

A Journey with Jesus
Book 2

Into the Harvest

“Beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” Matthew 9:38

Michael Gibson

A Journey with Jesus

Book 2 – Into the Harvest

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Follow Me **“A Message from God”**

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The Story

The most incredible story in the universe is God’s dealings with men. The story is told using seven types of literature woven together in one account called the Bible. These seven types of literature are divided into three groups commonly called the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Gospels. The Old Testament consists of three types of writing called: *The Law*, *The Prophets*, and *The Writings*. This group’s primary function is to point forward to the Messiah (or Savior). The New Testament also consists of three types of writing known as *The Acts of the Apostles*, *the Epistles (or Letters)*, and *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. This group’s primary function is to unfold the benefits that come from the Messiah. The final group, the Gospels, form the central and pivotal part of the story, which concerns the Messiah and the purposes for which He was sent to earth. The Gospels primary function is to blend both the Old and New Testaments into one account through the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

The Law	
The Prophets	The Old Testament
The Writings	
The Gospels	The Messiah
The Acts of the Apostles	
The Epistles	The New Testament
The Revelation of Jesus Christ	

The focus of my book is the central part of that story, the Gospels. This portion of the story is told by four men, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who each wrote an account of Messiah. Matthew's gospel is the most detailed and views things from a Hebraic mindset. Luke's gospel is written in chronological order and John's gospel reveals significant spiritual truths. Mark wrote the first gospel and it serves as the glue that binds all the others together. It is through their eyes, ears, and hearts that each one of us is able to see the works that God performed through Messiah, to hear the "good news" that He is proclaiming, and to understand the depth of His love for mankind.

The Purpose

The purpose of my writing this book is to forge the four gospels into one seamless story so that the reader may more fully understand the events that surround the Messiah and His coming to earth. It is my intent to make you feel like you are walking with Jesus and being taught by Him on His journey through life.

Besides combining the four gospels into one story other significant features have been included to increase the reader's awareness and understanding:

Two Unique Features

Just prior to His being raised up into heaven Jesus gave his followers a commission to accomplish before He returned again. That commission was to, "**Go** therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, **baptizing them in the name** of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." In response to the commission to teach others to observe all that Jesus commanded. I have highlighted in bold type all the instructions that He gave His group of disciples.

All of the instructions Jesus gave His disciples are contained in lessons which He was teaching them. The fifty-six lessons that Jesus taught them can be found in the companion teaching series entitled: "A Journey with Jesus." The teaching series consists of three books: "Fishers of Men," "Into the Harvest" and "Building the Temple."

Other Features

Chronology: All the events in this book are in the order in which they occurred and were derived from side by side comparisons of the four gospel accounts and various harmonies of the gospels.

Dating: The dates of events in this book assist the reader in discovering the time frames in which Jesus' story unfolds.

Divisions: The book has been divided into 18 parts in order to help the reader see the “big picture” of Jesus’ life and mission.

Headings: Each part of the book is further subdivided into specific events occurring within the life of Jesus.

Heading references (in parenthesis): Indicate the actual Scriptural passages used in the text under that heading.

Footnoting: Footnote references occur at the end of each part. Those referencing words or phrases are in regular type. Those referencing passages of scripture are in italicized type.

Glossary: The glossary contains comments on or definitions of commonly used words or terms used throughout the text.

Scripture: The text is taken directly from the New American Standard Bible.

To the Reader

Not everyone will agree with every position taken in this work, however, many knowledgeable sources were consulted in its preparation. This book is not meant to replace the individual accounts of the gospel writers, but merely to serve as a supplement to them. Date setting of various events is based on historical documents, astronomical evidence, the Jewish calendar with its 19 year repeating cycles, the Feasts of the Lord and the customs of the Jewish people. To those who have labored long in the study of God’s Word and prepared helps for each of us to learn by, I extend thanksgiving and gratitude for their labor of love in Christ.

My Hope

My heart's desire is that my Father in heaven be glorified by the exaltation of His Son in this book and that each of you, the readers, be transformed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Author's Intent

My purpose in preparing the teaching series entitled *A Journey with Jesus* is to help you become a more effective disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that by continually pointing you to what Jesus said and your willingness to do what He said, your life will be completely transformed. Then you will truly become as He is.

The goal of my teaching is to let the Scriptures speak for themselves while providing you with a 1st Century Christian mindset. The mindset is developed by drawing upon the Old Testament themes, traditions, rituals, concepts and insights that Jesus' original disciples would have understood.

At times, my teaching might appear as if I were indicating a return to Mosaic Law. Let me assure you, that is not the case! I believe that Christians are saved by the grace of God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, not by obeying the Law of Moses. However, I am also keenly aware that to many people the term "saved by grace" has come to mean that they can live their lives in a manner they so choose. This also is not the case! Christians are called to be a holy people, not to live lawless lives, thus perverting the grace of God. Instead, they are to live by the Law of the Spirit, which is to love God and man. Jesus said, "*If you love Me, you will keep **My** commandments.*"

A Journey with Jesus was not intended to be a scholarly work or a commentary on Scripture but rather designed to be thought provoking and life changing. It was prepared for the joy and benefit of the average Christian who trusts the Holy Spirit to lead and guide him into all truth.

My prayer is that this series will be a useful tool in helping you live a fruitful life in Christ.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to my wife Janice for her steadfast love, encouragement and support of me throughout the years. Without it this work would not have been completed. And I wish to further acknowledge her artistic abilities to paint the artwork that so inspiringly graces the covers of *A Journey with Jesus*.

Testimonials

Thanks for sharing the work of God in Odisha (*eastern India*) ... it was a real life transforming moment for me. In your teaching and training I could see and feel the fullest power and the presence of God. I take special delight in studying your designed notes and explain them to my disciples and many others ... I am using your discipleship material very well in my effort ... I have committed and dedicated my life to making disciples of Jesus Christ here in Odisha, India.

Rev. Kartik P.

Disciple Maker and Pastor in Eastern India

I was a Youth & Young Adult Pastor for 10 years, attended some of the best training & courses, steeped in the best ministry the world had to offer. Then I began to walk through this discipleship material, learning the teachings of Jesus ... I was undone. No church, seminar, book, curriculum, speaker, class, or convention has EVER taught me what I have learned through this material – what our Messiah was REALLY saying to us ... and WHY. I am forever changed – I have come awake, come alive, & I want more!

Brandon S.

Financial Advisor & Former Youth/Young Adults Pastor

The discipleship series *A Journey with Jesus* changed my life. If you really want to learn how to live and walk as Jesus did and learn how to become a disciple maker, this study is it. It can truly change your life.

Michelle M.

Homemaker, Mom & Disciple Maker

A Journey with Jesus curriculum is entirely Christ centered and God honoring. I highly recommend to people that are making the decision to follow Jesus Christ as a believer to commit to reading and studying the Word of God using this tool.

Noah G.

Entrepreneur & Former Missionary

Now I am discipling others and I find the teaching component to be even more of a blessing than when I was on the learning end. It is a straightforward practical guide to discipleship that is needed in today's church. This is a great way to jump start the calling on every Christians life to carry out the Great Commission.

Brandon B.

Realtor & Disciple Maker

Table of Contents
Book 2

A Journey with Jesus
Into the Harvest

“Beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” Matthew 9:38

<i>Lesson 18</i> Kingdom Parables	page 8
<i>Lesson 19</i> Growing in Understanding	page 13
<i>Lesson 20</i> More Kingdom Truths	page 17
<i>Lesson 21</i> Going into the Harvest Field	page 23
<i>Lesson 22</i> Evangelism	page 27
<i>Lesson 23</i> Serpents and Doves	page 31
<i>Lesson 24</i> Sobering Decisions	page 34
<i>Lesson 25</i> Looking for God’s Solutions	page 38
<i>Lesson 26</i> Fear Not!	page 43
<i>Lesson 27</i> A Little Leaven	page 47
<i>Lesson 28</i> Taking Up the Cross	page 51
<i>Lesson 29</i> Listen to Jesus	page 55
<i>Lesson 30</i> Becoming Offended	page 60
<i>Lesson 31</i> Causing Stumbling Blocks	page 64
<i>Lesson 32</i> Reproving a Believer	page 67
<i>Lesson 33</i> Forgiving Believers Who Repent	page 71
<i>Lesson 34</i> Cause for Rejoicing	page 76
<i>Lesson 35</i> Praying with Faith	page 80
<i>Lesson 36</i> Hypocrisy	page 84
<i>Lesson 37</i> Freedom from Fear	page 90
<i>Lesson 38</i> Freedom from Life’s Worries	page 93
<i>Lesson 39</i> Servant-hood	page 98

Lesson 18

Kingdom Parables

Group Icebreaker:

What is your favorite family story and what does it mean to you?

Introduction:

After finishing the Sermon on the Mount several noteworthy events occur in Jesus' life. Immediately after making the descent from the mountain He heals a leper and then returning to Capernaum, heals a Roman centurion's servant who is sick and about to die. Soon afterwards Jesus goes to the city of Nain where He encounters a funeral procession and raises a widow's son from the dead. Seeking reassurance that Jesus is the Messiah, John the Baptist, who is in prison, sends his disciples to interview Him. After this Jesus enters the home of Simon, a Pharisee, where He has an encounter with a sinful woman. She washes His feet with her tears and anoints them with perfume and then amidst controversy He forgives her sins.

Jesus then embarks on a missionary journey with His disciples and the women who support Him. Going to surrounding cities and villages, He preaches and proclaims the kingdom of God. Returning to Capernaum Jesus is again surrounded by the multitudes. There, scribes from Jerusalem begin accusing Him of being possessed by Satan. He confronts their charges in a series of parables and proclaims that all of men's sins would be forgiven them except blasphemies against the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus gets into a boat and teaches eight parables concerning the kingdom of God.

Before proceeding to Jesus' teaching, two basic concepts must be understood: what a parable is and what the kingdom of God is. First, let's consider what a parable is:

1. A parable is a **narrative** or short **story**.
2. When people hear a parable they are easily able to comprehend its **literal** meaning.
3. The parable has a **main** subject and contains one or more **truths, concepts** and/or **principles** that relate to it.
4. And the purpose or goal of a parable is to compare the truths, concepts and principles concerning the parable's main subject to **another** subject that is more **difficult** to understand.

Group Discussion:

1. Make up a simple parable with you as the main subject and tell it to the group.
2. Let the group try to guess what truths, concepts or principles you are trying to communicate in the parable.
3. After a brief time tell the group the truths, concepts or principles that you are trying to communicate through the use of the parable.
4. An example: There was a great white stallion that roamed wild and free and no man could tame it. Then one day a prince from another land came and began speaking to the stallion. Because of his gracious words the stallion was tamed and the prince rode on it the remainder of his days. (The interpretation: In the parable I am with white stallion. Upon hearing the words of Jesus I submitted my life to Him and He has used me ever since.)

Introduction Continued:

Now, let's consider the meaning of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God simply means the **rule of God**. However, to firmly grasp the idea of the *kingdom of God* and its *coming* is sometimes difficult. I'll try to make it a little easier. To be a kingdom, five elements must be present:

1. **A Person**, who is the king.
2. **A Process**, of ruling over the king's subjects. (How the king reigns)
3. **A People**, who are the king's subjects and in submission to do his will.
4. **A Place**, which is the area over which the king's authority extends.
5. **A Period** of existence, which is the length of time that the king rules.

Therefore it can be said that: (1) God, the king (2) is ruling by His Spirit (3) through Jesus Christ and those who are His (4) in heaven (5) forever.

Kingdoms are extended through either **gift** or **warfare**. Most commonly they are extended through warfare, the people of one kingdom must battle those of the opposing kingdom. **Conquering** the opposing people in warfare is necessary in order to extend territory. Conquest of the opposing people can occur in one of three ways:

1. Convincing the opposing people to change sides or switch **allegiance**.
2. **Defeat** of the opposing king either by capture and imprisonment or death. (However, in this type of conquest some of the people's allegiance may not change. Though they are forced to serve the new king they are waiting for an opportunity to rebel)
3. **Death** of the people.

By analogy, Jesus Christ was offered the kingdoms of this world, as a gift by Satan.¹ In order to get them Jesus would have had to switch His allegiance from God to Satan. He did not and warfare ensued. The Kingdom of God is currently engaged in warfare against Satan, the ruler of the kingdoms of this world. Jesus Christ and all those who are His (Christians) are battling for the earth against Satan, his demons, principalities and powers. They are extending the Kingdom of God in the earth.

At this present time the Kingdom of God is persuading opposing people to change sides. In the nearer future, Jesus will return, capture the opposing king and imprison him for a thousand years. Jesus will reign during this thousand-year period and everyone on earth will serve God. At the end of that time, the opposing king will be released from prison and lead those people whose hearts have not changed allegiance, in rebellion against the Kingdom of God again. Death is their destiny.

God could easily defeat His opponent, but His desire is to win the hearts of the people so they will switch their allegiance willingly. He does this through love: displaying acts of loving-kindness through His Son Jesus and those who are His. The disciples of Jesus are to wage a benevolent warfare. Even allowing themselves to be killed, anything to convince the enemy of the goodness of their King.

One of the reasons God raised Jesus from the dead was to demonstrate that He has the power of life and death. It acts as an encouragement to a disciple in his struggle to extend the kingdom of God. Jesus makes His disciples ambassadors so they can extend amnesty to His enemies. In the amnesty agreement God promises to forgive every sin and atrocity that His enemies have

¹ Matthew 4:8-9 and Luke 4:5-7

committed against Him and His people. To those who switch their allegiance God promises eternal life with Him.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15

The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-9, Mark 4:1-9, Luke 8:4-8

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very great multitude gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; and it came about that as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. And other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. And other seeds fell into the good soil and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

“Why Do You Speak To Them in Parables?”

Matthew 13:10-17, Mark 4:10-12

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" And He answered and said to them, "To you it has been granted to know the **mysteries**² of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM.'³ But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

² **Mysteries.** Secrets or things hidden, not previously understood, or revealed.

³ **Isaiah 6:9-10,** 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM.' Before Jesus begins teaching the parables He calls out to the multitude to listen to what He has to say. He begins the first parable with the word "Behold", which means to see or perceive and closes with the words, "He who has ears, let him hear." By using these phrases Jesus is challenging the multitude to gain understanding of what He is saying, not merely hear the sound of His words or visualize the story. But the multitudes are clueless as to what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Sower
Matthew 13:18-23, Mark 4:13-20, Luke 8:9-15
Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable might be. And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables? Hear then the parable of the sower. Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. The sower sows the word. And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved. And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

The Commands:

- ❖ Behold. Listen to this.
- ❖ He who has ears, let him hear.
- ❖ Hear then the parable of the sower.

The Lesson:

Before Jesus begins teaching the parables He calls out to the multitude to listen to what He has to say. He begins the first parable with the word “Behold”, which means to see or perceive and closes with the words, “He who has ears, let him hear.” By using these phrases Jesus is challenging the multitude to gain understanding of what He is saying, not merely hear the sound of His words or visualize the story. But the multitudes are clueless as to what Jesus is talking about.

The disciples are puzzled too, so they ask Jesus why he is speaking in parables. Jesus explains to them that He is fulfilling prophecy: that some will understand the parables and some will not. He goes on to explain that the disciples have been given the right to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God whereas the prophets and righteous men before them had not.

Jesus seems to be saying that the only ones who were to be privy to the secrets or hidden knowledge of the kingdom of God were the disciples. But that wasn't the case. The multitude could see the miracles but could not understand “who” was performing them or why they were being done. They heard the “Word of God” but could not understand His words. Their interest level was so low that they didn't even ask Jesus what He meant.

Though the literal sense of a parable is easy to understand the context in which it is used may be difficult to discern. It is always wise to ask the person using a parable what he is indicating by its use. For example, if you were told that you were like an oak tree you might have an immediate assumption as to the meaning, but it would be wise to get clarification. Many of us would immediately think that the person who said we were like an oak tree was implying that we are strong. But that may not be what is being implied. To make this point more clear I've listed several things that might also be implied.

1. You are a thick-skinned person.
2. You have a rough exterior.

3. You are so inflexible you can't even bend a little.
4. You provide shelter for others.

The disciples were wise to ask Jesus what He meant because it was the key to unlocking the hidden things concerning the kingdom of God. Jesus began His reply by saying, "*Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables?*" He is alluding to the fact that it is essential to understand the first parable, if they are to understand other parables. They must grasp its concepts and word interpretations. He tells them, "*Hear then the parable of the sower.*" Jesus wants them to hear with understanding, to meditate upon His words and discover the truths of the kingdom of God.

Group Discussion:

5. What is the main truth concerning the Kingdom of God that can be discerned from this parable? (The Kingdom of God is extended through speaking the Word of God)
6. What is the direct interpretation of the following words according to Jesus?
 - a. Seed (The Word of God)
 - b. Soil (The condition of people's hearts)
 - c. Birds (Satan, the adversary)
 - d. Sun (Affliction or persecution)
 - e. Thorns (The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things.)
7. What is the Word of God? (Jesus Christ and everything that God says)
8. Who is the sower? (Primarily Jesus Christ, the Son of Man but can include anyone who speaks the Word of God, including the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles and us)
9. How is sowing accomplished? (By speaking) The method that Jesus is describing is called broadcasting. The sower takes a handful of seed from his bag and releases it as his arm makes a sweeping outward arc through the air.
10. How does planting occur and what is it likened to? (By hearing) (Believing)
11. What two things do the hard path, rocky soil, thorny ground and good earth tell us? (The conditions of the human heart and what planting there will produce) In the broadcast method of sowing, seed is scattered everywhere. The farmer does not intentionally scatter seed in unproductive ground because it is wasteful. However some of it can't be helped. The path that the sower walks on through the field scattering the seed is hard ground. Rocky soil is ground that has not been prepared yet and usually lies adjacent to good soil. Thorny ground is normally found at the ends of the fields near fence lines.
12. Who is responsible for the preparation of the ground? (The owner of the field)
13. What are the remedies for the various soil conditions?
 - a. The hard path – (can be plowed, the birds chased off, and the sower can take a different path each time to prevent hardening the soil.)
 - b. The rocky soil – (can be turned into usable soil by digging down to remove the rocks.)
 - c. The thorny ground – (can be weeded.)
 - d. The good earth – (can be improved by adding nutrients or allowing the ground lie fallow. God commanded the Israelites to let their fields rest on the seventh year.)

The Point of the Lesson:

Understand the parable of the sower.

Lesson 19

Growing in Understanding

Group Icebreakers:

Answer the following questions concerning this figure of speech. “You hit the nail on the head.”

- What is the main point? (You made a good point or observation)
- What tool is being used to hit the nail? (Hammer – to drive home the point)
- What does this tool symbolize? (The words you spoke)
- What does the nail symbolize? (The point or observation)

Introduction:

To gain a broad view of the kingdom of God parables, the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke need to be dovetailed together. In doing so we find the order that Jesus gave the parables in, where He was at the time and to whom He gave them. From that we discover that not everyone was privy to the same information.

When Jesus begins giving the parables of the Kingdom of God, He is sitting in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. This place is called the Bay of Parables and sits below Mount Eremos. It lies halfway between Taghba, the place of the "seven springs" and the town of Capernaum. His audience consists of a multitude of people and His disciples. Jesus tells the first parable, that of the sower to everyone.

Then He turns to His disciples and gives them the interpretation of that parable. When He finishes with the interpretation Jesus issues two commands to the disciples based on their understanding of the parable of the sower. These commands involve a lamp and a standard of measure. Then He proceeds to tell them the second parable concerning the growing plant.

When he finishes speaking to the disciples Jesus again turns and speaks to everyone. In turn He tells them the third parable, that of the wheat and tares . . . then the fourth parable, that of the mustard seed . . . and finally the fifth parable, that of the leaven. At that point Jesus quits His teaching and leaves the multitude.

Then, taking only His disciples with Him, He enters a house where He continues the discussion. Jesus begins teaching again by giving the disciples the interpretation of the third parable, that of the wheat and tares. Then proceeds to tell them the sixth parable, that of the treasure hidden in a field . . . the seventh parable, that of the pearl of great price . . . and the eighth parable, that of the dragnet cast into the sea. He finishes by telling the disciples that now, having understood the parables; they will be able to grasp what had already been spoken concerning the kingdom of God, as well as things to come.

