



## Week 2 – When Jesus Speaks: Studying His Parables (#4-#6)

*Fresh eyes on Jesus' parables: discovering new insights in familiar passages.* Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

Spend Your Summer Listening: When Jesus Speaks

Join the Wednesday Night Crew as we study the words of Jesus to figure out how to actually live them. Until we get to meet face to face, will we be Livestreaming our “Chew On This” podcast on Wednesday Nights @ 6:30PM on Facebook (Maranatha Forest Lake) and Youtube. Links available [www.realchurch.org](http://www.realchurch.org)

Thank you for joining us here LIVE in the WAJC radio station.

You can listen to WAJC at 88.1 or 91.7 or at Realiferradio.fm or search WAJC in the TuneIn App on your phone

### Intro

We welcome you to this special live stream experience of Chew On This.

You are about to enter a discussion on how to actually live out faith in Christ.

Living it out loud within our messy lives. The content of this discussion comes from The Pastoral Preaching notes and this live, small group discussion these notes will prompt here tonight. Something we call: A Community Based Learning Experience. Come, Chew On This with us.

**Opening Question(s):** [Pertains to Subject being discussed. Pulls listener in.]

**Introduction:** This is Pr. Orleen Haseltine with and Sam Beamond along with Bruce Nelson (and our very own Otto Steve Lunde & Pr. Robin Bjornson joining us remotely).

### Date/Topic:

We thank you for joining us for this week’s discussion on Chew On This. This week’s topic **When Jesus Speaks: Studying His Parables**

**Access/Website:** All sermon/discussion, raw notes, and handouts are available at: [realchurch.org/wednesdaynight](http://realchurch.org/wednesdaynight)

### Discussion

**Closing Statement** [ Gives application of the topic. How do I apply to my life what was just talked about?]

### Outro (Steve)

Thank you for joining us for this week’s discussion on **When Jesus Speaks: Studying His Parables**

To enjoy this process live, come join us and the Wednesday Night Crew every Wednesday night @ Maranatha’s Forest Lake Campus @ 6:30PM. This is Steve Lunde, ALWAYS BE KIND.

Intro:

13:34-35



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### MYTH: JESUS CHRIST WAS ONLY A GREAT MORAL TEACHER

People marveled at the teaching of Jesus. Whether He spoke in interesting parables (Matt. 13:34) or gave more straightforward, extended discourses (chs. 5-7), people followed Him everywhere, hanging on His every word (7:28). “No man ever spoke like this Man!” His listeners remarked (John 7:46). And they were right. **Jesus was a master teacher and communicator.**

Moreover, beyond simply teaching the highest moral and spiritual principles ever known, Jesus actually *lived* them. He told people to love their enemies; He forgave those who crucified Him. He told people to lay down their lives for others; He laid down His own life for the world. He told people not to worry about material possessions; He owned no more than the clothes on His back. Jesus' example makes Him the most remarkable of all teachers.

And yet that legacy almost makes it too easy for people to dismiss Him, ignoring both His message and His person: “Jesus? Yes, He was a great moral teacher.” What they really mean is that, for them, Jesus was *only* a teacher—a great teacher, perhaps the greatest the world has ever seen, but a teacher and nothing more.

**Neither He nor His followers would allow for that. Jesus was either very much more than a great teacher or else very much less than one. For in addition to His great moral precepts, He made astonishing claims that no other sane person has ever made, and behaved in ways that no other decent human has. For instance:**

- He claimed to forgive people's sins (Matt. 9:2; Luke 7:47-48).
- He accepted people's worship (Matt. 8:2-3; 9:18-19; 14:33).
- He said that He alone was the way to God, the truth of God, and the life of God (John 5:40; 6:44; 7:16-17; 14:6).
- He said that He had come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).
- He promised that He would rise from the dead (Matt. 20:19; 27:63).
- He claimed that humanity would ultimately be accountable to Him (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46).
- He claimed to be God and allowed others to call Him God (16:15-16; 26:63-64; John 8:58).

These are astonishing claims. Any teacher who would make them had better be telling the truth or else He would be the worst of all liars and neither great nor moral.

The evidence suggests that Jesus was telling the truth. For in addition to His explicit claims are the implicit claims of fulfilled Old Testament prophecies and the performance of supernatural miracles. And there is also the fact that countless others who have examined His words and actions have come away convinced that He was not merely a great moral teacher, but the very Son of God. Among them have been determined and supposedly unshakable skeptics like Thomas and adamant opponents like the brilliant Saul of Tarsus who ended up becoming His most ardent follower.

To believe that Jesus was simply a great moral teacher is untenable. **As C. S. Lewis put it in his book *Mere Christianity*:**

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else He would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.<sup>1</sup>

### Parable #4:

#### Luke 11:5-9 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves,’<sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; <sup>7</sup> and he will answer from

<sup>1</sup> *Word in life study Bible*. (1996). (electronic ed.). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything <sup>(A)</sup> because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence <sup>(a)</sup> he will rise and give him whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup> And I tell you, <sup>(B)</sup> ask, and <sup>(C)</sup> it will be given to you; <sup>(D)</sup> seek, and you will find; <sup>(E)</sup> knock, and it will be opened to you.

### What does this parable mean?

#### a. Standard view:

PRAY...Ask and Seek and you will Find

#### b. Alternative view:

### Disciples asking how do they pray:

#### Luke 11:1-4

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."<sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, <sup>1</sup>hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup>Give us each day our daily bread,<sup>4</sup> and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation."

Our daily bread: What happens when we do not have any 'daily bread'?

Is this parable about asking for the things we do not have?

### Or More?

*"it's for people who find themselves with absolutely nothing to offer when facing a person in desperate need."*

Doug Newton

Could this be classified as a missional prayer?

OR is it outlining God as the man who will open the door?

**TEAM ASK:** Have I ever experienced "Desperate need"?

### What does it teach us about the Kingdom of God?

How does this glimpse into what the Kingdom of God is like affect my thinking? My actions? My life?

#### TEAM APPLICATION:

- Asking myself, "Do I care enough about someone else's problems to invest in prayer this way?"  
"Will I make time to do this?"
- What happens to us, inside, when we care like this?

### 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.



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**Pray, proseuchomai.** “The word is progressive. Starting with the noun, *euche*, which is a **prayer to God that also includes making a vow**, the word expands to the verb *euchomai*, a special term describing an **invocation, request, or entreaty**. Adding *pros*, ‘**in the direction of**’ (God), *proseuchomai* becomes the most frequent word for prayer.”<sup>2</sup>

### WORD WEALTH

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**Persistence, anaideia**, literally means “shamelessness, importunity, or **over-boldness**.” It describes a type of brassiness. “It isn’t the brassiness of a smart aleck making demands, but the forwardness of a person who is so taken with an awareness of need that he abandons normal protocol. Jesus is saying, ‘Your first barrier isn’t God, it’s your own hesitance to ask freely. You need to learn the kind of boldness that isn’t afraid to ask—whatever the need or the circumstance.’”<sup>3</sup>

### WORD WEALTH

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**Aitein** [to ask] refers to **the act of praying where the will is earnestly fixed on the answering of the prayer**. So the desire is not merely a vague or halfhearted one. **Zetein** means “to seek with the object of finding or obtaining.” So this includes faithful prayer and all other exertion directed towards the purpose of obtaining the things for which the prayer is offered. While confidently awaiting God’s answer, the one who prays must also from his side do everything that is necessary. **Krouein**, “to knock,” refers to the urgent sincerity exercised in praying and seeking. **All three verbs refer to the continuous, uninterrupted act.**<sup>4</sup>

### TIRED OF PRAYING?

**11:5–13** Do you ever feel impatient with God? Does He seem late in answering your requests or meeting your needs?

Jesus spoke to the issues of how to pray, how long to pray, and how long God might take to respond. One day His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). He told a story about someone with a need who was very persistent in asking a neighbor for help (11:5–8).

The story makes it clear that our ability to ask does not equal God’s response or its timing. God is not a celestial bellhop waiting at our beck and call. Neither does He rely on us to define our needs, outline solutions, or say when or how He should act. No, God does those for us—which is just as well since He is all-wise.

God delights in His children developing the habit and freedom of asking Him for help (11:9–10). But He won’t leave us trapped in our limited perception of the situation (11:11–13). Sooner or later He will answer our prayers, but in His own time. He asks us to trust Him to know what is needed and when.

Our calling, then, is to ask—even persistently—and to grow in the process. One of the surprising benefits of praying is how much we change. Sometimes, that in itself is the answer to our prayers.<sup>5</sup>

**IMPORTUNITY** Troublesome urgency; excessive persistence. In Luke 11:8 importunity results in a favorable response to a midnight request for bread (KJV, RSV). Many modern translations read persistence (HCSB, NASB, NRSV, REB). The literal meaning of the term is shamelessness (NEB; cp. TEV: “not ashamed to keep on asking”).<sup>6</sup>

**11:1. As He was praying ... one of his disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray.** Jesus set the example of prayer before His disciples (see a study of *Jesus’ Habits of Prayer* by S. D. Gordon).

**2–4.** These verses contain what is commonly called the “Lord’s Prayer,” also found in Matthew 6:9–13. It is a model prayer to show us how to pray, not a pattern to be repeated in vain repetition. We are to (1) recognize God for who He is and glorify His name, (2) pray for His program and (3) His will to be accomplished, then (4) ask for daily food, (5) forgiveness of sins, and (6) deliverance from sin and evil. These points are elementary and not exhaustive. Mature prayer will not be limited to these initial requests, but should at least contain these basic points. An example of how Christ prayed is given in John 17, the second longest prayer in the Bible. The longest is found in 1 Kings 8 when Solomon dedicated the Temple.

**5–10.** The parable of the friend who came at midnight was told to reinforce an aspect about prayer. Although importunity is important in prayer, this parable is probably trying to show a contrast between God and the friend who eventually opened the door. God is more than a friend, and will certainly grant our needs much more readily than the man who had gone to bed.

**11–13.** In addition, God is our Father and desires to give us freely all things. One of the most precious gifts is naturally the Holy Spirit who abides with all believers today, but who was not resident in the lives of Old Testament saints.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Hayford, J. W. (1995). *His name is Jesus: life and power in the master’s ministry. A study of Matthew, Mark and Luke*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> Hayford, J. W. (1995). *His name is Jesus: life and power in the master’s ministry. A study of Matthew, Mark and Luke*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> Hayford, J. W. (1995). *His name is Jesus: life and power in the master’s ministry. A study of Matthew, Mark and Luke*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *Word in life study Bible*. (1996). (electronic ed., Lk 11:5). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., & Butler, T. C. (Eds.). (2003). *Importunity*. In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 811). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (pp. 2038–2039). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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### Notes from Book:

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#### When Your Cupboards Are Bare

#### *The Friend in Need*

*Luke 11:5-9*

What do you say when you have nothing to say?

I hadn't even finished unloading our moving van when my first emergency call came as the ridiculously young, first-time pastor of a Bowling Green, Kentucky, church. A teenager from the church had crashed into a tree and severed his spinal cord. I quickly wiped away my sweat, changed shirts, and hopped into the car to race to a nearby hospital to see the distraught family. I had no clue what I would say. I had not yet been to seminary. I barely knew how to get to the hospital.

When I arrived and found the family in the intensive care waiting room, I learned Peter was conscious, and the family invited me to go in by myself and talk to him—a person I had never met. A situation I had never faced. I had no clue what I would say.

