

Imitating Jesus

1 Introduction

John 13:15 For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.

1 Corinthians 11:1 [Christian Order] Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

The theological term is imitatio Christi. (im-a-tah-tea-oh Chriss-tea) i-mi-'tä-tē-ō-'kri-stē

1.1 Who we admire is who we will imitate

Every one of us has a perspective on how to view life.

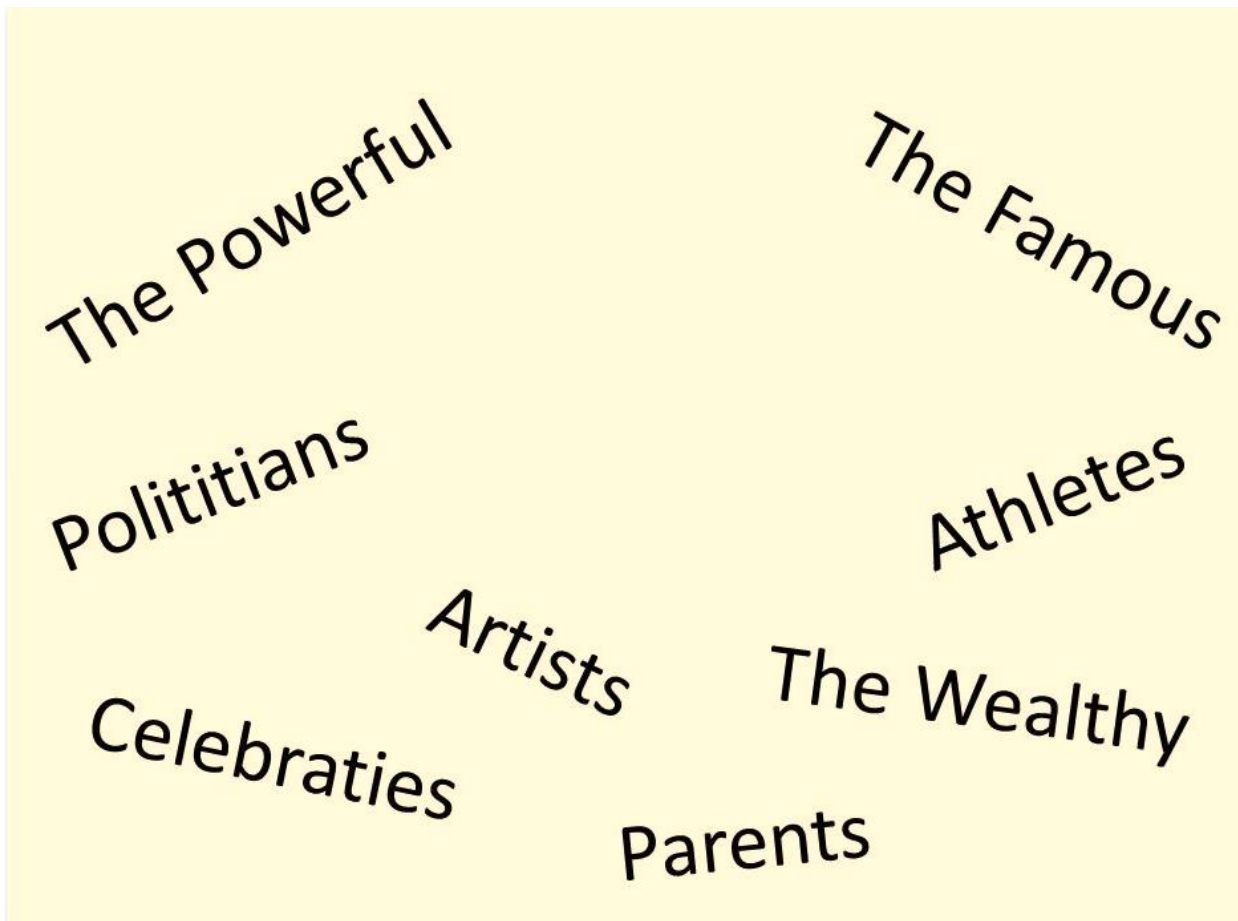
We build this perspective on what we admire and care about the most. For example:

If you admire yourself the most and only care about having the most pleasure at the moment then you will have a hedonist world perspective. You are the center of your perspective. You will imitate those things that bring you the most pleasure regardless of the effect on others.



If you don't believe in God but think that you should support and benefit your fellow human beings then you will have a humanist world perspective. Those who you admire the most will be at the center of your perspective.

But when we don't set Jesus as our target then we will set up other models.



All of these people have good qualities. But without the standard of Jesus Christ how will we know which traits to imitate? We will likely choose based on success rather than on righteousness.

How do we develop good character? It doesn't come from reading "Godly Character for Dummies."

Proverbs 29:19 says, "A slave will not be instructed by words alone; for though he understands, there will be no response."

Good character doesn't come from a text; it comes from example, from models.

We see this early in children. The child's question is not "Do I want to be good?" but "Who do I want to be like?" Their character is built not from dictates and commands but from watching people, from their models. You want to know how parents act; then watch their children.

So who is our example? Who is our model?

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" and in Ephesians 5:1 he says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children..."

The ultimate example of who we should become is God.



He is our target. He is our model.

There are many passages in Scripture that verify this. Here are two.

Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

1 Peter 1:15-16, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.'"

Our target is clear; it is God. It is not just to be better than your co-workers or your neighbors. It is not just to be better than celebrities or professional athletes. It is to be as perfect and as holy as God.

We want to compare ourselves to other people. "See, I'm better than he is. I don't curse like he does. I go to church every week and he doesn't." You can always find people who are less spiritual than yourself.

But when we compare ourselves to other people it's so that we will win. God wants us to compare ourselves to Him, to Jesus Christ. When we do that then we will grow.

Mark 12:30 tells us

And you shall love the Lord your God with

all your heart,	Emotions
and with all your soul,	Spirituality
and with all your mind,	Mentally
and with all your strength.	Physically

In other words, we should love God with all of our being. There isn't a thought, square inch, or deep, dark corner that we can pass on loving God.

In John 6:35 Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."

Jesus nourishes us, He sustains us, He promises us continual satisfaction and fulfillment.

But look at verses 53 - 56.

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

This is a rather shocking, if not brutal, passage. Eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood! Many of His disciples at the time were so offended by this statement that they withdrew and stopped walking with Jesus (verse 66).

Some apply this passage to Communion. But it goes much deeper than that. It is talking about union. Jesus is not someone to merely study. He is not someone to imitate from afar. As Christians we form a union with Jesus that is unlike anything with anyone else. We abide in Jesus and He abides in us. It is a most intimate and complete union. This word "abide" is the same one used to describe the relationship between God the Father and God the Son in John 14:10.

This union is a mystery, but it is real. No other religion has its adherents forming a union with their deity. But Jesus is different. This union is vital to imitating Jesus.

1.2 Why should be imitate Jesus

Because we are commanded to

Ephesians 5:1, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children..."

It is commanded. That, in itself, should be enough.

Because it glorifies God

Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

God is light – 1 John 1:5. He is the sun. We are the moon. We have no light in ourselves. We only reflect the light that He shines upon us. But if we hide behind our sin then His light won't penetrate and so we are darkness.

Imitate God and He will shine out of you onto others.



Because we will be more joyful and fulfilled

1 Thessalonians 1:6, "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit..."

Notice how even in the midst of tribulation they had joy. Why? Isn't that counter-intuitive? They had joy because they imitated the Lord. When you imitate the Lord, God will bless you. You will have abundant grace. Your focus will be on God and not on the problems.

If someone is standing several hundred feet away you can easily fit them between your thumb and index finger if you close one eye and spread those two fingers an inch apart. But if a tiny spider crawls across your glasses it appears as though a monster is in your face. An aspect of perspective is how objects appear to us based on our relationship to them. The closer something is to us the larger it will appear. In the above situation we know that a person is larger than a spider but at that moment the spider is more intimidating.

This same principle holds true for our problems and God. Whichever one we keep closer to us the bigger it will appear than the other. If we keep God at a distance by not reading the Bible, praying, or attending church then He will appear to be small and ineffective. We may occasionally yell to Him for help but it is like we are talking to someone on the other side of a parking lot. Whereas if we constantly focus on a problem, thinking about it, mulling its worst consequences then it will be like that spider on our glasses. Of course the reality is that God is greater than any problem but our perspective of these may be distorted because of which one we are keeping closest to us.

It is only by being in the constant presence of God that we can begin to see just how great and powerful He is.

As you strive to imitate God, you will focus on Him and not on the world and its problems.

To be an example to other believers

1 Thessalonians 1:6-7, You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

As a Christian, in your home, in this church, in the world, you are being watched. What do you want your children, the Christians sitting next to you, the people that you work with to imitate of yours? Your anger, your cheating, your language or your joy, your kindness, your humility?

Show God to others.

Because it will witness to and make an impression on non-believers

2 Corinthians 3:2-3, “2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

It’s been said that there are five Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and you. And the only Gospel that anyone may ever read is you.

The world doesn’t need you. But what the world desperately needs is to see Christ in you.

1.3 God never asks us to do something that He has not done already.

The culture that Christianity was born into was primary Roman and Greek.

How the Roman and Greek gods treated morals depended wholly on how the morals treated them. If humans treated them well even when the gods were in disguise then the people were rewarded. But if not, then the people were punished, sometimes severely. Usually the gods either exploited or they punished morals.

National Geographic wrote, “the Romans gods were seen as caring little about the morality of the Roman people. Rather, their chief concern was being paid tribute through very specific rituals.”

Here is a story that exemplifies how the Roman gods of that culture were viewed.



Philemon and his wife Baucis were an old couple that had lived in poverty on the outskirts of a town called Tyana.

Meanwhile, Jupiter, the Roman king of the gods, was going to destroy all of mankind but decided to give them one more chance. So he and his son Mercury, the wing-footed messenger god, disguised themselves as worn and weary travelers. They from house to house in Tyana but were always rudely turned away.

They then went to the final house which was Philemon and Baucis'. The couple did not know that they were being visited by gods, but, none-the-less, still treated them with great hospitality. They asked their guests to rest before their little hearth fire and brought in more wood to make it blaze even bigger. They fed their guests with fruits, olives, eggs, and wine.

Eventually Jupiter and Mercury revealed themselves to be gods. They told Philemon and Baucis to leave the town and climb the adjacent mountain. When they all got to the top they saw that the gods had flooded the town and killed the residents.



However, their humble cottage had turned into a temple presumably to honor Jupiter and Mercury. The couple were granted their wish to be priests in the temple. They also asked that when one of them died that the other would die at the same time so that they wouldn't grieve. This was also granted and when they died they were turned into two intertwining trees.



But how would you imitate these gods? When someone doesn't give you what you want then you kill them and flood their house? But when they do give you what you want then you allow them to be priests in your temple and at the end you turn them into trees? Not much there to really imitate and live your life by.

How different this story is from who Jesus was. Remember in Luke 9:51-56 Jesus and His disciples were on their way to Jerusalem, but the village did not receive them? Picking up in verse 54, "When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."] And they went on to another village."

The Roman gods came to be honored and, if not, then they destroyed. Jesus came to die, but if He was not honored, He refused to destroy.

The memorial of the Roman gods' visit was a temple. The reminder of Jesus' visit is a cross.

The Roman gods expected to be served and worshipped. Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus, as in so many areas, turned everything upside-down.

Into this culture stepped the only true, living God. But He didn't walk among people expecting them to bow down to Him and to perform rituals to appease Him lest He smite them. Rather, this God, Jesus Christ, lived as one of us. He did what we did albeit perfectly and without sin. Any good, any righteousness, any action of lovingkindness, Jesus Christ did. God never asks us to do anything that He has not already done Himself.

Let's look at some examples.

Romans 15:7 Therefore, **accept** one another, **just as Christ also accepted** us to the glory of God.

Ephesians 5:2 and walk in **love**, **just as Christ also loved you** and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, **love your wives**, **just as Christ also loved the church** and gave Himself up for her,

Ephesians 5:29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but **nourishes** and **cherishes** it, **just as Christ also does the church**,

Matthew 20:28 **just as the Son of Man** did not come to be served, but to **serve**, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Luke 6:36 Be **merciful**, **just as your Father is merciful**.

John 15:12 [Disciples' Relation to Each Other] "This is My commandment, that you **love** one another, **just as I have loved you**.

John 17:22 [Their Future Glory] The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be **one**, **just as We are one**;

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving** each other, **just as God in Christ also has forgiven you**.

Colossians 3:13 bearing with one another, and **forgiving** each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; **just as the Lord forgave you**, so also should you.

1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him **purifies** himself, **just as He is pure**.