Reading the Scripture:

Growing in Understanding **Mark 4:21-29, Luke 8:16-18**

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a peck-measure, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? For nothing is hidden, except to be

revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it should **come to light**.⁴ If any man has ears to hear, let him hear." And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides. For whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows-- how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

The Commands:

- ❖ If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.
- ❖ Take care what you listen to.

The Lesson – Part One:

According to the gospel of Mark, upon finishing His explanation of the parable of the sower, Jesus adds two illustrations. One concerns a lamp and the other a measure. In conjunction with these illustrations He issues two commands. They are "*if any man has ears to hear, let him hear*" and "*take care of what you listen to.*" Both the illustrations and the commands are linked to the parable of the sower and its interpretation.

In the interpretation of the parable, the seed is the Word of God. The term "Word of God" can take several forms: the Scriptures, Jesus Christ, Himself, or something spoken by God through someone. It doesn't matter in which form the "Word of God" comes, the principles in the illustrations and commands hold true.

Jesus tells His disciples that the purpose of a lamp is to provide light. The disciples recognize that He is referencing the parable and in turn revealing the mysteries of the kingdom of God. They also remember that Jesus had recently used similar words during His Sermon on the Mount. At that time Jesus said, "*They were the light of the world.*" For the first time the disciples are beginning to catch the role to which they have been called. They are to be the light by revealing the "Word of God", which is the kingdom of God. Jesus assures them of this when he states, "*For nothing is hidden, except to be **revealed**; nor has anything been secret, but that it should **come to light.***"

People hide valuable things and they keep them hidden until they deem that it is the appropriate time for their use. It is similar to a seed being hidden or planted in the ground and then coming forth in its season. The value of the seed and what it will produce is not known until the light of the sun reveals it. People also keep secrets until they find someone they can trust with their secrets. Jesus is simply telling the disciples that they are the trusted ones and that this is the time to reveal the "Word of God." He concludes by issuing the instruction, "*If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.*"

Based on the parable of the sower, which the disciples have just heard, this command takes on new force. The words they are hearing with their ears are to be planted and remain in the fertile soil of their hearts. Then the words will grow and produce more words for planting in other hearts.

⁴ **come to light.** come to light. To be revealed or understood.

Because the soil of a disciple's heart is fertile, Jesus issues a caution. *“Take care what you listen to.”* In other words, be selective in the things you allow to be planted and remain in your heart. Why? Because whatever words are planted and remain in the heart whether good or evil will grow to produce the words that you will speak. And everything you allow to grow will be multiplied.

Group Discussion:

1. How do sunlight and water affect growth? (Both are necessary for growth. Too little sunlight and the seed will not grow to maturity. However, sunlight will cause a plant to wither and die if it doesn't have an adequate water supply. Too much water kills the plant by drowning.)
2. What does sunlight symbolize? (Affliction or persecution)
3. What does water symbolize? (The Holy Spirit according to John 7:37-39)
4. Where do sunlight and water come from? (Heaven)

The Lesson – Part Two:

Studying the parable of the sower also sheds light on the rules that govern understanding other kingdom parables.

- The subject of each kingdom of God parable is the rule of God.
- The truths concerning God's rule can be applied to an individual or **all** those who are ruled by Him.
- Every parable makes **one** main point concerning the kingdom of God.
- The concepts and principles used within the parable are truths concerning the rule of God. These truths add depth and clarity to the subject and main point. They can be carried from one kingdom parable to another. An example of one of these truths is, seeds produce **plants**.
- The specific meaning that Jesus assigns to any word remains the same when used in the other kingdom parables. For example, seeds are **words**.

As Jesus tells His disciples the parable of the growing plant more truths become evident. The primary point of the parable is that the kingdom of God grows. This growth can be observed individually and corporately. According to the parable a word planted in the heart takes time to grow before it reaches maturity and it grows in three identifiable stages. The three stages of growth are referred to as the blade, the head, and the mature grain in the head. These growth stages correspond to those who have believed the word of salvation. The apostle John in his first epistle identifies these three stages as children, young men and fathers. It is at maturity that new seed is formed and reproduction occurs.

Group Discussion:

5. What are some other truths that can be ascertained from the parable of the growing plant?
 - a. Initially there is no evidence that a word is going to grow so it takes faith on the part of the sower to believe that it will.
 - b. Since growth takes time it requires patience on the part of the sower to see the words he has spoken bear fruit.
 - c. Watering begins soon after the seed is planted and continues throughout the entire growth period.
 - d. Sunlight only comes into play after the blade has been exposed.
 - e. Weeding occurs when both species of plants can be distinguished.

The Point of The Lesson:

Be careful what you listen to.

Application:

Prepare to make a short presentation on one of the five following parables to the group at the next meeting:

- Mustard seed
- Leaven
- Treasure hidden in the field
- Pearl of great price
- Dragnet cast into the sea

Develop the main point and supporting truths. Then discuss how the parable might be applied either individually or corporately.

Lesson 20

More Kingdom Truths

Introduction:

As Jesus sits in a boat by the shore He tells the multitudes three more parables concerning the kingdom of God: the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven. He then leaves the multitudes and enters a house. Once there He explains the parable of the wheat and tares to His disciples and tells them three more parables: the treasure in a field, the pearl of great price and the dragnet cast into the sea.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 13:24-52, Mark 4:30-34

The Parable of the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were **sleeping**,⁵ his enemy came and sowed **tares**⁶ also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Tares

Matthew 13:36-43

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

Then He left the multitudes, and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." And He answered and said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then THE RIGHTEOUS

⁵ **While men were sleeping** is just a way of saying men were unaware of what was going on or they weren't paying attention.

⁶ **Tares.** Sowing tares in an enemy's wheat fields was common practice in ancient times. The tares Jesus is talking about are "bearded darnel" a poisonous rye grass which remains indistinguishable from wheat until the grain appears in the head at maturity. According to the ancients, tares are not a different kind of seed, but only a degenerate kind of wheat. Sowing tares results in a decreased wheat crop, as the tares tend to strangle the wheat and take up the nutrients in the soil. It also demands more work of the farmer to separate the wheat from the tares.

WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN⁷ in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Other Parables Spoken to the Multitudes

Matthew 13:31-35, Mark 4:30-34

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds; but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."⁸ He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened." All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD."⁹

Matthew 13:44-52

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes." And He said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old."

The Command:

❖ He who has ears, let him hear.

The Lesson:

Jesus concludes His interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the tares by issuing a command to His disciples. "*He who has ears, let him hear.*" Jesus wants His disciples to firmly grasp what He is saying, because the parable of the wheat and the tares is helpful in confirming the truths gleaned from the parables of the sower and the growing plant. It also provides additional insight and direction to the other kingdom parables.

Since Jesus has given the interpretation in the parable of the wheat and tares already, this lesson focuses on providing insight into the meaning of its terms to clarify your understanding. The

⁷ THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN. Daniel 12:3

⁸ THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES. Ezekiel 17:23

⁹ I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD. Psalms 78:2

parable begins with the statement, *“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field”*.¹⁰ The following observations can be made from His statement:

1. The expression “kingdom of heaven” is another way of saying the kingdom of God and is used throughout Matthew’s gospel. The word heaven was substituted by Jews to avoid the use of the word “God” in their literature as a pious observance.
2. Jesus interprets the word “man” to be the “son of man.” In a literal sense this can mean any descendant of Adam, however the term was also used as a title of the messiah as derived from the book of Daniel, chapter 7, verses 13-14.
3. From the parable of the sower we learned that seeds represented words. Jesus interprets the good seed as the children of the kingdom of God. The term children can also be read as son, descendant, or offspring. From this we learn that the word of God produces godly offspring. These offspring are created when the word of God is believed in the heart of man. They grow to maturity and produce more seed that can be planted in other hearts.
4. The field is the world. The Greek word for world is **kosmos**. It doesn’t mean the earth but rather the way all things were created to be. The earth is part of the **kosmos**. So are the heavenly bodies, plants, animals and the laws of physics, etc.
5. The world, which contains various soils, belongs to the son of man not the devil.

The next lines of the parable read this way, *“But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.”*

1. The term while men were sleeping is just a way of saying men were unaware of what was going on or they weren’t paying attention.
2. Jesus declares that the enemy of the son of man is the devil. The term devil means **accuser**. The devil is also called Satan, which means **opponent**.
3. Sowing tares in an enemy’s wheat fields was common practice in ancient times. The tares Jesus is talking about are “bearded darnel” a poisonous rye grass which remains indistinguishable from wheat until the grain appears in the head at maturity. According to the ancients, tares are not a different kind of seed, but only a degenerate kind of wheat. Sowing tares results in a decreased wheat crop, as the tares tend to strangle the wheat and take up the nutrients in the soil. It also demands more work of the farmer to separate the wheat from the tares.
4. From this parable we learn that the devil uses the same method of sowing his seed as the son of man: by **speaking**. The devil corrupts the earth, from which man is made, by his words. When Satan’s words are believed in the heart of man they produce an offspring of the devil who in turn produces more words to be sown in the hearts of other men. According to Jesus, the devil’s offspring are those who cause others to stumble and those who are a law unto themselves.¹¹

The final line of the parable reads this way, *“Allow the wheat and the tares to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, first gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”*

1. By allowing the wheat and tares to grow together indicates that good and evil coexist in this world until the harvest.
2. The reapers are described as the son of man’s angels. The word angel means messenger. These **messengers** can be either heavenly or human.

¹⁰ Matthew 13:24

¹¹ Matthew 13:40-42

3. Jesus said the harvest is the end of the age (world). The Greek word used for age or world is **aión**. It indicates a period of existence.
4. In one sense, the age ends when the word of God, which has been planted in the heart of an individual, grows to maturity and is harvested. This results in a new creation and is known in Christian circles as being born again.
5. In a corporate sense, the age ends when God creates a new heaven and new earth as described in the book of Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:1. This event should not be confused with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ occurring a thousand years previously.

When taken as a whole the **eight** parables that Jesus spoke to the multitudes form a broad view of the kingdom of God. They show how it starts (the sower), how it grows (the growing plant) and how it ends (the wheat and tares). The growth of the kingdom is occurring both visibly (the mustard seed) and internally (the leaven) at the same time. The value of the kingdom of God is not readily seen (treasure hidden in the field) yet its worth is unsurpassed (pearl of great price). And only those who are clean and pure will remain (dragnet cast into the sea).

The Other Parables:

The parable of the mustard seed demonstrates that the kingdom of God starts out extremely small but grows to great size. In Israel, the mustard plant can obtain a height of up to fifteen feet thus giving it the appearance of a tree. It is a well-known fact that birds are attracted to the mustard plant and actually build their nests in its branches. However, Jesus is referring to something else.

Remember, that in the parable of the sower the birds represented Satan. When the kingdom of God is in seed form Satan can easily devour it. But when full-grown as illustrated by the mustard tree he can no longer destroy it. But once the kingdom of God has become large Satan can make his home there and devour the seed that is produced by it. Birds usually build their nests in the forks of a tree or where a new branch is formed. Where division in the Church occurs Satan can be found.

The parable of the leaven illustrates that the kingdom of God changes everything it comes in contact with. Many Christians believe that leaven represents sin. However, there is a more accurate view. Leaven is a change agent. It changes the characteristics of all that it is put into. Jesus would later equate teaching with leaven when He tells the disciples to “*beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees*”.¹² Teaching, whether true or false corrupts or changes the mind, either for good or evil.

In the parable, leaven was put in three portions of meal. The three portions represent the whole thing that was leavened. The Hebrew standard whole unit of dry measure is the ephah and it takes three seahs to equal one ephah. By this Jesus is indicating that every human being consists of three parts: spirit, soul, and body. When the leaven or the kingdom of God in this case, is introduced into each of the parts the entire nature of the person will be changed.

The parable of the treasure hidden in the field reveals more truths concerning the kingdom of God. Treasure indicates that it is valuable. The field represents the world. The kingdom of God was hidden in the soil of the field, which represents the heart of man. In the parable a man was looking for the treasure, discovered it. The man represents Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. After discovering the treasure he hid it again. Then he gave his life, which was everything he had, to purchase the world.

¹² Matthew 16:11-12

The treasure that Jesus was looking for in the hearts of men was the belief that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus would discover this treasure in the heart of Peter when He asked the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter replied that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Then Jesus told him, “*Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*”¹³ Jesus hid this treasure again when He told the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

The parable of the pearl of great price establishes the fact that the kingdom of God is the most valuable thing that anyone can possess. A merchant is one who makes a living from buying and selling. He is a savvy businessman and knows the value of his merchandise. When he finds the most valuable thing that he can possess, he sells everything he owns to obtain it. At the moment of purchase the merchant is out of business, he has nothing more to barter with. What would be the sense in selling the pearl of great price to obtain other pearls of less value again?

The merchant represents anyone in this world who is seeking after valuable things in this life. To possess the kingdom of God requires that an individual give up everything he has considered valuable in exchange for it. At that point why should anyone renounce the kingdom of God in order to obtain back the things he had before.

A second interpretation of the parable of the pearl of great price also has merit. In this scenario the merchant is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is best expressed today as working through the Church. So it might be said that the Church is looking for something to invest itself in or to possess. The pearl of great price represents the ultimate thing that can be obtained. In fact it is so valuable that the Church should be seeking after it. What is it? The patriarch Job gives the answer during his discourse on wisdom in chapter 28 of the book bearing his name. In verse 18 he says, “*Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned; and the acquisition of wisdom is above that of pearls.*” The analogy is clear; the pearl of great price is wisdom! Job concludes his discourse by defining what wisdom is. “*Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*”¹⁴

The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea reveals that the kingdom of God is not selective in this age. In the parable, fish represent people. This conclusion is derived from Jesus’ calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John the four fishermen. Jesus said that from then on they would be catching men. The kingdom of God, as best represented as working through the Church today, draws all kinds of people to itself.

As the net is pulled through the water the fisherman cannot see what is being caught and it is not until the net is pulled ashore that the type of fish can be determined. The Jews would then separate their catch into two groups, those that were clean could be eaten and those that were unclean were discarded. Clean fish were those having both scales and fins while the unclean fish were those that lacked one of these characteristics or the other. Prior to the coming of the next age in which a new heaven and earth will be revealed there will be a separation of individuals drawn into the kingdom of God. The righteous will be preserved and the unrighteous will be discarded.

The Point of The Lesson:

Grow in your understanding of the things of the kingdom of God.

¹³ Matthew 16:17

¹⁴ Job 28:28

Application:

Bring any questions you have concerning the eight kingdom of God parables that we have previously studied to the next group meeting for general discussion.

Lesson 21

Going into the Harvest Field

Group Icebreakers:

1. What does the term “harvest field” mean to you? (A field in which the crop that has been planted is ready to harvested)
2. Where is the harvest field? (Anyplace that seed has been planted and is ready to be harvested)
3. How does a person know when the field is ready to harvest? (The crop is mature: ready to be made into food or sown to produce more crops)
4. How does a person identify the maturity of the crop? (By testing it: visually, firmness, etc.)
5. What happens at harvest? (The crop is picked, accumulated and stored for future use)

Introduction:

Jesus has been preparing His disciples to produce the kingdom (rule of) of God in people. This will become their mission in life. In the previous three lessons we saw that Jesus revealed several kingdom truths through the use of parables. Those truths can be applied to people corporately or individually. Let’s summarize them here:

- The kingdom of God is planted in people’s lives by speaking the word of God to them. It may or may not grow to maturity depending on the condition of the heart. (Parable of the sower)
- The kingdom of God grows in people’s lives by stages: first the blade (childhood), then the head (youth) and finally the mature grain in the head (adulthood). Growth comes through watering (edification) and sunlight (persecution). (Parable of the growing plant)
- Those who cause stumbling blocks and live lawless lives affect the kingdom. (Parable of the wheat and the tares)
 - It is imperative that they are not heeded, as the heart will produce whatever is believed.
 - When maturity is achieved, those who cause stumbling blocks and live lawless lives will no longer have an affect on the kingdom.
- The kingdom of God grows both externally (visual evidence – numbers) and internally (spiritual maturity – wisdom and knowledge). (Parable of the mustard seed and the leaven)
- The kingdom of God contains undiscovered benefits. (Parable of the treasure in the field)
- The kingdom of God is the most priceless thing anyone can possess. (Parable of the pearl of great price)
- The kingdom of God will continue as it is until it is full, and then there will be a separation of the good from the evil. (Parable of the dragnet cast into the sea)

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 8:23-34, 9:35-38, Mark 4:35-5:20, Luke 8:22-39

Jesus Calms the Sea

Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And on that day, when evening had come, He and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." And leaving the multitude, they took Him along with them, just as He was, in the boat; and other boats were with Him. And there arose

a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

Demons are Cast into Swine

Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20, Luke 8:26-39

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And they came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. And when He had come out of the boat, He was met by a certain man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. And constantly night and day, among the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out and gashing himself with stones. And seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!" For He had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And He was asking him, "What is your name?" And he said to Him, "My name is **Legion**;¹⁵ for we are many." And he began to entreat Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there was a big herd of swine feeding there on the mountain. And the demons entreated Him, saying, "Send us into the **swine**¹⁶ so that we may enter them." And He gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the **steep bank**¹⁷ into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea. And their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country. And the people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had the "legion"; and they became frightened. And those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. And they began to entreat Him to depart from their region. And as He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was entreating Him that he might accompany Him. And He did not let him, but He said to him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marveled.

Evangelism

Matthew 9:35-38

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

29 AD, Late Summer/Early Autumn

And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were

¹⁵ **Legion.** At the time of Jesus a "Roman legion" consisted of 6000 infantry and a contingent of cavalry.

¹⁶ **Swine** are "unclean" animals.

¹⁷ **Steep bank.** There is only one place on the Sea of Galilee that matches this description, near the small village of Kursi.

distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

The Commands:

- ❖ Let us go over to the other side of the lake.
- ❖ The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.

The Lesson:

Fundamental to proclaiming the kingdom of God is Jesus' ministry of signs and wonders. He **teaches** what the kingdom is like through His **parables**. And He **demonstrates** the power of the kingdom through His **miracles**. "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you." (Matthew 12:28) The parables are verbal **proclamations** about the kingdom of God. The miracles are **visible manifestations** of the kingdom of God.

Having just finished His teaching on the parables of the kingdom of God, Jesus and His disciples, accompanied by a flotilla of boats, set a course for the eastern side of the lake in the region of the Gerasenes.

The eastern side of the lake was part of the Decapolis or "League of Ten Cities", which was controlled by the city of Hippos. The Roman general, Pompey, founded the Decapolis on his return from Syria in 63 BCE and conferred upon it pagan-Hellenistic city rights. The particular region they were headed for was the Gerasenes. In Hebrew, the word Gerushim or Gerashim means, "expelled people". And according to Jewish tradition this was the land of the Girgashites, one of the seven indigenous people of Canaan, that Joshua drove out of the land.

During the five-mile voyage they encounter a severe storm that threatens to destroy them all. Jesus is awakened from sleep by the disciples and He commands the storm and the sea to be calm. Arriving on the eastern shore near the village of Kursi the group encounters a demon-possessed man living among the tombs. Jesus casts the man's demons, about 6000, into a herd of swine and after being possessed by the demons, the herd of swine run down a steep slope and drown themselves in the lake.

Group Discussion:

1. Why do you think Jesus wanted His disciples to go to the other side of the lake?
(He may have wanted to demonstrate the power of the kingdom of God in confrontation with the kingdom of Satan or possibly to put the disciples in uncomfortable situations so they could observe the power of God in operation during difficult circumstances)
2. After rebuking the wind and the sea, why do you think Jesus said to His disciples, "Why are you so timid" and "How is it that you have no faith?" (He was challenging the disciples to have faith in God and to take authority over their circumstances. Throughout His ministry Jesus, as the Son of Man, demonstrated power over the earth and evil spiritual forces but never over the free will of men.)
3. Are you fearful of taking the message of the kingdom of God into unknown areas?