When I opened the door to one of the first hospital rooms I had entered in my twenty-four years of sheltered life, I saw him suspended from a contraption that resembled a large hamster wheel more than a bed. Peter was laid out prone about three feet off the ground, facedown. Pins drilled into both of his temples were attached to a metal halo and to cables that held him taut. A mirror lay on the floor so he could see who was talking to him. But I chose to ignore the mirror and slid underneath him on my back so I could look up into his frightened eyes face-to-face.

But still I had no clue what I would say . . .

That was my introduction to a life of ministry during which I have found myself in that very position, at least symbolically, many times: flat on my back, gazing into frightened eyes, with no clue what to say. Yet more often than not, something remarkable happens that has a lot to do with this parable and its famous concluding verse: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

In order to gain the hope offered in these twenty-two words, we need to examine grammatically the parable Jesus shared just before stating them. Without a clear look at the context, we won't grasp the very specific way in which Jesus intended us to hear this promise about asking and receiving. In this case, our "fresh eyes" approach is a matter of narrowing the application rather than expanding it.

#### Identifying Antecedents

This parable is the story of a man who approached a friend at midnight for some much-needed food. The secret to a fresh insight into this parable is found, surprisingly, in the bevy of pronouns that are detached from their antecedents.

Maybe a quick grammar lesson is in order. Join me back in your sixth-grade classroom. A noun is a word that refers to a person, place, or thing. Sound familiar? A pronoun is a word that refers to some previously stated noun, called the antecedent. So, for example, you can't use the little pronoun *it* until you have named the object *it* refers to. Otherwise no one will know what "it" you're talking about. The world is full of "its" galore. If you're first talking about a car and then you use the word *it*, everyone knows you're talking about the car. Similarly, you should use *he* or *she* only after you've named the he or she.

The problem with the brief story of the midnight food request is that there are more pronouns running around than school kids at recess. However, the good news is that if we diligently identify the antecedent behind every pronoun, the story becomes much more focused and Jesus' famous twenty-two-word saying becomes much more powerful.

First take a moment to read the story in the New International Version (Luke 11:5-8) and notice all the italicized pronouns.

Then Jesus said to *them*, "Suppose *you* have a friend, and *you* go to *him* at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend *me* three loaves of bread; a friend of *mine* on a journey has come to *me*, and *I* have no food to offer *him*.' And suppose the *one* inside answers, 'Don't bother *me*. The door is already locked, and *my* children and *I* are in bed. *I* can't get up and give *you* anything.' *I* tell *you*, even though *he* will not get up and give *you* the bread because of friendship, yet because of *your* shameless audacity *he* will surely get up and give *you* as much as *you* need."

See what I mean? There's not a single named person in the story! It contains a mishmash of pronouns. Our task becomes to identify the cast of characters in these four verses. We'll assign some contemporary names, since none is given.

#### Cast of Characters

Jesus	The one telling the story
The disciples	The ones hearing the story
Sam/you	The one who goes next door to get food
Fred	The one Sam goes to at midnight
George	The one who visits Sam and needs food

Then *Jesus* said to *the disciples*, "Suppose *Sam* has a friend, and *Sam* goes to *Fred* at midnight and says, '*Fred*, lend *me* three loaves of bread; *George*, a friend of *mine* on a journey, has come to *me*, and *I* have no food to offer *him*.' And suppose *Fred* answers, 'Don't bother *me*. The door is already locked, and *my* children and *I* are in bed. *I* can't get up and give *you* anything.' *I* tell *you*, even though *Fred* will not get up and give *Sam* the bread because of friendship, yet because of *Sam's* shameless audacity *Fred* will surely get up and give *Sam* as much as *Sam* needs.

#### Sharpening the Point



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First, why did Sam go to Fred's house? To ask for three loaves of bread. Why did Sam need bread? Because Sam needed to feed George, who, while on a journey, had come to Sam's home. But why did Sam need to ask Fred for bread? Because Sam had no bread. Let's go deeper.

**Why did Sam go to Fred at midnight?** Maybe George showed up late and was not hungry in just the ordinary sense. He may have been in very rough shape. So famished, in fact, that Sam considered it an emergency.

Wouldn't it take a serious problem for you to disturb one of your friends in the middle of the night? You and your friend have to get up in the morning to go to work—and you'll wake the friend's kids! Thanks a lot, Sam!

**Step back now and summarize this situation in its context. The disciples started off this chapter asking Jesus to teach them to pray. He gave them a prayer template we call the Lord's Prayer, which guides us to seek daily bread. "He said to them, 'When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread'" (Luke 11:2-3).**

So Jesus had just established that prayer, at least in part, is about trusting God for daily bread. Then Jesus launched into this brief story. **A story about one of the disciples being in a situation where he needs daily bread. But it's not for himself. It's for a person in desperate need, and the disciple has nothing to offer.** He goes through every cupboard in the house, looking for something. Bread. Ramen noodles. Twinkies. Something to help his famished friend in desperate need. But there's nothing. Empty cupboards.

After describing this desperate need, Jesus segued from story to promise: "So I say to you: Ask . . . seek . . . knock and the door will be opened to you" (v. 9). Suddenly these words, too often heard only as a broad generality, compress into a diamond-like promise with one brilliant setting: **it's for people who find themselves with absolutely nothing to offer when facing a person in desperate need.**

And even more particularly, **it's about needing life-giving bread,** which so often symbolizes divine words. Words of life. Words that feed the soul. Words that bring peace. Words that give divine counsel. Words that offer hope. **But words you don't have.**

### Finding Divine Words

One day about three years ago, a fellow pastor from another city asked to see me. He came to my office and poured out his frustrations over years of pastoral ministry fraught with one disappointment after another. He was wired to be a change agent but had been serving in a series of status-quo churches that seemed unresponsive.

The constant turmoil and resulting self-doubt brought him to the point of throwing in the towel. "I can't take it anymore," he said. The sense of defeat seemed to weaken his voice. His spirit lacked strength enough to hold up his head.

While my heart went out to him, I could not identify. Perhaps I have been spoiled by relatively conflict-free pastorates. While I've faced my share of challenges that sapped my strength for a season, I had never been close to clerical suicide. I didn't know what to say that would help. The cupboards of my own experience were empty. Plus, I had never talked with any other pastors who had survived such a season. That cupboard was empty too. I had no bread of counsel or hope to offer. And I certainly wasn't about to mouth the obvious platitudes: "Just hang in there. It will get better. You're just going through a discouraging time. The Lord will lift you up." Moldy bread is worse than no bread.

What did I do? I trusted Jesus' promise for receiving divinely supplied bread for desperate people in the context of prayer. So even though no words of wisdom came to mind, I asked to pray for him before he left.

I got up from my chair, walked over behind him, laid both hands on his shoulders, and prayed blessing from one brother to another. I had hardly finished one sentence before a scene came to my mind. It wasn't a vision; it was more like a description that arrived with a surge of energy. I spoke it out loud: "Lord, my brother feels like a palm tree at the edge of the ocean. Gale-force winds are blasting against him, and he feels like he's about to be blown over. But he has been standing strong, and I thank You that he will continue to stand strong against those winds and continue to bring glory to You."

Within just a couple more sentences the winds of that prayer died down and I concluded. I wondered if my friend had sensed the surge of passion that I had, so I asked.

He said, "I can't believe what you just prayed! Before I left home this morning to come see you, I told my wife almost those exact words. I said, 'I feel like a palm tree at the edge of the ocean with gale-force winds coming against me, and I'm about to be blown over.' But because you prayed those same words, I know the Lord is telling me He is pleased with me and that I will keep standing."

He left fed. His starvation ended. God provided bread from heaven's cupboards that I didn't have. My colleague continues to pastor faithfully and serves with stability and strength among his people and in his community. And I believe I experienced what is available to all of us, according to the apostle Paul: "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom" (Col. 3:16).

This "message [word] of Christ" dwelling richly in us is not only a matter of quoting Bible verses. Often, it's a matter of having just the right *awareness* by seeing into the spiritual realm. This awareness forms ideas, images, and words that fit what's really going on, and at just the right moment. It's experiencing what our Lord Jesus experienced that led Him to say, "For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. . . . So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say" (John 12:49-50).

Sometimes when we are confronted with desperate needs, it is necessary to seek the assistance of trained counselors and caregivers. But many Christians never experience the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to provide life-giving words, because they find their cupboards of knowledge, experience, or giftedness bare and pass people off too quickly to "someone else more qualified." Our bare cupboards become a barrier. But if we would let our bare cupboards become a signal to ask, seek, and knock, we would often find bread—daily bread—for others who need our help.



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Every time you face a situation and feel inadequate—I've never faced someone in this situation before. I have no clue what to say. I haven't been trained to handle this. I've never been through what he's going through—that's exactly the time *not* to back away. Go ask. Go seek. Go knock. And you will receive the bread you need for others.

As I crawled under Peter's suspended body and looked up into his eyes, I found words flowing from my heart that brought the sense of God's peace to a person whose limbs would never feel again. In this case, as in most cases since, they weren't miraculous words of divine knowledge—I don't even remember what I said. But they flowed easily and with gentle confidence. The flicker of hope I saw in his eyes in that room dimmed by silent fear gave me confidence divine comfort had come through my simple words. That moment I determined I would never run from situations when my cupboards are bare.

### 20/20 Focus

1. Think of a couple of times when you faced a challenging situation and didn't know what to say. What was it like? Did you finally say something?
2. Are you inclined to assume you have nothing to say if you aren't trained or experienced to handle certain kinds of problems? Do you tend to dismiss the advice of others if they have never gone through what you're going through?
3. It is often said that when friends face rough times you don't have to say anything; your presence with them is enough. But is that always true, or is it sometimes a cop-out? What if we only ever had God's presence but not His voice? What might we be missing?
4. Think of a person to whom you have hesitated to speak because you don't know what to say. How about reconsidering and applying Jesus' ask-see-knock promise to that situation and seeing what happens?

*Lord Jesus, I'm sure You understand how awkward and incapable I often feel when someone needs my help and guidance but I don't know what to say. I don't want to say anything stupid, insensitive, or incorrect. But I also admit these fears often keep me silent. The next time help me pause and pray according to the ask-see-knock promise before I assume I shouldn't speak. Amen.*

### Vision Check

When studying a difficult passage, it often helps to replace every pronoun with its antecedent and then read the passage aloud. It may sound awkward or repetitious, but you will find the point becomes either clearer or more emphatic.

Try doing that with Luke 6:35: "Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back."

There are only two pronouns to replace, but when you do your heart should be struck with new and challenging thoughts. If you want a double whammy, read the preceding context starting with verse 27 and notice how Jesus wants us to respond to other categories of people who could be considered enemies. Then get on [dougnewton.com](http://dougnewton.com) or the Fresh Eyes app and compare your thoughts with mine.

Newton, D. (2018). *Fresh eyes on Jesus' parables: discovering new insights in familiar passages.* Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

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### Parable #5:

#### Matthew 18:23-35 (ESV)

<sup>23</sup> “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ <sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

#### What does this parable mean?

##### Standard view:

You are forgiven so you must forgive.

##### Alternative view: (in addition)

Don't get caught in rationalizing....‘I cannot do that forgiveness thing’

#### What does it teach us about the Kingdom of God?

**How does this glimpse into what the Kingdom of God is like affect my thinking? My actions? My life?**

**John 8:7** **ESV** *And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”*

**Ps. 139:23–24** **ESV** *“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me”*

#### TEAM ASK:

What makes us pause in forgiving others?  
Forgiving ‘from your heart’ looks like????

How do we rationalize it away?

- “Their sin is worse than mine.”
- I am not strong enough to cancel this unforgiveness
- They deserve my unforgiveness
- They really are rotten people

How does the reality of boundaries fit in here?