1 John 3:7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices **righteousness** is righteous, **just as He is righteous**;

1 Peter 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, **since Christ also suffered for you**, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

1 Peter 4:4 Therefore, **since Christ has suffered in the flesh**, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has **ceased from sin**,

Philippians 2:5 Have this **attitude** in yourselves **which was also in Christ Jesus**,

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you **love** one another, **even as I have loved you**, that you also love one another.

1 Peter 1:16 because it is written, “You shall be **holy, for I am holy.**”

All of Ephesians 1 – 3 leading to the obedience of 4 – 6

The book of Ephesians has six chapters. In the last three chapters Paul is exhorting the Ephesians to live in a godly manner. He is laying down some pretty heavy stuff. Paul’s exhortations come like a trip hammer, do this, do this, do this over and over and over for 89 verses covering about every topic that you can imagine. But why can Paul lay this on us? Because in the first three chapters he tells us about all that God has done for us and who God is. And it is because of these first three chapters that he can start chapter 4 with “Therefore.”

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called...”

- Because God has saved you by His grace – Therefore walk in a manner...
- Because God has sealed you in Him with the Holy Spirit – Therefore walk in a manner...
- Because God has knit you into a church with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone – Therefore walk in a manner...

Paul can spend 89 verses telling us what we should become because God has already gone before us. God has been that person and God has done those things. And now He is giving us the abundant and sufficient grace to finish the task.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; -- Ephesians 5:1

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. – 1 John 2:6

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. – 1 Corinthians 11:1

We should do what is right because God has already done it for us.

1.4 But how do you imitate God?

God is omniscient. He knows everything past, present, and future. He knows every potential thing and every possible scenario. We can’t even find our car keys.

God is omnipotent. He is all powerful. He can do anything. He created the universe and holds it together. That doo-hicky that looks easy to fix is still broken.

God is omnipresent. He is everywhere, fully in all places. We're... here and only here.

God is eternal. It is not that He has existed forever in the past and will exist forever in the future. God created time. He is not bound by time. He exists outside of time. We stumble linearly through time. We can't go back. We can't go faster. We can't slow it down. Every single person goes through time at the exact same pace.

God is immutable. He does not change. We are in constant flux. We change our clothes, we change our attitude, we change everything at some point.

God is sovereign. He is the King, the Ruler, of the entire universe. No one listens to us. We don't rule anything.

That's a pretty high bar. Given all eternity—which we don't have anyway--we could never come close to imitating any of those attributes.

But God has other attributes. Generally, God's attributes are divided into two categories. One is the partial list above. These are God's attributes that only He possesses. They are called the Incommunicable or Absolute Attributes.

The other category of attributes is those that we can imitate to a degree. They are called the Communicable or Comparative Attributes. These consist of love, holiness, justice, order, compassion, faithfulness, mercy, grace and so on. It is these attributes that we can study to become more like Jesus.

So let's get started.

2 Compassion

2.1 Scripture

Matthew 20:29-34

29 As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. 30 And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" 31 The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 32 And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 33 They said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

This is turning point in Jesus' ministry. Previously, He was establishing that He was the Messiah as prophesied in the Old Testament. Starting in Matthew 17:14 this is the final event where Jesus was teaching the disciples what they need to know about His death. After this Jesus makes His triumphant entry into Jerusalem where He cleanses the temple and where His focus is on the preparation for His death. We read this in Matthew 20 verses 18-19, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up." He needed to be in Jerusalem for the Passover so that He might be the ultimate and final Lamb of God.

Jesus and His disciples were coming from Galilee and had just crossed over the Jordan River from Perea which is today's Jordan.

This was a main road and there would be many pilgrims, merchants, and travelers on this road. Many of them would join up with Jesus' crowd thus swelling the numbers.

Also along this road would be many beggars including many who were blind. Since there were many people traveling on this road it was a good place to beg for money.

Two blind beggars were on the side of the road in their usual place when they hear a very large crowd shouting and singing and very excited. They ask someone what is going on and they are told that Jesus is passing by. They had heard about Jesus and His miracles. They knew that this was perhaps their only encounter with Him so they needed to catch His attention. So they start to shout as loudly as they could, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" This word "cried out" is *krazó* which means "an onomatopoeic term for a raven's piercing cry ("caw"); (figuratively) cry out loudly with an urgent scream or shriek, using "inarticulate shouts that express deep emotion"" It means "to scream." These beggars weren't just calling out. They were screaming. Their screams were piercing the crowd. But the crowd was very excited and having a good time. They were with Jesus on a small journey. They were better off than these filthy, blind beggars. They didn't want this moment to be ruined.

The crowd "sternly told them to be quiet." This had the idea of rebuking the beggars to prevent something from going wrong. What were the beggars ruining? They were ruining the festive mood of the crowd. "You two! Shut up!" But they cried out even louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" "Shut up! Didn't we tell you to shut up! You're ruining everything! If you don't shut up we won't give you any more money! Then what?"

Everything was against these two men. They were blind. They were poor. Now the crowd was against them.

But then Jesus stopped. And everyone else stopped and held their breath. Was Jesus going to rebuke them? They hoped so. That would vindicate their own behavior. "See even Jesus is annoyed with them."

Notice that these men didn't blame God. They weren't yelling "Look what God did to me. I didn't deserve this." They weren't asking for balance in life "I've suffered long enough. Now it's time for me to feel better." They weren't blaming other people, "No one gives us enough money. We have to come out and beg on this dirty road every day because no one cares about us." They didn't make any demands. Instead, they asked for mercy. Mercy means that you know that you are unworthy.

They referred to Jesus as the "Son of David." This is significant.

2 Samuel 7:12-13 are words that God told Nathan to say to David, "12 When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

David reigned about 1,000 years before Jesus was born. But in all of that time the people of Israel knew that the phrase "Son of David" was a reference to the promised Messiah.

In Matthew 12:22-23 we read,

22 Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. 23 All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"

Here we see Jesus healing the blind and the mute which were signs in the Old Testament for the Messiah. These things Jesus did and they wondered if He was the "Son of David"—the promised Messiah.

These might have been blind beggars with, I'm sure, limited education, limited travel, limited contact with other people, but what they heard they put together. They knew that Jesus was the One. Jesus was the promised Messiah. Never

underestimate a person's faith or who they are because of how they look, what job they have, their education, their social status, where they come from or any other outward criteria. Some of God's most faithful servants are the ones that you least expect.

- Faith is not limited by money.
- Faith is not limited by social status.
- Faith is not limited by lack of skills.
- Faith is not limited by what others think about you.

Faith is only limited by one thing: you. You don't read your Bible enough. You don't pray enough. You don't serve enough. You don't give God the chance to empower you with grace because you always play it safe.

1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

These men had faith.

They persisted in seeking out God even though the crowd was against them.

- Do you pursue God no matter the obstacles?
- Do you read your Bible every day or do you let the obstacle of fatigue or TV get in the way.
- Do you regularly attend church and serve in church or do you let the obstacle of sleeping in or "having better things to do" get in the way?
- Do you pray throughout the day or do you let the obstacle of impure thoughts or day dreaming get in the way?

Persist in pursuing God. Hosea 6:3a says, "So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord." Press on to know God. As you follow God you will always press against something: people's contrasting opinions, your lack of desire, your fears. But press on. These blind men pressed on to encounter Jesus despite the crowd's opposition.

A crowd that a few moments ago was dancing and singing and shouting was now silent and still. They were all watching Jesus. Even the beggars must have sensed the change and stopped shouting.

Jesus had just left Jericho and was on His way to His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. This was His big moment. Perhaps one of His last big moments on the Earth since He would be crucified in a few days. The crowds were excitedly following Him. If you had to pick the peak of Jesus' ministry on the earth in terms of success and grandeur this was it. He was fulfilling prophecy. The crowds were with Him. They were celebrating. And then right in the middle of it what happened? Two dirty, blind beggars yell out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The mood was being ruined. The crowds told them to "shut up." But they cried out even louder. Jesus' big scene was being destroyed. So what emotion did He feel? Did He feel disgust? Annoyance? Was He mad? What would you feel?

But then Jesus stopped.

Out of the stillness came a gentle voice. Jesus spoke to the blind beggars, "What do you want Me to do for you?" I bet that their jaws went slack, their hair stood on end, and their bodies tingled. Even though they could only see blackness, their faces turned towards the voice. Jesus was actually talking to them. The crowd became non-existent. They were still there, of course, but they were no longer an issue. When we encounter Jesus all else fades from view. As the song says:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

- Jesus was never too busy to stop for the oppressed.
- He was never too great to stop for the lowly.
- He was never too distracted that He didn't hear the cries of the burdened.

It might have been obvious what these blind beggars wanted Jesus to do. But Jesus wanted to hear it. In the same way, God knows what we need and what we want, but He wants to hear us say it. Pray. When God says to you, "What do you want Me to do for you?" don't look away. Don't be silent.

They answered, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." How simple. Yet how filled with faith.

Then we read "Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes..."

In the Greek, the phrase "moved with compassion" is all one word. It originally was used to denote the "inward parts" of a sacrifice, and specifically the nobler parts such as the heart, liver, lungs, and kidneys. These were the parts that were used in the sacrifice and the word eventually went on to mean the sacrifice itself. In later writings it came to mean the "seat of feelings" and the "center of human feeling and sensibility." I.e., it denoted the whole person in respect of the depth and force of feeling. So in using this particular word here, it is saying that Jesus was moved to the very deepest part of His being and with all of His feelings and emotions.

- Jesus was not motivated to heal the men because He felt the need to fulfill Old Testament Messianic prophecy, although He did do that.
- Jesus was not motivated to heal the men because everyone was watching and He wanted to impress the crowd, although He did that, too.
- Jesus was not motivated to heal the men because He wanted more followers, although I'm sure that happened, also.

Jesus was motivated to heal the men because He felt compassion for them from the very innermost depths of His being.

Jesus takes the rejects of society and He works with them.

Kings, emperors, politicians all surround themselves with the wealthy, with the powerful, with those who can contribute to them.

Jesus surrounded Himself with those who had nothing to give so that He could give everything to them.

This is what we are to imitate.

2.2 Imitation

How do we imitate the compassion of Jesus?

2.2.1 Let your heart be broken.

How often do you see or hear of someone in need and you are completely unmoved?

Can you put yourself into someone else's place? Can you picture yourself without enough food, without adequate clothes? Or are you only worried about getting the latest, expensive technology? As you are rushing to get that promotion how many suffering people are you blind to that you pass by?

Nehemiah was a man of compassion.

We read in Nehemiah chapter 1.

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, 2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. 3 They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

His heart was broken. He related to those people. He didn't see them as distant. He related to their distress, to their sorrow.

Then we read in Nehemiah chapter 2.

17 Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach."

But he didn't just feel bad for those people. He took action. He did something about it.

Compassion is not feeling sorry for someone. It is not merely pity. Compassion means reaching out to that person and doing something for them. It means meeting their needs, comforting their fears. Compassion means changing that other person's life.

When Jesus was stopped by the blind beggars on the side of the road what didn't He say? He didn't turn to the crowd and tell them to empty their pockets and give their money to the men. He took action Himself. He made the difference. He didn't wait for others to act so that He wouldn't have to.

We must bring the Bible to people's lives. Study Scripture so that you know how to think, how to speak, and how to act. Someone says, "I was abused. Now I can't think straight. I can't trust anyone. Do I have to live like this the rest of my life?" We take that broken life. We listen. We have empathy. We make every effort to understand that person. We don't have to immediately correct their doctrine. We are not there to defend every aspect of the Christian worldview. We are there to be with that person. That is compassion. Eventually we bring that life to Jesus and the Bible. 1 Timothy 1:5, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

You can't save the entire world. You can't solve every problem. But you can make a difference to that one person today.

Let your heart be broken. Feel for others. See people the way that Jesus sees them.

2.2.2 Practice acceptance.

To demonstrate acceptance doesn't mean that you always agree with someone or approve of everything that they say or do.

To practice acceptance means that you allow others to make honest mistakes. When you make a mistake you want mercy and understanding. But when someone else makes a mistake, ho boy, they clearly are wanting to start world war III. When you make a mistake you want a smile and a handshake. But when someone else makes a mistake it is time to put on the gloves and try out that right hook. We want mercy, but we are slow to give it.

Memorize Matthew 5:7 from the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

And Matthew 7:12 also known as the golden rule, ““In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you...”

You can't get much more powerful than the Beatitudes and the golden rule.

The first response of mercy and acceptance is not “How dare they?” but rather “What would I want if I were them?”

To practice acceptance means to accept disagreements and differing opinions. This is hard. It is easy to create “sides,” to be divisive.

Why have some churches split? These examples are all true.