The Lesson Continued:

Upon returning to the northern shore of the lake Jesus heals a woman, who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Later that day He raises a little girl from the dead, restores the eyesight of two blind men and causes a man who is dumb to speak. From there Jesus goes back to his hometown of Nazareth where He heals a few sick people by the laying on of hands.

As Jesus travels about on His next preaching tour¹⁸ he notices that the people are behaving like sheep without a shepherd. They wander aimlessly, without purpose, suffering every kind of malady and disease, as their enemies pick them off one by one. They need to be cared for, given direction, and provided protection. Feeling compassion for them and recognizing that He is not able to care for all of them Jesus calls His disciples to prayer.

Group Discussion:

4. Do you know anyone, who is behaving like a sheep without a shepherd and if so what behavior do they exhibit? (They wander aimlessly, without purpose, suffering every kind of malady and disease, as their enemies pick them off one by one.)
5. Why do you think Jesus told His disciples to pray for more harvesters and not more sowers? (It takes more people to harvest than it does to sow)

Point of the Lesson:

Find the harvest field and go to work.

Application:

Pray every day for the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest.

¹⁸ Probably April to October in 29 AD.

Lesson 22

Evangelism

Group Icebreaker:

What pictures or images come to your mind when you hear the word “evangelism”?

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 10:1-15, Mark 6:7-13, Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-16

The Twelve Are Sent Out to Preach the Good News

Matthew 10:1-15, Mark 6:7-13, Luke 9:1-6

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-gatherer; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"¹⁹ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.; freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. And into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it; and abide there until you go away. And as you enter the house, give it your greeting.²⁰ And if the house is worthy, let your greeting of peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your greeting of peace return to you. And whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable **for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah**²¹ in the day of judgment, than for that city.

The Sending of the Seventy

Matthew 11:20-24, Luke 10:1-16

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your ways;"²² behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way.²³ And whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' And if a man of peace is there, your peace

¹⁹ **The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.** Another way of saying, “God is ruling here and now.”

²⁰ **Greeting.** “Shalom aleikhem” or “peace be upon you”. The word Shalom not only conveys the idea of peace but also well-being, wholeness, health, success, integrity, and comfort.

²¹ **The land of Sodom and Gomorrah.** An area at the southern end of the Dead Sea which God destroyed in the time of Abraham because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.

²² **Go your ways.** Go to the city to which I have assigned to you.

²³ **Greet no one in the way.** Don’t stop to engage in idle conversation.

will rest upon him; but if not, it will return to you. And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. And whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat what is set before you; and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near'²⁴ to you. But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you. The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me."

The Commands:

- ❖ Do not go in the way of the Gentiles.
- ❖ Do not enter any city of the Samaritans.
- ❖ Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
- ❖ Go to every city to which I am about to come.
- ❖ As you go, preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."
- ❖ Heal the sick.
- ❖ Say to them, "the kingdom of God has come near you."
- ❖ Raise the dead.
- ❖ Cleanse the lepers.
- ❖ Cast out demons.
- ❖ Freely you received, freely give.
- ❖ Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts.
- ❖ Do not acquire a bag for your journey.
- ❖ Do not acquire even two tunics.
- ❖ Do not acquire sandals.
- ❖ Do not acquire a staff.
- ❖ Greet no one on the way.
- ❖ Into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it.
- ❖ Abide there until you go away.
- ❖ Eat what is put before you.
- ❖ As you enter the house, give it your greeting, "peace be to this house!"
- ❖ If the house is worthy (a man of peace is there), let your greeting of peace come upon it.
- ❖ If the house is not worthy (a man of peace is not there), let your peace return to you.
- ❖ Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet.
- ❖ Go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near you."

²⁴ **That the Kingdom of God has come near.** In effect they were saying, "We have come to you as directed by God, under His authority, with His power, to accomplish His purpose."

Group Discussion:

1. Who was the most influential person in your decision to follow Christ?
2. What was that person's relationship to you?
3. What did that person do which influenced you?
4. Describe how that person made you feel.
5. What did the person say to influence you?

The Lesson:

The Scripture states that Jesus sent out ambassadors twice to care for the people before giving the “Great Commission”. The first time He sent out the twelve apostles for about a six-month period of time²⁵ only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Several months later He sent seventy other disciples for about a two-month period of time²⁶ to all the cities to which He was about to come. The instructions He gave both groups were essentially the same and very, very specific.

Prayer preceded both ventures. Everyone petitioned God to send workers into the harvest. Then Jesus commissioned those who would go. He sent them out in pairs, so that every word of God would be confirmed in the mouth of two or more witnesses. He told them to preach that men should **repent**²⁷ and to proclaim that the kingdom of God was at **hand**.²⁸

And He told them to heal people, so that their testimony would not rest merely in words alone but with the power of God from on high. Jesus gave these ambassadors power to cast out demons and to heal every kind of sickness and disease. He sent the “twelve” to Jews only and the “seventy” to the cities, which He would visit.²⁹ When He gave the “Great Commission” to His disciples it included Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.

The instructions Jesus gave concerning the journey to their destinations seemed to be wrapped in a sense of urgency. His disciples were not to make any formal preparations for the journey. They were not to acquire anything for their journey or for their support such as money, clothing, luggage or food. And they were not to schmoose, chitchat or have idle conversation with anyone along the way. This instruction would remind the ambassadors of the story in 1 Kings 13: God sent a prophet on a mission with specific instructions about not stopping to eat and drink along the way. He disobeyed and died immediately.

Upon entering a city Jesus' ambassadors were to find a “man of peace”.³⁰ They were to stay in his home and eat his food during the duration of their stay in that city. Upon entering his house they were to greet the people with “shalom aleikhem” or “peace be upon you”. The word “shalom” conveys not only the idea of peace but also safety, well-being, health, contentment, success, comfort, integrity and wholeness. When this greeting is given, then God extends His peace and favor to the people of that home. If Jesus' ambassadors are rejected by that home, God withdraws His peace and favor.

²⁵ Probably from October 29AD to April 30 AD.

²⁶ Probably October and November of 30 AD.

²⁷ Repent – (the Greek word *metanoiete*) – change your mind – have a change of heart (*simply stated*, “stop doing it your way and start doing it God's way).

²⁸ The kingdom of God is at hand is used in a couple of ways. First, it declares that God is ruling here and now. Secondly, it is saying that the kingdom is near because its power and authority is contained within the person making the statement.

²⁹ The second commission is the precursor to the Great Commission. It extends the mission of the disciples to everywhere that the Lord may come. At that moment in time it would include cities in the Galilee, Samaria and Judea. However, this could be taken to mean, any city that Jesus might visit at that time or in the future.

³⁰ “Man of peace” is a term that denotes a person who is humble, hospitable and has a great respect for God (a God-fearer). He would not necessarily have to be Jewish or Christian to qualify.

To give credibility to His ambassadors, Jesus gave them the power to heal every kind of sickness and disease. They were able to cleanse lepers and cast out demons. After someone was healed they were to declare to them, “The kingdom of God is at hand”. With the power to heal came an additional responsibility. Jesus’ ambassadors were not permitted to take any money or compensation for the healing, for freely they received the gift from God therefore, they should give it away freely. This would remind the ambassadors of the story of Naaman, the leper, from 2 Kings 5. The prophet Elisha freely healed Naaman of his leprosy, but Elisha’s servant Gehazi ran after Naaman to receive some compensation for the healing. As a result, Elisha put Naaman’s leprosy on Gehazi.

If a home or city refused to receive or heed their words, Jesus’ ambassadors were to go out into the streets and shake the dust off their feet. As they did this they were to say, “*Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.*” Historically, Jewish people would shake the ritually impure dust of a Gentile (non-Jewish) city from their feet before leaving it and returning to the land of Israel. Jesus wants His ambassadors to convey this idea to those who rejected them. That they, being Jews, would not receive the word of God so henceforth they would be as Gentiles to them. This concept was demonstrated in Acts 13:51. Along with this idea comes the concept of blood guiltlessness. When people reject the word of God then those who have preached it are innocent when God brings judgment against the people who rejected Him. This concept is clearly demonstrated in Acts 18:6.

The Point of the Lesson:

According to Jesus, this is how you should evangelize.

Application:

- Pray every day for the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest.
- Preach the gospel to at least one individual this next week trying to stay as close to how Jesus said to do it.

Lesson 23

Serpents and Doves

Group Icebreaker:

Why do you think Christians feel inadequate and fearful about evangelism?

Introduction:

After giving His disciples instructions on how to proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God, Jesus prepares them to enter a hostile environment. He is sending the disciples among people who will oppose His message, even to the point of killing them.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 10:16-23, Luke 10:3

Serpents and Doves The Twelve Are Sent Out to Preach the Good News Matthew 10:16-23 *Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”*

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes.

The Sending of the Seventy Luke 10:3 *Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”*

Go your ways;³¹ behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.

The Commands:

- ❖ Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves.
- ❖ Beware of men.
- ❖ But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak.
- ❖ But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next.

The Lesson:

Jesus told the disciples that He was sending them as sheep among the wolves. In a previous lesson, Jesus had told them about the canine family. He said, “*Do not give what is holy to dogs.*”³²

³¹ **Go your ways.** Go to the city to which I have assigned to you.

The instruction meant that they were not to give anything that was from God (holy) to those that had already rejected God (dogs). In other words they were not to preach the message of the kingdom to these people. The disciples were to be shrewd like snakes, avoiding contact with them by staying low, moving quietly and purposefully while staying out of sight. They were also to have peaceful natures like doves. The disciples were to exhibit good conduct, not provoking men to argument nor giving them cause to persecute Christians.

Jesus told the disciples to beware of these men, so recognizing the kind of people they are becomes important. Like wolves, they have several common traits. They tend to **band together** in society, **appear** to be shy, have a strong leader, **attack** the **weakest** individual as a group and usually are howling about something. Jesus told the disciples you could recognize them by their fruit: (1) living after the flesh instead of walking in love, (2) teaching others to cause God's children to fall and (3) grumbling and complaining against God and His ways.

Despite taking these precautions, Jesus said the disciples would not be able to avoid all confrontation. Some would be tried in court and persecuted for their message. Jesus assured them that they didn't need to worry about how to defend themselves when on trial, as the Holy Spirit would enlighten them as to what to say. Once the disciples were persecuted in a city, they were to immediately flee to the next town.

This principle applies to Christians today. Once a testimony of Christ is given to a person and the witness is persecuted for that testimony he is not to bring another testimony to that individual but is in fact obligated to get away from him as quickly as possible. God will not hold the witness guilty of that man's blood should he die in his sins.

At this point in His instructions on preaching the kingdom of God, Jesus makes an interesting statement, *"For truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes."* He is essentially equating His second coming with the preaching of the gospel throughout Israel. For many years this preaching assignment was difficult to do since the Jewish people were dispersed³³ among the nations and not in control of the land. In 1948, Israel became a nation once again and the "times of the Gentiles"³⁴ has been fulfilled. It is still difficult to preach the gospel in Israel since it is against the law but it is of primary importance for Christians to continue the message to the Jewish people in their homeland.

Group Discussion:

1. How long a time do you think it takes between sowing any "word of God" into a person before you can reap what you have sown? (Fairly immediately. 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, *Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"*. Also in Amos 9:13 it says, *"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "When the plowman will overtake the reaper."*)
2. What do you think Ecclesiastes 11:4 means? *He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.* (This verse tells us that a fearful person looking for ideal conditions will neither sow nor reap. Their justification runs like this: 1) The

³² Matthew 7:6 – "Do not give what is holy to dogs."

³³ The Diaspora. Hebrew Galut (Exile), the dispersion of Jews among the Gentiles, outside of the land of Israel.

³⁴ Times of the Gentiles. After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, Jews were allowed to remain there until the Bar Kokhba Revolt (131-135 AD). They were expelled from the city of Jerusalem in 134 AD and it was renamed Aelia Capitolina. The city remained under foreign (Gentile) control until June 8, 1967 when it was liberated from Jordan in the Six Day War. In 1980, a proclamation was issued that declared Jerusalem a united city under Israeli sovereignty.

- wind might blow my seed on unproductive ground; therefore I might be wasting it and 2) The clouds indicate it might rain; therefore the harvest would be ruined.)
3. How might a person overcome his fear? (By changing the way he thinks. For example, in the case above he could change the direction of his throw and make provisions to cover his crops.)
 4. When is the best time to sow the word of God? (*Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good – Ecclesiastes 11:6.*)
 5. What does Psalms 126:5-6 mean to you? *Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.*
 - a. Tears indicate the time to plant.
 - b. The ground is broken up and well watered
 - c. The tears can be another's or your own.
 - d. There are six kinds of tears:
 - i. Joy (Genesis 33:4)
 - ii. Sorrow (2Kings 20:5)
 - iii. Desperation (Esther 4:1,3)
 - iv. Travail – like childbirth (Isaiah 42:14)
 - v. Repentance (Joel 2:12-13)
 - vi. Compassion (John 11:35)
 6. What is a wise way to sow your seed? (Sow in peace. James 3:17-18 says, “*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace*”)
 7. How much sowing should you do? (That depends on how much you want to reap. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, *Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.*)
 8. What are you sowing? (*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*)

Point of the Lesson:

Be wise in the way you declare the gospel.

Application:

- Pray every day for the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest.
- Preach the gospel to at least one individual this next week trying to stay as close to how Jesus said to do it.

Lesson 24

Sobering Decisions

Group Icebreaker:

Do you want to be a martyr for Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

Introduction:

In the Scriptures the Greek word for martyr is “martus”. It simply means a “**witness or testimony**” and does not necessarily convey the idea of death. Throughout Scripture the word is associated with giving evidence to something. Death became associated with the word martyr because those who witnessed were convinced of the validity of their testimony even to the point of dying for what they believed. As Christians we should live as martyrs, giving evidence of a changed life in Christ through our words and deeds.

Reading the Scripture:

Sobering Decisions

Matthew 10:24-42

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household! Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth;³⁵ I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.³⁶ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take **his cross**³⁷ and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of

³⁵ **Peace on the earth.** Jesus came to establish peace between man and God, not peace between all men.

³⁶ **Micah 7:6.** SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.

³⁷ **His cross.** The thing which will bring about his suffering and death.

cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward." And it came about that when Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. And they went out and preached that men should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

The Commands:

- ❖ Therefore, do not fear them.
- ❖ What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light.
- ❖ What you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.
- ❖ And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul;
- ❖ But rather fear Him who is able to destroy body and soul in hell.
- ❖ Therefore, do not fear.
- ❖ Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

The Lesson:

Jesus was a pragmatist and He didn't use hype to motivate His disciples. He told them the truth. They will be persecuted for their faith and the message they proclaim. Despite the message of impending persecution, Jesus issues several commands for His disciples to follow that fly directly in the face of the fear they feel.

He literally commands His disciples not to fear men but instead to fear God. By issuing a command, Jesus is forcing the disciples to make a decision. Will they choose to be governed by God or their feelings? The rationale for choosing God is simple. Men can kill the body, which is not going to live forever anyway. But they have no power to destroy the soul, which will last forever. Only God has that power. So it is better to fear God than men.

Jesus comforts the disciples by telling them that He will be actively engaged with each of them in bringing forth their testimony. In fact, He will guide them in what to say. *"What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light."* In this case Jesus is saying He will communicate with them through dreams and visions. There are several references to this:

"Now a word was brought to me stealthily, and my ear received a whisper of it. Amid disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling, and made all my bones shake. Then a spirit passed by my face; the hair of my flesh bristled up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance; a form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice:" (Job 4:12)

"It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." (Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17)

A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:9-10)

Jesus also tells His disciples, “What you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.”³⁸ In this case Jesus is saying He will communicate with them audibly, like a whisper in their ear. This is extremely common. God has been speaking to men ever since the Garden of Eden. Some men refuse to hear God’s voice and others choose to disobey it.

When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, He replied this way: “The foremost is, **HEAR**, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ “The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:29-31)

Did you notice it? The first commandment is to **HEAR**, followed by love. God is equating loving Him with hearing His voice in order to obey it! Another of Jesus’ statements supports this, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Following are just a few references to disciples hearing Jesus’ voice:

“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” (John 10:3-5)

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (John 10:27)

“Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” (John 18:37)

And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.” (Acts 9:4-6)

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear His voice.” (Hebrews 3:7)

Group Discussion:

1. Many Christmas cards start off with the phrase from Luke 2:14, “Peace On Earth, Goodwill Toward Men”. How does this view measure up with what Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword?” (A more accurate rendering of Luke 2:14 is, “On earth peace among men, with whom God is pleased.” In other words, “There is peace on earth only among those with whom God is pleased.” Jesus primary purpose was to reconcile men to God, not to bring peace to the earth. He knew that what He was proclaiming would divide people. They would either be for Him or against Him.)
2. Which is more beautiful, the white lily or the red rose?
3. List the attributes of each and come to a group decision.

The Lesson Continued:

The early church recognized the importance of an individual’s testimony concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and developed symbols to represent the two aspects of his witness. The **Lily** of the

³⁸ In Israel, housetops were flat roofs where people gathered when the weather was pleasant. Since houses were close together, people could shout from their housetops and proclaim to an impromptu audience.

Valley was white, signifying the **good deeds** of the saints. It represented an individual's testimony before men while he was **alive**. The **Rose** of Sharon was red, signifying the **blood** of the martyrs. It represented an individual's testimony before God in the manner of his **death**. Both flowers are aromatic. Just as the flowers fragrances are pleasing, a Christian should be pleasing to God whether he lives or dies.

Is it better to live for your faith or die for your faith? The Apostle Paul struggled with the same dilemma. In the first chapter of his epistle to the Philippians he deals with the issue. At the time of writing his epistle in 62 AD, Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting sentencing for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Would he live or would he die?

Listen to what he said. *“Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.”* And Paul did live on. He was released from prison later that year and spent four more years on the mission field. He was imprisoned again and martyred for his faith in 67 or 68 AD.

Paul's decision whether it was better to live or die was not motivated by the fear of death or personal loss. Those issues had been decided when He first believed. Following Jesus' instructions to “fear not”, Paul made the decision that Christ would be exalted in his body whether he lived or died. This should be the focus and purpose of every Christian's life.

Paul used two tests in helping him make life and death decisions:

- Is it for **God's** glory not just my own? (For **me** to live is Christ and to die is to be with Him)
- Is it in the best interest of **others** not just mine? (**I** regard others as more important than myself)

Group Discussion:

4. Will you choose to not fear death? (Do you really believe your own message concerning Christ?)
5. Will you choose to not fear personal loss? (Do you love the things of this world too much?)
6. Will you choose to not fear persecution? (Do you live for the praises of men or God?)

Footnote:

Both white lilies and red roses are used to weave a victor's crown. Every believer will receive one, symbolizing those whose faith overcame through life and those whose faith overcame through death.

Point of the Lesson:

Fear of men is overcome by faith in Go.

Application:

- Pray every day for the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest.
- Preach the gospel to at least one individual this next week trying to stay as close to how Jesus said to do it.

Lesson 25

Looking for God’s Solutions

Group Icebreaker:

What would you do if you heard someone teaching the Word of God and performing signs and wonders?

Introduction:

When the disciples return from their first preaching tour in late March,³⁹ Jesus takes them with him to Bethsaida.⁴⁰ But doing the work of the ministry in Bethsaida is so overwhelming they don’t have time to eat. So Jesus suggests they get in the boat and go away by themselves for a little rest and relaxation . . . to some quiet place.

However, casting out demons, healing people and performing signs and wonders tends to attract crowds. Running along the lakeshore people follow the boat’s progress and arrive before it puts into shore. Despite His weariness Jesus has compassion on the crowd and spends the remainder of the day teaching them.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 14:15-21, Mark 6:35-44, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:3-14

The Apostles Return

Matthew 14:13-14, Mark 6:30-34, Luke 9:10-11, John 6:1-4

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. And the people saw them going, and many recognized them, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

Jesus Feeds 5,000 Men

Matthew 14:15-23, Mark 6:35-46, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-16

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And the day began to decline, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" And they said to Him, "Shall we go

³⁹ Late March appears to be the correct time period as John 6:4 records that the Passover of the Jews was approaching. That year it would have fallen in early April.