**The Forgiven must forgive.  
Live in forgive looks like what?**

**Unforgiving people prove that they have never been born of God. A/DA?**

**Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.



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**Notes:** What comes prior

### Matthew 18

#### Who Is the Greatest?

**18** At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” <sup>2</sup> And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them<sup>3</sup> and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>5</sup> “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, <sup>6</sup> but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,<sup>[a]</sup> it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

#### Temptations to Sin

<sup>7</sup> “Woe to the world for temptations to sin!<sup>[b]</sup> For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! <sup>8</sup> And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. <sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell<sup>[c]</sup> of fire.

#### The Parable of the Lost Sheep

<sup>10</sup> “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>12</sup> What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. <sup>14</sup> So it is not the will of my<sup>[e]</sup> Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

#### If Your Brother Sins Against You

<sup>15</sup> “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed<sup>[f]</sup> in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

7. *His mercy: Sanctification of forgiveness. 18:1–35*

a. *Personal forgiveness. 18:1–14*

See Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48. **This chapter forms Jesus' longest recorded statement regarding the principle of forgiveness.** The act of forgiving one who has wronged us is one of the most responsible and spiritual activities in our lives and must be repeated continually throughout one's life. This serves as the last great discourse before the journey to Jerusalem and is given in response to the disciples' jealousy of one another and to prepare them for the crucifixion, an act they will have to learn to forgive. Mark 9:33 indicates the message was given “in a house,” probably Peter's.

**18:1–4. The dispute over Who is the greatest was settled by Jesus' emphasis that it was the one who was willing to forgive the most! Thereby, He cut down the basic human motivation of pride in order to be the greatest by calling for the “greatest” to be the one most willing to forgive, which is contrary to proud human nature.** Atkinson (p. 794) suggests that the little child may have been a member of Peter's family. Be **converted means a “turning” (Gr *strepho*) of one's whole life and person toward God.** This is the true biblical picture of conversion. It is far more than mental acknowledgment of the truth or intellectual assent to certain ideas. He now speaks generically of man's need to turn to Him and of the evidence of that turning in an attitude of humility. Thus, He challenges the disciples' selfishness by making them examine the reality of their own conversion. To become as little children means to be born again (converted) as a newborn spiritual child, characterized by faith and humility.

5–7. Thus, the little child represents a new convert or young believer. To receive such a fellow believer is to welcome Christ Himself. Therefore, the basis of true Christian fellowship is established in Christ Himself. There can be no real fellowship with those who deny Him and have not been converted, but with any true believer fellowship may exist. This, of course, does not overlook the discipline of an errant believer. Offenses are viewed as a reality which must be accepted in the present world, but woe (the prophetic condemnation to death) to the one who is the source of the offense. Jesus very definitely took this matter seriously. A millstone is literally an “ass-stone,” or a large grinding stone turned by an ass.

### The Transfiguration

**8–14.** Verses 8–9 repeat the same ideas as in the Sermon on the Mount (see note on 5:29–30). The hand, eye, foot are not the real source of temptation nor are they the real cause of offending others. Just as temptation arises from within, so does offending others and being offended. It should be noted that this message is dealing with both aspects of the problem. **We are most likely to offend others when we are selfish and proud. At the same time, however, we are also most likely to be offended when we are selfish and proud.** The reference to their angels (vs. 10) supports the idea of individual guardian angels for believers (not all children, in general) (see also



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Heb 1:14). Verse 11, while legitimate in Luke 19:10, seems to be inserted here, since the more reliable texts omit it. The truth of the statement, however, is reinforced throughout Scripture. Salvation is not just a privilege to be enjoyed by the elect, but is also to be shared with the lost that they too may be saved. Thus, it is not the Father's will ... that any of these "little ones," should perish. The immediate context in Matthew relates "little ones" to believers but the cross reference in Luke 15:3–7 clearly refers to lost sheep. Thus, we may conclude that it is not the ultimate wish (or desire) of God that anyone perish. While God permits man to perish in his unbelief, He does not reprobate him to such condemnation against his will. Rather, all of heaven rejoiceth over every lost sheep which is saved. The contrast of the imminent danger to the lost sheep and the safety of those in the fold (of faith) clearly expresses where the majority of our attention and concentration should be in the ministry and activity of the church as we fulfill our commission to the world.

### *b. Church discipline. 18:15–35*

The setting of these verses fits into the context of church discipline. If a church member offends someone or refuses to forgive someone, what must be done? Three basic views have been given here for the synagogue or the church (Gr *ekklēsia*). In either case the action is the same. The responsibility of action is threefold: (1) personal, "go and tell him"; (2) "two or three witnesses"; (3) corporate, "tell it to the church."

**15–18. Tell him his fault** means to honestly express the point of offense. This should not be done in vindictive anger, but it must be done in straightforward honesty. To fail to speak up is to be dishonest and will lead to harboring continued bitterness. The last phrase of verse 16 is taken from Deuteronomy 19:15, substantially from the LXX. This just and sensible principle of the Mosaic law is thus brought over by our Lord into the New Testament and established for the advantage of the Christian church. **Neglect**, better, "refuse," **as a heathen man and a publican**, i.e., as those who would not be admitted into the church. The obstinate sinner is to be cut off, at least temporarily, from Christian fellowship. Examples of this are to be found in 1 Corinthians 5:4–5 and 1 Timothy 1:20. The promise is here addressed to all the disciples.

**19–20.** Verse 19 is one of the great Gospel promises with regard to prayer. But note the close connection of the verse with those that precede and that which follows. The promise is specifically given to a gathering of disciples with Christ **in the midst** (vs. 20), called to discipline an erring brother (vs. 17). Their authority to do this is restated (vs. 18) and the promise can be claimed because they are acting on behalf of the Father, in the name of the Son. **In my name**, i.e., claiming and using My authority. Notice that the church in view here is operating in the future, in Christ's absence but by His authority.

**21–22.** All this teaching on forgiveness seemed overwhelming to the disciples, thus prompting Peter's question: **Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me?** Peter wrongly assumed that **seven times** were ample to forgive anyone. Jesus responded that seven was not only insufficient but that one should forgive **seventy times seven**, in other words, unlimited forgiveness must characterize the true disciple, not retaliatory listing of others' offenses in an attitude of limited forgiveness.

**23–27.** The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (vss. 23–25) was used by Jesus to reinforce the power and importance of the principle of forgiveness. **A certain king** represents God, the sovereign Father (cf. vs. 35), to whom the debt is owed. The one who **owed him** is a servant or satrap who had access to the king's money, and represents the individual sinner. **Ten thousand talents** was an insurmountable debt equivalent to millions of dollars in our society. It represents the debt of sin which the sinner cannot possibly pay by himself. The command that he be **sold ... and payment to be made** indicates his being placed in a debtor's prison. However, an entire lifetime of service could never repay such a debt. The interpreter must stick to the main point of the parable and not be sidetracked by its minor details. The **compassion** of the king releases him and forgives (cancels) the **debt**. The picture illustrates God's total forgiveness when dealing with our sins at the point of salvation. The debt has been paid by Christ and we are set free from it forever!

**28–35.** The contrast in verse 28, where the **same servant** is unwilling to forgive his fellow servant a debt of **a hundred pence** (about ten dollars) is deliberately presented as a hideous hypothetical situation. As unbelievable as this action would be, that is how unbelievable it would be for a Christian disciple, who has been forgiven a lifetime of sin, to be unforgiving of others. In the story, such an unforgiving servant is called a **wicked servant** because no true believer would do such. The unforgiving servant is not one who was saved and then lost his salvation. The story is merely hypothetical; no one forgiven a debt of millions would behave this way, therefore, the intention of the parable is to challenge the genuineness of the disciples' conversion. A truly saved man would never behave like the man in the story, who was delivered to the **tormentors** (Gr *basanistēs*, meaning "torturers" or "jailers"). This is certainly not a reference to purgatory. One behaving in this manner falls into the condemnation of the lost. The searching threat of verse 35 does not mean that a true believer will be lost, but if he claims to be born of God, he will act like a born-again person. True forgiveness "from the heart" of a regenerate man is one of the true signs of genuine salvation and conversion (cf. **Eph 4:32**). Saved people are both forgiven and forgiving.

**Unforgiving people prove that they have never been born of God.<sup>9</sup> A/DA?**

**Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> **Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**

### **18:1–35 Humility and Forgiveness**

<sup>9</sup> Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (pp. 1932–1933). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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**In his fourth major sermon in Matthew, Jesus began to outline regulations for life in Christian community under the sign of the cross.** This discourse divides naturally into two sections. **The first focuses on humility (18:1–14); the second, on forgiveness (vv. 15–35).** In verses 1–9 Jesus called His disciples to a humble demeanor. Positively, this means adopting a childlike dependence on God (vv. 1–5). Negatively, it means ruthlessly excising from one's life anything that could cause another believer to sin (vv. 6–9). In verses 10–14 Jesus explained why He can command these things of His followers. God has already demonstrated the ultimate humility in leaving His nearly complete flock of ninety-nine sheep to seek to recover one stray.

Closely linked with humility is forgiveness. When believers offend fellow believers, they should seek reconciliation at almost any cost. Verses 15–20 describe the appropriate process but recognize that at times one party will still refuse to be reconciled. When all other measures fail, the unrepentant sinner must be “excommunicated” from the fellowship. But even then the goal is rehabilitative and not punitive. Treating people like pagans or tax-collectors suggests first of all that they are not considered as members of the community. But it also indicates that, even as Jesus dealt with the literal pagans and tax collectors of His day, they are continually to be wooed to repent so that they might return. Decisions made by the church in keeping with the procedures of verses 15–18 will be ratified in heaven (vv. 19–20). On the other hand, when believers do repent, forgiveness should be unlimited (vv. 21–22). For in light of the immense sin God has forgiven each of us, a professing Christian's refusal to forgive a fellow believer who requests it (and demonstrates a change of heart and action) proves so callous that one can only conclude that such a person never truly experienced Christ's forgiveness in the first place (vv. 23–35).<sup>10</sup>

### 5

#### Before You Cast Stones *The Unmerciful Servant* *Matthew 18:23–35*

Go ahead and be appalled, but then look in the mirror.

I set a thirty-five-acre field on fire when I was eight years old. It was an accident. But like most of my “accidents,” it showcased my stupidity and sinful nature.

I was at my neighbors' house, playing in the basement with their two kids who were a couple years younger than I. A matchbook in an ashtray on an end table caught my attention. My parents didn't smoke, so we didn't have matches lying around to ignite a kid's curiosity. I could not resist this novel temptation—to have matches!—so I snatched and stuffed them in my pocket when the other kids weren't looking.

Then my as-yet-untamed ego had a brilliant idea: I could be the big kid. The one who impresses the little kids. I suggested we go outside, where I would show them something “cool.” We walked a quarter mile down the road and out into someone's field—I didn't know whose—and I led the little kids behind some bushes where we couldn't be seen.

“C'mere,” I said, then showed them the matchbook. “Wanna see me start a little fire?” They didn't seem quite as interested as I'd imagined, but still, they joined me as I stooped down, scooped together some twigs and dry grass, and struck a match. The wind blew it out.

That should have been my first warning not to light a fire. But of course I was too young and cocky and stupid for that thought to spring to mind. So I struck a second match, and this time it ignited the brush I had gathered.

I stepped back like a magician with a *voilà* gesture that lasted barely two seconds before the fire started to spread. Fast! I tried stomping it out, but the flames ate up the dry grass too quickly in all directions. The only reasonable thing to do—reasonable to an eight-year-old boy about to get into big trouble, that is—was to run! I think the two little kids ran too, but I was no longer thinking about them or their adulation. I did not look back.