- Because the service lets out too late. So what? Well, then members of other churches get to the restaurants first. Now that's a problem.
- Too many new members of the wrong political leaning, socioeconomic class, or other non-“like us” type.
- Fighting over Janitorial/cleaning service issues.
- This can be especially true in smaller churches, but two families that have been with the church for a long time squabbling over which family gets to make the major decisions.

People also split over the silliest things. Sometimes people don't talk to each anymore and neither can even remember why. Does that glorify God?

Romans 12:18, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” Put ten times as much effort into peace as you do conflict and your life will be so much better.

All throughout the Bible God tells us to accept those who are less fortunate, who are downtrodden, who are outcasts.

In Ruth 2:15 we read what Boaz said to his workers, “When she [Ruth] rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, ‘Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her.’”

This comes from Leviticus 23:22, ““When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the Lord your God.”

According to Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology and alien was:

A foreigner, or person born in another country, and therefore not entitled to the rights and privileges of the country where he resides. Among the Hebrews there were two classes of aliens.

- 1) Those who were strangers generally, and who owned no landed property.
- 2) Strangers dwelling in another country without being naturalized (Leviticus 22:10 ; Psalms 39:12).

Both of these classes were to enjoy, under certain conditions, the same rights as other citizens (Leviticus 19:33 Leviticus 19:34 ; Deuteronomy 10:19). They might be naturalized and permitted to enter into the congregation of the Lord by submitting to circumcision and abandoning idolatry (Deuteronomy 23:3-8).

Notice what this passage in Leviticus and how Boaz practiced it. God tells us to respect the God-given dignity of those who are needy and struggling in life and also those who are foreigners in our land. We are not to disgrace them. For those who have plenty, leave something for these people. It doesn't have to be money or goods. Here are some examples.

- If you own a business and have extra office space, invite a non-profit to come in and use it as their office.
- If you have a talent and teach a class or have students, found someone who is interested in what you do but who can't afford it and teach them for free.

You don't have to accept the person who has something valuable to give to you. It is harder, though, to accept the person who has nothing to give to you and, furthermore, is looked down upon by others.

Practice acceptance.

2.2.3 Stand with the oppressed.

If you are in school, actively side with the person being bullied. Don't just silently pray for the situation. Take sides. Be their friend.

Don't shun someone because they do not meet your standards of dress or looks or education or any other subjective measure. Instead have compassion on them.

Don't judge and reject that person with AIDS because "they deserve it." You don't know why they have the disease or what circumstances led them to that situation. And even if it is because of sin, the results of their sin are obvious. The results of your sin may be more concealed but they are eating at you none-the-less. Stand with that person.

Don't judge and reject the addict. Stand with them.

Don't judge and reject the prisoner. Stand with them.

Jesus left the cheering crowd to approach the blind beggars. Leave your comfort and safety and stand with the downtrodden.

Defend someone and the flip side, don't gossip.

"Never look down on someone unless you're helping them up."



2.2.4 Listen to people.

Compassion, by its definition means putting the other person first. Thinking about their needs, their concerns, their fears.

Don't turn other people into microphones for you to talk about yourself all of the time.

The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply.

When you are talking to people put them first. Ask questions. Show sincere interest.

Then the next time that you run into that person ask follow-up questions.

I think that our dog believes that God created people so that they can pet her. That is their only reason for existence. Don't you think that God created people so that they can listen to you.

Augustine said that God loves every man as though there were no one else to love.

Jesus listened to the beggars as if there was no crowd.

Philippians 2:3-5, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus..."

Imitate Jesus. Make that person's life more important than your own.

2.2.5 Get off of your phone and computer and spend time with people.

Face-to-face has been replaced by Facebook.

Talking has been replaced by tweeting.

Here are some facts.

For mothers who habitually used cell phones their children were 50% more likely to have behavioral problems. The reason was most likely because of the reduced amount of attention that the children received.

(<https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/cell-phones-and-behavior/>)

A study of depression of 612,000 adolescents and young adults found a 52% increase in depression from 2005 to 2017 for teenagers and a 63% increase in depression for young adults. This was correlated with cell phone use.

Teens who spent more time doing sports, homework, socializing with friends in real life, and going to church had a lower risk for both depression and suicide. (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2017/12/11/phone-addiction-is-real-and-so-are-its-mental-health-risks/#7a5386ca13df>)

Both the total amount of time spent on social media and the frequency—how often you check your accounts—have been associated with an increase in depression and anxiety. Another problem: The more social media platforms used (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, etc.), the greater the chance for depression, anxiety, and other negative emotional outcomes.

Dr. Primack, who is a professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, said, “When people are socially isolated, they’re more likely to be depressed and more likely to not deal with their weight problem or something like that. Being online a lot may be what’s keeping us from more valuable, supportive in-person relationships.”

(<https://www.weightwatchers.com/us/article/can-screens-make-you-sad>)

Call someone up. Go over to their house. Be with actual people. Be there... with them.

Don’t send a hug emoji. Actually hug them.

2.2.6 Look around you; be aware of others.

The needs are out there. Go find them.

Ask people for three things that you can pray for them. Then actually pray. Then the next time that you see that person ask about those things.

In Mark 16 Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to Jesus’ tomb but found it empty. When they entered the tomb there was a young man wearing a white robe who told the three women that Jesus had risen. Then in verse 7 he says, “But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.’” What do you find unusual and/or interesting about this verse? The angel tells them to “tell His disciples **and Peter**.” Peter was one of the disciples so why single him out? Peter had just denied Jesus three times and he wept bitterly about it. Jesus and the angel knew that Peter was having a particularly hard time about it. He was probably feeling overwhelmed. So Jesus sent a special word of comfort to him; a word of hope. Can you imagine how it cheered Peter up to know that Jesus had thought specifically of him? We should be like that also. Send words of comfort and cheer to those who need them.

Every person has a struggle, a trial, a burden. Some just hide them better than other people. But that doesn’t mean that they aren’t there.

2.2.7 Praise and encourage.

Who here doesn’t need to be encouraged at times? Who here hasn’t been down or feel defeated or feel worthless?

Have you ever sent one of the pastors an email or, better yet, wrote, yes—hand wrote, a note thanking them for the sermon or the ministry that they did?

What about the music ministry. It sounds so good because of the effort that they put into it. They may be on the stage for maybe 20 minutes but hours of preparation went into those 20 minutes. Have you ever encouraged them?

Did you ever walk away from an event thinking how good that was but then never once thought to encourage the person who put it together? Or the person who cleaned up afterwards?

What about your spouse? Is he or she doing a good job in some area that you take for granted?

Do you praise your children?

Seriously think about a goal of encouraging someone at least once a month. That is not too hard. Send an email. Leave a note in someone's church mailbox. Praise a coworker.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another...

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Isn't that an amazing connection? What does that verse say? A lack of encouragement leads to sin. The word "encourage" literally means "to call to one's side." If you had asked me how to keep someone from sin I would answer, "Reprove them. Tell them to repent. Beat them with a hammer until they stop." What this verse says to keep someone from sin is to encourage them.

2.2.8 Actually help.

We were prisoners of our sin. God heard our cries. Did He merely feel pity and stop there? Psalm 102:20, "To hear the groaning of the prisoner, To set free those who were doomed to death." He did something. He set us free.

Nehemiah rebuilt the wall.

Jesus stopped to minister to the blind beggars.

Jesus was and is a person of action.

If you are talking to someone who is struggling, don't say "If you ever need help then just call me." The person will never call. People who are struggling usually don't know what they want or need, and they won't call you. Your offer, though sincere, is the equivalent of, "I've said something nice, now see ya later." It gives no real thought or effort to the person's needs and circumstances.

Instead say "What can I do for you now" or "Tell me something that I can do to help you now." Or take it even one step further and determine what the person needs and specifically tell them that you will do that. Wise friends consider and then buy more dog food for that person, do the dishes, drop off a meal, cut the grass, babysit the kids, clean the house, give a ride to small group, call on the phone, help sort out medical bills, and so on. If you were in their shoes what would be your needs?

Instead of feeling sorry for those people in our church who are isolated or struggling alone pray something like this, "I'm going to the park this Saturday, God, show me someone who I can invite to come with me."

Compassion takes action.



Service in a ministry at church.

2.2.9 Compassion International

Research has shown that sponsoring a child through Compassion International makes a huge difference not only in that child's life but also in the lives of his or her family.

2.2.10 Once a month plan to do something compassionate.

Send a note to someone in church who is in the Vine. Pray for them every day for a week.

Someone wrote this poem:

I was hungry

and you formed a humanities club
and you discussed my hunger.
Thank you.

I was imprisoned

and you crept off quietly to your basement chapel
and prayed for my release.

I was naked

and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance.

I was sick

and you knelt
and thanked God for your health.

I was homeless

and you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God.

I was lonely

and you left me alone to pray for me.

You seem so holy

so close to God.

But I'm still hungry

and lonely
and cold.

So where have the prayers gone?

What have they done?

What does it profit a man to page through his book of prayers
when the rest of the world
is crying for his help?

When someone is drowning in life's crises you be the one to pull them out.

"Do you want to do something beautiful for God? There is a person who needs you. This is your chance." – Mother Theresa

3 Standing for Righteousness

3.1 Scripture

Mark 11:12-26

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12 On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. 13 Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening.

15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; 16 and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. 17 And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a robbers' den." 18 The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

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19 When evening came, they would go out of the city.

20 As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. 21 Being reminded, Peter said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered."

22 And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. 24 Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you. 25 Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. 26 [But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.]"

13 Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening.

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This event occurred in the middle of the month of Nisan which was April. Starting in March, fig trees in Palestine would produce small edible buds. This would be followed by the large green leaves in early April. Eventually the buds would drop off and be replaced by the figs in late May and June. If these buds were absent then it meant that the tree would not bear any fruit that season.

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Jesus was hungry. When He saw the fig tree in April there were already leaves which means that there should have also been these edible buds. But there were none. That meant two things: 1) Jesus would not have been able to satisfy His hunger by eating some of the buds and 2) this tree would not bear any figs that year.

Jesus' curse of the tree was not because He was mad because He didn't have anything to eat. He cursed the tree because He was using it as a symbolic prophecy of how the nation of Israel, though outwardly appearing to be spiritual, was actually barren inside and would not produce any spiritual fruit.

We can likewise apply this to our own lives. Jesus looks for fruit from those who make a profession of faith in Him. Jesus hungers for this fruit. He gives us grace and makes us sufficient to do His will.

God doesn't want to look at us and see only an outward appearance of spirituality. He wants to see us bearing fruit also.

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2 Corinthians 9:8, "And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

Notice all of the words of completeness and limitlessness:

- Bless you **abundantly**
- **All** things
- **All** times
- **All** that you need
- **Abound**
- **Every** good work

And this verse starts with the source of all completeness and the most perfect of all: **God**.

Is there any doubt that you have enough from God to bear fruit?

There are people who will come to a good, evangelical church and fit right in. They will say the right things, do the right things, possibly impress a lot of people.

But eventually the hypocrite will wither. They will leave the church using some self-righteous excuse of "they're all phonies." Then they'll leave Christianity because they don't need it anymore. They had no root, no real foundation in Jesus Christ. God gives grace to the humble, but not to the self-absorbed and self-righteous. Once grace, which was the crutch that was holding them up, disappears then the fact that they were pretenders (maybe even deceiving themselves for a while) will be revealed.

Jesus cursed the fig tree because He wants His people to be abundantly fruitful whether that be Israel or His church. The pretenders, the deceivers, the wolves, they will all wither.

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Rather, at the end of your life you want to be able to say like Paul in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."

This symbolic prophecy about the fig tree is an appropriate lead-in to Jesus cleansing the temple.

What was so important about the Temple that it caused Jesus to act so violently?

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In Genesis 22 we read about Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac. Then in verse 14 we read, "So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'" This was Mount Moriah. It was also referred to as Zion. This was so significant that eventually all of Israel became known as Zion. As we know, this act was a foreshadowing of God the Father sacrificing His only begotten Son, Jesus, on the cross for our sins. This is an extremely sacred site; perhaps the greatest one in the world.

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In 2 Samuel 24:18 we read, "On that day Gad went to David and said to him, 'Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.'"

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This threshing floor where God told David to build an altar is associated with the place where Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac. David bought this land to build the Temple, but because of David's sin and the blood on his hands, God forbid David to build it.

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We read this in 1 Chronicles 22:6-10:

6 Then he called for his son Solomon and charged him to build a house for the Lord, the God of Israel. 7 David said to Solomon: "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the Lord my God. 8 But this word of the Lord came to me: 'You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. 9 But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. 10 He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.'

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Solomon built what is now called the first Temple in the 10th century B.C.

But why even the need for a Temple at all?