⁴⁰ Bethsaida or “House of fishing” was a city located about three miles east of Capernaum on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee where the Jordan River empties into it. Bethsaida was the hometown of Andrew, Peter and Philip.

and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." And He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" And He said, "Bring them here to Me." And He said to His disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each." And they did so, and had them all recline. Now there was much grass in the place. And they reclined in companies of hundreds and of fifties. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost." And they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. And there were about **five thousand men**⁴¹ who ate, aside from women and children. When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, immediately made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to **Bethsaida**,⁴² while He Himself was sending the multitude away. And after bidding them farewell, He departed to the mountain to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

The Commands:

- ❖ Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.
- ❖ You give them something to eat.
- ❖ How many loaves do you have? Go look!
- ❖ Bring them here to Me.
- ❖ Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each.
- ❖ Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost.

Group Discussion:

1. How often should you take a break from doing the work of the ministry?

The Lesson:

New ministry lessons are in store for the disciples. During their missionary journeys the disciples had been focused on the instructions that Jesus gave them about going into the harvest field. Now they are confronted with doing ministry in an impromptu setting.

Let's begin by saying that God is not a taskmaster. He doesn't drive His people hard. Jesus recognized His disciple's need for rest and relaxation and **commanded** them to take some. Many people involved in church ministries actually burn themselves out because they won't take a break.

Their failure usually is related to an issue of pride. It might be because they believe the ministry that God has given them can't do without them for a minute (self importance). Or there is no one

⁴¹ **Five thousand men.** The total number of people that Jesus fed that day could easily have been in excess of 20,000.

⁴² **Bethsaida.** A town near Capernaum which was the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip.

else to do the work (God has failed to provide). Or perhaps, they are only pleasing to God when they are doing the work of the ministry (God is a taskmaster).

God does not condone laziness but He also doesn't want His people to be workaholics either. That is why He made so many occasions in the Bible that **required** them to rest:

- One day a week.
- Seven holidays each year.
- Three vacations per year:
 - Spring, 8 days plus travel time,
 - Summer, 2 days plus travel time, and
 - Fall, 8 days plus travel time.
- The whole year off on every seventh year.
- Also the whole year off every fiftieth year.

And those were just the required rest periods!

Group Discussion:

2. How do you react when you are faced with an overwhelming sense of need?

The Lesson Continued:

As the disciples become aware of the physical needs of the people that are being taught, they approach Jesus with their concerns. Their first solution like many of ours is to send the people away letting them make provision for their own needs. It's a prudent and reasonable idea. "Let everyone be self-reliant and own their own stuff." In America, we might call this the Republican way.

But Jesus puts a stop to that idea right away. He commands His disciples, "*You give them something to eat.*" He wants the disciples to accept personal responsibility for these people's needs. And perhaps it answered for them the age-old question, "*Am I my brother's keeper*" (Genesis 4:9). From His response, Jesus evidently believed the way of love was expressed by helping those in need.

Accepting their personal responsibility the disciples present Jesus with an alternative solution. The solution like many of ours is to spend our own money in order to meet the people's needs. Surely this is a prudent and reasonable idea. "Let us accept are social responsibility and throw some money at it." In America, we might call this the Democratic way.⁴³

But Jesus puts a stop to that idea as well by forcing the disciples to think through the situation logically. Since they are out in the middle of nowhere he asks, "*Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?*" In other words He is saying:

- Do you remember it is late in the day?
- Since we are in a remote location where are you going to go to get the bread?
- Can you get enough bread for all these people to eat in one town or will you have to go to several towns?
- Which towns will you go to?

⁴³ The solutions the disciples gave Jesus illustrate the two primary ways which people handle the needs of others. This is clearly evident in the two-party dominated American political system of the 21st century. The result of this is that Democrats accuse Republicans of not having a heart and Republicans accuse Democrats of not having a brain.

- Is there a grocery store in the town or will you have to beg for bread from door to door?
- If you buy bread who takes the money if you going to different towns?
- Then how will you transport the bread back here?

Finally, Philip grasps the enormity of the situation when he replies, "*Two hundred denarii*⁴⁴ *worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.*" Bless Philip's heart. He was willing to spend all the money they had to meet the needs of the people but even he saw the futility of the idea. After spending the money they would not be able to care for themselves, promote the work of the ministry or meet future needs.

Having heard the disciple's solutions for meeting the needs of others, Jesus provides His own solution. It follows a familiar pattern, living by faith:

- **Ask** – for a revelation or word from God. This is called a **rhema**: a **personal** revelation or word from God to an individual in a situation. It is like asking for help and waiting for the answer.
 - Jesus knew what he was going to do. *And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.*
- **Seek** – speak God's plan to others looking for the resources to accomplish it.
 - *"How many loaves do you have? Go look!"*
 - *"Bring them here to Me."*
 - *And He said to His disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each."*
- **Knock** – take action on God's plan trusting that He will fulfill His word to you.
 - Thank God for His provision. *And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food.*
 - Do what He told you to do.
 - *And broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all.*
 - *"Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost." And they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish.*

Besides demonstrating the primary pattern of obtaining provision for needs, Jesus also teaches His disciples some other principles through His commands. Lets examine them. When Jesus said, "*How many loaves do you have? Go look!*" He is indicating that when a need arises look to the resources that God has **already provided** to meet the specific need.

In saying, "*Bring them here to Me.*" Jesus is stating that He wants His disciples to bring their resources to Him. As Lord of heaven and earth He can multiply even the smallest of resources to meet their need.

Jesus had His disciples group the men by fifties and one hundreds following the Old Testament pattern of serving people. The basic groupings were tens, fifties, one hundreds, and one thousands and there was one leader for each group who served the people. For example when ten men could be found a synagogue was established and the elder appointed.

⁴⁴ Evidently this is the amount of money that they had in their "bank account".

It is always appropriate to thank God for His provision as meager as it may appear. “*And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food.*”⁴⁵

Then Jesus started giving away what He had and in His giving what He had was multiplied. This comes from the Law of “sowing and reaping”.

- “**Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.**” (Luke 6:38)
- *Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have abundance for every good deed; as it is written, “HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.” Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.* (2 Corinthians 9:6-12)
- Notice, Jesus gave away **all** that He had.

Finally, Jesus told His disciples to gather up what was left over. He wants the disciples to recognize that whatever God supplies, He does so for a reason. So don’t waste His provision. Even though they may not see an immediate need for the surplus at the moment . . . it has a purpose in the future.

Group Discussion:

3. Who were the people around Jesus and what did He feed them? (Luke 4:18)
 - Poor “preached the gospel (good news)”
 - Captives “proclaimed release”
 - Blind “proclaimed recovery of sight”
 - Downtrodden “proclaimed freedom”
4. Who are the people around you?
5. How does it make you feel when you realize that you have special gifts to contribute to the world’s needs?

The Point of the Lesson:

God wants to use you to bless people and glorify His name.

Application:

Minister to the people around you.

⁴⁵ “He blessed the food.” In reality the provision (food) is never blessed, God is blessed through the giving of thanks for His provision.

Lesson 26

Fear Not!

Group Icebreaker:

Has the Lord ever told you to do something, which you found difficult to obey? If the answer is yes, describe the events.

Introduction:

When Jesus fed five thousand men with just two fish and five loaves the people were astonished. They wanted to make Him king. Knowing this, Jesus immediately told His disciples to get in the boat and return to Bethsaida⁴⁶ while He went up on the mountain to pray.

From His vantage point high on the hill Jesus could see the disciples in the distance struggling to row their boat against the wind.⁴⁷ So during the fourth watch⁴⁸ of the night He went to them walking on the water.⁴⁹

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 14:24-33, Mark 6:47-52, John 6:14-21

Jesus Walks on Water

Matthew 14:24-33, Mark 6:47-52, John 6:17-21

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

But the boat was already many **stadia**⁵⁰ away from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And seeing them straining at the oars, at about the **fourth watch of the night**,⁵¹ He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were frightened. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. And those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

⁴⁶ Bethsaida or "House of fishing" was a city located about three miles east of Capernaum on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee where the Jordan River empties into it. Bethsaida was the hometown of Andrew, Peter and Philip.

⁴⁷ Different winds blow over the lake at different times of the year. In the summer the afternoon west wind (Gharbiyeh) cools the summer heat, but causes no storms. In winter and spring the east wind (Sharkeyeh) often causes sudden dangerous storms. Late March appears to be the correct time period as John 6:4 records that the Passover of the Jews was approaching. That year it would have fallen in early April.

⁴⁸ Between 3:00 am and 6:00 am.

⁴⁹ According to the Apostle John, they had rowed about 25 to 30 stadia before Jesus came to them walking on the water. A stadion is a measure of length equivalent to 606 feet; therefore the distance would have been around three miles.

⁵⁰ **Stadia.** A stadion is a measure of length equivalent to 606 feet. According to the apostle John, the disciples had rowed about 25 to 30 stadia (about 3 miles) before Jesus came to them.

⁵¹ **Fourth watch of the night.** From 3:00 AM until 6:00 AM.

The Command:

- ❖ Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid.

Group Discussion:

1. If you were in the boat with the disciples what would you have thought about seeing Jesus walking on the water?
2. Why do you think Jesus was going to pass them by?

The Lesson:

There are several lessons that can be learned from the events in this story. The primary one involves obedience to what Jesus says to do and in doing so He will supply all that we need to complete His request. Let's take a closer look at the story.

The sequence begins when Jesus tells the disciples to get into their boat and go ahead of Him to Bethsaida on the other side of the lake. They obeyed Him immediately and even kept going when the winds and the sea made it difficult for them. Jesus observed their progress from on high. He saw the struggle they were having in complying with His commands just as He does ours. Having compassion for them He decides to walk across the lake to give them encouragement in the midst of their struggle.

It was dark on the lake that night⁵² so Jesus passed near enough to them so they would recognize Him. The miracle of walking on the water was meant to reassure them. In other words it was if He were saying, "Keep going guys, I'll see you in Bethsaida just like I said." From this impromptu encounter the disciples were supposed to understand that Jesus was aware of their difficulties but was expecting them to make it to the other side of the lake despite the obstacles.

But the outcome was surprisingly different. The disciples were terrified at His unexpected appearance, thinking they had seen a ghost. According to the Scriptures this fear was generated because they had forgotten about the miracle of the loaves and their hearts had become hardened. The disciples like many of us have forgotten that Jesus still does supernatural things in support of His people.

Group Discussion:

3. What would your reaction have been to seeing Jesus walking by you on the water?
4. Has the Lord performed any miracles in your life?
5. If He has, tell us what they were and what your reactions to them were.

The Lesson Continued:

As we look at the story as a whole we can see it is representative of what is occurring in Christians lives on earth at this time. In the midst of the struggle Jesus wants us to remember His command, "*Take courage it is I, do not be afraid*".

- At the beginning of the story Jesus commissions His disciples to go before Him to the other side of the lake where He will meet them.
 - Christians have been commissioned to preach the gospel to everyone and when that occurs He will return and meet us in the air.
 - "*Take courage it is I, do not be afraid.*"

⁵² Passover was approaching, which occurs in the middle of the month or at the full moon. They would have been making the crossing near the first of the month with little or no moon at all. The storm would have made it even more obscure.

- After Jesus leaves He goes up to a high mountain.
 - After Jesus’ resurrection He went to heaven.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid.”*
- On the mountain Jesus prays.
 - Jesus, our High Priest lives to make intercession for us.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid.”*
- Jesus saw the disciples struggling to make headway against the contrary wind.
 - He sees our struggles to do His will in a world that is contrary to God.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid.”*
- He came to the disciples in a miraculous way to encourage them.
 - He comes to us in miraculous ways to encourage us.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid.”*
- The disciples were frightened when they saw the supernatural.
 - Christians become frightened when they see the supernatural.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid”.*
- The disciples weren’t sure about the supernatural occurrence. Was it Jesus?
 - Christians wonder about supernatural occurrences as well. Is it really Jesus?
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid.”*
- Peter asked Jesus if he could join him in the miracle.
 - Some Christians want to participate in the miraculous things Jesus is doing.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid”.*
- The other disciples remained in the boat.
 - Some Christians don’t want to participate in the miraculous.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid”.*
- By faith Peter obeyed Jesus and got out of the boat.
 - By faith Christians obey Jesus and participate in the supernatural.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid”.*
- Peter took his eyes off Jesus and became distracted by the wind.
 - Christians take their eyes off of Jesus and become distracted by the circumstances surrounding them.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid”.*
- When Peter got into trouble he cried out to Jesus to save him and was rescued.
 - Christians cry out to Jesus and He rescues them.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid”.*
- Jesus told Peter, *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”*
 - Jesus tells Christians, *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”*
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid”.*
- When Jesus got in the boat the wind ceased.
 - It is easier for Christians to reach their objectives when Jesus is along for the ride.
 - *“Take courage it is I, do not be afraid”*

Group Discussion:

6. After Peter had just walked on the water why did Jesus say, “You of little faith”?
7. What would have been great faith?

8. Why do doubt?
9. Why are you fearful?

The Point of the Lesson:

Jesus cares for you and will help you.

Application:

Remember, there are **365** “fear nots” in the Scriptures, enough for one a day all year long.
Use them everyday!

Lesson 27

A Little Leaven

Introduction:

The storm on the lake subsided when Jesus got in the boat with His disciples but a different kind of storm was already brewing when they landed. The multitudes were seeking Jesus so He made Himself available to them. Using the feeding of 5,000 men with five loaves and two fish as His basis, Jesus launched into a discussion about working for food.

The essence of the discussion was two-fold: The work that God wants people to do is to believe in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and the food they are to eat is His body and blood. The discussion set off a firestorm of controversy. Many of the disciples believed that Jesus was telling them to participate in cannibalism, so they quit following Him. Then the scribes and Pharisees cornered Jesus when they observed His disciples eating bread before washing their hands.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 15:1-20, 16:5-12, Mark 7:1-23, 8:13-21

Defilement Comes from the Heart

Matthew 15:1-20, Mark 7:1-23

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'⁵³ "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER';⁵⁴ and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH';⁵⁵ but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." And after He called the multitude to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear." Then the

⁵³ **Isaiah 29:13.** 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'

⁵⁴ **Exodus 20:12.** 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER.'

⁵⁵ **Exodus 21:17.** 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.'

disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." And Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." And He said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

Matthew 16:5-12, Mark 8:13-21

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. And they had forgotten to take bread; and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, "It is because we took no bread." But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR?⁵⁶ And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Commands:

- ❖ Listen to Me, all of you, and understand.
- ❖ If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.
- ❖ Let them alone.
- ❖ Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Group Discussion:

1. Name a tradition we practice in this church?
2. What is the origin of the tradition?
3. Who authorized it?
4. Why do we hold to it?

The Lesson:

Tradition is important. It is a way to **hand down** information, beliefs and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without **written** instruction. Every society on earth utilizes tradition. It helps people relate to one another and maintain an ordered way of life. When the scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus' disciples for eating before washing their hands they were appealing to a long-standing tradition. Many of us had parents who held to the same tradition.

⁵⁶ **Jeremiah 5:21.** HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR?

Jesus used the tradition of washing hands before eating as an opportunity to teach about **defilement** or in other words “things that make people unclean.” Within the topic there are three lessons to be learned. They are so important that Jesus commanded the people to hear and understand what He was saying.

The first lesson is that whatever one eats does not make him **unclean**. This was hard for the Jewish audience to hear and understand as they practiced the strict dietary laws (kashrut) of the Law of Moses. Jesus did not abolish the Jewish kosher laws as some are inclined to believe. He merely stated that what people ate did not make them unclean because what went into the mouth was processed in the stomach with the body utilizing what was good and eliminating the waste.

The Apostle Peter was directly confronted with this issue several years later when He saw a vision concerning the Gentiles. That reference is Acts 10:9-15.

On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.” Again a voice came to him a second time, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.” This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

Peter obeyed the vision. He went to the Gentiles and preached the gospel. It wasn't until the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they began speaking in tongues and exalting God that Peter could fully accept them. And even then he lapsed back into his old beliefs until the Apostle Paul confronted him face to face. (Galatians 2:11-21)

In the second lesson Jesus insisted that what is **spoken** comes from the heart and makes a person unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murderers, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness and slander. Words reveal what is in the heart and the Scriptures give many admonitions concerning what a person should speak. Here are just a few:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (Proverbs 18:21)

But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. (James 3:8-10)

Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent. (Proverbs 17:28)

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matthew 12:36-38)

When Peter heard the Gentiles speaking in tongues and exalting God, he realized God had given them a new heart. This was a confirmation of Jesus' teaching that what is spoken comes from the heart. Therefore, these people were to be considered clean by God.

The last lesson dealt with teaching human tradition as equal to or greater than God's commands. Jesus clearly showed the scribes and Pharisees they were valuing the oral law, consisting of the Mishna, Gemara and other works above Scripture (Torah). *"But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."* Since they were also teaching others to do the same Jesus commanded His disciples to leave them alone.

Some time later Jesus reminded the disciples to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He likened their **teaching to leaven**. As **leaven** permeates every part of the substance in which it is placed, so too does **teaching**. What people are taught affects them for a lifetime.

Both the Pharisees and Sadducees⁵⁷ placed their oral traditions above God's word. And in doing so they were defiled, unclean and impure. Remember, Jesus just got through telling His disciples that what comes out of a person's mouth defiles him. And by their words they were showing they valued their tradition above God's word, therefore their hearts were unclean.

It is one thing for an individual to be unclean but quite another when he infects another through teaching. In his epistle, James the brother of Jesus, supports this idea when he says, *"My brethren, be not many masters,⁵⁸ knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."*

Group Discussion:

5. Name a church tradition that is **contrary** to Scripture?
6. What is the origin of the tradition?
7. Who authorized it?
8. Why do people hold to it?

The Point of the Lesson:

Consider carefully the words you speak.

Application:

Reflect on the traditions that you hold and teach others. Do they violate God's word?

⁵⁷ As a group, the Pharisees generally added to God's word. For example of this was they added many prohibitions to working on the Sabbath. One of these was that it was unlawful to start a fire on the Sabbath. The Sadducees tended to subtract from God's word. One example of this was that they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

⁵⁸ Instructor or teacher.

Lesson 28

Taking Up the Cross

Introduction:

It is September in our year 30 AD, three years after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. The summer harvest is nearly complete and the autumn winds of change are in the air. Jesus senses the change too. He and his disciples have been preaching the gospel and ministering to people wherever they go. But he knows His time on earth is short and he has many things left to teach them. It's time to prepare them for the unexpected . . . His impending death. Taking the disciples with Him, Jesus travels the twenty-five miles up the Jordan River from Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee to Caesarea Philippi at the foot of Mount Hermon . . . a fitting place to talk about the subject of death.

In 20 AD, King Herod the Great received the whole district of Caesarea Philippi from Augustus Caesar and dedicated a temple to the emperor there. Herod's son Philip enlarged the town and called it Caesarea Philippi to distinguish it from his father's city of Caesarea on the seacoast. What is significant about Caesarea Philippi is that it was originally a Canaanite sanctuary, probably Baal Hermon, which was dedicated to the worship of Baal. And within its confines stood a large cavern, which was known to be the entries point to the realm of the dead . . . the gate of Hades.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 16:13-28, 17:22-23, Mark 8:27-9:1, 9:30-32, Luke 9:18-27, 9:43-45

Taking Up the Cross

Matthew 16:13-21, Mark 8:27-31, Luke 9:18-22

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

Now when Jesus came into the district of **Caesarea Philippi**,⁵⁹ He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon **Barjona**,⁶⁰ because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are **Peter**,⁶¹ and upon this **rock**⁶² I will build My **church**,⁶³ and the **gates**⁶⁴ of Hades⁶⁵ shall not overpower it.⁶⁶ I will give you the **keys**⁶⁷ of

⁵⁹ **Caesarea Philippi.** A city located about 25 miles north of Bethsaida at the foot of Mt. Hermon.

⁶⁰ **Barjona.** "Son of Jonah".

⁶¹ **Peter.** The name in Greek is Petros meaning a rock or small stone.

⁶² **Rock.** The Greek word is Petra meaning foundation stone. (Jesus said that His Church was going to be built on the foundation stone [truth, principle, or fact] of Peter's statement that declared Jesus, as the Christ, the Son of the living God.)

