands on, and bring them here.’” ²²“The servant reported back, ‘Master, I did what you commanded—and there’s still room.’” ^{23–24}“The master said, ‘Then go to the country roads. Whoever you find, drag them in. I want my house full! Let me tell you, not one of those originally invited is going to get so much as a bite at my dinner party.’”

GO DEEPER

Using the passages on pages 35 and 36, answer the following questions. Depending on your schedule and study style, you may want to do this all in one sitting or break it up into multiple days.

1. In the first story, Jesus challenged the Pharisees' understanding of the law about the Sabbath. How did he challenge them? How did they respond?

Jesus challenges them all that one of the basic requirements of the Sabbath is to show mercy. The law demands not just that we do not work, but that we give our family members, those who work for us, and our animals a day of rest so that they can relax, be refreshed, and enjoy life as God's gift rather than as simply labor. If we are responsible to show mercy on the Sabbath in this way every week of our lives how much more important is it to show mercy to someone or something whose whole life is endangered (the son or the ox), or to a person whose whole life is a miserable burden to them because of illness? (Barrs, 235)

2. How did the Pharisees view the law? Why were Jesus' actions so surprising and threatening to them? How do you think about God's law?

3. Summarize Jesus' point in the parable about the dinner guests. How do you perceive yourself in most social situations? What does Jesus have to say about pride and humility, and how can you learn from his teaching in this parable?

Christ has loved us in our great need. He asks us to lift up our eyes and show a little of this love to those around us. Every meal or cup of cold water given to someone in need pleases the Lord and has an eternal reward, not simply a social payback or "next Christmas at our house." (Barrs, 241)

4. Jesus in verses 12–14 exhorts the Pharisees to not invite their friends, family or rich neighbors when they are having a luncheon but instead to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. How did Jesus live out what he is teaching here? How can you imitate Christ in these ways in your own daily life?

5. Jesus goes on to tell another parable about a man planning a banquet and everyone whom he invites is too busy to attend. Think about your own daily life and priorities. Where does kingdom work and evangelism fit? (Think about how kingdom work can be a part of every expression of your life where you live, work, and play.)
6. In all of these parables, Jesus implies that when we humbly follow Him, it will change how we see people who suffer and people who are on the margins of society. Have you experienced that? If so, how?
7. What about Jesus do you long to imitate? Spend some time praying for Jesus to transform your heart to be more like his.

APPLICATION SUMMARY

As you engage this passage, dwell on how Jesus offers correction and challenge to the pharisees who are listening to him. The same corrections and challenges he offers to them, he offers to us.

First, Jesus invites them to a deeper understanding of Sabbath, asking them (and us) to reflect on the meaning of the law.

God designed his law to be about love for God and for one another, about justice, mercy, and faithfulness. (Barrs, 236)

Second, Jesus asks them (and us) to consider humility in our daily lives, and fulfill the second greatest commandment: to love our neighbors as ourselves. A posture of true humility leads us to show true hospitality to everyone: not just our friends and family, but to the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the alien. Without Jesus' sacrificial life and death, we would have no right to dine at God's table. And so through Jesus' transforming work, we, too, can open our homes, tables, and lives with humility.

Lastly, Jesus tells another parable about a great banquet. In telling this story, Jesus challenges his listeners to examine times they may not be listening to God's invitation to participate in his kingdom work. There is no part of our lives to which Jesus does not have claim, and kingdom work should infuse all of our work, life, and play.

DEEPER STILL

Read Chapter 16 in *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*.

WEEK EIGHT

A WOMAN OF SAMARIA

*When we come to Christ, we are startled by the beauty of his welcoming heart.
The surprise itself is what draws us in. – Dane Ortlund*

Read through this passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would have you see, and jot down what comes to mind.

JOHN 4:7–30, 39–42 (ESV)

⁷A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” ¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” ¹⁹The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.” ²⁷Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” ²⁸So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” ³⁰They went out of the town and were coming to him.

³⁹Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

JOHN 4:7–30, 39–42 (MSG)

^{7–8}A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, “Would you give me a drink of water?” (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.) ⁹The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, “How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” (Jews in those days wouldn’t be caught dead talking to Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered, “If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water.” ^{11–12}The woman said, “Sir, you don’t even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this ‘living water’? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?”

^{13–14}Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.” ¹⁵The woman said, “Sir, give me this water so I won’t ever get thirsty, won’t ever have to come back to this well again!”

¹⁶He said, “Go call your husband and then come back.”

^{17–18}“I have no husband,” she said. “That’s nicely put: ‘I have no husband.’ You’ve had five husbands, and the man you’re living with now isn’t even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough.”

^{19–20}“Oh, so you’re a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?”

^{21–23}“Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God’s way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you’re called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.

^{23–24}“It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”

²⁵The woman said, “I don’t know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we’ll get the whole story.” ²⁶“I am he,” said Jesus. “You don’t have to wait any longer or look any further.” ²⁷Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked. They couldn’t believe he was talking with that kind of a woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it. ^{28–30}The woman took the hint and left. In her confusion she left her water pot. Back in the village she told the people, “Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?” And they went out to see for themselves.