Originally, God's desire was to be in a close intimate relationship with people. In Genesis 3:8 we see that God walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve. This was not symbolic because Adam and Eve heard His footsteps. But they hid themselves that time because they had sinned. Imagine, though, actually walking and talking with God in an intimate manner every day? When we get to Heaven this type of relationship will be restored.

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In Genesis 3:23 God banished them from the Garden: "So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken."

In addition to our being banished from the Garden, another consequence was that we are now too corrupt to see God directly. Genesis 33:19-20 tells us, "And He said, 'I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.' 20 But He said, 'You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!'"

So then, God could not walk unveiled among us as He did in the Garden. But He still did want to be in our presence.

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Therefore, He had the Israelites build the Temple so that He could dwell in the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest could go in once a year and even then, if he offended God, he could be killed.

So the Temple was a place where God could dwell among us. It was the most holy and sacred place on Earth. It was meant to show God's unconditional love and desire for us. If any Israelite doubted God's concern about them all that he had to do was to look at the Temple and be reassured of God's unconditional love.

Now back to Jesus' time.

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Annas who lived from 22 B.C. to around 40 B.C. was appointed as the first High Priest after Rome began ruling Judea. Annas began serving as High Priest in 6 A.D. But then he was deposed in 15 A.D. at the age of 36 for allegedly plotting to kill Lazarus of Bethany. This is the same Lazarus who was raised from the dead by Jesus in John 11. This plot to kill Lazarus is alluded to in John 12:10, "But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also..." This plot would have been against Roman law hence why he was removed from office.

But Annas did not go down easily and sulk away to some villa in South America. Josephus in his monumental work "Jewish Antiquities" wrote, "It is said that the elder Ananus [an alternate spelling of Annas] was extremely fortunate. For he had five sons, all of whom, after he himself had previously enjoyed the office for a very long period, became high priests of God - a thing that had never happened to any other of our high priests."

Annas' five sons and his son-in-law became the High Priests. Do you know who Annas' son-in-law was? It was Caiaphas, the same Caiaphas mentioned at Jesus' trial.

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Matthew 26:57, "Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together." Interestingly in Luke 3:2 we read, "in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness." This indicates that even though Annas was no longer the actual High Priest his influence was so great that he was, for all practical purposes, a, or maybe even still, "the" High Priest.

Annas and his sons and Caiaphas were very corrupt and very rich. Originally, the Israelites were to bring the best of what they had for the Temple offering.

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Leviticus 1:2 tells us, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock.'" God desire was to accept what each person brought to Him as the best from their animals.

However, Annas commercialized the Temple offerings. He allowed only authorized animals and these had to be bought from the temple keepers. Furthermore, the people had to pay for these animals with temple money. To get this temple money the people had to exchange their money for the temple money at exorbitant rates. The result was that Annas and his clan made money from the money exchange and from the sale of the sacrificial animals. Therefore, they made a double profit on every sacrifice. No wonder why they were rich.

Their actions violated several of God's commands. One was not to charge interest.

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Exodus 22:25, ""If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest."

Another unrighteous action was not accepting the best of what each person could bring. This was important because God wants the best from each of us regardless of the overall quality of quantity. We see this in the widow's mite.

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Mark 12

41 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. 43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

Jesus commends the woman because she gave God her best even though, in comparison to others, it really wasn't that much.

God treats us as individuals. He cares about each one of us personally. Thus if someone has a terrible singing voice but their heart is given wholly in worship then that is sweeter music to God's ears than the person with the beautiful voice but who is singing only to impress those around him or her.

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We see this in 2 Chronicles 16:9a, "For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His."

Annas violated and distorted this principle of God treating us as individuals and looking at our heart to, instead, focus on the quality of the sacrifice itself. Thus making God more interested in things rather than in people. This is a terrible distortion of God's character. It changes Him from being a loving Father to being a greedy despot.

If your three year old child brings you something that they made and is proud of, when they give it to you with a big smile on their face your response, hopefully, won't be "This is crap. Take this away." Rather, you'd be "This is wonderful. Thank you very much. I'm going to put this on the mantle so that everyone can see it." God wants us to see Him as the latter. Annas was causing the people to see God as the former.

No wonder that when Jesus saw this He was furious.

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“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” was being destroyed by man’s greed. It was replaced by “For God so demanded only the very best that He took and those who did not bring the very best He rejected.”

But this perversion was not just any man, but the man who, more than any other, was supposed to be God’s representative on the Earth. This was from the High Priest, supposedly the most holy man on the earth.

This was a terrible distortion of God’s character. Therefore, Jesus went into this area of sin in order to set righteousness and the view of God’s character right again.

Jesus’ actions set Him at odds with the leading Jewish leaders of the day. Their profits were being destroyed and they were being humiliated in front of the people because, of course, the people wholeheartedly approved of Jesus’ actions. They probably knew that they were being ripped off. Jesus was their hero. He was setting things back to the way they should have been.

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We see this in verse 18 of our passage, “The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.”

The next morning after Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem they saw the withered fig tree.

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Jesus used this to teach three godly character qualities that we see in verses 22-25: faith, prayer, and forgiveness. These are all qualities that are inward and come from the heart. Why did Jesus curse the fig tree? Because it looked good but was not bearing fruit. The tree was all outward appearance but lacked inward quality. Here Jesus was emphasizing the importance of the inward. What is on the inside of us will flow outward and result in good actions and words.

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We see this in Luke 6:45, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”

In this passage we saw that Jesus stood for righteousness. He stood to uphold the character of God. We should imitate the same.

3.2 Imitation

How do we stand for righteousness?

3.2.1 First, we must be courageous.

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We must be courageous in order to stand for righteousness. Just as Jesus went into the Temple which was filled with those who would oppose Him so, too, we must be willing to wade into sinful situations and be the light that shines out of that darkness. We will be opposed.

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5 are considered to be one of the most magnificent passages in all of Scripture. Of the eight Beatitudes two of them speak about righteousness.

Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Do you feel unfulfilled in life? Do you feel empty, not very useful, in a rut? Then stand for righteousness. God promises that you will be satisfied.

Matthew 5:10 assures this but then also gives us a promise as to why we should be brave and bold, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"The kingdom of heaven." Practice righteousness and drink in all of its abundance.

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But courage can be hard to come by. We aren't naturally courageous in ourselves. That is why God wrote Joshua 1:9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." We can be courageous because God is with us. Courage, like all positive traits, are best fulfilled by the grace of God.

2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline." But why did God give us this spirit of power and love and discipline? Read verse 8, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God..." He gave us power, love, and discipline so that we won't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. One aspect of standing for righteousness is to go out and share the Gospel.

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Deuteronomy 20:1 is another good verse on why we can be courageous, "When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you." God is with us. God will give us grace.

As has been said, "You plus God is a majority."

Standing against sin will not be easy. You'll be fighting the world, the flesh, and the devil.

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In Matthew 10:16 Jesus tells us, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves." Wolves are not cuddly, gentle creatures. They rip and tear. The world is not going to fall to its knees and repent just because we've said a few words. It will fight and cling to its sin with its last dying breath. This is why we need to stand together. This is why we need to be in church and be united with fellow believers.

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The muskox live in the Arctic Circle in northern Canada, Greenland, and Russia. They roam in herds. When a pack of wolves come by the muskox form a circle with their backs all together and their horns facing outward. The calves stay in the middle.



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Then when the wolves attack they stand united protecting their vulnerable backsides. To succeed, the wolves must overcome this united and powerful group of bulls.



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But if one muskox is caught by itself then it is curtains.



We Christians must stand together. We will never succeed if we try to be Lone Ranger Christians. The world will eat us up.

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If the church were compared to a boat it would not be a cruise ship.

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It would be a battleship.

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There are many people in the Bible who had the courage of their convictions and who stood up for what they believed.

- Moses stood against Pharaoh and led the children of Israel out of Egypt.
- Elijah stood against the prophets of Baal and won a mighty contest on Mount Carmel.
- Daniel stood up for his God by faithfully praying to Him even though he ended up in a lion's den.
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood against idolatry by refusing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image and ended up in the fiery furnace.
- Peter and John stood up against the Sanhedrin to stress the importance of sharing the Gospel.
- The 144,000 in Revelation will stand against the anti-Christ and his armies and see many saved during the Tribulation.

Standing for righteousness won't be easy, it will take courage. But God and your fellow Christians will be with you.

3.2.2 Be righteous yourself

[Slide]

Here are two verses on being righteous.

2 Timothy 2:22, “Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

Don't just pray about it.

Don't just think about it.

Don't just plan to do something about it.

Flee from it!

Avoid it, get away from it, jump away from it like its hot oil.

Why did God give us the Bible? There are many reasons not the least of which is to reveal Himself to us and to show us the way to salvation. But look at this verse.

2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

One of the reasons why God gave us the Bible is to train us in righteousness.

Though there are easily thousands, here are some suggestions on how to have a character of righteousness.

- 1) Watch your language. Don't curse or use God's name in vain. I may be being overly judgmental here but when I hear someone curse I automatically conclude that they are not a Christian. There is not room for cursing: not in the home, not in the workplace, not in the street, not anywhere. If you are around people who are always cursing then by not being drawn in and going along you will be even more of a light. At my last job I shared an office with a guy who cursed so much that if he didn't use the “F” word at least twice in a sentence I thought that maybe he became born-again. One day someone came in and asked how we were getting along. As a joke he said, “Bob curses all of the time and I'm always quoting Bible verses.” He reversed the actual roles. But see how he noticed? The world will always notice. It is always looking for a way to bring your character down to their level. Then they don't need a Savior because, after all, we're both the same.
- 2) Matthew 7:12, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you...” Put yourself in the other's person shoes. How would you like to be treated in that situation? Do you want mercy then be merciful. Do you want to be forgiven then forgive.
- 3) Don't gossip. Don't speak badly of others just to put them down.
- 4) Practice the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) especially in your home and especially around your children if you have any.
- 5) Be quick to repent and quicker to forgive.

What are some other ways that you can practice righteousness?

3.2.3 Actively expose sin.

God does not ask us to lay down for righteousness or to sit for righteousness. We are to stand for righteousness. It is not passive. It is active. It is being a light.

There have been 61 million surgical abortions in the U.S. since Roe v. Wade in 1973. This does not count chemically induced abortions. That 61 million would rank as the 23rd largest country in the world today just behind France and just ahead of Tanzania. This is out of 230 world countries. Protesting at abortion clinics is a great way to stand for righteousness.

Drug trafficking is the number one source of illegal income in the world today. Do you know what the second largest source of illegal income is? Human trafficking. It is estimated that there are more people today who are slaves than at any other point in history. 90% of trafficking victims are women. What country do you think is the number destination for child sex trafficking? United States. The Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report for 2012 states that the United States is a top “source, transit and destination country for men, women and children—both U.S. citizens and foreign nationals—subjected to forced labor, debt bondage, involuntary servitude and sex trafficking.” Chris Smith who is our U.S. Congressman for our district has this on his website: “ On December 8, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) concluded its annual meeting of the Foreign Ministers of 57 OSCE participating States by adopting a ministerial decision on combatting child trafficking—modeled on OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) resolutions adopted in 2016 and 2017, authored by Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04). Rep. Smith is the Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues in the OSCE PA.”

I was initially shocked, but not anymore, when Disney went pro-homosexual and a Pixar movie had curse words in it (“Incredibles 2”). Society is becoming cruder. What was yesterday’s sin is today’s standard. But is it enough to boycott these movies? Is it enough to boycott the studio? I think that we should do more than a passive protest. I think that we should make our voices known. The least that we can do is to send the studios an email stating that that is not acceptable to expose children to wrong, offensive, and sinful words and concepts.

How many more sins and problems predominate in the world: drugs (\$300 billion), prostitution, illegal animal trade (\$10 billion), pornography, homelessness, and so many.

You can do something about it. Maybe just one. Maybe just a little. But it is still something.

3.2.4 Choose what is right over being right

If you are in a discussion or argument with someone your goal is not to prove that your view is the correct one. Your goal is to align yourself with what is true and right. If you realize that the other person is correct and you are wrong then be humble and admit it. Don’t walk away or dig your heels in even further.

Your goal is always to glorify God and to become more like Jesus. It is better to abandon the idol that you’ve created of yourself as always having to be right and cross over that line to be on the other person’s side than to stubbornly cling to your I’m-always-right idol. If you insist on being correct then you are only looking to glorify yourself and are moving further away from becoming more like Jesus.

3.2.5 Persevere

Water is hot at 211 degrees Fahrenheit, but it boils at 212 degrees. Little things make a big difference.

Galatians 6:9, “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.”

<https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/christianity/articles/5-bible-characters-who-were-successful-after-miserable-failure.aspx>

Here are some people in the Bible who preserved.