⁶³ **Church.** The Greek word is ekklesia meaning "called out ones". The Hebrew equivalent, kahal means assembly, congregation, or community. Both of these words refer to people. Neither of them refers to an institution or a building.

⁶⁴ **Gates.** The entry or departure points of a fortified place or stronghold (i.e., a walled city). Gates were closed in dangerous times to prevent entrance by enemies attempting to overpower the stronghold. This is called going on the defense. Gates were opened to allow the stronghold's resources to be released against an enemy. This is called going on the attack.

⁶⁵ **Gates of Hades.** Entry and departure points into the realm of the dead.

the kingdom of heaven;⁶⁸ and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

True Discipleship

Matthew 16:24-28, Mark 8:34-9:1, Luke 9:23-27

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels; and WILL THEN RECOMPENSE EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS." And He was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

Jesus Prophesies His Death

Matthew 17:22-23, Mark 9:30-32, Luke 9:43-45

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And from there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He was unwilling for anyone to know about it. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears; the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved. But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.

The Command:

- ❖ Let these words sink into your hears.

Group Discussion:

1. Would you like to know when you are going to die? Why or why not?
2. How would you like to die?

⁶⁶ **Shall not overpower it.** Jesus simply means that the power of death cannot kill the Church, by opening its gates and attacking. Nor can it stop the Church from taking souls out of the realm of the dead by closing its gates and defending the stronghold.

⁶⁷ **Keys.** Instruments used for either locking or unlocking the gates of strongholds.

⁶⁸ **Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.** One key locks (binds or closes) the gates of Heaven, thus barring entrance and keeping its blessing from being released. The other key unlocks (looses or opens) the gates of Heaven to provide entrance and releasing of it's blessing. Peter first used these keys to release heaven's blessing on the first Feast of Pentecost following Christ's resurrection from the dead. He declared, "*Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.*" (Acts 2:38-39)

The Lesson:

Jesus introduced the subject of His death by asking the disciples who people thought he, the Son of Man, was. They respond by saying that people think He is one of the prophets who has returned from the dead. Then He asked the disciples who they thought He was. Peter answered for them, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

By his answer, Jesus recognized that God had revealed to Peter the identity of the Son of Man.⁶⁹ Immediately He responds with several shocking statements, the import of which would not fully be comprehended until after His resurrection from the dead.

1. Jesus referred to Peter as Barjona, which means son of Jonah. This was a fitting title for Peter who would be the first to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, much as was his forerunner the prophet Jonah, who also took his message to the Gentiles.
2. Peter’s real name was Simon, but Jesus called him, “Peter”. The name in Greek is Petros meaning a rock or small stone. A small stone is solid and strong but can be moved.
3. Jesus referred to Peter’s statement, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”, as the rock on which His Church would be built. The Greek word for this rock is Petra meaning foundation stone. A foundation stone is also solid and strong but cannot be moved.
4. Jesus said He would build His church. The Greek word for church is ekklesia meaning “called out ones”. The Hebrew equivalent, kahal means assembly, congregation, or community. Both of these words refer to people, not an institution or a building. The fact that Jesus was starting his own community of believers would have come as a great surprise to the disciples since it was not **directly** revealed in the Torah (Old Testament). However the concept was alluded to several times.⁷⁰
5. He also said that the gates of Hades would not overpower His church. In saying this He indicated a two-fold meaning: 1) that the church could never be killed, as it would last forever and 2) that the church could not be prevented from taking souls out of the realm of the dead.
6. In addition, Jesus said He would give His disciples the keys to the kingdom. This would have been surprising news to them since the Pharisees of that day claimed to hold the keys to Heaven.⁷¹ One key locks⁷² the gates of Heaven, thus barring entrance and keeping blessings from being released. The other key unlocks⁷³ the gates of Heaven thus allowing entrance and releasing of its blessings. The term bind simply means to forbid something and to loose means to permit something. There are two primary uses of the authority to bind and loose: 1) prayer and 2) making legal decisions regarding communal life within a church body.

⁶⁹ Daniel 7:13-14 – “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the **clouds of heaven** one like a **Son of Man** was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. **And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom**, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.”

⁷⁰ Exodus 32:9-10 – “The LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.’”

Deuteronomy 32:21 – “They have made Me jealous with what is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.”

Isaiah 65:1 – “I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here am I, here am I,’ to a nation which did not call on My name.”

⁷¹ According to Josephus in his “Wars of the Jews 1:5:2”.

⁷² Binds – forbids – closes

⁷³ Looses – permits – opens

7. Finally, Jesus tells the disciples that He must go to Jerusalem where He will be persecuted and killed. But then He reassures them that He will be raised from the dead on the third day.

If the previous revelations weren't enough, Jesus challenges His hearers with this statement. *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross⁷⁴ daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”* Jesus makes it quite clear that discipleship is costly. There is no “cheap grace” in being a Christian or some primrose path to follow in doing God’s will. Jesus’ statement is a sobering thought to all who call themselves, Christians . . . that is to say, we who follow Christ. Can we deny ourselves . . . by giving up what we want to do to serve another? Can we embrace and carry our cross daily⁷⁵ . . . the very thing that just kills us to do? Or can we follow Jesus . . . by obeying what He tells us to do?

Group Discussion:

3. Name one thing that you can give up to serve another?
4. Name one thing that Jesus has told you to do?

The Point of the Lesson:

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ will cost you your life.

Application:

1. Check to see if your motives are pure.
2. Don't be fearful or anxious about your life.
3. Believe what God has told you to do, and then do it.

⁷⁴ The cross was the Roman method of executing non-citizen lawbreakers. The Jewish people used only four methods of execution: stoning, burning, beheading and strangling. Hanging someone from a tree (cross) was not one of them. The reason for this was that according to Deuteronomy 21:22-23 when someone was hanged he was accursed by God. This was how the Apostle Paul was able to make his statement in Galatians 3:13. *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE”.*

⁷⁵ Carrying our cross daily consists of accomplishing the purpose for which God created us. Anything that causes us to turn aside from that task should be denied. For example, Jesus' purpose was to die on a cross that men might be saved and nothing deterred him from accomplishing that task.

Lesson 29

Listen to Jesus

Group Icebreaker:

Do you have a desire to know the future? Why?

Introduction:

Upon ending the discourse of His impending death and the rise of the church Jesus left the disciples with a mysterious but hopeful statement. *“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”* At that point the disciples had no idea what Jesus meant by the statement but within a few days three of them would experience it first-hand.

This happened when Jesus asked Peter, James and John to accompany Him on a trek up the high mountain⁷⁶ to pray. We know that this event occurred early in the Jewish month of Tishri, which is the 7th month⁷⁷ on God’s calendar. After the steep arduous ascent the disciples were weary and fell asleep. As the disciples slept Jesus prayed and while praying His appearance changed. His face shined like the sun and His clothing became white as light. The kingdom of God had appeared with power and glory.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 9:1-13, Luke 9:28-36

The Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-3, Mark 9:1-4, Luke 9:28-32

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

AD 30, September 16 – Feast of Trumpets⁷⁸

And some eight days after these sayings, it came about that He took along Peter and John and James, and went up to the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were

⁷⁶ Scholars are divided in their opinion as to which mountain is the Mount of Transfiguration. Some say Hermon while others favor Tabor. I lean towards Mount Hermon for the following reasons. Jesus and His disciples had been spending time in the area of Caesarea Philippi, which lies at the southern foot of Mt Hermon. Mt Tabor on the other hand is fifty miles south of Caesarea Philippi, about six miles southeast of Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. The Scriptures indicate that it was a high mountain. Mt Hermon is the highest mountain in Israel at 9,232 feet whereas Mt Tabor is a modest 1,929 feet in elevation.

⁷⁷ The fact that the “transfiguration” occurred early in the seventh month can be determined from Scripture. By using the gospels of Luke and John in conjunction, the next major event to occur after the transfiguration was Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth), which began on the 15th day of the seventh month. The second witness is Peter’s statement when he saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus, *“let us make three tabernacles”*. The tabernacles that Peter was talking about were sukkahs, temporary tent-like structures made out of tree branches. The Jews usually started erecting them immediately after the Day of Atonement, which was on the 10th day of the seventh month. They lived in these temporary shelters during the entire Feast of Tabernacles.

⁷⁸ **Feast of Trumpets.** Today Jews call this Rosh Hashanah (New Year) although the Biblical name is Yom Teruah (Day of Sounding the Trump or Day of Warning). This feast also has two other names that represent themes connected with it. They are Yom Hazikaron (Day of Memorial or Remembrance) and Yom Haddin (Day of Judgment). All of these names point to God’s sovereignty and kingship while declaring that men should repent and prepare for His coming.

speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him.

Matthew 17:4-13, Mark 9:5-13, Luke 9:33-36
Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And it came about, as these were parting from Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – not realizing what he was saying. And while he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "THIS IS MY SON, MY CHOSEN ONE; LISTEN TO HIM!" And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid. And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone. And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." And they seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead might mean. And they asked Him, saying, "Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.

The Commands:

- ❖ **THIS IS MY SON, MY CHOSEN ONE; LISTEN TO HIM!**
- ❖ Arise, and do not be afraid.
- ❖ Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.

The Lesson:

As we begin this lesson we must remember that what the disciples saw was a **vision** . . . not the **real** thing. The vision was a portrayal of **future** events, much as was the vision given to the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos many years later. And without that revelation we would be limited in our understanding just as the disciples were. What transpired on the Mount of Transfiguration just as the disciples were. However, by using the Book of Revelation we can gain a better understanding of those events.

When the disciples awoke from their sleep, they saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. From this we can make several observations:

1. *Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses of the book of Revelation.* "And I will grant authority to my **two witnesses**, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." (Revelation 11:3)
2. *Moses and Elijah are* "the two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth." (Revelation 11:4)
 - a) *The olive trees are referenced in the book of Zechariah.* He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; also **two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side.**" Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?" Then he said, "These are the **two**

anointed ones who are **standing by the Lord** of the whole earth.” (Zechariah 4:2-4 and 11)

- b) *Moses and Elijah, as the witnesses are called lampstands because they represent the Law and the Prophets, which provide heavenly light to live by.*
3. *On the Mt of Transfiguration we see Moses, representing the Law and Elijah, representing the Prophets speaking with Jesus, the Word of God. Both Moses the Law and Elijah the Prophets testify of Jesus the Word of God.*
4. *As witnesses of Jesus, Moses and Elijah also represent the following:*

Moses

The Father

Truth

Domestic Olive Tree

Israel, who was given the Law

Those who have died

Elijah

The Holy Spirit

Spirit

Wild Olive Tree

Church, who was given the Spirit

Those who are living

Jesus had told the disciples that some of them would not die until they had **seen** the kingdom of God, **after** it had come in power.⁷⁹ In the vision both Moses and Elijah appeared in their **glorified** state and the apostles knew their identities. This indicates that the time of the vision is **after** the two witnesses of the book of Revelation are killed and resurrected from the dead. (Revelation 11:7)

1. *Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will **all be changed**, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the **last trumpet**; for the trumpet will sound, and **the dead will be raised imperishable**, and we **will be changed**. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “**DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY**.” (1 Corinthians 15:49-54)*
2. None of the disciples had seen Moses or Elijah on earth before, so they wouldn’t have known them on sight. However, the disciples did know who they were. This indicates that their heavenly identity was revealed to the apostles.
3. The book of Revelation also supports the time of the vision because the next major event to occur after the witnesses’ death and resurrection is the sounding of the seventh and last trump. With the blowing of the trumpet loud voices in heaven declare, “*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever.*” This is the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ on earth or “the kingdom of God after it has come in power.”

Exactly when, Jesus will begin His reign on the earth has been a subject of much debate. The vision doesn’t tell us exactly when this event will take place but it does give the time of year for its occurrence . . . early in the seventh month of God’s calendar. This was derived from Peter’s statement about the construction of tabernacles (sukkahs) for Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

There are two significant feasts of the Lord that occur early in the seventh month of Tishri. On the first day of the month is Yom Teruah, the Day of Blowing the Trumpet and it is a Sabbath Day. The day is also called Rosh Ha Shannah (Head of the Year or New Years Day), Yom

⁷⁹ “The kingdom of God after it has come in power” is just another way of describing the millennial reign of Christ on the earth.

Hazikaron (Day of Remembrance) and Yom Haddin (Day of Judgment). On the tenth day of the month is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It is also a Sabbath Day and the only fast that God declared. Following these two feasts of the Lord is Tabernacles, which begins on the fifteenth day of the month. The first day of the feast and the eighth day are also Sabbath Days. From the evidence of Scripture I believe that the “transfiguration” occurred on Yom Teruah, the Day of Blowing the Trumpet. Hence the beginning of Jesus reign on earth would begin at the same time.

1. The book of Revelation says that His reign begins just prior to the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet blast. On Yom Teruah trumpets are blown throughout the day and as the day draws to a close the **last trump** is sounded with the note Tekiah Godola . . . an extended blast. In theory this note does not **end** until it is blown again ten days later at the end of the Day of Atonement.
2. The prophecy in chapter seven of the book of Daniel concerning the Son of Man supports Yom Teruah as well.
 - *I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was blaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and **the books were opened**. Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time. I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, **with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man** was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. **And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.***
 - The Hebrew teaching is that on Yom Teruah, God opens three books:
 - The Book of Life** – those who are found therein are sealed for life.
 - The Book of the Dead** – those who are found therein are wicked and sealed for judgment.
 - The Book of Repentance** – this book includes most people whose works are neither good nor bad and they have until Yom Kippur to repent. This is called the **sealing**. Jews wish each other a good sealing for the year to come, and then say, “Next year in Jerusalem.”
3. On the Mt of Transfiguration, God, himself spoke out loud saying, “*This is My Son, My chosen one, Listen to Him.*” This is the Ancient of Days bestowing dominion, glory and a kingdom upon His Son, the Son of Man.
4. The disciples didn’t come down from the mountain until the following day indicating that it might have been the Sabbath, therefore required to rest.
5. The “transfiguration” probably **didn’t** occur on the Day of Atonement because that would have given Jesus only one week of travel to reach Jerusalem by the middle of the feast of Tabernacles. The journey from Mt. Hermon would have been five or six days which makes it possible for Jesus to do. However, in order to accomplish the intervening events it would indicate a somewhat longer period of time.
6. On the day following the “transfiguration” we see that the disciples could not cast a demon out of one child. Jesus explains to them that that kind of demon did not come out but by prayer and fasting. This indicates that the disciples had not been in prayer and fasting on

the previous day, which eliminates the Day of Atonement because both prayer and fasting are requirements of that feast day.

While Jesus, Moses and Elijah were speaking a **bright cloud** overshadowed the whole party. The cloud is called the **Shekinah** in Hebrew. It is the **cloud of glory** that surrounds God himself. This cloud is seen several times in Scripture. It was the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led the Israelites out of Egypt. It was the smoke and fire that enveloped Mt Sinai from which the trumpets sounded and God's voice was heard speaking the Ten Commandments. And it was the smoke that filled Solomon's Temple at the dedication ceremony.

As the cloud began to descend upon the whole party God spoke a commandment to the disciples, *"This is My Son, My chosen one, Listen⁸⁰ to Him."* The disciples fell on their faces and were terrified but they got the point; they needed to do the things that Jesus commanded them to do. Immediately, in the twinkling of an eye, Moses, Elijah and the cloud disappeared. This reminds us of the resurrection of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:12 *"And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' Then they went up into heaven in the cloud."* When the vision ended Jesus touched His disciples and told them to get up and not be afraid.

Group Discussion:

1. Have you ever had a vision?
2. If you have, what was it like?
3. How does the Old Testament portion of scripture end? Read the last three verses (Malachi 4:4-6).
4. Why do you think Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone the vision until after He had risen from the dead?
5. After Peter made his statement about building the three sukkahs, why do you think the Scriptures add this commentary, "not realizing what he was saying"?
 - Peter did not realize He was seeing a vision but thought it was real.
 - It was the Sabbath; therefore he would not be permitted to build the sukkahs.
 - The Day of Atonement had not come yet; therefore by tradition he should wait until the day following it before beginning his construction.
 - Another reason?

The Point of the Lesson:

Hear and obey Jesus now . . . before He returns!

Application:

Read Malachi 3:16 - 4:6

Read Daniel 7

Read Revelation 11

⁸⁰ Hear and obey.

Lesson 30

Becoming Offended

Group Icebreakers:

- What is one thing that people do that really offends you?
- How does it make you feel?

Introduction:

After descending the Mt of Transfiguration Jesus had an encounter with a demon-possessed child before continuing His journey back to Capernaum where we find the tax gatherers confronting Peter regarding he and Jesus' temple tax obligation, in which Jesus reply's by instructing Peter in this matter, ". . . so that **we do not offend them**, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me," (Matthew 17:24-27). Jesus used this conversation with Peter as a means to introduce the subject of "Offenses" to His disciples.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 17:14-27, Mark 9:14-38, Luke 9:37-49

The Question of the Temple Tax

Matthew 17:24-27

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected **the two-drachma tax**⁸¹ came to Peter, and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" And upon his saying, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Consequently the sons are exempt. But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a **stater**."⁸² Take that and give it to them for you and Me."

Humble Yourselves . . . Serve Other Believers

Matthew 18:1-5, Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:46-48

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. And sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all." And taking a child, He set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." And taking him in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me; for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great."

⁸¹ **The two-drachma** or Temple tax was imposed annually on all males twenty years of age and older for the maintenance and upkeep of the Temple. It amounted to two-days wages.

⁸² **Stater**. Also called a tetradrachma, the stater was the equivalent of 4 drachmas.

Group Discussion:

1. What do you think of people, who talk about themselves all the time and brag about their accomplishments?
2. Is it offensive to you? Why?

Introduction Continued:

Knowing that the disciples had been discussing who was the greatest among them, Jesus **doesn't take offense** at it or rebuke them. Instead, He gently begins to instruct them about the subject of greatness. He starts by seating a child in front of them and then makes two profound statements:

- a) Unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.
- b) Whoever humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus then takes the child into His arms and makes three more statements:

- c) Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me.
- d) Whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent me.
- e) He who is least among you, this is the one who is great.

Group Discussion:

3. Take a few minutes to reflect on what Jesus had to say in the five statements and write down any observations you made.
4. What qualities do children have that adults **tend** to lack?
5. What childlike quality do you need to recapture?

Reading the Scripture:

Mark 9:38-41, Luke 9:49-50

Becoming Offended

Mark 9:38-41 and Luke 9:49-50

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

The Command:

- ❖ Do not hinder him.

The Lesson:

Many times, Christians become offended at others who claim to be Christians, but don't hold to the exact form of belief they do. In other words ... they're not orthodox. The number of denominations of Christianity that exist on this planet today evidences this. Add to those all the independent and house churches and we see that there are an awful lot of people who claim to follow Christ in this world that don't always see eye to eye on issues of doctrine.

Jesus addressed a **similar** issue when the apostle John approached Him saying, "*we saw someone casting out demons in Your name and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us.*" Jesus could have taken offense at the other person like His disciples had but chose not to. Instead,

He told the disciples not to **take** offense by explaining, “*He who is not against us is for us.*” Then He told them not to **give** offense when He said, “*Do not to hinder him.*”

By using the “hinder” Jesus gave His disciples a chance to reflect on ways they could be giving offense to others. For example:

- a) Do not put a stumbling block in his way.
 - By **requiring** him to be a member of our group.
 - By **discrediting** him to others.
 - By **rebuking** him.
- b) Do not restrain him.
 - From **doing** the work of the ministry.
 - From **using** the name of Jesus.

Being able to **identify** whether someone is for or against Christ is invaluable for Christians. For example, the Apostle Paul cautioned Christians to “*not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?*” (2 Corinthians 6:14-15) How then can Christians determine whether someone **they do not know** is for Christ or against Him? Jesus gave his disciples two signs to look for: 1) Gifts of the Holy Spirit, which is the power of God, used in conjunction with the name of Jesus and 2) Fruit of the Spirit, which is the love of God, used in conjunction with the name of Jesus.