Just before I got home, I stopped running in case my mom was outside. She wasn't, so I lingered in the yard for a little while and tried to divert my worry by climbing a tree or two. I pretended I didn't hear the fire siren but climbed a little higher to see the smoke as I worked on my alibi. Eventually, I scrambled down to go into the house and walked with forced nonchalance into the kitchen past my mom, who was sitting at the table—“Hi, Mom”—and immediately up to my room. At least that's where I was headed when she called me back.

“Doug, do you know anything about a fire out in the Andersons' field?”

“A fire?”

“The Andersons said they thought you were out there with a couple other kids.”

“Oh yeah, a fire.” It's amazing how fast the human mind can produce lies. By the time I was eight, I was already very quick—albeit not very good—at it. “Yeah, Jimmy and Carrie and I were out there, and I saw somebody had started a fire. I tried to put it out, but I couldn't,” I said.

“Somebody else started the fire?” Mom looked me in the eyes. Hers were red and moist now.

“Yeah, but I don't know who. Probably one of the big kids around here was smoking or something.”

“Well, Mrs. Collier called me and said a matchbook was missing from her ashtray in the basement.”

“Really? They have ashtrays down there? Do they smoke? I guess they aren't Christians, are they?” I hoped my budding legalism would distract my mother.

<sup>10</sup> Dockery, D. S. (Ed.). (1992). *Holman Bible Handbook* (pp. 558–559). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.



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“Doug, tell me the truth. Actually, let’s just go down to the Andersons together and tell them the truth.”

That was the longest walk of my young life as my mom marched me down to face two soot-stained people who had just finished fighting a fire that burned thirty acres of their land. I confessed. They did the right thing and did not try to make me feel better. They let shame smolder in hopes of making sorrow burn and the lesson last a lifetime.

The memory of that long walk serves as a metaphor to me of how hard it is for me and most people to face the truth about ourselves and accept blame. Even when we know we’re wrong, we still attempt to stifle our consciences with excuses, which leads me to a fresh way of looking at the familiar parable of the unmerciful servant.

### Appalling Behavior

Jesus told this parable in response to Peter’s question about how many times we must be willing to forgive a person. Peter wondered if the expectation was upward of seven times. Jesus responded with “seventy-seven times” (or “seventy times seven,” depending on your translation) and then told a parable about a debtor who owed his master millions of dollars.

After the man pleaded with his master to show mercy and not sell his whole family into slavery to repay the debt, the master canceled it entirely and let him go. However, almost immediately the forgiven man went out and found someone who owed him a couple bucks, and, in an atrocious display of mercilessness, the former debtor . . . Well, just read the text: “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt” (Matt. 18:28–30).

It’s hard to imagine how anyone could be so callous! How could someone who had been forgiven millions be so unforgiving over a couple bucks? In the parable, that was also the reaction of an audience of fellow servants who couldn’t believe their eyes when they witnessed the event. Jesus said, “When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened” (v. 31).

**Jesus knew that anyone witnessing such an act of injustice, or hearing about it, would share the fellow servants’ point of view. So He crafted the story to place us among that audience of witnesses. We cheer their act of whistle-blowing. We would have done the same thing, and the momentum of this story rushes us toward a satisfying resolution.** “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed” (vv. 32–34).

We cheer again. As part of the horrified onlookers, we are thrilled by how quickly the unmerciful servant had his forgiveness rescinded and his unpayable debt reinstated. Justice is wonderfully sweet.

However, the parable’s pace causes us to speed right past a moment that should be given more attention. A “fresh eyes” look at a Scripture text sometimes requires slowing down and not jumping so quickly from sentence to sentence or scene to scene without wondering what might have happened in between. This parable is a case in point. Between the cancellation of the servant’s debt and the time he started demanding his money from a fellow servant, a moment must have come when the unmerciful servant thought about what his fellow servant owed him.

### Reasonable Rationalizations

Reasonably, we might ask, “What was he thinking in that moment when he decided to go after repayment from his fellow servant so mercilessly?” Unless this man was a total sociopath, he must have had reasons he thought justified his action, either before or after the fact. To be sure, the parable does not attempt to expose those reasons. Probably because they don’t matter to the master. In effect, the parable allows no excuse for such behavior, because it does not grant the servant an opportunity to explain it. But that doesn’t mean the unmerciful servant did not have one or two or more excuses. What might they have been? And why meditate on that?

**Simply put, we might be capable of similar rationalization and self-justification.** Taking a cue from Jesus’ words to the adulterous woman’s accusers (John 8:7), we shouldn’t cast stones but should instead examine our own tendencies and track records. Even then, our self-orientation often blinds us to how unmerciful we can be. That’s why it’s always good practice to submit ourselves to the Lord’s scrutiny in the humble spirit of the psalmist who prayed, “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me” (Ps. 139:23–24).

Here are some examples to show how we also might have rationalized unforgiveness had we been in the unmerciful servant’s position. In each case, I will identify a possible root excuse and then share a few variations.

### The “Difference” Excuse

The root excuse: I’m grateful my debt was forgiven, but his debt differs from mine, because . . .

- it was his fault he got into debt. I couldn’t help my debt. It was due to a whole set of circumstances over which I had no control.
- he never pays people back. I realize my debt was larger, but he keeps borrowing money and not repaying other people, not just me. Someone needs to teach him a lesson.

Can you see yourself in either of these? We self-justify like this all the time. We tend to see our circumstances as unique. When we have problems, we are quick to understand why those problems happened in a way that casts us in a positive light, or at least we think, *There’s nothing I could have done.* When other people have the same problems, we are quick to connect those problems to a flaw or failure on their part.



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Let's not be so quick to cast stones. And remember, this parable does not explain the unmerciful servant's behavior, because there is no excuse. It doesn't matter why a person racks up a debt, even though some debts occur by unwise choices and others by uncontrollable circumstances. God's Old Testament provision for the "year for canceling debts" every seven years (Deut. 15:1) and the "year of jubilee" every fifty years (Lev. 25:10) mandates the cancellation of debts and restoration of lost property regardless of whether a person was to blame for being in debt or was simply a victim of unfortunate circumstances.

This spirit of "jubilee" applies not only to financial indebtedness. When people "owe" you more gratitude or thoughtfulness than they've shown or when they "owe" you an apology or a better attitude or kinder words, you have no more right to demand those "debts" be paid than the unmerciful servant had to demand payment. These offenses of sin and neglect are most likely what Jesus had in mind when He taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).

When you hear yourself using the "difference" excuse to justify treating a person with a lack of grace and forgiveness, stop. Just stop. You have no excuse for using the "difference" excuse.

### **The "Obligation" Excuse**

The root excuse: don't get me wrong; I am so relieved to have my debt canceled! But just because the master was obligated to cancel mine does not obligate me to cancel other people's debts. The master was obliged to cancel mine, because . . .

- he's rich. He can afford to forgive my debt. He has plenty of money and won't go without food if he doesn't have my money. But the very fact that I couldn't pay the debt means I don't know whether I will even have enough money to put groceries on the table unless people who owe me pay me back. So the guy has got to pay up. A couple bucks is a couple bucks!
- there's a certain logic to debt repayment. If it's impossible to pay, then it might as well be erased. But when a debt is not too large to be repaid, then the obligation should be enforced. Consequently, the master was right not to enforce my debt, because it was unpayable. But I am justified in enforcing the debt of the guy who owes me, because it's payable.

A person who wants to find a law for everything makes these kinds of excuses. If there's obligation, then act. If there's no obligation, then there's no need to act. Again, this is a very common way we process moral decisions. Peter was coming from this perspective when he asked Jesus how many times he was expected to forgive someone. "Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). How long am I obligated to forgive? Give me a black-and-white rule I can follow.

Jesus' answer—"seventy-seven times" (v. 22)—along with this elaborate parable reorients the question of forgiveness away from law toward grace. Unfortunately, most of us have not completed that reorientation, and we still function and justify ourselves according to whether we have fulfilled the laws of obligation rather than the law of love.

### **The "I'm Only Human" Excuse**

The root excuse: I shouldn't have come down so strongly on that guy—maybe I even should have just let him off the hook—but I'm only human. You can't expect me . . .

- to act perfectly all the time. I was having a bad day and had a splitting headache. Plus, my stupid car just broke down again. So great . . . I had my debt forgiven, but I still didn't have enough money to get my car repaired. On another day, I probably would have been kinder in the way I approached the guy. But you need to understand I'm only human. It was the buildup of pressure.
- to be someone I'm not. I'm hotheaded. It's in my blood. It's just the way I am. Actually, that trait is usually a good thing; it's how I get things done. I'm aggressive in a good way. So when occasionally it works out in a negative way, cut me some slack, okay?

We do not give these excuses *before* we act poorly, but we use them to justify our behavior *after* the fact. We live in a culture that feeds us a steady diet of these kinds of excuses. We hear them on the news almost nightly. The CEO of a billion-dollar company gets caught on video using blistering epithets or racist language and defends himself by saying, "This is not who I really am. I'm not that kind of person." A group of teens take a video of a drowning man and do nothing to help and the parents defend their kids: "That's not who they are. They made a mistake."

Even in Christian circles, people excuse their wrong behavior or lack of love as a function of their personality type or their place in the birth order or their love language ("That's not my love language"). All these excuses boil down to this "I'm only human" idea with the implicit "You can't necessarily expect anything different and certainly can't fault me if I fall short of *your* expectations."

Yes, we each have a certain personality type that makes it easier or harder to behave in certain ways for the better or worse. And yes, birth order, upbringing, and social experiences all shape us. But there is no UOC version of the Bible that allows us to insert the phrase "unless, of course" after admonitions to love people, as in "Love your neighbor as yourself, *unless, of course*, you've had a frustrating day." Or "Bless those who mistreat you, *unless, of course*, you're at the end of your rope." Our God promises to conform us to His image as we by faith shed the "I'm only human" view of ourselves.

This famous parable that makes it so natural for us to join the onlookers and scorn the unmerciful servant should instead call us to look in the mirror, see our similarities to the unforgiving servant, and drop our stones. The spirit of forgiveness has no limit. No more excuses.

### **20/20 Focus**

1. Compare the harsh words Jesus put in the mouth of the master toward the unmerciful servant with some other portion of Scripture that is similarly unforgiving toward unforgiveness.
2. This chapter focuses on our human tendency to rationalize attitudes of unforgiveness. What other things do human beings tend to rationalize? Make a list and identify the top two situations you rationalize.
3. We considered three "reasonable rationalizations" for the unmerciful servant's behavior. Can you think of any other? Here's a hint: think of someone you're having a hard time forgiving and listen to what you've been telling yourself.



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*Lord Jesus, this chapter has confronted me with my own tendency to rationalize unforgiveness. But Your Word also warns me about how difficult it is to know my own heart. Are there situations I've been rationalizing, especially in the area of unforgiveness, that I'm not even aware of? I'm nervous about what I might see, but I know I need to. So search me and see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me onto Your path of mercy and grace. Thank You. Amen.*

### Vision Check

Storytellers often leave gaps—undescribed moments between the actions when a character would have had to think or do something that triggers the next recorded action. Since it is not stated, you can't know for sure. But you can often make reasonable assumptions about some things that might have gone on.

Try stepping inside this major gap: the young disciple, John Mark, who eventually wrote the gospel of Mark, once deserted Paul on the world's first Christian mission trip. And Paul was so upset he refused to give Mark a second chance. This created an irreconcilable disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (read Acts 15:37–40). As time went on, Paul must have had a change of heart, because he later wrote approvingly about Mark (read 2 Tim. 4:11). Create a brief narrative to explain what might have happened sometime between what Paul said in Acts 15 and what he wrote in 2 Timothy 4. Compare your imagined scenario with mine on [dougnewton.com](http://dougnewton.com) or the Fresh Eyes app.