Job

He lost everything: his children, his wealth, his health, his reputation. But he withstood the trials. He withstood the accusations. And in the end he was vindicated and God blessed him with twice of everything. A side note: Job started with seven sons and three daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys in chapter 1. At the end in chapter 42 he then had seven sons and three daughters, 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 female donkeys. All of his animals were numerically doubled. Why weren't his sons and daughters numerically doubled? Because when animals die they are gone. But when people die their souls continue on forever. Therefore, Job's original seven sons and three daughters still existed although not on the earth. So adding seven more sons and three more daughters actually did double his children.

Joseph

He was taken from his parents, sold into slavery, tempted by his boss's wife, told to commit idolatry, and faced with the ones who did him wrong. But he persisted in being righteous and, in the end, he helped save many people in that part of the world.

Moses

He was taken from his culture and family and raised in a heathen environment. He was threatened to be killed. He had to leave everything and run away. His brother, Aaron committed idolatry. But Moses stood on the side of the Lord and delivered people from oppression and into the place that God had prepared for them.

Peter

Peter denied Jesus. Then he thought that Jesus had been killed. But he persevered and became a great man of God.

Read Hebrews 11. These are all people who, went faced with opposition, persevered and were great men and women of faith.

Throughout our lives we are graded and ranked on everything. We start in preschool when we are compared to the progress of other children at our age, all through school, at our jobs, how many followers we have on social media, in video games, and sometimes even in church. We are judged by others and by ourselves on how we perform. At the end of the day we sometimes wonder if we've done enough. We need to remember that grace oftentimes comes from failure.

Your righteousness, your compassion, your love should be like water. When flowing water hits an obstacle it does whatever it can to go around it or through any cracks. If it can't do that then it keeps pushing until it breaks through. Be like that. Don't let obstacles stop you from doing what is right.

3.2.6 You're the one to do it

Don't say, "Someone should do something about that." You're someone. You do something about it. God gave you as much of the Holy Spirit as the next person.

Martin Niemöller (1892–1984) was a prominent Lutheran pastor in Germany. He emerged as an outspoken public foe of Adolf Hitler and spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps. He famously said this referring to the Nazis in Germany:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

A characteristic of Jesus is that He took the initiative. If He wanted for us to come to Him then we'd all be in Hell.

If you see a need then you consider being the solution.

4 Forgiveness

4.1 Scripture

Luke 23:33-34

33 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

From the Praetorium to the hill called The Skull, Jesus carried His cross from about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

It is called "The Skull" because the rock formation resembles a skull.



Jesus spoke seven phrases while on the cross, the first of which is recorded here. Each of these phrases traditionally has a theme associated with it.

Order	Scripture	Saying	Words of:
1	Luke 23:34	Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.	Forgiveness
2	Luke 23:43	Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.	Salvation
3	John 19:26–27	Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.	Relationship
4	Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34	My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?	Abandonment
5	John 19:28	I thirst.	Distress
6	John 19:30	It is finished.	Triumph
7	Luke 23:46	Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.	Reunion

When Jesus spoke His first words on the cross many vile scenarios were occurring all around Him.

- The two criminals on either side of Him were insulting Him.
- The Roman soldiers were gambling for His clothes.

- The crowd that was passing by Him were hurling abuse at Him.
- The religious leaders were mocking Him.

This, the Son of God, creator of the universe, was being scorned by all around Him.

And soon, even His Father in Heaven would forsake Him.

Yet even in the midst of all of this revilement and sin Jesus' first concern was forgiveness. It wasn't retribution. It wasn't disgust. It wasn't "God, help Me!" It was forgiveness.

- After the shouts of the soldiers giving instructions.
- After the clank of the hammer hitting the nails into His hands and feet.
- After the thump of the cross hitting the bottom of the hole as it was raised upright.

Amidst the cacophony of the crowd came a tortured voice, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

However, forgiveness offered does not mean forgiveness accepted. Not everyone around Him accepted this forgiveness but many did.

- One of the two criminals had the faith to believe and Jesus promised that he would be with Jesus in Paradise.
- A Roman centurion proclaimed, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"
- Nicodemus, one of the religious leaders, came to the tomb to anoint Jesus with 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes.
- Eventually, millions came to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior including 3,000 in Acts 2 at the start of the church.

"And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves" is a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." This garment was seamless and was more valuable as a whole than divided up. So to determine who would get it the soldiers cast lots.

Jesus, at the time of the greatest suffering and punishment of anyone in history and, in fact, probably more than everyone else in history put together, thought first of forgiving others.

That brings us to one of His teachings.

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus *said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 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. 26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'



27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'



29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.



31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.



35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Let's start looking at this passage.

"up to seventy times seven"

The number 7 in the Bible indicates spiritual perfection and fullness

- In Hebrew the word "seven's" root word means "to be full"
- God rested on the seventh day
- Seven Sabbatical years followed by the year of Jubilee
- There are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit

- It took Solomon seven years to build the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:37-38)
- There are seven holy feasts days observed by Israel
- Seven covenants of God with man: Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Levitic, Davidic, and Messianic or new
- Seven days was the usual time of mourning for the dead
- Seven of Jesus' miracles were on the Sabbath
- There are seven churches in Revelation chapters 1 – 3
- Many sevens in Revelation: seals, trumpets, bowls, angels, hills, kings, and final visions (chapters 20 – 21)

So when Jesus says 7 x 70 He doesn't mean that after 490 sins against you, you can nail him.

It means that you should forgive people a complete number of times.

The first slave owed ten thousand talents.

The talent was the heaviest and the largest unit of currency at the time. It weighed 65 to 75 pounds.

The second slave owed 100 denarii.

A denarius was a silver coin that weighed 60 grains (about 0.14 ounces). It was equivalent to about one days wage for a hired hand. We see that in Matthew 20:2, "When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard." In New Jersey the minimum wage is \$8.85 an hour. Thus 8 hours of work would be around \$71.

Back in Jesus' time, one denarii could buy enough bread to feed at least 25 people. How do we know that? In Mark 6 is one of the accounts of the feeding of the 5,000. Verse 37 states, "But He [Jesus] answered them, 'You give them something to eat!' And they said to Him, 'Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?'" If they were going to spend 200 denarii on 5,000 people then that works out to 25 people per denarii. If the 5,000 were counting only the men and the crowd was maybe three times that size then one denarii would feed closer to 75 people.

A talent was the equivalent of 6,000 denarii. That would make a talent around \$426,000 in today's New Jersey money.

The first slave who owned 10,000 talents then owed around \$4,260,000,000 (around 4 billion dollars). This would weigh around 750,000 lbs. or 375 tons. George Buttrick wrote that "the total annual taxes of Judea, Idumea, Samaria, Galilee and Perea amounted to only eight hundred talents." So this one man owed 12 ½ times more than the entire annual taxes for five local regions.

The second slave owed around \$7,100. This weighed around 14 ounces, not even a pound.

The first slave owed around 600,000 times more than the second slave.

Let's look at this another way.

A talent weighed around 75pounds so one man could carry one talent.

Take each of the talents that this man owed and put them into the hands of 10,000 men and then put them into a line. That line would stretch to six miles long.



Then if that line was put in front of the lord to whom the money was owed and every four seconds a talent was placed at his feet, it would take 11 hours for every man to pass by the king and put down his talent. At the end of this time the king would have around 375 tons of money in front of him.

The other slave owed 100 denarii which would have weighed around 14 ounces. He could have carried all of the coins in one handheld bag. By himself, he could walk up to his debtor, hand over the bag and within a couple of seconds be done with the entire transaction.



That was the difference in what was owed. The difference was enormous. One debt was payable, the other was not.

In those times, if someone owed a debt that could not be paid their family could be sold into slavery. We see that in 2 Kings 4:1 in the story of the widow's oil: "Now a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, 'Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord; and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.'"

The first slave could not pay back even the tiniest fraction of his debt. Obviously this is a made-up story because no slave could run up a debt of four billion dollars. The slave then pleaded with the lord of the debt to give him more time to repay. But the lord had compassion and forgave him all of the debt.

Then this first slave found a man who owed him \$7,100. He demanded payment in full and when the second slave couldn't satisfy that demand he was thrown into prison.

This bad behavior was reported to the lord. Verses 32-34,

"Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him."

Jesus concludes, "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

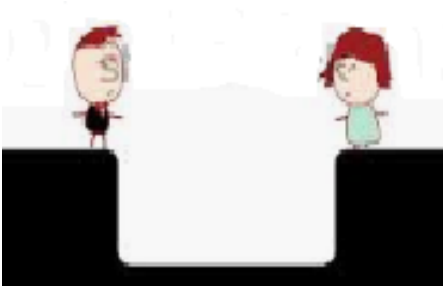
In this fictitious story about two men who owed money we read about why we should forgive each other. Then while on the cross, Jesus did that very thing. We are to imitate Jesus' forgiveness. But why and how?

The story of the two debtors sets up a contrast.

Isaiah 59:2 tells us, "For your sins have made a separation between you and your God."

Realize that sin does not merely make you less acceptable to God; sin separates you from God.

But this separation isn't like this:



It is more like this:



Does it take a lifetime of sin to create this separation?

James 2:10 says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all."

It only takes one sin.

But you may think that by trying really hard you can bridge that gap and be on God's side again.

Think of it this way.

Gather as many people as you can, maybe some are great athletes and bring them to the beach at Ocean Grove. Then ask all of them to swim out into the ocean as far as they can. Some may make it a few miles; some may even be able to swim over a hundred miles. Some, like myself, would be able to go about three feet. But no one would be able to reach the goal, which would be to swim to England, because England is 3,000 miles away. Even the mightiest swimmer would

eventually tire, stop, and drown. That is how it is for us to think that we can reach God through our efforts. Sin places an ocean between God and us.

Man's false religions tell us to swim. False religions tell us that if we pray enough, attend church enough, be good enough, read our Bible enough that we will be able to swim that ocean. But we can't.

The first slave owed four billion dollars. At an average of \$50,000 per year it would take him 85,000 years to pay off that debt. It is impossible.

What we owe God because of our sins is an infinite, impossible debt.

What is the only thing that we have to offer that is infinite? It certainly isn't our goodness or our money. The answer is our time. So if someone dies who is unsaved they must spend an infinite time in Hell as the payment for their sins.

However, because God is of infinite value, He can pay for our sins in one shot by offering up what? —Himself as the sacrifice. Only He can pay off an infinite debt because only He is of infinite value.

2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Because Jesus Christ died for all of our sins, God does not give us more time; He completely wipes away that debt.

Colossians 2:13-14 tells us,

13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

In our story verse 27 says this, "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt."

This is what we must grasp. If we don't understand this, if we don't believe this, if we don't take this deep into our hearts then we will struggle with forgiving others.

Our infinite, impossible debt has been completely and forever canceled out. It is gone. No payment, no matter how small, will ever be required.

But which of the two slaves do we tend to be more like?

How unlike God we can be when someone sins against us.

When someone offends us how often do we scheme and fume and gossip about them?

But think about this, if we make that person pay anything at all because of their sin against us then we are placing on them a burden that God does not place upon us.

xxxxxx

When God looks at you now as a forgiven Christian, what does He see?

- Does He see a raggedy sinner?
- Does He see someone who is unworthy to come near to Him?
- Does He see someone whom He regrets saving because you are such a failure?

Gal 3:27, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

When God looks at you, He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

When you write a letter, you put it into an envelope, moisten the glue, and seal the envelope.

At that point you can no longer see the contents of that letter; it is completely enclosed by the envelope.

Now write down in a letter all of your sins.

Fold that letter, put it into an envelope, moist the glue, and seal it.

No one can read that list of sins anymore.

In the same way, we, with our sins, are enclosed in Jesus Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and God the Father, the righteous judge, can no longer see that list of sins.

When we are baptized into Christ we are completely immersed, we are completely placed in Him and our sins are no longer visible to the Father.

Forgiveness doesn't merely dust us off; forgiveness cleanses us and covers us.

And yet how unlike God we can be when someone sins against us.

When someone offends us how often do we scheme and fume and gossip about them?

But think about this, if we make that person pay anything at all because of their sin against us then we are placing on them a burden that God does not place upon us.

God says, "You have committed this great number of sins against Me all of your life. Some of them were indeed terrible. Yet here is My forgiveness.

- It is free.
- It is complete.
- It is totally unconditional.

Please, just take it."

And, you know what? He wants us to be the same way towards others.

- He wants us to be just as free in our forgiveness of others.
- He wants us to be just as complete in our forgiveness of others.
- He wants us to be just as unconditional in our forgiveness of others.

It is far better to forgive and forget than to hate and remember.

Before Louis XII became King of France he suffered great indignities and cruelties at the hand of his cousin Charles VIII. He was slandered, thrown into prison, kept in chains and constant fear of death.