The first indicator or sign that a person is a believer in Jesus Christ is the use of spiritual gifts. “*These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*” (Mark 16:17-18) When the disciples saw the individual casting out demons in Jesus’ name they could be assured that it was by the power of God.

Exorcisms existed at the time of Jesus and were recognized as a work of God. An exorcism was viewed as the kingdom of God coming into conflict with the kingdom of Satan. It was considered part of God’s covenant with Israel; that He would deliver or save His people from their enemies. This can be evidenced by Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees who accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. “*Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges.*” (Matthew 12:25-27)

Jesus knew that it was the Holy Spirit who delivers or saves people and went so far as to say that **speaking against** the Holy Spirit was the unpardonable sin. “*He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.*” (Matthew 12:30-32) Therefore, when the disciples came to Jesus saying they saw someone casting out demons in His name, He realized that it was the Holy Spirit working through him.

Some people use the name of Jesus to work a miracle, but if they don’t belong to Him it has no effect. A case in point occurred in about 54 AD when the Apostle Paul was at Ephesus. *But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who*

had the evil spirits **the name of the Lord Jesus**, saying, “I adjure you by Jesus **whom Paul preaches**.” Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, **but who are you?**” And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. (Acts 19:13-17)

The second indicator or sign that a person is a believer in Jesus Christ is when he evidences the fruit of the Spirit or the love of God. *By this all men will know that **you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.***” (John 13:35) This can be observed when someone does an act of kindness to another because he is a fellow Christian. Jesus put it this way. “*For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.*”

The Point of the Lesson:

Guard against becoming easily offended by fellow believers.

Application:

If a fellow believer offends you this next week, reflect on **why** you became offended and **how** you handled it.

Bring a photograph of yourself as a child to the next meeting.

Lesson 31

Causing Stumbling Blocks⁸³

Group Icebreaker:

Pass around each other's photographs of themselves when they were young children.

Introduction:

Jesus began His teaching on offenses by seating a child in front of the disciples. He told them that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven people must be **converted** and then **become** like children. By saying this Jesus was equating that **all believers** are **children**. Then Jesus took the child in His arms indicating how He lovingly accepts all believers as children and treats them accordingly. During His entire discourse on how to treat fellow believers Jesus holds the child in His arms. It is a visual reminder to the disciples of how He expects them to treat each other.

Group Discussion:

Have each person hold up his own photograph in front of him.

Look at each person in the room, seeing them as children being held in Jesus' arms.

1. What comes to your mind?
2. How then do you think Jesus wants you treat them?

Reading the Scripture:

Causing Stumbling Blocks

Matthew 18:6-10, Mark 9:42-48

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

"And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off,⁸⁴ it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.⁸⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

The Commands:

- ❖ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.⁸⁶
- ❖ If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off.
- ❖ If your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out.

⁸³ The Greek word for stumbling block is "skandalon" from whence comes our English word scandal. The word can also be interpreted as "occasion to fall", "offense" or "thing that offends". It denotes a snare, an entrapment or something that trips up. It is used in the Scriptures to refer to something that **entices** a person to sin, apostasy or cause displeasure to God.

⁸⁴ **Cut it off.** Get rid of anything that causes you to fall.

⁸⁵ **Isaiah 66:24.** THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

⁸⁶ Cut it off or cast it out simply means to get rid of anything that causes you to stumble.

The Lesson:

Jesus begins His lesson on stumbling blocks with this statement. *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.”* When people read this passage of Scripture most think Jesus is talking about children, however upon rereading the passage it actually says **these little ones who believe**. Little ones who believe can be taken in a narrow context to mean children who follow Christ. However, the proper application is to all Christians since He just got through telling the disciples no one could enter the kingdom of heaven unless they become like children. It is from this perspective that the lesson is taught.

Jesus declared that anyone who placed a stumbling block in front of a believer would suffer dire consequences. In fact, it would be better if the man died rather than cause a believer to stumble. From Scripture⁸⁷ we find a perfect example of people who caused others to stumble. The two men involved in the plot were Balaam, a prophet and Balak, king of Moab. King Balak hired Balaam to curse the children of Israel but God did not permit Balaam to do that. So for monetary gain, Balaam told King Balak how to get God to destroy His own people. The women of Moab were to **entice** the men of Israel to commit sexual immorality and then they would be able to lead them into idolatry. The same stumbling block occurs in the Church of Pergamum, one of the seven churches of the book of Revelation. *‘But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a **stumbling block** before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.* (Revelation 2:14)

Perhaps we can gain a better understanding of Jesus’ teaching when we reflect on how stumbling happens. First, a person can only stumble when he is **walking** or **running**. Secondly, people stumble because they **don’t see the obstacle**. This can occur for any of the following reasons: 1) they are blind 2) it is dark 3) they are not paying attention to where they are going or 4) they step into a hidden trap. Third, every stumble constitutes a **change in direction** of the body. Lets look at some Scriptures that apply to each point.

Walking and running:

- *For we **walk** by faith, not by sight.* (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- *So that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not **walk** according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* (Romans 8:4)
- *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **run** with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith . . .* (Hebrews 12:1-2)

They don’t see the obstacle:

- **Blind** – *But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has **blinded** his eyes.* (1 John 2:11)
 - This blindness also occurs in the Church of Laodicea, one of the seven churches of the book of Revelation.
 - *Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and **blind** and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the*

⁸⁷ Number 22:1–25:2

shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. (Revelation 3:17-18)

- **It is dark** – *Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” (John 11:9-10)*
- **Not paying attention to where they are going** – *Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.” (John 8:12)*
- **Stepped into a hidden trap** – *You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? (Galatians 5:7)*

Change in direction:

- *I am amazed that you are so quickly **deserting Him** who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; (Galatians 1:6)*
- *Let no one in any way deceive you, for it [the coming of the Lord and our gathering together to Him] will not come unless the **apostasy** comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (2 Thessalonians 2:3)*
- *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and **fall** from your own steadfastness, (2 Peter 3:17)*

One of the things that make Jesus’ teaching interesting is that He approaches the subject of **causing stumbling blocks** from two different perspectives: 1) what one person does to another and 2) what one does to himself. As incredible as it sounds, believers can trip themselves up and they suffer the same fate as those who set stumbling blocks for others.

Jesus cautions His hearers that stumbling blocks can be created by: 1) what you do (hands) 2) where you walk (feet) and 3) what you see (eyes).

Group Discussion:

3. What are some ways that you can cause a believer to stumble?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____

The Point of the Lesson:

Don’t be a stumbling block to anyone.

Application:

Reflect on what things in your life are offensive to other believers. **Confess** them and **repent**.

Lesson 32

Reproving A Believer

Group Icebreakers:

- How do societies deal with lawbreakers?
- What is the primary goal in treating the lawbreaker this way?

Introduction:

Jesus held a child in His arms when He instructed the disciples about not causing stumbling blocks for others or themselves. And then, recognizing that children are prone to making mistakes, Jesus transitions His teaching to dealing with a believer who is straying from the truth by engaging in sin. He was not talking about petty offenses, the little things that so easily annoy us: a person's habits, social skills, manners or politics.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 18:11-20

Don't Let a Straying Believer Perish

Matthew 18:11-15

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."

Matthew 18:16-20

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.⁸⁸ Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that **if two of you agree**⁸⁹ on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

The Commands:

- ❖ See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones.
- ❖ Go and reprove him in private.
- ❖ Take one or two more with you.

⁸⁸ **As a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.** Individuals who were considered as not being a part of the congregation of Israel with the benefit of fellowship.

⁸⁹ **If two of you agree.** This statement pertains to individuals coming together to make a judgment, as to whether something is to be permitted or forbidden.

- ❖ Tell it to the church.
- ❖ Let him be to you as a gentile and a tax-gatherer.

The Lesson:

Jesus begins the teaching with this statement. *See that you do not despise one of these little ones,⁹⁰ for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*

To despise someone means to look down on them or to think less of them. There are many reasons people despise others. For example, they are not smart enough, they are poor, they have failed in some way or their moral standards are not up to par. In each case, the despiser is behaving in a prideful manner and is in fact passing judgment on the other. Jesus had instructed the disciples previously on this issue. *Do not judge lest you be judged⁹¹ and first take the log out of your own eye.⁹²*

Group Discussion:

1. Why do you think this first step in dealing with an offending believer is important?
2. According to Matthew 18:11-14, what is the goal of dealing with an offending believer?

The Lesson Continued:

Having addressed the two issues of 1) judging one's own heart before reproving a fellow believer and 2) having as a goal to restore the offending believer, Jesus then outlines a four-step process in dealing with the offender. Each step in the process is based on the law of love. *"However you want people to treat you, so treat them."⁹³ And as such, each step in the process is designed to give the offender an opportunity to repent. The **way** the offender is treated is based on whether he repents of his sin or not. This lesson deals with those who **do not repent** while the next lesson deals with those who do.*

The first step involves the person who observes a believer sinning. He is to go to the offender and reprove him in private. From this we can see that it is always the **responsibility** of the offended party to reprove the offender. If he does not do this he is guilty of not fulfilling the law of love himself. In other words he would rather see the offender continue in sin and suffer punishment from God than reprove him. It also shows a lack of love and concern towards others who may be affected by the sin.

In approaching the offender privately the offended individual is demonstrating that he desires to prevent further **embarrassment** to the offender by covering his shame. Two Old Testament examples of covering another's shame are: 1) When God provided animal skins for Adam and Eve to cover the shame of their nakedness after they had sinned⁹⁴ and 2) when Japheth and Shem covered their father, Noah's nakedness.⁹⁵ Wisdom from the book of Proverbs supports this action as well. *Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions⁹⁶ and a fool's anger is known at once, but a prudent man conceals dishonor.⁹⁷*

⁹⁰ Within the context of his teaching on offenses, Jesus equates little ones or children to Christians/Disciples.

⁹¹ Matthew 7:1

⁹² Matthew 7:5

⁹³ Matthew 7:12

⁹⁴ Genesis 3:3 and 22

⁹⁵ Genesis 10:23

⁹⁶ Proverbs 10:12

⁹⁷ Proverbs 12:16

If the offender does not repent it is an indication that he is being **stubborn**. Therefore, the second step is to take one or two more individuals to confront the offender *so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed*.⁹⁸ The witnesses play an important role. First, because of their impartiality, they help ensure that there is no **miscommunication** or **misunderstanding** between the parties. Secondly, they serve as ambassadors of peace and reconciliation. And third they gather the facts concerning the offense in regards to Scripture, what the offended party says and what the offender says.

If the offender does not repent at this point it indicates he is in **rebellion**. Therefore, the third step is to tell the church. In telling the church it is not necessary to inform every member of the church immediately but only the ruling body. After hearing the witnesses the ruling body then makes a **legally binding decision** in regards to the church's position. Jesus addressed this issue when He said, *“Truly I say to you, whatever you bind [forbid] on earth shall have been bound [forbidden] in heaven; and whatever you loose [permit] on earth shall have been loosed [permitted] in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”*⁹⁹

Should the ruling body fail to take action they are remiss in their responsibility and not acting in love. In other words they would rather see the offender continue in sin and suffer punishment from God then reprove him. It also shows a lack of love and concern towards others of the congregation who may be affected by the sin. The Apostle Paul rebuked the leadership of the church at Corinth over this exact issue.¹⁰⁰

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover lamb also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Once the ruling body has made its position clear the offender has one last chance to repent.¹⁰¹ If he does not the he is guilty of acting with **presumption** or **high-handedly**. Jesus said that if he failed to repent at this point then everyone in the church was to treat him as a Gentile and a tax gatherer. In other words, the congregation was to have no fellowship with the individual until he repented. The Apostle Paul upheld this position in his first letter to the Corinthians:¹⁰²

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a

⁹⁸ Deuteronomy 19:15

⁹⁹ Matthew 18:18-20

¹⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

¹⁰¹ This was the third offer.

¹⁰² 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

*drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.*¹⁰³

Group Discussion:

3. How many churches do you know use the biblical process of dealing with an offending believer?
4. Why don't most churches use the biblical process?
5. At what point in the process do failures in responsibility occur most frequently?
6. Why?

The Point of the Lesson:

Correct straying believers.

Application:

When you see a Christian sin, don't neglect your responsibility in the correction process.

¹⁰³ The basis for dealing with offending believers can be studied in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy. Specifically see Deuteronomy 17:6-7 and 12-13. The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy also said, "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning."

Lesson 33

Forgiving Believers Who Repent

Group Icebreaker:

What is the difference between the two sayings, “I’m sorry” and “I repent”?

Introduction:

When Jesus finished telling the disciples the process for reproving an erring believer Peter approached Him with a question that lies in the heart of every believer. *Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?* (KJV) In this lesson we will cover Jesus’ reply to Peter’s questions and the instructions He gave the disciples on the same issue a few months later.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 18:21-35, Mark 9:49-50, Luke 17:1-10

Forgiving Believers Who Repent Matthew 18:21-35, Mark 9:49-50

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

"Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him **ten thousand talents**.¹⁰⁴ But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii;¹⁰⁵ and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart. For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

The Commands:

- ❖ Have salt in yourselves.
- ❖ Be at peace with one another.

¹⁰⁴ **Ten thousand talents.** About 461,500 years wages.

¹⁰⁵ **A hundred denarii.** About 1/3 of one year's wages.

Group Discussion:

1. What is the most number of times that you have forgiven the same individual for the same sin against you?

The Lesson:

When Peter approached Jesus with his question concerning the number of times that he should forgive he added a second question, “*Until seven times?*” (KJV) Peter’s use of the number seven in this manner wasn’t just arbitrary. In Hebrew the word for what he said is *shaba* and refers to something that has been “sevened” or multiplied by seven. It carries with it a double meaning: 1) an oath and 2) the number seven. The word *shaba* literally means, “to be complete” and refers to something that cannot be altered or broken. It references the idea that when a person makes an oath he repeats it seven times.

So when Peter used the term “seven times” (*shaba or sevened*) he was seeking clarification from Jesus. In English, Peter might have phrased the question this way, “Is it okay to forgive someone who says he repents up to seven times since in fact he has not made it an oath yet?”

Jesus replied to Peter’s question in this manner, “*I say not unto thee, until¹⁰⁶ seven times: but, until seventy times seven,*” (KJV) In English we hear His statement something like this. A person should forgive four hundred ninety times and since the number is so large he can’t keep track of it . . . so he should just keep on forgiving. This way of thinking is okay, but Jesus’ somewhat cryptic reply has more depth to it than that.

In Hebrew what Jesus said is, “*I say not unto thee, seven: but, until seventy sevens.*” This is a clear reference to the prophecy of Daniel 9:24. *Seventy sevens¹⁰⁷ have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place.* In this case, Jesus is telling Peter that he must continue to forgive fellow believers until the things stated in Daniel’s prophecy come to pass.

To reinforce His point, Jesus couples it with a kingdom parable. In the parable a certain king (God) forgives a man his debt¹⁰⁸ (sins). But that man does not forgive the debt¹⁰⁹ (sins) of another. Because he withheld forgiveness from another, the king (God) turns him over to the torturers until the debt is paid. The purpose of the parable is to illustrate how much God has forgiven us in relation to how little we have to forgive others.

Jesus concludes the parable with the statement, “*For everyone will be salted with fire.*” The term “salted with fire” is a reference to sacrifices made to God. In the Old Testament all sacrifices were required to be salted before they were burned with fire. Salt served as a reminder to both God and man that a covenant relationship¹¹⁰ existed between the two parties. So it is entirely

¹⁰⁶ Here I have switched to using the King James Version of the Bible as it more accurately reflects the meaning of the Greek word “*heos*”. The KJV translates the word “*heos*” as “**until**”, which represents a point in time. Most other translations tend to use the phrase “**up to**” for the word “*heos*”. When the term “up to” appears the reader tends to focus on the idea of counting up to a certain number, while disregarding the concept of a point in time, which the term also means.

¹⁰⁷ Many translators substitute the word “weeks” in place of the word “sevens”. This can be misleading as the Jews use the word “sevens” to indicate several periods of time. It can represent one week, the Feasts of Weeks (Pentecosts), a “*Shemittah*” (7 year period) or a Jubilee.

¹⁰⁸ Equivalent to 461,500 years worth of wages.

¹⁰⁹ Equivalent to 1/3 of one year’s wages.

¹¹⁰ Numbers 18:19, Leviticus 2:13 and 2 Chronicles 13:5

appropriate for Christians, who are to offer themselves as living sacrifices,¹¹¹ to be salted with fire.

It is truly a sacrifice to forgive another his sins, especially when everything in us is crying out for retribution, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Jesus recognized it and that's why He used the illustration of salt. It was to remind His disciples that they were in a covenant relationship with God. *"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."* (Matthew 6:14-15)

In addition to covenant use, salt has two primary uses:

- To **season** or make palatable - *Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.* (Colossians 4:6)
- To **preserve** or save from decay - *My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.* (James 5:19-20)

When Jesus commanded the disciples to have salt in themselves and to be at peace with one another, He was essentially saying, "Speak to the offending party in a kind way with the thought of preserving his life while establishing a better relationship between the two of you."

Reading the Scripture:

Luke 17:1-10

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

"And He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you. But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will eat and drink'? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"

The Commands:

- ❖ Be on your guard.
- ❖ Rebuke him.
- ❖ Forgive him.
- ❖ Say.

¹¹¹ Romans 12:1 - *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

The Lesson Continued:

Sometime later Jesus spoke to his disciples again about the necessity of forgiving an erring believer. This time He began His instruction with the words “Be on your guard.” They seem like odd words to begin a teaching on forgiveness with. However, this short phrase is very powerful and can be interpreted to mean any of the following: 1) stay alert, 2) be watchful, 3) pay attention, 4) keep on the lookout, 5) don’t be fooled, 6) take an appropriate defensive stance, 7) don’t let yourself be attacked.

The phrase and all of the interpretations indicate a **defensive** posture. Each of them begs to have the question answered, “Defend against what?” The answer is twofold. The first is to guard oneself from being sinned against in the first place . . . wise as serpents. And the second is to not harden one’s heart so as not to forgive a believer who sins but then repents . . . innocent as doves.¹¹²

The instruction, “Be on your guard” is meant to be both reflective and instructive. After a Christian has been sinned against by a fellow believer he should reflect on **how** the events came to pass. In other words, “How did I get myself into this position?” Secondly, he should take the time to discover the **steps** he needs to take in order to avoid being sinned against in the future. Many times Christians naively put themselves in the same position of being sinned against over and over. Some would describe this as insane behavior.¹¹³

Group Discussion:

2. What does this old adage mean? Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.
3. Name one way a believer can be hurt by the sin of another believer?
4. What did the offended believer do that allowed himself to be sinned against?
5. What are some steps he could take to avoid being sinned against in the future?

The Lesson Continued:

In rapid-fire succession, Jesus lists the steps that a believer should take when another believer sins him against. “*Rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.*” It is always the responsibility of the offended believer to bring the first rebuke against a sinning believer! It is also always the responsibility of the offended to believer to forgive the offender if he says he repents.¹¹⁴

Lest the disciples should misunderstand His earlier statement on the number of times they were to forgive, Jesus reinforces His point. Not a mere 490 times as some think but, “*if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.*” The disciples are flabbergasted at this command. In a seventy-year period it would total of 178,850 times.

But Jesus doesn’t see this command as being unreasonable. To Him it is not how often a believer forgives it’s just how His disciples are to be . . . merciful as their Father in heaven is merciful. To support this idea He finishes the teaching with this statement. *So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, “We are **unworthy** slaves; we have done only that **which we ought to have done.**”*

¹¹² Matthew 10:16

¹¹³ A popular definition for an insane person is one who continues to do the same thing repeatedly expecting a different result. In other words, “How many times do you have to put your hand in the fire before you realize your going to get burned?”

¹¹⁴ Repentance indicates a change in direction. So when a person says he repents it means that he will change the course of actions or steps that brought him to the point of sin.

The Point of the Lesson:

Be ready to forgive.

Application:

If someone sins against you take the time to reflect on how it happened and what steps you will take in the future to avoid the experience again.

Lesson 34

Cause for Rejoicing

Group Icebreaker:

Name some things that cause you great joy?