Newton, D. (2018). *Fresh eyes on Jesus' parables: discovering new insights in familiar passages.* Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.



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### Parable #6:

#### Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.<sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.<sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.<sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”*

#### What does this parable mean?

**Standard view:** Jesus is our foundation.

This classic parable supports the biblical maxim found in **James 1:22**: “**Be doers of the word, and not hearers only**” (NKJV). Jesus promised that doers of the Word will be unshakable and resilient in the midst of life’s storms. But foolish non-doers are sitting ducks subject to hurricane-like destruction. Any sensible person will want to prepare for the worst through diligently putting Jesus’ words “into practice.”

#### Alternative view:

This goes beyond *saving* grace; He offers *sanctifying* grace.  
Call to understand and walk in the process of Sanctification.  
DO THE HARD THINGS...yes, Jesus means that.

#### What does it teach us about the Kingdom of God?

**How does this glimpse into what the Kingdom of God is like affect my thinking? My actions? My life?**

#### TEAM ASK:

We will need Jesus as our foundation to be able to do the hard things:

How does someone behave when they’re walking on an uneven surface?

How does someone behave when they’re walking on an even surface? [Confidence! Eager to run, to try to run faster.]

#### [Two Foundations:

*d. The two alternatives: Character established. 7:13–27*

The closing section of the Sermon on the Mount presents two choices to the listener. These are presented in a series of contrasts: two ways (vss. 13–14); two trees (vss. 15–20); two professions (vss. 21–23); and two foundations (vss. 24–29). This was a common method of teaching in both Jewish and Greco-Roman thought.

**13–14. Enter ye in at the strait gate** (narrow gate) means that one must come in the narrow way of the gate in order to reach the path which leads to eternal life. The order of the gate first and then the way suggests the gate is the entrance by faith in Christ into the way of the Christian life. It is interesting to recall that Christians were first called those of “the way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14). Though the many are on the **broad ... way that leadeth to destruction** (eternal death), the gate which leads to life is so narrow that **few there be that find it**. Christ Himself is both the gate and the way (cf. Jn 14:6), and God enables men to find that gate (cf. Jn 6:44). In the immediate context of Jesus’ day it could be assumed that His way was presented as that which is narrow and the way of the Pharisees as that which is broad. The contrast here is one between the way of grace and the way of works. There are many on the broad road of life who are seeking to arrive in heaven by means of their own works, but only a few have received the grace of God which guarantees them heaven. We are reminded of Jesus’ statement, **Many are called, but few are chosen** (22:14).

**15.** The warning of **Beware of false prophets** fits appropriately with the concept of the two ways. Since many are being misled in the wrong way, it is obvious that they are being misled by wrong ones. False prophets were prevalent in the Old Testament, whereas God’s true prophets were often in the minority (as in Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal). These appear in **sheep’s clothing** but are in reality **ravening wolves**. This is a perfect description of those preachers who have denied or distorted the truth of the gospel. They look like a lamb but they act like a wolf. Their description is similar to that of the great false prophet in Revelation 13:11.

**16–20.** A true test of a prophet was the conformity of his doctrine to that of the Scripture (cf. 1 Cor 14:37; Deut 13:1–5). **Their fruits** not only refer to actions of their lives, for these men are very, very sheepish, but to the doctrines which they proclaim. Having warned us against falsely judging others, Jesus now must remind us to beware and know such people. We are to be discerning enough not to be taken in by their cleverness.

The two trees are contrasted in relation to the fruit which they produce. The searching question, **Do men gather grapes of thorns?** reminds us of the origin of spiritual life which produces spiritual fruit. Man cannot produce such fruit out of his own unregenerate nature. Because he is a sinner by nature, he is a sinner by choice. Not only must his choice be changed, but so must his nature in order for him to make the right choice. **Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit** consistently, while a **corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit** continually. Therefore, the normal and consistent production of fruit, whether good or evil, in a person’s life will bear evidence whether or not that life is of God. Verse 19 makes it clear that the unfruitful life is a picture of the unregenerate which is **cast into the fire**. The term “fire” is used as an apparent picture of eternal punishment in hell. The evil (Gr *sapros*) trees are literally rotten and useless. While the production of fruit in the life of a Christian may vary, some thirtyfold, some one hundredfold, no true Christian has the option of producing no fruit at all. No fruit means no life. The absence of life is the absence of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the fruitless life is the proof of an unregenerate heart which can only be cast into hell. Always in the New Testament the changed life is the proof of one’s profession of conversion (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).



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**21–23.** Not everyone professing Christ is genuinely saved. Even the outward verbal acknowledgment of His lordship is in itself not enough to save the unbeliever apart from true repentance and faith. A genuinely saved person is one **that doeth the will of my Father**, the Greek present tense meaning that he is continually living in obedience to the will of God as the normal course of his life. He may fail at times, but his general course of consistency is to obey the will of the Father. It is tragic to note that many will proclaim in that day, **Lord, Lord** and yet will be lost. On what do they base their profession? Their **many wonderful works** cause them to think that they have attained salvation and yet the response of Christ, pictured here as the Judge, will be **I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity**. Those who are continually living in sin, as the normal course of their lives, have no assurance of salvation whatever. This does not mean that one must experience basic and initial changes in one's life to validate his claim to conversion. The phrase "work iniquity" is also progressive in Greek (i.e., they continue to work iniquity).

**24–27.** In drawing His concluding illustration of the **two foundations**, Jesus begins with the word **Therefore**. On the basis of all that He has taught and illustrated, He concluded that all who both hear and do His sayings shall be saved. He is not adding works to faith, but, as James reminds us, He is showing faith by its works. **Faith is the root of salvation and works are its fruit**. The works of man do not produce his own salvation. In fact, to the contrary, this entire message shows that man's human efforts alone are futile in gaining his salvation. Having made His point, Jesus also clearly stated that while salvation is by faith, it is by a faith which shows itself in a changed life. There is a repentant faith, a life-changing faith, a faith that works!

The contrast here is threefold: the wise man is the one who hears and practices upon a foundation of rock; the foolish man does not practice these sayings and builds upon a foundation of sand. As a great master counselor, Jesus reminded His listener that hearing this message alone will not change his life. He must both hear and do what Jesus has said. The elements of the closing illustration are drawn from the simplicity of nature itself, the **rock**, the **rain**, the **winds**. The rain (Gr *brochē*) pictured here is that of a natural storm. However, it is implied as relating to the troubles and persecutions of life. The man whose house collapsed was at fault, not because he failed to labor, but because he did not lay the proper foundation. How lively must this imagery have been to an audience accustomed to the fierceness of an eastern tempest and the suddenness and completeness with which it sweeps everything unsteady before it! The sand represents human opinion and the doctrines of men as opposed to **these sayings** (vs. 28).

**28.** The entire Sermon on the Mount is addressed to believers and presupposes faith in Jesus as Messiah. The works which are done by the believer are not based upon himself but upon the **rock** (vs. 24), who ultimately is Christ Himself (1 Cor 10:4). He is the personal embodiment of all of His teachings. Thus, when He had finished the discourse, **the people were astonished**. Lenski (p. 314) notes that as Jesus spoke, crowds were in rapt attention, but when He ceased, attention relaxed and shocking amazement engulfed them.

**29.** The outstanding feature of His teaching was His **authority**, meaning the divine approval and authoritative constraint with which He delivered His message. **Such straightforward preaching, based on the depth of one's own life**, was in direct contrast to that of **the scribes**. The scribes were the copyists of the law and the theologians of their day. The scribes had to rely on tradition for their authority, whereas Christ was His own authority. This undoubtedly disturbed the Pharisees for He had no approval as an official teacher in their system. Rather than quoting the opinion of tradition, Jesus spoke as if He personally knew what He was talking about. He did!

The note of authority in the Sermon on the Mount warns the readers of Matthew's Gospel that they cannot ignore or reject Jesus' teaching without ruinous consequences. Why should we practice this sermon? Because of the beauty of its diction, its impressive pictures, its striking illustrations? No, we practice it because beyond its moral, ethical, and spiritual teaching is the person of the Preacher Himself! In the closing verses of this chapter we see that, without an ostentatious parade, our Lord calls attention to Himself as the focal point of the entire message. This is no mere restatement of the law but is the highest expression of the quality of Christian living which Christ alone can produce. The gospel is the message of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Its amazing "good news" is that He can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He can change a sinner into a saint!<sup>11</sup>

### W. Build on the Rock (7:24–29)

**7:24, 25** Jesus closes His sermon with a parable that drives home the importance of obedience. It is not enough to hear these sayings; we must put them into practice. The disciple who hears and does Jesus' commands is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. His house (life) has a solid foundation and, when it is battered by rain and winds, it will not fall.

**7:26, 27** The person who hears Jesus' sayings and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. This man will not be able to stand against the storms of adversity: when the rain descended and the winds blew, the house fell because it had no solid base.

If a person lives according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, the world calls him a fool; Jesus calls him a wise man. The world considers a wise man to be someone who lives by sight, who lives for the present, and who lives for self; Jesus calls such a person a fool. It is legitimate to use the wise and foolish builders to illustrate the gospel. The wise man puts his full confidence in the Rock, Christ Jesus, as Lord and Savior. The foolish man refuses to repent and rejects Jesus as his only hope of salvation. But the interpretation of the parable actually carries us beyond salvation to its practical outworking in the Christian life.

**7:28, 29** As our Lord ended His message, the people were astonished. If we read the Sermon on the Mount and are not astonished at its revolutionary character, then we have failed to grasp its meaning.

The people recognized a difference between Jesus' teaching and that of the scribes. He spoke with authority; their words were powerless. His was a voice; theirs was an echo. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown comment,

<sup>11</sup> Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (pp. 1903–1904). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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The consciousness of divine authority, as Lawgiver, Expounder and Judge, so beamed through His teaching, that the scribes' teaching could not but appear drivelling in such a light.<sup>12</sup>

### 6

#### These Words? What Words? ***The Wise and Foolish Builders*** *Matthew 7:24–27*

Jesus gave tons of commands. Having a hard time obeying them all? One tip leads to great optimism.

You've heard of mass communication theory? I have a *miscommunication* theory: many cases of miscommunication can be traced back to the use of pronouns that lack clear antecedents, a topic I touched on earlier. I'll explain my theory in more depth in a moment, but I need to give you a more detailed review of pronouns and antecedents than I did in chapter 4. First, though, a refresher. A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun or noun phrase: *he, she, or it; they or them; this, that, those, or these; who, whom, or which*—just to name a few. Thus, every pronoun requires an antecedent, a previously mentioned noun to which it can refer.

The idea of the pronoun-antecedent relationship is simple. You can't use pronouns like *it* or *she* or *that* until you have identified what *it, she, or that* you are talking about. You can't just walk up to a friend or stranger and begin a conversation with "*It* may happen today if you're not careful," because the other person will wonder what *it* you're talking about. Or "If *she* starts coming your way, don't even stop." *She* who? Or "*That* is not something you should buy." What *that* are you talking about?

With that reminder, we can delve a bit more into pronouns. Some are called "demonstrative pronouns" because they not only have antecedents but also point to the location of that antecedent—they "demonstrate" whether the person or thing is nearby (e.g., *this* or *these*) or farther away (e.g., *that* or *those*). These demonstrative pronouns are particularly important in my miscommunication theory: **many cases of miscommunication can be traced back to the use of pronouns that lack clear antecedents.** I have tested *it* (notice the pronoun referring to the miscommunication theory?) for more than forty years of ministry and marriage, so I believe it is a sound theory. Plus, I maintain that if everyone paid more attention to the importance of this theory, much conflict in relationships could be prevented. Here's a common scenario: a wife arrived home from work and said to her husband, "I've been thinking a lot about the talk we had this morning before we left the house. I'm glad we did *that*."