^{39–42}Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman’s witness: “He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!” They asked him to stay on, so Jesus stayed two days. A lot more people entrusted their lives to him when they heard what he had to say. They said to the woman, “We’re no longer taking this on your say-so. We’ve heard it for ourselves and know it for sure. He’s the Savior of the world!”

GO DEEPER

Using the passages on 39 and 40, answer the following questions. Depending on your schedule and study style, you may want to do this all in one sitting or break it up into multiple days.

1. Take a moment to write down or underline ways the woman is described in the passage. Who is she? What is she doing? What is her story?
2. Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar. The Jewish people held so much prejudice against the Samaritans that most Jews wouldn't even travel through Samaria because exposure to a Samaritan could make them unclean. She was also not Jewish, and she was a woman. How did the Samaritan woman react to Jesus' first words? How do you think she felt?
3. List below or highlight in the passage all the ways Jesus is described in this story.
4. What do Jesus and the woman talk about? How does Jesus treat the woman? Why is it so remarkable that he treated her this way?
5. Think about your interactions with people who are different, difficult, or outcast. How can you imitate Jesus in your interactions with others? (Think through the three movements of their conversation: he asks for her help, he acknowledges her sin, he reveals his identity as the Messiah.)

6. Jesus confronts the woman about her sin. How does the woman transform through Christ's care throughout this passage? Compare the woman from verses 9–12 with the same woman in verses 27–30 and 39–42.

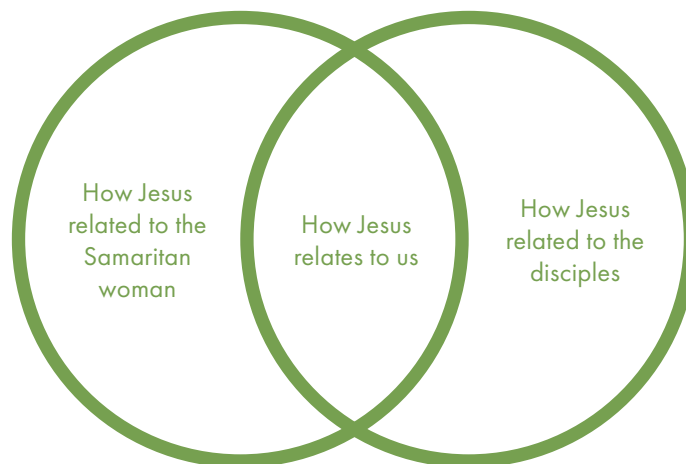
Jesus comes to each of us grace, gentleness, and respect. He meets each of us and leads us through our confusion to the knowledge of the truth, just as he brings this Samaritan woman to himself. He shows us our sin without making us feel rejected and condemned in his holy presence. Instead, he causes us to know that we are loved, forgiven, welcomed, and accepted, just as he accepts this lonely woman. (Barrs, 50)

7. In what ways are you like the Samaritan woman before Jesus? How have you been “startled by the beauty of his welcoming heart” (Ortlund)?

8. How can you imitate the welcoming heart of Christ?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

In this story, we see the tender and inviting heart of Jesus on full display, but we also see the transforming power of his gospel and life. Think about this story as a Venn diagram. One circle represents how Jesus relates to the Samaritan woman. The other circle represents how Jesus relates to the disciples in this story. The overlap in the middle is us, and how Jesus relates to us.



Jesus related to the Samaritan woman with transforming tenderness. He addressed an outcast, asked her to help him by giving him water, gave her dignity, respected her intelligence by engaging her in a theological conversation, gently acknowledged her sinful past, and invited her to follow him. Jesus offers all of those things to you and to me.

Jesus related to the disciples by undermining their prejudice against this Samaritan, this woman, this sinner. He broke religious and social convention, and he did so to call this woman to himself. Jesus came not just for the Jews, but the Gentiles. Not for the righteous, but the sinners. Not for the healthy, but the sick.

*And now the LORD says,
he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him;
and that Israel might be gathered to him—
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD,
and my God has become my strength—
he says:
“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:5–6)*

As believers and followers of Jesus, who strive to both be transformed by him and to imitate him, we sit in the middle of the Venn diagram. We hear the gentle call of Christ into our weary, sinful hearts. But we also have all our prejudices dismantled, and are called to carry the cause of Christ into the whole world. We are saved, then sent out. Transformed, then tasked.

As you finish this lesson, reflect on these questions:

How has Jesus seen your sin, yet called you into the glorious inheritance of his love? How can you be startled like the disciples, your bias and pride defeated by breadth and depth of Christ’s mercy? How can you respond like the Samaritan woman, full of joy and unable to keep quiet about her transforming encounter with the Messiah?

DEEPER STILL

Read Chapter 3 in *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*.