Introduction:

After Jesus finished His instructions concerning offenses, He attended the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem where He forgave a woman caught in adultery. While at the feast He declared himself to be the light of the world, healed a man who was born blind and then finished by declaring Himself, the good shepherd. A short time later He sent seventy other disciples to preach the gospel in the cities and towns where He was going. The instructions He gave them can be found in Lessons 21-24.

Reading the Scripture:

Luke 10:17-24, Matthew 11:25-30

Cause for Rejoicing

Luke 10:17-20

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

Come to Me, and I Will Give You Rest

Matthew 11:25-30, Luke 10:21-24

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

At that very time **He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit,**¹¹⁵ and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you,¹¹⁶ and learn from Me,¹¹⁷ for I am gentle and humble in heart; and **YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.**¹¹⁸ For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." And turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them."

¹¹⁵ **He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit.** Jesus was probably shouting and leaping in the air with joy.

¹¹⁶ **Take My yoke upon you.** Trust Me and let Me direct you.

¹¹⁷ **Learn from Me.** Let Me show you what is good for you and pleasing to God.

¹¹⁸ **YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.** Jeremiah 6:16, "This is what the LORD says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'"

The Commands:

- ❖ Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you.
- ❖ Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you.
- ❖ But rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.
- ❖ Come to Me.
- ❖ Take My yoke upon you
- ❖ Learn from Me.

The Lesson:

When the seventy went out, they weren't sure what was going to happen or what results they would achieve. They simply obeyed Jesus' commands! Upon returning from their evangelistic tour they were overjoyed and reported to Jesus that even the demons had been subject to them in His name. In reply, Jesus reminded them that He had given them authority over all the power of the enemy.

This authority is granted to all of Jesus' disciples because in preaching the gospel they are speaking **truth** in love thereby, directly opposing spiritual powers. In fact, Jesus when confronted by Pontius Pilate, said that testifying of the truth was the purpose for which he had come to earth. *"You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."* (John 18:37) And the apostle John put it this way, *"The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil."* (1 John 3:8)

At the feast of Tabernacles prior to sending the seventy Jesus described the works of the devil and contrasted it with His own works. *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.* (John 10:10) The power of the enemy is **lies** through **deception**, which brings about **sin** resulting in **death** and the power of Christ is **truth** spoken in **love**, which brings about **obedience** resulting in **life**.

Jesus used two symbolic creatures to describe His enemies and how they affect mankind: the serpent and the scorpion. The serpent represents **lies** and **deception**. *Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.* (Genesis 3:1) *And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.* (Revelation 12:9) The **scorpion** represents **sin** and **death**. *O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1 Corinthians 15:55-57)

Although it seemed appropriate for the seventy disciples to rejoice with the authority they had been given, Jesus told them not to. Instead they were to rejoice in the fact that their names were written in heaven. In saying this Jesus was telling them that their names were inscribed in the Book of Life. This would have given His disciples something to rejoice about! Jewish teaching holds that only the truly righteous are inscribed in the Book of Life. We might think of them as "saints" or those who had nothing to be ashamed of. The Jews also believe that most people are written in the book of repentance and their fate has not yet been sealed, while the truly unrepentant wicked people are inscribed in the book of the dead. To hear Jesus say that their names had already been inscribed in heaven would have been good news indeed.

Then, in the midst of His own rejoicing, Jesus commanded, *Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.* His appeal reaches to every part of man: spirit, soul and body and is a direct reference to what He said at the Feast of Tabernacles. *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

The burdens people carry may be different. Some struggle with the physical burdens of life. Others struggle with the spiritual burdens of sin and death. And still others struggle with the soulish burden of keeping the Law. Jesus even addressed this last burden when he spoke with the scribes and Pharisees. *Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers.* (Luke 11:46) The Apostle Peter also addressed the issue at the first church council in Jerusalem around 50 AD. He said, *“Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”* (Acts 15:10) It really doesn't matter what the burden is, the people carrying it are all looking for the same things. To those who come to Jesus, He offers rest, a shared load and a lighter load. Lets take a closer look at what He said.

Most people who are weary from carrying a heavy burden look for an opportunity to rest. They want to set their load down, sit or lie down for a while and be refreshed. Jesus said, *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”* The prophet Isaiah spoke of this rest when he said, *“He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, He who said to them, ‘Here is rest, give rest to the weary,’ and, ‘here is repose,’ but they would not listen.”* (Isaiah 28:11-12) The book of Acts adds its own commentary. *Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.* (Acts 3:19)

Jesus doesn't just offer people rest, He offers to help carry their burdens the rest of the way. *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.* In saying, *“take my yoke upon you”*, Jesus gives His hearers a commonplace illustration of a pair of animals working together to accomplish a task. And He is speaking as if He were one of the animals. When a young animal is first put under **yoke**, he is paired with an older animal, which is use to the work. The older animal is in fact **teaching** the younger animal to work efficiently and in tandem with others. By stating that He was gentle and humble in heart, Jesus is reflecting on His very nature and telling others how He will treat those who are paired with Him. This concept is alluded to in John 6:45. *“It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’”*¹¹⁹ *Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.”*

Jesus not only offers people rest and sharing their load, but He promises that they will also have a lighter load. *For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.* In hearing Jesus' statement we should be reminded that animals are yoked together in order to pull something. In Jesus' illustration it is a wagon. Why, because wagons are designed to carry loads!

Try to visualize this. You are carrying a huge load of wood on your back. How far can you go without needing rest and refreshment? Then imagine that someone comes along and offers to help you carry your wood the rest of the way. Are you feeling better? Now he says to you, “lets just

¹¹⁹ Isaiah 54:13

put it in my little **wagon and we'll pull it together**. How does that make you feel? Oh and by the way, the guy who is **helping you pull the wagon is God**. Does this give you cause for rejoicing?

This is the very concept that Isaiah the prophet was conveying to the people. *Do you not know? Have you not heard? **The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.*** (Isaiah 40:28-31)

Group Discussion:

1. What burdens are you carrying by yourself?
2. Can you by faith let the Lord help you with the burden?
3. If you can, what does that help look like to you
4. What does the following statement mean to you? *Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*

The Point of the Lesson:

Our Father in heaven has given us many things that we can rejoice about.

Application:

When the burden becomes too great, look to the Lord and the children of God to help you.

Lesson 35

Praying with Faith

Group Icebreaker:

Name some things, which you have prayed for that were fulfilled?

Introduction:

Jesus began to visit the towns and villages to which he had sent the seventy disciples. In November of 30 AD he arrived at Bethany and stayed at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. From there it was just a short walk¹²⁰ to the Garden of Gethsemane where He liked to pray. At some point the disciples approached Him seeking to learn how to pray. Jesus obliged them and began with a rendition of what we now call the Lord's Prayer, which He had previously taught them during the Sermon on the Mount two and one-half years earlier.

Reading the Scripture:

Praying with Faith

Luke 11:1-4

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

"And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

The Commands:

- ❖ When you pray say.

Group Discussion:

1. What is the difference between hope and faith?
 - Hope is a **desire** for something.
 - Faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for.
 - *Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye **desire**, when ye pray, **believe that ye receive them**, and ye shall have them.*

The Lesson:

The first key element in praying is to become like the disciples, **ask the Lord**. "How then should we pray about such and such?" For as it is written, "*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*"

Jesus commands His disciples to begin prayer, with the Lord's Prayer.¹²¹ Then He uses an illustration, which incorporates all three aspects of making prayer requests to God: Asking, seeking and knocking.

¹²⁰ Bethany is about 2 miles southeast of Jerusalem.

¹²¹ The prayer and its implications were taught in Lesson 12 of this discipleship series.

The illustration comes in the form of a parable, which I will call the “Parable of the Sleeping Friend”. It reads like this.

Reading the Scripture:

Parable of the Sleeping Friend Luke 11:5-13

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And He said to them, "Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he shall answer and say, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. And I say to you, **ask**,¹²² and it shall be given to you; **seek**,¹²³ and you shall find; **knock**,¹²⁴ and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

The Commands:

- ❖ Ask
- ❖ Seek
- ❖ Knock

The Lesson Continued:

Upon reading this parable most Christians get the idea that Jesus wants them to persist in prayer to God about the same issue. That simply is not true!

Many illustrations that Jesus used were **comparative** parables. In other words, “something is **like** something else.” For example, *the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea*. However, the “Parable of the Sleeping Friend” is a **contrasting** parable. In other words, something is **unlike** something else.

In this parable a man goes to his friend’s house while he is sleeping asking for the loan of some bread. The friend in the parable stands in contrast to God, who is closer than our friends. Proverbs 18:24 says, “*A man of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who **sticks closer** than a brother.*” Second, God does not sleep. Psalm 121:3-4 says, “*He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you **will not slumber**. Behold, He who keeps Israel will **neither slumber nor sleep**.*” And third, the man asks his friend to loan him three loaves of bread versus God, the owner of the cattle on a thousand hills, who cannot be **repaid**. So the point of the parable is that 1) if a friend will give you what you need if you are persistence no matter what time of day or night, 2) how much **more** will God do to meet your needs.

In fact, Jesus wants his disciples to **not** miss the point! So He even goes so far as to restate the meaning of the parable two more ways. Read it carefully! *So I say to you, **ask**, and it **will** be given*

¹²² **Ask**. Keep on asking.

¹²³ **Seek**. Keep on seeking.

¹²⁴ **Knock**. Keep on knocking.

to you; **seek**, and you **will find**; **knock**, and it **will be opened** to you. For everyone who **asks**, **receives**; and he who **seeks**, **finds**; and to him who **knocks**, **it will be opened**.

Group Discussion:

2. When you pray do you **hope** what you pray for will come to pass or are you **sure** that it will come to pass?
3. Are you reading and believing God's word as it is or are you substituting other words, like Eve did in the Garden of Eden.

The Lesson Continued:

Jesus continues the point by using more contrasts. *“Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”* In doing so He is explaining that if you ask God specifically for one thing, He won't give you something other than what you asked for. And secondly, if you ask for something good He won't give you that which is evil.

There are also two spiritual applications that can be made from his statement as well. Jesus used symbolic imagery consisting of a fish, a snake, an egg and a scorpion to convey these thoughts. In the previous lesson Jesus used the snake in regards to that which deceives and the scorpion in regards to that, which brings death. Here He contrasts them with a fish and an egg. In doing so the passage can be read as follows:

*“Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for **truth**; he will not give him **deception** instead of **truth**, will he? Or if he is asked for **life**, he will not give him **death**, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”*

In using the contrasting illustration Jesus points to the fact that a good thing to ask God for is more of the Holy Spirit, which He will deny to no one. The Holy Spirit brings both truth and life to all men. So precious is this gift that the Apostle Paul wrote these things concerning the Holy Spirit:

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, **to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God**. Now to Him who is able to do **far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us**, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21)*

*For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be **filled** with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (Colossians 1:9-12)*

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be **filled with the Spirit**, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; (Ephesians 5:18-20)*

Just think! All that a Christian has to do to receive more of the Holy Spirit is to ask and believe that he has received it.

Since Jesus finishes His discourse with the thought that a truly good gift to ask God for is **more** of the Holy Spirit, it gives us pause to rethink the “Parable of the Sleeping Friend”. Notice that the man asked his sleeping friend for three loaves of bread. Why three loaves for just one journeying friend? In light of what Jesus said we could think about this in a different way. Since man is a three-part being the three loaves were needed to meet all the needs of the journeying friend: one each for his spirit, soul and body. The three loaves, themselves are representative of God’s gifts through the Holy Spirit to meet those needs: the **word** of God, the **love** of God and the **power** of God.

Also notice that the man came to the sleeping friend’s house at midnight. Why didn’t he wait until the morning? It shows that the Holy Spirit can meet a man’s needs at any time. And why didn’t the man have anything to give his journeying friend in the first place? This indicates that we by ourselves aren’t always able to meet the needs of others but that we do have instant access to the One who can. All we have to do is ask, seek and knock.

There is one final spiritual application that can be drawn from the “Parable of the Sleeping Friend”. And that is the sequence: seek, knock and ask. The man sought his friend first. *“But **seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**”* (Matthew 6:33) Then the man knocked on his door to rouse him. *“Enter His **gates with thanksgiving** and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.”* (Psalm 100:4) And finally he asked for what he wanted. *“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you **ask of the Father in My name** He may give to you.”* (John 15:16)

The Point of the Lesson:

Pray with faith.

Application:

Work through the following prayer exercise. (For example)

1. Pray the Lord’s Prayer.
2. Seek the Lord’s will – (Father, we are looking for your wisdom and direction.)
3. Knock (rouse Him with praise and thanks) – (For you are wonderful and kind.)
4. Ask Him for what you need – (Fill us with your Spirit to overflowing.)

Lesson 36

Hypocrisy

Group Icebreaker:

Why in some parts of the American culture do people call what is really “good” . . . “bad”?

Introduction:

When Jesus concluded His instruction on how to pray, He intimated that the best thing the disciples could ask for would be more of the Holy Spirit. Then, as if to showcase the importance of the Holy Spirit, Jesus cast a demon out of a man who was both blind and dumb. At that point the Pharisees accused Him of working the miracle by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. Jesus’ reply to their accusation would begin an ongoing firestorm of opposition from the Scribes and Pharisees that would last until His crucifixion six months later.

In order to better understand what Jesus was preparing to teach the disciples, it will be helpful to develop some background information on the events leading up to the lesson and the individuals who were in opposition to Him.

Opposition to Jesus arose from three major groups within Israel: the Scribes, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Let’s take a brief look at each group:

The Scribes were a group of individuals who were experts in the Law of Moses. The Scripture sometimes refers to them as “lawyers” as their primary functions were: **1)** theoretical development of the law, **2)** teachers of the law and **3)** jurists or judges who passed sentences according to the law. During the time of Jesus they were called the Tanaim (repeaters) because of the way they taught the Law to their students. They had them orally repeat it over and over until they knew it. Many of Scribes were members of Israel’s ruling body, the Sanhedrin and most, strongly supported the Pharisees. The Tanaim period of Scribes lasted for more than five hundred years from 300 BC to 220 AD.

The Sadducees were a religious party that arose in Israel during the second century BC during the reign of the Maccabees. The name itself basically means, “the Righteous”. The Sadducees were few in numbers but were primarily made up of an aristocracy who associated themselves with the priesthood. They tended to accentuate man’s **free will**, while the Pharisees accentuated man’s **predestination**. Their influence came through politics. The Sadducean party died out shortly after the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD.

The Pharisees were also a religious party that arose in Israel during the second century BC during the reign of the Maccabees. The name itself basically means, “Separated”. The term was derived from the idea that its members separated themselves **from** the “common” people and separated themselves **to** the Law of Moses. The Pharisees numbered about 6,000 at the time of Jesus and were generally held in high regard by the people. Whereas the Sadducees power and influence came through politics the Pharisees derived theirs from religion. Although this party no longer exists, we might consider the ultra-orthodox Jews of today as being closely associated with them.

The Pharisees did not have a stellar record among the Jews as many people think. Although they set a high ethical standard for themselves, not all lived up to it. According to the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds there were eight kinds of Pharisees:¹²⁵

1. The **shoulder** Pharisee, who ostentatiously carries his good deeds on his shoulder so all, can see them.
2. The **wait-a-moment** Pharisee, who wants you to wait while he performs a mitzvah (good deed).
3. The **bruised** Pharisee, who runs into a wall while looking at the ground to avoid seeing a woman.
4. The **reckoning** Pharisee, who commits a sin, then does a good deed and balances the one against the other.
5. The **pestle** Pharisee, whose head is bowed in false humility, like a pestle in a mortar.
6. The Pharisee who asks, “**What is my duty so that I may do it**” as if he thought he had filled every obligation already.
7. The Pharisee from **fear of consequences** if he doesn’t perform the commandments.
8. The Pharisee from **love** – either love of the rewards God promises for performing the commandments, or love of Torah¹²⁶ itself [no matter which, he is understood here to be the one good kind of Pharisee].

The events leading up to the lesson began when the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub. Then through a series of responses Jesus began to expose the hypocrisy¹²⁷ of His opposition. They claimed to be godly men, but their words and actions proved otherwise.

Jesus’ first response dealt with the issue of blasphemy or speaking against the Holy Spirit, the unpardonable sin. Essentially this sin consists of calling what is good . . . evil or what is evil . . . good and is directly referenced in Isaiah 5:20, “*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!*”

From a Biblical mindset the idea of calling “what is good . . . evil” takes on a much greater significance than we tend to think of in our modern society. According to the Scripture there is only one who is truly good . . . God. Jesus referred to this in His conversation with the rich young ruler. *And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what **good thing** shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is **good**? There is **only One who is good**; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”* (Matthew 19:16-17)

So when the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out a demon by Beelzebub (a good thing which can only be done by the power of God) they had in fact said, “The Holy Spirit is evil and Beelzebub is good.” By this it was evident to Jesus that His opponents were not of God. If they had been then, they would not have been able to speak against the Holy Spirit because a house divided against itself cannot stand. Jesus quoted another familiar idiom to make the same point, a tree is known by its fruit.

¹²⁵ David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary (1992) pages 69-70.

¹²⁶ The word Torah means teaching and refers to what we refer to as the Law, the Pentateuch or the first five books of the Bible.

¹²⁷ See Lesson 11 of this discipleship series, for more on the subject of hypocrisy.

Jesus went on to say that the Pharisees were a brood of vipers. By this He was implying several things:

- That their father was Satan, the serpent of old.
- That being Satan’s offspring they were liars and deceivers just like him.¹²⁸
- And not only were they serpents, but vipers, which are deadly serpents. Hence they cause destruction of people through their lies and deceptions.
- Satan was lifted-up in pride against God and so were they.
- Satan blasphemed against God and so did they.
- Since they are Satan’s offspring they too are evil.
- And since they are evil how can they speak¹²⁹ what is good.

After that, the Pharisees asked Jesus to show them a sign, completely ignoring the fact that He had just got through performing a major miracle; casting out a demon and restoring the eyesight and speech of an individual. Jesus declined their request, called them an evil and adulterous generation and told them that the only sign that would be given to them was the sign of Jonah.

Then one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to lunch. While dining with him Jesus pronounced three woes upon the Pharisees and three woes upon the Scribes. Many Christians think that when Jesus spoke the woes that He was condemning the Scribes and Pharisees, but He wasn’t. The word “woe” means lament or sorrow. So Jesus was simply stating that because of their actions, sorrows would come their way.

Reading the Scripture:

Luke 11:37-12:3

Woe to the Pharisees

Luke 11:37-44

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. And when the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the front seats in the synagogues, and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like **concealed tombs**,¹³⁰ and the people who walk over them are unaware of it."

¹²⁸ John 8:44 - *You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

¹²⁹ A parallel to this can be found in the culture of American Indians. When a person lied they described it as “speaking with a forked tongue”. This allusion was drawn from the fact that snakes have forked tongues.

¹³⁰ **Concealed tombs.** Jews who came into contact with a grave became unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:16). Jesus equated the Pharisees with concealed tombs implying that they made people impure.

Woe to the Scribes Luke 11:45-54

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And one of the lawyers said to Him in reply, "Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too." But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.' Woe to you **lawyers!**¹³¹ For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered." And when He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him, to catch Him in something He might say.

Jesus Teaches His Disciples Luke 12:1-3

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of all, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

The Command:

- ❖ Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.

The Lesson:

Shortly after rebuking the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus resumed His duty of teaching the disciples. He began the lesson with this command, “*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy.*”

In an earlier account Jesus had cautioned the disciples about the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.¹³² On that occasion it was connected with placing the **traditions** of men before the word of God. *But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.* This time He deals with the issue of their **hypocrisy**.

Although the Pharisees had the Scriptures and lived by them they were **devoid** of the Spirit of God. Jesus knew this by the words they spoke. The Pharisees did not recognize Him as being from God or accept the miracles He performed and even went so far as to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. On one occasion Jesus even told the Pharisees that, “*You search the Scriptures because*

¹³¹ **Lawyers.** Another term for scribes.

¹³² Lesson 27.