So far so good. She used the pronoun *that*, clearly referring to the talk they had before going to work. "I'm glad too," he replied. But he quickly discovered she was pleased with the talk itself but not with what he actually said, because she continued, "But I can't believe you think *that*."

There's that *that* again, but this time it referred to something other than the talk per se. And here's where the conversation unnecessarily went off the rails. He assumed she was referring to his comment about her parents' overbearing tendencies and not wanting them to stay so long after Christmas. So he replied, "Why wouldn't I think *that*? Just look at the evidence. *It's* staring you right in the face."

He used two pronouns—*that* and *it*—referring to the way her parents meddle and make comments about how they don't keep their house in good order. But she wasn't talking about her parents when she said, "I can't believe you think *that*." She was talking about her weight-control struggle. What? Why did her mind go there? Because earlier that morning he mentioned the fact that they needed to get back to the gym as soon as the holidays were over as another reason her parents shouldn't stay long.

That comment held twice as much importance to her than he thought it did. She assumed he was commenting on her size. So after he said, "Why wouldn't I think *that*? Just look at the evidence," well, let's just say the peace of Christ was not present in their home for the rest of the week. Instantly the conversation escalated from *that* misunderstanding—which never got cleared up, by the way—to two hours of trading accusations that began with her saying, "You never support me; you're always so critical." And all because of their different interpretations of the pronoun *that*.

Pay attention to a miscommunication problem and see if demonstrative pronouns—*this, that, these, and those*—are contributing to the problem. Whenever you notice a demonstrative pronoun, be very careful to identify the antecedent!

Taking care with demonstrative pronouns not only avoids unnecessary conflict but also brings helpful clarity, as we will see in this chapter's focus on the parable of the wise and foolish builders. Remember how *that* goes?

Therefore everyone who hears *these* words of mine and puts *them* into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against *that* house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears *these* words of mine and does not put *them* into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against *that* house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matt. 7:24–27)

**This classic parable supports the biblical maxim found in James 1:22: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (NKJV). Jesus promised that doers of the Word will be unshakable and resilient in the midst of life's storms. But foolish non-doers are sitting ducks subject to hurricane-like destruction. Any sensible person will want to prepare for the worst through diligently putting Jesus' words "into practice."**

<sup>12</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1230). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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### Hunting for the Antecedent

Now we come to the all-important pronouns *these* and *them* when Jesus said, “Therefore everyone who hears *these* words of mine and puts *them* into practice . . .” What is the antecedent of *these* and *them*? If putting *them* into practice is so crucial—almost a life or death matter—then we need to know what words He had in mind.

Some people might say, “It doesn’t matter whether you identify *exactly* which words He had in mind. Just gather up all Jesus’ words wherever we find them and practice them *all*.”

Granted, that’s the safest thing to do. But ultimately it’s not very helpful. If you’re teaching your sixteen-year-old son to drive and you want to make sure he drives safely after he gets his license, sure, you could say, “Just remember *everything* I’ve taught you about driving and you’ll come home in one piece every day.” But if you really understand how dangerous it is to be out on the highways these days with fast cars, heavy traffic, text-distracted drivers, and some drivers who may even be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, then undoubtedly you want him to diligently follow certain key admonitions. Telling him to “just remember everything” lacks the kind of focus that will help keep his attention on the most important actions to ensure his safety. You will want him to practice particular “words of yours” like these:

- Do not text while you’re driving.
- Do not play your music loud.
- Do not be goofing around with your friends.
- Watch out whenever you’re approaching an intersection.

In the same way, while it may seem reasonable to practice everything Jesus said in the Gospels, that too lacks the kind of focus we need if we are to avoid the specific life-demolishing circumstances Jesus warned about. Plus, the placement of Jesus’ parable as His concluding remarks in the Sermon on the Mount should restrict our search for the antecedent of *these words of mine* to within the sermon itself. That is what we will do in just a moment, as soon as we look at an important viewpoint on this most famous sermon.

### How the Bible Is God’s Word

Many scholars debate whether the Sermon on the Mount is a sermon Jesus preached all at once or a collection of some of His famous sayings that were spoken at different times. Why is this important? If Matthew 5–7 is not one sermon preached all at once, then perhaps the antecedent to *these words of mine* can be found anywhere in the Gospels. If, however, this is a stand-alone sermon, then we should confine our search for the antecedent to Matthew 5–7. So which is it?

Matthew certainly presented it as one sermon, as I believe it is. However, even conservative New Testament scholars recognize how the gospel writers occasionally presented variations and rearrangements of Jesus’ words and actions in order to make their theological points. What did He actually say and when? That’s the question we often face as we study the biblical record. There were no recorders or cameras capturing Jesus’ teaching moments. Are the words in red ink word-for-word quotations? Detailed paraphrases? Rough recollections of Jesus’ teachings?

It’s interesting to ask those questions. However, I don’t believe we have to answer them in order to approach Scripture as God’s Word with great confidence. Still, you may ask, “But if the Sermon on the Mount as Matthew recorded is not exactly what Jesus said word-for-word and if He did not speak it all at the same time in one sermon, then how can we have confidence in Scripture as God’s Word?”

Consider this: What makes a portion of the Bible like the Sermon on the Mount a bona fide part of God’s Word to human beings? Does it have to be an exact transcript of what Jesus said? Suppose I am talking to a friend and tell him some good things about my wife. Does my wife need a complete transcript from him of what I said? Or is it just as good if that friend says to my wife, “You should hear what your husband thinks of you. He is in awe of your strength and grace and is sure there isn’t a more wonderful person on earth!” Even though he isn’t quoting me verbatim, he has delivered the intent and meaning of my words accurately.

In the same way, whether or not we have an exact transcript of Jesus’ words, the Holy Spirit is that divine friend who delivers the intent and meaning of Jesus’ words accurately. Perhaps He enabled the writers to remember Jesus’ exact words. That’s not hard for me to believe. Or perhaps the human authors used their memories to the best of their ability, but the Holy Spirit prompted and helped them organize their best recollections in such a way that not only preserved Jesus’ teachings but also best served the church over the centuries.

In other words, I have what might be called a Trinitarian view of Scripture’s creation. The Father is the *ideation*—the source of the Word. The Son is the *incarnation* who declared and demonstrated the Word by His physical presence—and still does. The Spirit is the *inspiration*, responsible for these processes:

- recalling and transmitting the words during the oral stage so they would be preserved accurately.
- recording and translating the words so they would be passed on faithfully in written form across the ages and among all people groups.
- declaring and understanding the words so they would be spoken with their original authority and received with penetrating power.

Together the three persons of the Trinity collaborated in harmony with one another. The Son spoke and lived the Father’s words (John 12:49–50), and the Spirit both spoke Jesus’ words (John 14:26) and inspired Jesus’ followers as they wrote them (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21).

The symbiotic work of all three persons of the Trinity is what creates the Word of God and makes it authentic and authoritative, not just the isolated moment Jesus verbalized words to a group of people on a hillside. Because that comprehensive process involved all three persons of the Trinity working through human authors, transcribers, church councils, and translators, what we have before us today



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is what God wanted us to have. We should, therefore, relate to Scripture not as an enigmatic puzzle to be questioned but as an infallible document that does not fail to deliver eternal truth.

Therefore, because Matthew recorded a stream of Jesus' teaching as a sermon spoken all at once, that's how we should relate to it. That's how we will get the most out of it. And therefore, since it concludes with Jesus having said, "Everyone who hears *these* words of mine and puts *them* into practice," we should look for the antecedent to *these* and *them* within the body of that so-called sermon. I think that's the way the Holy Spirit wanted it to come to us. So let's do that now.

### A Study in Contrasts

A total of 2,346 words compose the Sermon on the Mount in the New International Version. When Jesus used the pronoun *these* in "these words of mine," was He referring to all 2,346? It appears not. We can narrow "these words" down considerably based on the fact that Jesus then said "and puts *them* into practice" ("does them" in the Greek). So we need look only for admonitions (i.e., things a person can do). But then we can narrow the list down even more by looking for admonitions related to contrasting behaviors or attitudes. Why should we do that?

Notice that this parable is a contrast parable: the wise man *versus* the foolish man. Often when Jesus used the contrast format in His parables, He was confronting the Pharisees and drawing a distinction between their values and those of His kingdom. A large portion of the Sermon on the Mount functions that way. It took Jesus only 343 words before He reached the part where He began to create this prophetic contrast: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

Just like the warning element directed toward the foolish builder in the parable, this verse warns those who think that the Pharisees' righteousness standard is satisfactory in God's eyes. Jesus then proceeded to contrast the ethical standards of His kingdom with the lower standards of the Pharisees. Therefore, the admonitions contained within this *framework of contrasts* constitute the most likely antecedents for "*these* words mine" that Jesus would have His hearers practice.

- Don't avoid just murder; avoid anger altogether (5:21–22).
- Don't presume to worship God until you have humbled yourself enough to make peace with your fellow believer (vv. 23–24).
- Don't avoid just adultery; avoid sexually illicit imaginations (vv. 27–30).
- Be so truthful you don't even need to swear an oath to be believed (vv. 33–37).
- When people mistreat you, do not seek retribution, even when it's just and your right to do so. Instead, bless and serve those people (vv. 38–47).
- Do not attempt to elevate yourself in other people's eyes by drawing attention to your good deeds (6:1–18).

A few other admonitions in the sermon also fall into this category of "surpassing righteousness," but these are enough to make the point.

### Impossible Commands, Incredible Promise

So far we have seen how the antecedent of "*these* words of mine" should be found within the confines of the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew 5–7. Specifically, the antecedent is the collection of admonitions Jesus gave concerning righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees. Let me explain the benefit of narrowing our search down to these few admonitions.

Simply put, you now have something much more specific to focus on as you answer the question: **If I want to live my life on an unshakable foundation, to what should I pay careful attention? The answer: pay careful attention to Jesus' commands for surpassing righteousness.**

Try reading those commands again. You may be overwhelmed. Avoid anger altogether? Never seek retribution? You've got to be kidding! That standard for entering the kingdom of heaven seems virtually impossible. And it's a standard made seemingly more impossible by Jesus' summary admonition: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

What is a person to do in the face of such an impossible standard? You have two options. One is to throw up your hands and fall on God's grace, trusting in what theologians call *imputed* righteousness. You confess your selfishness and sinful nature that render your own moral perfection impossible and rely solely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the only Perfect One, to cover you in the eyes of a holy God. As the old hymn says,

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly trust in Jesus' Name.  
On Christ the solid Rock I stand,  
All other ground is sinking sand.

Trusting in His righteousness is "credited" to you as righteousness, which is fundamentally how *saving* grace works. But too often Christians stop there and slap bumper stickers on their cars that read, "I'm not perfect, just forgiven."

The other option in the face of the "impossible" standard of moral perfection is *not* to throw up your hands in resignation but to lean intently toward moral regeneration, to believe that God is calling you to a life of holy character. God's purpose and promise then is to *impart* His righteousness to you through the Holy Spirit's indwelling, recreating work. **This goes beyond saving grace; He offers sanctifying grace.**



## Week 2 – When Jesus Speaks: Studying His Parables (#4-#6)

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Let's look at some facts revealed in this sermon. When Jesus told His disciples that their righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees, His examples of countering anger, impurity, revenge, and self-promotion set a standard for our behavior here and now. If someone had asked Jesus, "Do You really mean we're supposed to be able to turn our other cheek and not get angry?" He would have said yes. These are *actual* expectations of *actual* behavior for *actual* people to exhibit *actual* righteousness. According to this parable, it's our practice of *these* words of Jesus, **these admonitions of surpassing righteousness**, that place us on solid ground instead of sinking sand.