When he succeeded his cousin to the throne, however, his close friends and advisers urged him to seek revenge for all these shameful atrocities. But Louis XII would not hear to any of these suggestions.

But then they saw him preparing a list of all the names of men who had been guilty of crimes against himself. Behind each name they noticed he was placing a red cross. His enemies, hearing of this list and the red cross placed behind each name by the king himself, were filled with dread alarm. They thought that the sign of a cross meant they were thereby sentenced to death on the gallows. One after the other they fled the court and their beloved country.

But King Louis XII learning of their flight called for a special session of the court to explain his list of names and the little red crosses. "Be content, and do not fear," he said in a most cordial tone. "The cross which I drew by your names is not a sign of punishment, but a pledge of forgiveness and a seal for the sake of the crucified Savior, who upon His Cross forgave all His enemies, prayed for them, and blotted out the handwriting that was against them."

We, too, must have red crosses next to each person who has offended us.

Ironically, when offered bitterness while on the cross, Jesus refused it.

The bitterness no longer belongs to us, we belong to the bitterness.

Once sin gets into our lives it doesn't stay for a while and then decide that it has done enough damage and then it just goes away on its own.

Sin may

- Creep in
 - It may burst in
 - It may disguise itself and slip in
- But it always leaves clawing and screaming.

It never just fades away.

Six points.

- a) The first step in forgiving is to recognize that God has greatly and abundantly and completely forgiven us.

You must first see how abundantly God has forgiven you before you will be able to forgive others.

- b) Secondly, we need to pray.

This takes realizing that we cannot do it on our own--that we lack the power, and that we lack the desire.

When we struggle with forgiving someone--let's face it--the problem is not that we don't have enough faith to forgive them.

The problem is that we don't have any faith to forgive them.

Why?

The main reason may be because we don't want to.

- We want to see them suffer for what they did.
- We want them to feel the same hurt that they made us to feel.
- We want to give them the message that if they hurt me then they will feel pain also, so they better think twice about hurting me again.

But let's be truthful, if someone hurts me and then I make them suffer for it to the point where I feel satisfied that they know what it feels like then I can't forgive them.

Why?

Because forgiveness involves releasing someone from a debt.

But if I make them pay off that debt then there is nothing left to forgive.

Forgiveness means graciously releasing them from a debt; not making them do penance first.

This gives hope.

We can, by the grace of God, forgive anyone; no matter how deep, no matter how long it has been there.

We need to pray, "God, give me the desire to forgive. God, give me the power to forgive."

We can forgive others the way that God forgives us.

The key is that we must want to forgive them.

You see, God does not make forgiving others to be hard.

But He is saying that if you don't have the faith to obey God in even the simple basic commands then don't expect to have the faith to do something like forgive another person.

- If you aren't regularly attending a church
- If you aren't reading the Bible on a consistent basis
- If you aren't praying

Then how can you expect to be able to forgive?

A key to forgiving someone is not for us to psyche ourselves up until we think that we have convinced ourselves that we should forgive that person.

It is not weighing the reasons for and the reasons against.

The key is in believing God to do the work in our own hearts and to believe His strength and His power.

We will struggle with forgiveness so long as we leave God out of the picture and try and accomplish this on our own.

If you cannot free people from their wrongs then you will enslave yourself to your own painful past and will then allow that bitterness to become your future.

You can reverse this future only by releasing the other person from their sin against you and you can only do that by forgiving them.

Hebrews 12:15 says, “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.”

When you are bitter and refuse to forgive, not only will it destroy your own life, but it will also negatively affect the lives of those around you.

In the early 1950s a Rabbi was planning to move to America from Europe but he said that he would not be able to go unless he did one thing first, and that was to forgive Hitler. Because if he did not forgive Hitler then he would take Hitler with him to America.

You will know that you have truly forgiven someone when you can spontaneously wish them well.

General Robert E. Lee’s zeal for North-South reconciliation verged on the evangelical, judging from some of his postwar statements. One of his biographers, Charles Bracelen Flood, recounted an anecdote that speaks to Lee’s conviction that the formerly warring factions — particularly the side that lost, his side, the South — needed to forgive and forget and get on with the business of being Americans:

Lee knew that the war was over and that everything depended on a new attitude for a new day. He was taken to call on a lady who lived north of Lexington, and she promptly showed him the remains of a tree in her yard. All its limbs had been shot off by Federal artillery fire during Hunter’s raid, and its trunk torn by cannonballs. The woman looked at him expectantly as she showed him this memento of what she and her property had endured. Here was a man who would sympathize. Lee finally spoke. “Cut it down, my dear Madam, and forget it.”

It is better to forgive the injustices of the past than to allow them to take root and add bitterness to your future.

Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

There is always a time to forgive.

That time is always now.

- Your season of bitterness is over.
- Your season of anger and plotting revenge is over.
- Your season of chaining yourself to this other person’s hurt or disappointment is over.

It is a new season, a fresh season, a season to plant something new.

Do you want to forget what was behind?

Then do what Paul did in **Philippians 3:13**, “but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.”

Do you want to forget the past? Then forgive; chop down that broken tree and nurture something new and exciting. Discover what God wants to do with you once you've freed yourself from the bitterness of your past. Live in the present and the future and not in the past.

You may feel that the person hasn't paid enough yet to be forgiven. But forgiveness, by its definition, excludes payment. Otherwise, it's not forgiveness; it's justice.

What two words are the key to our struggle with forgiving?—"not want." We do not want to forgive.

By the abundant grace of God we most definitely can forgive, we may somewhat want to forgive, but we don't.

And, yes, it is true that a particularly vile offense may take time.

It might not be that we don't want to forgive but that the wound is too new, we are still wobbling and confused, or we just don't know what hit us.

And this could be justified.

But as time goes on, the problem anymore is not so much the original offense but the attitude that we've developed.

If you are struggling to forgive then perhaps you should dig deep enough to ask yourself "why not?"

Let's go back to the story about the two slaves.

1) The first slave did not ask for forgiveness; he asked for an extension of time (**verse 26**). He didn't realize that what he owed was unpayable.

If we have any attitude toward our sin and God thinking that we can do something—anything—to help pay for our sin or to do some sort-of penance, then we will struggle in our forgiving of others.

Why?

Because if we think that we can do something to help pay for our sin before God then we will require others to pay us for the sin that they commit against us.

If you do not allow God to be gracious and forgiving then how will you ever be gracious and forgiving yourself?

So what is one thing that you can do to be able to forgive others?

It is to more deeply realize and appreciate God's forgiveness towards you.

And what is one way that you can do this?

Verbally thank God for sins that you have committed that He has forgiven you for.

- "God, even though I was immoral, thank You that You have forgiven me."
- "God, even though I was bitter and angry, thank You that You have forgiven me."
- "God, even though I lied and cheated, thank You that You have forgiven me."
- "God, even though... even though... even though..."

Bring God's forgiveness off the pages of the Bible and into your heart.

Take it from being mere doctrine to applying it personally to your own life in a very concrete and specific way.

2) The first slave didn't understand the offer of forgiveness and so he was unable to grant it. Notice what is missing between verses 27 and 28.

There was no humility or thankfulness. He goes out and meets someone who owes him a relatively small amount.

Now if God's forgiveness were on his heart then that would have flowed out of his life when he met the second man. But what was on his heart? --Himself. It was on what he was lacking.

We must be careful not to take God for granted. Do not trample on God's graciousness.

When you put it into perspective, God's forgiveness of us is like the distance from here to the planet Pluto. But our forgiveness of someone else is like the distance from yourself to the person standing in front of you.

This is God's rebuke in verse 33, "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" God gave him an ocean of forgiveness; He only asked that this man show a drop of forgiveness to the next man.

To sum up this section, so why should we forgive others?

- Because God has forgiven us
- Because unforgiveness will take over our lives and make us its slave
- Because forgiveness allows us to exhibit God's grace, power, and forgiveness in our own lives
- Because God has so richly forgiven us how could not return even a morsel of forgiveness to someone else?

5 Stories by way of parables

5.1 Scripture

Matt 13:1-3a, 10-16

That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. 2 And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.

3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying [the parable of the sower]

10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 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. 14 In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;

You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;

15 For the heart of this people has become dull,

With their ears they scarcely hear,

And they have closed their eyes,

Otherwise they would see with their eyes,

Hear with their ears,

And understand with their heart and return,

And I would heal them.’

16 But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 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.

Whose house Jesus came out of is never identified. Some commentators think that it was the writer of the book Matthew’s house, but it is unclear.

When the crowds gathered Jesus went out into a boat to address the crowd. He did this so that He could be easily be seen and heard. By being in the boat He put some separation between Him and the crowd and so gave everyone a more equal way of seeing and hearing Him.

Here is Matthew 13 is the first place where Jesus starting using parables. To understand why He did this we need to go back to chapter 12. That is a pivotal chapter. There is where the religious leaders formally rejected Jesus. Jesus accuses them of the unpardonable sin and calls them a brood of vipers. The religious leaders and the crowds had proven themselves to be deaf to the messages of Jesus. So now He was changing His presentation.

There were three types of people to whom Jesus was addressing.

- 1) There were those who were His followers. These people hung on Jesus’ every word and desired to understand what He said. This is why when they didn’t understand something they asked. For example in Matthew 13:36, “And His disciples came to Him and said, ‘Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.’”
- 2) The second group was those who opposed Jesus and who had closed their ears and hearts to His message.
- 3) The third group was that great crowd who were on the fence. They would consider what Jesus had to say but to what effort would they make to understand it? If they realized that Jesus was more than a good teacher then they would know that He was not giving them lessons on where to plant seed. They would then think about it and think about it. Sometimes they might figure it out although that might be difficult and would require illumination by the Holy Spirit. Other times they would want to hear more from Jesus so they would come back. With additional information they then might be able to connect the dots.

The disciples ask Jesus why He was now speaking in parables. From His answer we can draw some conclusions.

From this section, three observations can be made regarding why Jesus used parables.

First, Jesus used parables in order to hide or conceal the true spiritual meaning of what He was teaching. Those who were only there to catch Jesus in some error or to stir the crowd against Him would not be able to find anything wrong with what He said when speaking in parables. After all, there is nothing erroneous about seed falling on rocks not growing.

Also, for those people who were only there for the excitement or the free food would hear a simple, common truth and be happy with that. They would get nothing deeper and that was OK with them. But think of what they were missing out on. These are the people who go to a sumptuous buffet piled with cheeses and meats and seafood and eat only the lettuce. These people heard Jesus teach about money, and seeds and birds but missed out on eternal riches and forgiveness and life everlasting in Heaven.

Were the meanings of parables always meant to be kept secret to everyone except believers? Matthew 10:27 says, “What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.” Parables were one of the most common teachings that Jesus told to only the disciples, i.e., what He told them in the darkness. After Jesus ascended I believe that the disciples then went out and proclaimed and explained

these parables. Then those who heard the original parable from Jesus but did not understand it would go “Ahhh, now I get it.”

Second, parables were a common means of communication and had been for many centuries in the Mideast culture.

Ezekiel 17:2-10 is the parable of the two eagles and the vine.

In 2 Samuel 12:1-4 Nathan rebukes David with the parable of the rich man and his flocks who takes the one ewe lamb from the poor man.

Judges 9:8-15 is the parable of the trees trying to anoint a king.

And there are many more.

Parables such as these drove the point home. They stuck in people’s minds and gave them something to remember. It carried the weight of illustration.

Which of these two sentences will you remember more?

Don’t try to build yourself up by putting others down?

Or

“Surrounding yourself with dwarves does not make you a giant” – Yiddish Proverb.

By using understandable illustrations, Jesus was able to connect with the people. He did not try to dazzle them with complicated treatises filled with large, technical words. Parables taught both everyday practical truths and spiritual principles.

Third, Jesus used parables to fulfill prophecy. Matthew 13:34-35 tells us, “34 All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.’”

Jesus was quoting Asaph in Psalm 78:1-4. A sign of the Messiah would be that He speaks in parables.

<https://www.simplybible.com/f664-why-jesus-spoke-in-parables.htm>

5.2 What is a parable?

The Bible uses many literary devices: simile, metaphor, allegory, symbol, personification, hyperbole, proverb and others. Parable is one of these devices.

The root word of parable is “paraballo.” “Para” means “at or to one side of, side by side” and “ballo” means to “a throwing.” Hence parable means “to throw alongside” as in a comparison.

A Biblical parable has the following characteristics.

- 1) It is a comparison between two different things.
- 2) It is a short story usually between one sentence and several paragraphs.
- 3) It has a front side which is the story and a back side which is what is being illustrated.