*you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.” (John 5:39-40) And later He told them, “**If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.**” (John 8:42-47)*

Jesus recognized that the Pharisees were **practicing a form of religion but without the power to live it**, which was the Holy Spirit. On the outside they appeared righteous but on the inside they were not. Therefore He cautioned the disciples about following men such as these and giving heed to their teachings. The reason for this is that what people are taught affects them for a lifetime. As leaven permeates every part of the substance in which it is placed, so too does teaching.

It is imperative that we, as Christians, heed Jesus’ instruction concerning people such as these, who teach about righteousness but are devoid of the Holy Spirit. For many it is difficult to imagine that these kinds of people actually hold places of authority within the Church. But we shouldn’t be surprised. Listen to what the Apostle Paul said. *But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.*** (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Before leaving them, Paul also cautioned the Ephesians about the same issue. *I know that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert.*** (Acts 20:29-31) And if that is not enough, Jude the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ devoted a whole book to that subject.

Jesus closes the subject of hypocrisy with two sobering statements. *But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops.* Hypocrisy cannot be hidden from God!

Group Discussion:

1. In what ways can a Christian be guilty of hypocrisy?
2. Do you think a Christian can speak against the Holy Spirit?
3. Why or why not?

The Point of the Lesson:

Test the spirits.

Application:

Meditate on 1 John 3:23 – 4:7:

*This is His commandment, that we **believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another**, just as He commanded us. The **one** who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. **Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God**, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. **By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God**; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; **he who knows God listens to us**; he who is not from God does not listen to us. **By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.***

Lesson 37

Freedom from Fear

Group Icebreaker:

Name some fears you have?

Introduction:

Jesus has just finished telling the disciples to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. He had recognized their hypocrisy when they blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. While the Pharisees appeared righteous on the outside they were in fact devoid of the Holy Spirit. They had been hiding their evil, unrepentant and unbelieving hearts behind the mask of religion. Jesus went on to say that everything a person attempts to **hide**, whether hypocrisy or anything else would be revealed. And to that he added that everything a person ever **said**, including what was said as a secret or in the heart would be revealed as well.

Group Discussion:

1. Why do people try to hide what they have done or said?
2. What things have you done or are still doing that you are attempting to hide from others?
3. What evil or derogatory things have you said either secretly to others or in your heart?
4. Take a few minutes and compile a list.
5. Then take your list and publicly confess it to the Lord Jesus Christ. For it is written, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”* (1 John 1:9-10)

Reading the Scripture:

Freedom from Fear

Luke 12:4-12

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows. And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but he who **blasphemes**¹³³ against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him. And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become

¹³³ **Blasphemes** (*Strongs No. 988 – blasphemía*): “switches” right for wrong (wrong for right), i.e. calls what God disapproves, “right” which “exchanges the truth of God for a lie” (Ro 1:25) (Isa 5:20 – “you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness”). Literally, slow (sluggish) to call something good (that really is good) – and slow to identify what is truly bad (that really is evil). (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* – βλασφημία, railing, reviling): a. universally, slander, detraction, speech injurious to another’s good name. (*Understanding the difference between “the unpardonable sin” or “the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” and “the forgivable blasphemy” is that the “unpardonable blasphemy” is calling what is good evil and what is evil good (“There is only one who is good – (God alone),” Matt 19:17 and “whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven” Matt 12:32), whereas the “forgivable blasphemy” is being slow to call something good or evil (i.e. Matt 12:31, “people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy” (Mk 3:28-29, Lk 12:10).)*)

anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you should say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

The Commands:

- ❖ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body.
- ❖ Fear the One, who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell.
- ❖ Yes, I tell you, fear Him.
- ❖ Do not fear
- ❖ Do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you should say.

The Lesson:

When Jesus told the disciples that everything a person says or does will be revealed it was a frightening prospect. For who is without sin and not ashamed of some aspect of his life? Fortunately for all of His disciples, then and now, Jesus initiated this lesson by calling His disciples¹³⁴ . . . friends. This is a powerful and reassuring message for them. For when an individual voluntarily enters a relationship with another as a friend, he has committed himself to oversee the welfare of his friend. And for Jesus, the Son of the Living God, to call you a friend is indeed a supreme blessing.

Group Discussion:

6. List some traits of a true friend.

The Lesson Continued:

Jesus knows that His disciples will face persecution and death because of the message they will bring so he prepares them for this eventuality. Since death is a natural fear of man, Jesus uses it to present some truths to the disciples. First, He commands them **not to fear man**, even their enemies, because their authority and power are limited to the killing of the body. Instead they are to **fear God** alone, as He has both the authority and power to kill the body and to cast into hell.

Next Jesus reassures the disciples by telling them not to fear because they are of great value to God. He gives them two reasons why they should not be fearful. **1)** They believe in and confess Him and **2)** they have not blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. While this is assurance for the disciples, it gives cause to fear in others who are not following Him.

Listen to what Jesus had to say about why people should have reason to fear God:

1. *And I say to you, everyone who **confesses Me** before men, the Son of Man will **confess him** also before the angels of God; but he who **denies Me** before men will be **denied** before the angels of God.* In his second epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul talked about this reason when he wrote: *It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we **deny him**, he also will **deny us**: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.* (2 Timothy 2:11-13)
2. *And everyone who **blasphemes (speaks a word)** against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who **blasphemes (speaks a word)** against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.* The apostle Paul also wrote Timothy concerning the time when he blasphemed against Jesus, the Son of Man. *Who¹³⁵ was before a **blasphemer**, and a*

¹³⁴ A disciple is one who learns from his teacher and then implements what he is instructed to do. "You are My friends if you do what I command you." (John 15:14)

¹³⁵ The Apostle Paul.

persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. (1 Timothy 1:13-15)

From the Scripture it appears that there are two reasons that God can cast a man into hell: **1)** Willfully denying that Jesus is the Christ and **2)** willfully speaking against the Holy Spirit. In other words calling Him who is good . . . evil or calling him who is evil . . . good.

At the beginning of the lesson Jesus had told the disciples they were not to fear men And He concludes the lesson by telling them that when men bring them before rulers and authorities they are not to be concerned about defending themselves. Because the Holy Spirit will give them what to say when they need to speak.

The Point of the Lesson:

Jesus followers have no reason to be afraid of God.

Application:

Since everything you say or do will be revealed, confess (reveal) those things, which you are ashamed of, to Jesus now so they can be covered by His blood.

Lesson 38

Freedom from Life's Worries

Group Icebreakers:

- What kinds of things do you worry about?
- Why do you worry?

Introduction:

Jesus has just finished telling His disciples that they have no reason to fear God because they were His friends. And with His friendship comes the freedom from the fear of men, death and public speaking.

Reading the Scripture:

Luke 12:13-34, Matthew 6:24-34

Storing Up Treasure

Luke 12:13-21

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbiter over you?" And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'" And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Freedom from Fear

Matthew 6:24-34, Luke 12:22-34

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. And He said to His disciples, 'For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. For life is more than food, and the body than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; and they have no storeroom nor barn; and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why are you anxious about other matters? Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you, O men of little faith! And do not seek what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you."

So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

The Commands:

- ❖ Do not be anxious for your life.
- ❖ Consider the ravens.
- ❖ Consider the lilies.
- ❖ Do not seek what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying.
- ❖ But seek for His kingdom.
- ❖ Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow.

The Lesson:

He begins the lesson by telling a parable:

“The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.’” But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:16-21)

It is evident from the parable that men make choices. They either choose to serve God or themselves. Jesus put it another way. *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”* (Matthew 6:24)

Group Discussion:

1. Are you serving God or wealth?
2. How do you know?

The Lesson Continued:

Having begun the lesson with the sobering thought that men can choose one of two masters to serve, Jesus reassures the disciples¹³⁶ that they are serving God. He does this by issuing them a commandment. *“For this reason I say to you, do not worry¹³⁷ about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”* In other words, “Since I have called you friends and you are following Me; you need not worry about food and clothing because God will provide them for you.”

The concept that God provides for the people who follow Him was not a new one for the disciples. Their ancestors left Egypt following Moses and during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness they never lacked food or clothing. Also, the Levites who served as the **priesthood** in Israel were not required to work but God provided for them through the sacrifices and freewill offerings of the people.

¹³⁶ A disciple is one who learns from his teacher and then implements what he is instructed to do. *“You are My friends if you do what I command you.”* (John 15:14)

¹³⁷ Do not worry – don’t be anxious – take no thought of – do not be distracted.

Many years later the Apostle Peter would make reference to this special covenant relationship that Christians have with God when he declared, “*But you are a **chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.***” It is incumbent upon every Christian that he understands the story of the Israelites who came out of Egypt because it parallels the life of all Christians. The Apostle Paul used this admonition when writing his first epistle to the Corinthians. *Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were **written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*** (1 Corinthians 10:11)

Let’s be reminded of the parallels:

1. The Israelites were in bondage while living in Egypt.
 - a. Christians were in bondage to sin while living in the world.
2. On the night of their deliverance the Israelites applied the blood of an unblemished lamb to the lintel and doorposts of their homes. Then they entered through the door and were spared by the death angel when he recognized the blood on their doorways. (Exodus 12)
 - a. Jesus Christ is the unblemished Lamb of God. His blood was smeared on the cross of Calvary in the same pattern as the Israelites applied it. The lintel is where the crown of thorns caused the blood to flow from His head and doorposts are where the nails pierced His hands. Jesus said, “*I am the door, if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved.*” (John 10:9)
3. The Israelites were all under the cloud¹³⁸ and all passed through the sea.¹³⁹ And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (I Corinthians 10:1-2)
 - a. Christians are all baptized into Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit and in water. *For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.* (1 John 5:7-8)
4. The Israelites received the Law of Moses written on tablets of stone at Mt Sinai.
 - a. Christians received the Law of Christ written on their hearts at Mt Zion.
5. The Israelites all ate the same spiritual food . . . manna, the bread from heaven.
 - a. Christians all eat the same spiritual food . . . communion bread, which is the body of Christ.
6. The Israelites all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from the spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.
 - a. Christians all drink the same spiritual drink . . . communion wine, which is the blood of Christ.
7. God was not pleased with **most** of the Israelites and they died in the wilderness. These people 1) craved evil things, 2) were idolaters, 3) acted immorally, 4) tried the Lord, and 5) grumbled against Him. They did not enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief (lack of faith).
 - a. Christians are cautioned against doing these things.
8. The Israelites never lacked for food, clothing or shelter on their journey.
 - a. Christians will not lack for food, clothing or shelter in their life.
9. When the Israelites engaged in battle they always won.
 - a. When Christians engage in spiritual warfare they always win.
10. The Israelites had their sins forgiven when they confessed them while laying their hands upon the head of a lamb.

¹³⁸ The specific cloud that is being talked about in Hebrew is called the Sh’khinah: the cloud of glory. It is the same cloud that led the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings, became a pillar of fire at night and filled the Temple of God. It always indicates the presence of God.

¹³⁹ The Red Sea.

- a. Christians have their sins forgiven when they confess them to Jesus, the Lamb of God.
11. The Israelites were healed of their afflictions when by faith they looked to the bronze serpent on the staff.
 - a. Christians are healed when they look to Jesus Christ who was crucified on the cross.
12. The Israelites entered the Promised Land following Joshua.
 - a. Christians will enter the Promised Land (Heaven) following Joshua.¹⁴⁰

The Lesson Continued:

As Jesus continues the lesson He provides additional assurance to the disciples when He tells them to, “*Consider the ravens.*”

- They neither sow nor reap . . . they cannot make their own food.
- They have no storeroom nor barn . . . they cannot hoard any food they find.
- And yet God feeds them . . . even though they are unclean animals. *Who prepares for the raven its nourishment when its young cry to God and wander about without food?* (Job 38:41)
- Ravens have to trust God for their daily provision. Jeremiah also made the same point concerning God’s people. *The LORD’S loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.* (Lamentations 3:22-23)
- And remember God even used ravens (unclean birds . . . they and their food are non-kosher) to feed the prophet Elijah in the midst of a famine. (1Kings 17:1-9)

Moving to His next point Jesus tells the disciples to, “*Consider the lilies.*”

- How they grow . . . they allow God to supply the seed, the nutrients in the soil, the sunshine and the rain.
- They neither toil nor spin . . . they don’t make clothes for themselves.
- They are beautiful . . . yet even the finest clothes that people can make for themselves are not as beautiful.
- The lilies trust God for their daily provision. Jeremiah also made the same point concerning God’s people. *The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I have hope in Him. The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.* (Lamentations 3:24-25)
- And remember it was God who cared enough about Adam and Eve, even when they sinned, to clothe them.

As Jesus begins to draw the lesson to a close He reminds the disciples again not to be anxious about necessary things like food, water and clothing. God will provide for them if they merely seek to establish His rule in their lives. Then to this He adds, that the disciples should give no

¹⁴⁰ The reason I used the name Joshua here is to make the point that Jesus’ name in Hebrew is Yawshua (Joshua), which means, “I AM SALVATION”. You should be reminded that Moses could not take the Israelites into the Promised Land because of his disobedience. This occurred when he struck the Rock, which was Christ, a second time to bring forth water. God had told Moses to speak to the Rock and it would bring forth water. The effect of this was that Moses gave a false prophetic sign: saying the Christ would be struck twice. However, God only permitted His Son, Jesus, the Christ to be struck once: on the Lord’s Passover . . . at His trials, beatings and crucifixion. Moses also told the Israelites, “God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.” (Deuteronomy 18:15) The book of Numbers 27:12-23, indicates that it was Joshua whom God chose and it was he who led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Jewish people today have never made this connection concerning Jesus (Yawshua or Joshua) Christ as the one prophet who will lead the people to the Promised Land (Heaven).

thought for tomorrow because like manna His blessings are new each day. And how by being anxious or worry can anyone expect to increase his lifespan?

Group Discussion:

3. What things do good governments try to provide for the people?
4. What things does God provide for His people?

The Point of the Lesson:

God will take care of your needs.

Application:

Read Psalm 103

Lesson 39

Servant-hood

Group Icebreakers:

- As a wealthy individual, what qualities would you want in a personal servant?
- Who is responsible for taking care of your personal servant?

Introduction:

When Jesus drew the previous lesson to a close, He told His disciples to seek **first** the Kingdom of God. This was the equivalent of saying, “First, establish God’s rule over your lives.” Once a disciple makes that commitment then God accepts the responsibility to provide the necessities of life for him. In this way he will have no cause for worry and will be able to devote his time and attention to serving God.

Reading the Scripture:

Luke 12:32-59

Servant-hood

Luke 12:32-34

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Be Prepared At All Times

Luke 12:35-40

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps alight. And be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. Whether he comes in the **second watch, or even in the third**,¹⁴¹ and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. And be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."

The Faithful and Sensible Steward

Luke 12:41-48

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And Peter said, "Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?" And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave

¹⁴¹ **Second watch, or even the third.** Jesus is probably speaking of the Jewish method of dividing the night into watches. The Jews divided the night into three watches of four hours each: 1st - 6 PM - 10 PM, 2nd - 10 PM - 2 AM, 3rd - 2 AM - 6 AM. The Romans divided the night into four watches of three hours each.

whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him, and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two, and two against three. They will be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Be Discerning
Luke 12:54-59

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And He was also saying to the multitudes, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming,' and so it turns out. And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it turns out that way. You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right? For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, in order that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the constable, and the constable throw you into prison. I say to you, you shall not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent."

The Commands:

- ❖ Do not be afraid, little flock.
- ❖ Sell your possessions.
- ❖ Give to charity.
- ❖ Make for yourselves purses, which do not wear out.
- ❖ Be dressed in readiness
- ❖ Keep your lamps alight.
- ❖ Be like men who are waiting for their master.
- ❖ You too be ready.

Group Discussion:

1. Are you a servant of God?
2. Do you believe that God will provide the necessities of life for you?

The Lesson: Part 1 – Employed by God

Jesus begins the lesson on servant-hood by assuring His disciples that God has employed them. He has **gladly** chosen to give them the Kingdom of God, so they do not need to be afraid. He will provide for their needs. And since God has freely chosen to give the disciples employment, they can feel free to sell their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor and needy.

These acts of charity were quite prevalent in the early Church as the book of Acts attests to:

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. (Acts 2:44-45) And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

The Lesson: Part 2 – The Job Description

The next thing that Jesus tells His disciples to do is to make purses for themselves, which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven. Upon hearing this command the disciples might have been somewhat puzzled . . . but with a little thought we can ascertain what Jesus was saying. Let's break it down.

- According to the Scriptures there are only three things (treasures¹⁴²) that have eternal worth or value. They are faith hope and love. (1Corinthians 13:13) These three are priceless treasures in both heaven and earth. No thief can steal them and no moth or rust can destroy them.
- Finding material to **make purses** that can hold faith hope and love forever is the next step. The only things that qualify are human beings. They can be made into disciples of Jesus Christ who in turn will go to heaven with treasures stored in them:

*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)*

The Lesson: Part 3 – The Daily Responsibilities

In the final portion of the lesson Jesus addresses the disciples daily responsibilities. First, they are to be dressed in readiness. This implies that disciples are to be **prepared** at all times and points to a well-known passage of Scripture:

*Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the SHIELD OF FAITH with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, which is the WORD OF GOD.** (Ephesians 6:13-18)*

Secondly, He tells them to keep their lamps alight. In Lesson 4 we discovered that the disciples' light shines when they bring the testimony of Jesus to others. In order to keep the light shining a constant supply of oil is needed. Throughout Scripture oil is used symbolically to represent the Holy Spirit. For example, in Zechariah chapter four we see the image of a seven-branched golden lampstand flanked by two olive trees with pipes running from them to the lampstand providing it

¹⁴² See Lesson 13 of this discipleship series.

with a constant supply of oil. Then we hear God declare, “*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.*” In order to keep their lamps alight the disciples need to be continually filled with the Spirit of God. Interestingly, several months later Jesus cautioned the disciples not to run out of oil when He told them the **Parable of the Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins**.

Thirdly, Jesus tells the disciples to be like men who are waiting for their master. Within this command are two concepts: **expectation** and **priority**. The disciples are to go about the business of making disciples daily. However they are to remain alert for the arrival of their master who may give them additional instructions that override what they were currently doing. As Christians we are to be constantly listening for our Lord’s voice and immediately stop what we are doing and respond to it.

An additional allusion can be drawn from what Jesus told them:

“Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks.” (Luke 12:36)

In the Book of Revelation the last message given to the Church before Jesus’ return concerns this very issue. The Church has become wealthy, apathetic and self-satisfied. Yet the Lord is displeased with their servant-hood and finds them needy. Do they hear His voice anymore? Will they welcome Him in their midst? Listen to how the message to the Church of Laodicea¹⁴³ reads:

*“Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. **Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.** He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*
(Revelation 3:19-22)

Group Discussion:

3. Why do you think that Jesus would want His disciples to sell their possessions and give to charity?
4. How can you be more effective at making purses that don’t wear out (disciples)?
5. Are you waiting expectantly for the Lord’s word each day?
6. Are you willing to prioritize His word above what you are doing?

The Point of the Lesson:

Learn to be a good servant.

Application:

Read Revelation 3:14-22

¹⁴³ The name Laodicea means “human rights”.

Learn what Jesus teaches us to do, what it means and how it is applied to our lives today as we walk by the Spirit!

Into the Harvest . . . connects Christians to people through ministry. Jesus uses lessons 18 through 39 to add structure to the lives of spiritually maturing disciples, teaching them about the kingdom of God, evangelism, caring for people, church discipline, freedom from fear, praying with faith and servant-hood.

- *Jesus' teachings have completely transformed my life. (M.M.)*
- *Jesus invites you to walk with Him and learn from Him. (J.G.)*
- *I have been going to church for over 30 years and have never heard anything like this before. Why don't churches teach this? (J.R.)*

Upon coming to faith in Jesus Christ at age 33, Michael Gibson earnestly wanted someone to disciple him in the faith. Finding no one . . . he became a student, and then teacher of God's word.

One statement in particular captured his attention, "Go . . . make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) From that he wrote his first book, "Follow Me" (1996), a compilation of the four gospels into one account while highlighting each of the 263 instructions Jesus commanded His disciples to do and teach. Subsequently, he has written the three-part teaching series, "A Journey with Jesus" and many other books which help equip believers to do the work of the ministry.

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