Therein lies the great optimism behind the impossible standard. Every command of God contains an implied promise. Simply put, if God commands something, then obeying that command is possible. God, in His moral perfection, would never command a person to do what he or she cannot do.

The kind of righteousness we long for, the kind of relief from selfishness and sin we need, is available now. In heaven, there will be no temptations of anger, lust, revenge, or self-promotion. At that time these commands become unnecessary, so this kind of righteousness is both required and possible here and now. You can be the kind of person whose heart is fully inclined toward peace instead of anger, purity instead of impurity, grace instead of grievance, humility instead of hubris. That's great news!

Becoming this kind of person does not happen all at once. It's a gradual work over time. We are being made new (Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 4:23) and changed incrementally (2 Cor. 3:18) as we choose to put off falsehood and put on truthfulness, to put off anger and put on gentleness, to speak only words that encourage and strengthen others (Eph. 4:25–32). Every choice is like opening a window to a fresh breeze of God's righteousness that fills us with power to "will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13). In this process, we are actually fulfilling Paul's admonition—"Therefore, be imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1 ESV)—which echoes Jesus' call to "be perfect" in the Sermon on the Mount.

When you look at yourself and think about your struggles, it may be hard to see things this way. But that transformation process is what God wants and makes possible; it is what is going on as you cooperate and don't "grieve the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 4:30). God is faithful. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Phil. 1:6).

Let that optimism grip your heart as you consider this parable and its reference to such lofty words of Jesus. When you say and do everything with that optimism, that confidence in God's promise and in His ability to make you truly righteous like Jesus is the rock you're standing on. Your hope is sure. What's more, as it turns out, you are becoming a demonstrative pronoun, pointing back to Jesus, our righteous antecedent.

### 20/20 Focus

1. Over the years, many scholars have questioned the reliability of quotations attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. While it is true there were no recorders or transcribers at the time, can you come up with at least three reasons we can trust the accuracy of quotations such as those found in the Sermon on the Mount?
2. Review the specific commands this chapter suggests Jesus was referring to when He said "these words of mine." Why would obedience to these commands in particular place a person on a firm foundation in life?
3. This chapter presents an optimistic view concerning *actual* human righteousness. It claims that every command of God implies a promise of what's possible, because God "would never command a person to do what he or she cannot do." If you agree, can you name some commands other than those highlighted in this chapter that imply incredible possibilities for a human being?

*Lord Jesus, I thank You that Your words bring life and hope. And most incredibly, the very words You tell me to obey bring the promise of obedience. I can't lose as long as I make Your words the standard for my life. So that's what I'm committing to right now—obedience to those impossible standards of righteousness with You as my hope and helper. Amen.*

### Vision Check

It is important to pay special attention to demonstrative pronouns. Whenever you see *this*, *that*, *these*, or *those* used in a sentence, always stop to make sure you know exactly what each pronoun is pointing to. Doing so improves your chances of seeing something new in the Scripture passage.

Here's an example to try. John told of a well-known moment when Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" The first time, Jesus asked, "Do you love me more than *these*?" (John 21:15). To what was Jesus referring when He used the demonstrative pronoun *these*? If you figure that out, you might see this special moment in a different way than it is often portrayed. (Hint: read Matt. 26:31–35.) Check out my insights on [dougnewton.com](http://dougnewton.com) or the Fresh Eyes app and compare them with yours.

Newton, D. (2018). *Fresh eyes on Jesus' parables: discovering new insights in familiar passages.* Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.



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24–27. In drawing His concluding illustration of the two foundations, Jesus begins with the word **Therefore**. On the basis of all that He has taught and illustrated, He concluded that all who both hear and do His sayings shall be saved. He is not adding works to faith, but, as James reminds us, He is showing faith by its works. Faith is the root of salvation and works are its fruit. The works of man do not produce his own salvation. In fact, to the contrary, this entire message shows that man's human efforts alone are futile in gaining his salvation. Having made His point, Jesus also clearly stated that while salvation is by faith, it is by a faith which shows itself in a changed life. There is a repentant faith, a life-changing faith, a faith that works!

The contrast here is threefold: the wise man is the one who hears and practices upon a foundation of rock; the foolish man does not practice these sayings and builds upon a foundation of sand. As a great master counselor, Jesus reminded His listener that hearing this message alone will not change his life. He must both hear and do what Jesus has said. The elements of the closing illustration are drawn from the simplicity of nature itself, the **rock**, the **rain**, the **winds**. The rain (Gr *brochē*) pictured here is that of a natural storm. However, it is implied as relating to the troubles and persecutions of life. The man whose house collapsed was at fault, not because he failed to labor, but because he did not lay the proper foundation. How lively must this imagery have been to an audience accustomed to the fierceness of an eastern tempest and the suddenness and completeness with which it sweeps everything unsteady before it! The sand represents human opinion and the doctrines of men as opposed to **these sayings** (vs. 28).<sup>13</sup>

### 5:2 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

*“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” Jesus warned as He began His public ministry in Galilee (Matt. 4:17). His message quickly spread, and huge crowds came to hear Him from Galilee, from nearby Syria and the Decapolis, and from as far away as Jerusalem, Judea, and east of the Jordan River (4:24–25).*

They came to hear about a kingdom. Instead, Jesus talked about a lifestyle—the lifestyle of those who intend to live in the kingdom. As perhaps thousands gathered on a hillside (or “mountain,” 5:1; the exact location is unknown), Jesus began to fill out the implications of His appeal for repentance. It would mean far more than an outward show of piety. Indeed, Jesus urged His listeners to make such a complete change of heart and life that they would “be perfect, just as you Father in heaven is perfect” (5:48).

Jesus may have spoken the contents of Matt. 5–7, known as the Sermon on the Mount, on more than one occasion. It is possible that the address lasted for some time as He described the new lifestyle of the kingdom, holding it up like a jewel with many facets, to be examined from many different angles. On the other hand, bits and pieces of the sermon can be found throughout the Gospels. Like any good teacher, Jesus probably repeated much of His teaching at other times and places in order to drive home the message.

The Sermon on the Mount contains the core of Jesus' moral and ethical teaching:

*The Beatitudes (5:3–12).* True happiness comes from looking at life from God's perspective, which is often the reverse of the human point of view.

*Salt and Light (5:13–16).* Jesus wants His followers to influence the moral and spiritual climate of the world.

*The Morality of the Kingdom (5:17–48).* Jesus' listeners were familiar with the Old Testament Law and with the many traditions that generations of rabbis had added to it. But Jesus revealed a morality that went beyond the letter of the Law to its spirit.

*Spiritual Disciplines (6:1–18).* Practicing religion certainly involves behavior, but it goes beyond an outward show of spirituality to the hidden quality of one's character.

*Treasures on Earth (6:19–34).* Our relationship to money and material possessions reveals much about our relationship to God. Jesus does not denounce worldly goods, but He urges His listeners to place ultimate value on the treasures of heaven.

*Judging Right and Wrong (7:1–6).* Most of us are quick to point out the moral flaws of others. Jesus warns us to pay more attention to our own.

*Asking and Receiving (7:7–12).* When we approach God with a request, we can expect Him to deal with us as a loving father deals with his child. And just as God deals with us in love, He expects us to deal with others in love.

*A Challenge to Obedience (7:13–29).* Jesus wraps up His message with a challenge to change. The alternatives are clear: living a lifestyle that is worthy of the kingdom, resulting in life and joy; or ignoring the way of Christ, resulting in death and disaster.

In this manner, Jesus described the lifestyle of the kingdom. When He was finished, Matthew says that the people were “astonished” at His teaching (7:28; literally “overwhelmed” or “stunned”). They had come to hear a new teacher, but this one exceeded their expectations. His voice had an unusual but unmistakable ring of authority (7:29). And no wonder: they were listening to the King Himself!<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (pp. 1903–1904). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>14</sup> *Word in life study Bible*. (1996). (electronic ed., Mt 5:2). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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*Having forgiven us ALL.*  
Colossians 2:9-15

### SANCTIFICATION

*"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." 1 Peter 1:23*

**The Salvation Equation: {Grace > Atonement} Man can now respond: + Repentance + Faith → (and God answers)  
Conversion + Regeneration + Justification + Adoption → Sanctification**

#### 1. What is the meaning of Sanctification:

~The central idea is separation FROM and separation or devotion TO.

Hebrew: qodesh-to divide especially from what is secular.

Greek: hagios-referring to an object of awe, whether reverence or aversion, paralleling a sense of purity.

The basic meaning of the word is to BE holy, because a person or thing is set apart, not to MAKE holy. It just is.

Another word that can be used for sanctification is *consecration*.

- Old Testament: many things were set aside or consecrated for God including clothing, vessels, the temple & priests.
- New Testament: sanctification became more personal in nature.

John 17:17 Jesus prays to the Father on behalf of his disciples, "Sanctify them by the truth. "

Eph 5:26-27 Paul shows that Jesus Christ sanctifies the church

**1 Thess 5:23** Paul expresses his desire that God sanctify the readers "through and through."

**John 10:36** The Father sets Jesus apart to carry out His will in the world.

~Sanctification is a part of the salvation experience, so we must be in a relationship with Jesus to experience this.

In sanctification, we consecrate ourselves to fulfill the holy purposes for which we have been set apart.

#### 2. Why is Sanctification important and what is the goal?

"Because God is holy, He is completely separate from sin or evil. This poses a problem for humanity because fallen humankind has a sinful nature and is not holy. Holy God cannot have fellowship with sinful men and women. Yet God desires that fellowship. Holy God cannot stop being holy to have fellowship with humankind. Therefore, humankind must somehow be made holy to have fellowship with God."

Two concepts that are important in our understanding of sanctification are HOLINESS and RIGHTEOUSNESS.

- i. Our understanding of *holiness* is rooted in our understanding God.
  - In **1Peter 1:15-16**, we learn "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"
    - In **Hebrews 12:14** we are told, "Make every effort to live at peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."
  - God's plan is for us to be holy.
- ii. Righteousness is the quality of being right or just.
  - In the Old Testament, righteousness came through obedience to the Law.
  - In the New Testament, righteousness comes through faith in Christ. **Philippians 3:9**  
*"righteousness is conformity to divine Law" and "holiness is conformity to the divine nature." Dr. Stanley Horton*

That is, righteousness is more about outward obedience, while holiness is more about inner purity and motivation.

~So we see in the process of Salvation, Holy God imputes Christ's holiness to us (legal declaration) and empowers us (via the Holy Spirit) to become like Jesus by growing in holiness. Only with this imputation of holiness can we have relationship.

#### 3. What Sanctification is NOT:

- Conformity to a revelation from nature
- Mere external conformity to the law
- Mere outward reformation
- Natural restraining influences
- Natural gifts
- Complete removal of the nature of sin.
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not the moment of sanctification, that is a 2<sup>nd</sup> distinct interaction with God whereby He empowers us for ministry.



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### 4. What is the process of Sanctification:

Sanctification is both INSTANT and PROGRESSIVE.

It is a positional (God's view) and experiential. (man's action)

- a. putting off of the old
- b. putting on of the new
- c. continually dedicating our lives to God & His purpose for us
- d. believing that He is doing what He promised to do.