- 4) The front side is not necessarily historical but will be true to life.
- 5) The front side is familiar, recognizable, and easily understood and will draw from nature, common activities or situations, family life, business, personnel interactions, and politics.
- 6) The back side is a spiritual principle or moral lesson that is harder to understand.
- 7) The back side is not stated or revealed in the story; it is hidden. It must be derived by reasoning and deduction.
- 8) It has one central point.
- 9) The details of the front side are there only to illustrate the main point and are not meant to call attention to themselves.

Thus we can define a parable as a familiar, realistic short story that illustrates a spiritual truth.

Easton's Bible Dictionary calls a parable "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

5.2.1 Front and back sides

By its very definition there are two sides to a parable. There is the front side. This is the telling of an event or events that is potentially observable and familiar. But the front side is not the main point; it is not the reason for the telling of the story.

In the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-9) Jesus is not telling the story to encourage us to look for lost money. This is merely an illustration of a back side. We can match up the front side to the back side. The coin represents a person. A coin has special value because it has stamped on it the image of the king; otherwise, it is just a piece of metal. Likewise, a person has special value because we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The woman represents God who has a tremendous concern about this lost person. So the woman lights a lamp symbolic of how Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12) and she sweeps out the dirt showing how He washes away our sins (Psalm 51:2). Then when she has found the coin she rejoices with her friends and neighbors just as when a person repents and is born-again all of heaven rejoices. The real moral of the story is how much God cares about the eternal destiny of each person and therefore we should be driven by that same attitude.

Every parable has these two stories: an illustrative front story based on the recognizable and natural and the meaningful back story based on the supernatural.

5.2.2 Hidden meaning

When in Matthew 13:10 the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered that the reason was to hide spiritual meaning from those who have closed their eyes to the spiritual. The real meaning behind the story will only be discerned by those who actually care, by those who want to take the time and make an effort to understand. To the rest (the "them" in verse 11) the story of the parable is nothing more than what they hear upfront.

For example, the parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matt 13:24-30) could be interpreted by a non-believer as being simply about gardening. If someone who does not like you throws weed seed into your garden then wait until both are mature before you weed otherwise you may pull out your good plants with the bad. That was all that Jesus was talking about, they claim, and they do not care about anything more.

But those who are spiritual see the deeper spiritual meaning of how the wicked and the deceivers are mixed in with true believers and that they can be hard to tell apart. The final separating must be left to God and to the truths that He has given to us in the Bible.

5.2.3 Presentation of the story

Every Biblical parable presented a short story from beginning to end that was commonplace and familiar. They were relatable. In every one of them a person could be standing off to the side and watch what is going on. You could be walking on a road and see five women entering a carriage with lit lanterns while five other women are rushing down the street to buy oil for their extinguished lanterns. It may be an unlikely event but it, or something very similar, could be witnessed. We could see a man searching in ditches and bushes for his lost sheep. We could be coming home from the market and find a man who is beaten and left on the side of the road. These were recognizable if not always common situations. There was a wedding feast, someone who owes a lot of money, a tree with no figs and so on.

5.2.4 A comparison

The definition of “parable” is a comparison of one thing that is placed or “thrown” alongside another thing. This is the front side compared to the back side. They are two threads, the natural and the supernatural, that run alongside of and parallel to each other.

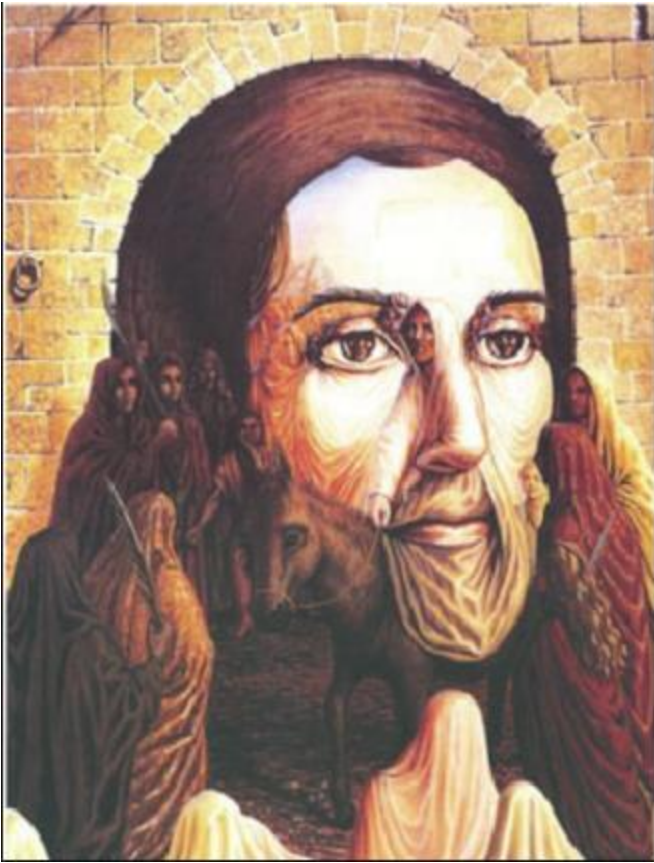
In Luke 8:16-18 a lamp is not put under a basket but put on a lampstand compares to the Gospel not been hidden in our lives but eagerly shared with those who do not know.

In Matt 7:24-27 the house built on sand falls when opposition comes but the house built on a rock will endure. Likewise, a person who builds his or her life on money, prestige, or power will fall when trials come, but the person who builds his life on the eternal foundation of Jesus Christ and the Bible will endure.

Paintings can sometimes be created like a parable.

You’re going to see a painting called “Palm Sunday” by the Mexican artist Octavio Ocampo. It is a type of painting called an ambiguous painting.

Take a very quick look at it and think of what you see.



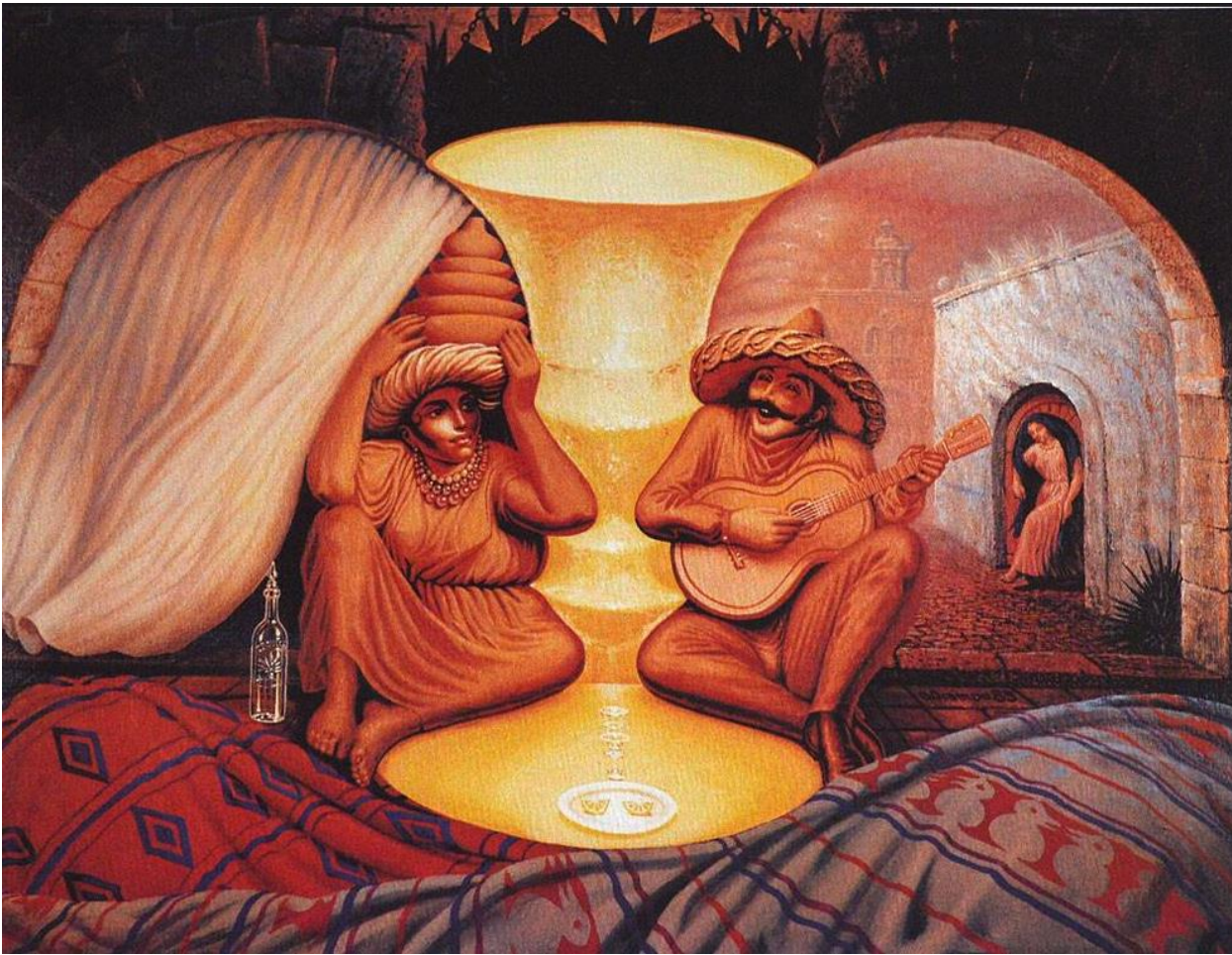
How many of you saw the face of Jesus?

How many saw a crowd scene?

On a quick glance most of you probably saw the face of Jesus. By went you look closer you see that the scene is actually a crowd of people watching Jesus riding on a donkey. This event is what forms the face of Jesus.

A parable is like this. On the surface it looks like one thing but as you look closer you see that it is really about something else.

Here is one more. Same artist. Now your eyes are more trained as to what to look for. This is called "Forever Always."



You might see the two people sitting on a patio with blankets with one serenading the other. Against the doorway on the right there is a woman standing in the doorway listening to them.

However, you might see the older couple and notice that they share the Cup of Life (center of the picture) and the crown of fidelity (above the cup). Both of these are symbols of the life they have shared and the love that fills the cup with a golden light.

The older couple sees each other as they were when they were much younger and they courted with serenades. The viewer is able to look into the older man's mind to note that he always sees his chosen as beautiful and desirable. The young man remembers how his love came out of her house in response to his serenades.

This is how the parables work. Jesus tells one story, but for those who look deeper there is something much more profound.

How can we imitate this?

5.3 Imitation

Of the ways that a parable can be used and presented we are going to focus on their use as a relatable story that carries with it a spiritual meaning.

5.3.1 When presenting Jesus to people use stories

Can you tell stories? Absolutely. You may not be able to create parables but there is one story that every one of you can tell. It is your testimony of your situation before, during, and after you were saved by Jesus Christ.

It doesn't have to be a spectacular testimony. In fact, a rather mundane and pedestrian testimony is good because is the one that most people can relate to.

You were in a motorcycle gang and you once killed a man just to see him die. Then you got saved while the blood was still on your hands. Now you are a published Bible scholar who speaks around the world on the kenosis of Jesus Christ. Who can relate to that?

You were a wife and mother with two small children. Try to juggle that plus holding down a job stressed you out. You tried everything but nothing worked. Then a friend invited you to church and you understood God in a way that you had never thought possible. You got saved and now, even though you still have big challenges, you know that the grace and power of God will bring you through. Half the world can relate to that.

If you don't feel comfortable sharing your testimony then work on it until you do feel comfortable, until it comes naturally.

Other stories that you can share are trials or experiences that you went through where your reliance on God pulled you through. If you've been a Christian for more than a month then I'm sure that you have many of these stories.

Here's an example. Years ago at my previous church I started a Singles Ministry. Once a month we had a group Bible study. I was the teacher. Our first one was at our church. There were maybe 50 people in attendance. I was nervous. I hadn't done a Bible study for years. Before the study I was wandering around the church by myself praying. I wandered into the church secretary's office. On her desk was a day-by-day Bible verse calendar. That day's verse was this: "I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears." There are 31,102 verses in the Bible. For that night under those circumstances there couldn't have a better verse on that calendar than that one. That showed me several things.

One, God gave me His perfect word at the right time. This is a verse that I have clung to hundreds of times since.

Two, God is sovereign. He knew that I was going to wander by that desk at that night way ahead of time. That means that while the publisher was selecting and then ordering the verses for that year, God made sure that Psalm 34:4 was going to be there on that exact day.

Three, God made sure that I saw it. How did He do that? Well, He's God. He figured it out.

Four, God does really care about me.

A story like that you can share with a lot of people and they can relate to it because everyone has had times of fear and anxiety. But the point of the story is not so that the other people can relate to me. The point is that I was in a pickle and God came through.

We all have problems, and we all want solutions to those problems. We want people to know that God is the solution in real life situations.

Nobody ever bought a drill because they actually wanted a drill. They bought a drill because they wanted a hole. Meet the person's need. Even God does this Read Isaiah 1:18, "'Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the Lord, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.'" God is saying, "Here is why you should listen to Me. You have a problem. You are guilty because of your sin. It has corrupted

you. It will or may have already ruined your life. But I have a solution. I am the solution. I can forgive you. I can make you clean. I can take away that ruin. I can make you a new creation.”

Base facts are oftentimes not as powerful as stories.

Stories connect us to others and show that we are authentic.

There’s a well-known marketing axiom that “people buy from people they know, like and trust.” We don’t want to look like we are mere peddlers of the Gospel. We want people to see and know that God has changed our lives and He can change theirs also.

What is the oldest book in the Bible? I.e. which book was written first? Job. It was written about 2,000 B.C. Genesis, though it describes the earliest events in human history, was actually written by Moses around 500 years later around 1446 – c.1406 B.C.

What type of book is Job? It is a story. It is, in fact, an intimate and personal story about one man and his friends. So the first book ever written for the Bible was a story.

What is Genesis? It is a collection of stories as is most of the Bible. The Bible isn’t a bunch of lists. The Bible is a book of stories.

Which will you remember longer?

Someone saying this:

- 1) Read your Bible every day because it is important.

Or something saying this:

- 2) In survival, the rule of three states that you can survive no more than three minutes without oxygen, three hours without warmth, three days without water, and three weeks without food. The results of these deprivations are obvious. As you get close to these limits you will feel extreme discomfort. You will think about nothing else other than breathing, a thick blanket, a long glass of water, or spaghetti and meatballs as the case may be.

But there is another type of deprivation that can be equally devastating. The problem is that the results are not as easily connected and so we continue to go without. This is when we neglect to spend time with God by not reading our Bible. Then the consequences will be worry, anxiety, frustration, discouragement, anger or a host of other wrong attitudes or temperaments. Usually we attribute these behaviors to trying circumstances or bad relationships, but fail to make the connection that our time with God has been neglected. When we are spiritually healthy then we will be more joyful, confident, motivated, and peaceful. This is why we should read the Bible every day and stay connected to God.

Which one sparks your imagination? Which one will you think about more afterwards?

You catch people with stories. You then engage people with ideas.

Advertisers know this. The best ads tell stories. I looked up the top three TV ads of all time. All three tell stories.

#1 Apple – “1984” which appeared during the 1984 Super Bowl.

In a futuristic society a large group of similarly clad people in drab, gray outfits are marching in unison.



They are going to watch a leader talk about unification.



A woman in bright colors runs down the aisle.



She destroys the screen by throwing a sledgehammer.



The crowd is shocked.



Apple then promotes its new Macintosh computer. Did this ad work? Apple sold \$155 million worth of Macintosh computers in the next three months. This was a one-minute story that changed advertising forever.

#2 Wendy's – “Where’s the Beef?” also in 1984

Three older women are looking at a hamburger commenting on how big and fluffy the bun is.



Then they remove the top to reveal a small hamburger patty. One of the women proclaims, “Where’s the beef?” This ad brought Wendy’s back from the brink of bankruptcy and gave our culture a new catch-phrase. Whenever something is lacking in substance we hear “Where’s the beef?” That is a story that is memorable.

#3 Tootsie Pop – “How many licks?” from 1968

A little boy goes into the forest to ask several creatures how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop. He asks a cow, fox, turtle and finally an owl.



None of them can give him an answer because they all bite it since they cannot wait.



Today's average American is exposed to 5,000 ads each day. We need to cut through that noise with something relevant and memorable. We want to give people something to think about. We want people to walk away thinking "That is something that I can relate to." We want to leave them with a next step. There is always a next step.

Stories are motivational. We want to be like the successful person in the story. You hear the story of the Good Samaritan. Who do you want to be like: the mugger, the person who was beaten up, the two who walked by and ignored him, the innkeeper, or the person who helped?

When you drive by someone broken down on the side of the road do you think about the story of the Good Samaritan? And, if you continue to drive by, do you call yourself, as I do, the Bad Samaritan?

Stories help build cues and associations. You tell the story of crucifixion and relate how only God's forgiveness comes through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and that forgiveness can wipe away all guilt and need for penance. Then when that person sins the association that will come to mind is Jesus' death. You want that association.

Stories give emotion to facts. They give depth and connection. They are memorable.

Why do we love John 3:16? Because in one verse it tells us a story.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

- There are two sets of beings:
 1. God and His Son who is quite powerful
 2. “Whoever” these are quite helpless
- The “whoever” are going to perish. This is the story’s problem and conflict.
- But God loves these “whoever” people.
- The rescue from perishing is for God to send His Son.
- If the people then believe in His Son they will not perish. This is the resolution to the problem and conflict.
- And beyond not perishing they will moreover have eternal life.

An entire story in 25 words. And not just “a” story but “the” story.

John 3:16 is a short story about people. It is not just about ideas or concepts. It inspires. This is why it catches us.

Maya Angelou once said, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” We want to give people stories that will give them hope.

In public speaking you want to go for the “STAR moment” (Something To Always Remember)

In case you still aren’t convinced, here is one more example.

Which one of these are you going to remember a week from now?

- 1) Even if you have disabilities or terrible weaknesses you can still accomplish great things for God.

Or

- 2) Fanny Crosby went blind at six weeks old. Her father died when she was six months old. Raised by her mother and grandmother she memorized long passages of Scripture. She wrote her first poem at age eight. At the end of her life she had written over 8,000 hymns and Gospel songs with over 100 million copies printed including “Blessed Assurance” and “To God be the Glory.” She said, “It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me.” And “when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.”

Which one grips your heart? Which one inspires you?

Have your story toolbox available.

Spend at least the next week thinking of instances where God came through in your life.

Our stories don’t have to be book worthy. This isn’t a competition. They just have to be genuine. Share your stories with humility. Jesus doesn’t need you to be the next C.S. Lewis or J.R. Tolkien or Dorothy Sayers. Jesus just wants you to be sincere.

Have stories that make an association with Jesus. So when the person does something obviously wrong they will associate forgiveness with Jesus and the cross. When the person is at the end of their rope they will associate hope with God’s love and grace.

But remember, the story is not about you. It is not an excuse to just talk about yourself and then throw in Jesus at the end.

Also determine in the situation that sometimes a story isn't the right vehicle. Sometimes the person just needs to hear straight up Scripture or some comforting words. Everything that came out of Jesus' mouth was not a story. He knew what was appropriate for the situation at hand. We need to be aware of that also.

Sometimes the Gospel is best presented using steps and exposition and clever arguments. But at other times the Gospel is most vivid when it is narrated in our lives. We want to bring Jesus to people in the way that best speaks to that person.

Consider Matthew 13:52, "And Jesus 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 out of his treasure things new and old." This should be us when talking to someone about Jesus. We need to have in our treasure things prepared (the old) and things ready on the spot (the new).

Have Scripture ready.

Have illustrations ready.

Have your stories ready.

Be ready to present the things of the Kingdom of God.

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Christianity is like a network of neurons. It requires connectivity and interaction. Church is one way that provides that connectivity. We need to take the initiative for the interaction.

Throughout our lives we are graded and ranked on everything. We start in preschool when we are compared to the progress of other children at our age, all through school, at our jobs, how many followers we have on social media, in video games, and sometimes even in church. We are judged by others and by ourselves on how we perform. At the end of the day we sometimes wonder if we've done enough. We need to remember that grace oftentimes comes from failure.

Sometimes the Gospel is best presented using steps and exposition and clever arguments. But at other times the Gospel is most vivid when it is narrated in our lives. We want to bring Jesus to people in the way that best speaks to that person.

Our stories don't have to be book worthy. This isn't a competition. They just have to be genuine. Share your stories with humility. Jesus doesn't need you to be the next C.S. Lewis or J.R. Tolkien or Dorothy Sayers. Jesus just wants you to be sincere.

Thinking about God that 0.6% of our lives that we are in church and 99.4% of the rest of the time isn't enough. All of our lives must be shaped by the things eternal.

We must bring the Bible to our and to people's lives. Study Scripture so that you know how to think, how to speak, and how to act. But we must also bring our and people's lives to the Bible. "I was abused. Now I can't think straight. I can't trust anyone. Do I have to live like this the rest of my life?" We take that broken life. We listen. We have empathy. We

make every effort to understand that person. We don't have to immediately correct their doctrine. We are not there to defend every aspect of the Christian worldview. We are there to be with that person. That is compassion. Eventually we bring that life to Jesus and the Bible. 1 Timothy 1:5, "But the goal of our [e]instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

We don't want to be a seed picker. A little bird that flits from there to there to there. We want depth.

Hebrews 13:3, "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body."

Your compassion should be like water. When flowing water hits an obstacle it does whatever it can to go around it or through any cracks. If it can't do that then it keeps pushing until it breaks through. Be like that. Don't let obstacles stop you being compassionate.

Even if you can't do everything then do whatever you can. Compassion is like a mustard seed. It may not be big but that small seed may sprout and eventually make a big difference.

Listen to people

The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply.

Get off the phone

For mothers who habitually used cell phones their children were 50% more like to have behavioral problems. The reason was most likely because of the reduced amount of attention that the children received.

<https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/cell-phones-and-behavior/>)

A study of depression 612,000 adolescents and young adults found a 52% increase in depression from 2005 to 2017 for teenagers and a 63% increase in depression for young adults. This was correlated with cell phone use.

About 48% of those who spent five or more hours a day on their phones—a lot of time by any measure—had thought about suicide or made plans for it, vs. 28% of those who spent only one hour per day on their phones. No other variables—like household financial issues, homework, or school pressure—could account for the rise in mental health issues over that time.

teens who spent more time doing sports, homework, socializing with friends in real life, and going to church had a lower risk for both depression and suicide.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2017/12/11/phone-addiction-is-real-and-so-are-its-mental-health-risks/#7a5386ca13df>

Both the total amount of time spent on social media and the frequency—how often you check your accounts—have been associated with an increase in depression and anxiety. Another problem: The more social media platforms used (think Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, etc.), the greater the chance for depression, anxiety, and other negative emotional outcomes.

Speaking of support, Dr. Primack also found that people who use more social media feel more socially isolated. “When people are socially isolated, they’re more likely to be depressed and more likely to not deal with their weight problem or something like that,” says Dr. Primack, who is also a professor of medicine, pediatrics, and clinical and translational science at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. “Being online a lot may be what’s keeping us from more valuable, supportive in-person relationships.”

<https://www.weightwatchers.com/us/article/can-screens-make-you-sad>

Smartphone or Internet addiction can also negatively impact your life by:

Increasing loneliness and depression. While it may seem that losing yourself online will temporarily make feelings such as loneliness, depression, and boredom evaporate into thin air, it can actually make you feel even worse. A 2014 study found a correlation between high social media usage and depression and anxiety. Users, especially teens, tend to compare themselves unfavorably with their peers on social media, promoting feelings of loneliness and depression.

Fueling anxiety. One researcher found that the mere presence of a phone in a work place tends to make people more anxious and perform poorly on given tasks. The heavier a person’s phone use, the greater the anxiety they experienced.

Increasing stress. Using a smartphone for work often means work bleeds into your home and personal life. You feel the pressure to always be on, never out of touch from work. This need to continually check and respond to email can contribute to higher stress levels and even burnout.

Exacerbating attention deficit disorders. The constant stream of messages and information from a smartphone can overwhelm the brain and make it impossible to focus attention on any one thing for more than a few minutes without feeling compelled to move on to something else.

Diminishing your ability to concentrate and think deeply or creatively. The persistent buzz, ping or beep of your smartphone can distract you from important tasks, slow your work, and interrupt those quiet moments that are

so crucial to creativity and problem solving. Instead of ever being alone with our thoughts, we're now always online and connected.

Disturbing your sleep. Excessive smartphone use can disrupt your sleep, which can have a serious impact on your overall mental health. It can impact your memory, affect your ability to think clearly, and reduce your cognitive and learning skills.

Encouraging self-absorption. A UK study found that people who spend a lot of time on social media are more likely to display negative personality traits such as narcissism. Snapping endless selfies, posting all your thoughts or details about your life can create an unhealthy self-centeredness, distancing you from real-life relationships and making it harder to cope with stress.

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/smartphone-addiction.htm>

Praise and encourage

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Serve in a ministry at church

Choose something like the Fellowship Ministry

The Food Pantry

People buy from people they know, like or trust

People don't often buy for logical reasons. They usually buy for emotional reasons.

Nobody who bought a drill actually wanted a drill. They wanted a hole. Therefore, if you want to sell drills, you should advertise information about making holes – NOT information about drills.

1 Timothy 1:5, “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”