**Col 2:11-12, Col 3:1-10, Romans 6:1-14**

In the sanctifying process, God is the author. God's intention is to sanctify us wholly, including every part of our being, even the body. He assures us that His goal for us includes the culmination of the process: that we might be blameless before Him at the coming of Christ (**1 Thessalonians 5:23**)

### 5. How can I respond to Sanctification:

I can choose to participate WITH what God is doing instead of fighting AGAINST the growth process He has for me.

- Living by the Spirit-Sanctification's goal is the fruit of the Spirit. His work in our lives looks like:
  - Prompting, an inner witness **Titus 2:11-13**
  - Knowing the Heart of God & "Building" in us the mind of Christ **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**
  - Always in harmony with scripture **2 Tim 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21**
  - Teach and remind **John 14:26**
  - Point out truth (give direction in our lives) **John 16:13a, Luke 4:1, Acts 10:19-20, 16:6-7**
  - Prophetic (forth-telling of scripture) **John 16:13b-14**
  - Feels guilty when w sin, concerned with Christ's standard of righteousness & God's judgment **John 16:8-13**
  - Opposed to sinful desires **Gal 5:17-18, 1 Peter 2:11**
  - Exhort believers on sin, backsliding, perseverance, sonship **Romans 8:13-16**
  - HS becomes weaker the longer the believer resists his promptings **Romans 1:18, 1 Thess 5:19**
  - Results in spiritual death when rejected & results in spiritual life when obeyed **Romans 8:6-13**
- Putting off the old & putting on the new:
  - Prayer
  - Fasting
  - Scripture-meditation, memorization, filling ourselves with scripture
  - Consistency
  - Support by fellow believers (small group interaction, growing healthy in community)
  - Being hearers & doers of the word (Sunday & Wednesday services, etc.)
- Slowing down in my responses with others to ask:
  - Am I responding from my flesh, my old nature, wounding, trauma, rejection? (these no longer hold us)
  - What does responding in the Spirit look like? What scriptures can guide me?
  - Which will I choose?

Helpful scriptures: **Romans 6:11-14, 1 Peter 1:13-23, Galatians 5:13-26**

We display our love for God and our spiritual maturity by how we choose to interact with others.  
Our actions indicate our separation from sin and devotion to God. Does our behavior say what we intend?  
Are we humbly willing to ask others for input on how we're doing?

**"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."**

Matthew 5:48

#### SOURCES:

~SOTERIOLOGY: A Study Guide by Daniel B. Pecota (Global University Textbook); Introduction to Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective by Johnny Ford (Berean School of the Bible Study Guide); Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective, William W. Menzies & Stanley M. Horton; Essential Doctrines Class, Chapter 9, Membership Series notes. (MAG); Being Led By The Spirit Handout compiled by Pastor Orleen Haseltine  
The Salvation Equation: Personal study notes Pastor Orleen Haseltine ©2011. Personal study notes Robin Bjornson ©2011.



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### PERSEVERANCE

*"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." 1 Peter 1:23*

Perseverance: That continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which the work of divine grace that was begun in the heart is continued and brought to **completion**.

#### **Calvinism:**

Even though God uses means in preserving us (us committing our lives to Him), preservation is unconditional. It teaches that our final salvation is inevitable.

We may fall away for a time but will never finally be lost.

God will preserve us.

*Calvinism does not teach that once a person is saved they can do anything they want and still be saved.*

They also believe we are to live in obedience to what God's Word commands. Continued disobedience is sufficient reason to question if we have really been saved.

#### **Arminianism:**

Do all who profess to be a Christian know Christ? **Galatians 5:5&6; Galatians 6:15; 1 John 2:3-6**

The example of Simon the Sorcerer: **Acts 8:9-25** Moved by emotion but not saved?

Who is the Judge of the heart? **1 Samuel 16:7**

Perseverance is conditional.

In the entire process of salvation man is not totally passive. He is actively involved in and through it all. Just as we have willed to receive Christ, we can will to turn away from Christ.

His final salvation is assured but not inevitable.

A person who is truly saved today may choose to walk away and denounce Christ.

*This does not mean Arminianism states that a person can be saved and lost many times in their life. There is no saved today, lost tomorrow syndrome.*

There is drift and time and decisions before one walks away from their faith.

#### ARMINIANISM

Matt 18:21-35  
Matt 24:4, 5, 11-13, 23-26  
Matt 25:1-13  
Luke 8:11-15  
Luke 11:24-28  
Luke 12:42-46  
John 6:66-71  
John 8:31-32  
John 8:51  
John 13:8  
John 15:1-6  
Acts 11:21-23  
Acts 14:21,22  
Rom 6:11-23  
Rom 8:12-14, 17  
Rom 11:20-22  
Rom 14:15-23  
1 Cor 9:23-27  
1 Cor 10:1-21  
1 Cor 11:29-32  
1 Cor 15:1, 2  
2 Cor 1:24  
2 Cor 11:2-4  
2 Cor 12:21-13:5  
Gal 5:1-4  
Gal 6:7-9  
Eph 3:17  
Phil 2:12-16  
Phil 3:4-4:1  
Col 1:21-23  
Col 2:4-8  
Col 2:18, 19  
1 Thess 3:1-8  
1 Tim 1:3-7, 18-20

1 Tim 2:11-15  
1 Tim 4:1-16  
1 Tim 5:8  
1 Tim 5:11-15, 5, 6  
1 Tim 6:9-12  
1 Tim 6:17-19  
1 Tim 6:20, 21  
2 Tim 2:11-18  
2 Tim 2:22-26  
2 Tim 3:13-15  
Heb 2:1-3  
Heb 3:6-19  
Heb 4:1-16  
Heb 5:8,9  
Heb 6:4-9  
Heb 6:10-20  
Heb 10:19-31  
Heb 10:32-39  
Heb 11:13-16  
Heb 12:1-17  
Heb 12:25-29  
Heb 13:9-14  
Heb 13: 17, 7  
James 1:12-16  
James 1:21, 22  
James 2:14-16  
James 4:4-10  
James 5:19, 20  
1 Pet 1:5-9, 13  
2 Pet 1:5-11  
2 Pet 2:1-22  
2 Pet 3:16,17  
1 John 1:5-2:11  
1 John 2:15-28  
1 John 2:29-3:10  
1 John 5:4, 5

1 John 5:16  
2 John 6-9  
Jude 5-12  
Jude 20, 21  
Rev 2:7  
Rev 2:10, 11  
Rev 2:17  
Rev 2:18-26  
Rev 3: 4,5  
Rev 3:8-12  
Rev 3:14-22  
Rev 12:11  
Rev 17:14  
Rev 21:7, 8  
Rev 22:18, 19

#### **In Your Face:**

Matthew 13:22  
Matthew 24:12  
Luke 9:62  
Luke 17:31  
John 15:6  
Galatians 5:4  
1 Timothy 1:19  
1 Timothy 4:1-3  
2 Timothy 2:12  
Hebrews 3:6  
Hebrews 3:12  
Hebrews 3:14  
Hebrews 10:35  
2 Peter 2:22  
  
CALVINISM  
Matt 5:13 (with 1 Jn 3:10)

Matt 6:23 ( " )  
Matt 7:16-19 ( " )  
Matt 18:23-35  
Matt 24:13  
Matt 25:1-13 (Matt 13:1-8)  
Luke 11:24-26  
Rev 2:18-26, 27, 28. Cf Jn8:51)  
John 6:39-40  
John 8:31  
John 10:27-30  
John 13:8  
John 15:2  
John 15:6  
John 17:11, 42  
Acts 5:32  
Acts 13:43 (with 1 Jn 3:10)  
Acts 14:22 ( " )  
Rom 8:6, 13 (with 1 Cor 11:29-32)  
Rom 8:17 (with 1 Cor 9:27)  
Romans 8:35-39  
Rom 11:21  
1 Cor 9:27  
1 Cor 11:29-32  
1 Cor 15:1, 2  
2 Cor 1:22  
(Ephesians 1:13, 4:30)  
2 Cor 5:5 (Eph 1:14)  
Gal 5:4  
Phil 1:6

Phil 2:12  
Col 1:21-23  
1 Thess 3:5 (w/ 1 Jn 3:10)  
1 Tim 1:19 (w/ 1 Jn 3:10)  
1 Tim 2:14, 15 (w/ 1 Jn 3:10)  
1 Tim 4:1, 2 ( w/ 1 Jn 3:10)  
1 Tim 5:8  
1 Tim 5:12  
1 Tim 6:10  
2 Tim 1:12  
2 Tim 2:12 (w/ 1 Jn 3:10)  
2 Tim 2:18  
Heb 3:6, 14  
Heb 6:4-9  
Heb 7:24-25  
Heb 10:26-29  
James 2:17, 18, 24, 26  
1 Peter 1:5  
1 Peter 5:10  
2 Pet 1:10, 11  
2 Pet 2:1-22  
1 John 3:9-10  
1 John 4:4  
1 John 5:4, 5  
1 John 5:16-18  
Jude 3-19

Parable of the Sower: **Matthew 13:1-23**

Abandon: **1 Timothy 4:1**

Apostasy: Defection from truth, falling away, forsake.

The Greek word for apostasy implies the idea of moving or standing away from a place where a person once stood.

**Mark 10:4 (Mt 5:31; Dt 24:1,3)** Similar Greek word used. Deliberate severing of a relationship that once existed.

APOSTASY Compilation and commentary by Stella Paterson [http://www.ekkleisia4him.net/Apostasy\\_study.pdf](http://www.ekkleisia4him.net/Apostasy_study.pdf)

The word “apostasy” is not found in the Bible, but the Greek word from which it is taken was translated as found in this study. It is a short study because of so few references to “falling away” or its synonyms. In spite of that fact, massive apostasy has infiltrated the Church. As Paul the Apostle said, this apostasy would occur before the second coming of Christ. As with previous studies, the Greek words and their meanings are listed, followed by the verses in which they occur.

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Greek #646

apostasia (ap-os-tas-ee'-ah) Feminine of the same as G647

Definition: “defection from truth (properly the state), (“apostasy”)”

Translated: “falling away, forsake”

2 Thessalonians 2:3(&4): Acts 21: (20&)21

Translated: - (writing of) divorcement.

Matthew 5:31; Matthew 19:7; Mark 10:4

Greek #647

apostasion (ap-os-tas'-ee-on) Neuter of a (presumed) adjective from a derivative of G868

Definition: “properly something separative, that is, (specifically) divorce”

Greek #868 aphisēmī (af-is'-tay-mee)

Definition: “to remove, that is, (actively) instigate to revolt; usually (reflexively) to desist, desert, etc.”

Translated: “depart, draw (fall) away, refrain, withdraw self”

Luke 13:27; 2 Corinthians 12:8; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:19; Luke 2:37; Luke 4:13; Acts 12:10; Acts 15:38; Acts 19:9; Acts 22:29; Hebrews 3:12; Acts 5:37-38(&39); Luke 8:13; 1 Timothy 6:5

**REJOICE:** God’s love is so strong, His power so great, and His work so sure that we can rest securely in our salvation – **for both the present and the future.** Romans 8:35-39; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:30; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:14; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:24-25; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 John 4:4

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The following are personal notes of Pr. Orleen:

Misconception #1: True regeneration seals you as a Christian regardless of post conversion decisions, beliefs, and behaviors. In other words, full assurance or eternal security. Does this discussion belong under sanctification? No. The paraphrase of if you were *really* saved, you would never walk away brings the discussion to the beginning of the ordo salutis. “<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

We do not earn salvation, if that was possible there would be no need for the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. However, does regeneration remove the ability for a human to choose to walk away from the salvation they once embraced? The discussion centers on whether there can be a nominal Christian conversion that really is not belief or whether backsliding can happen but never enter non-belief state again. “It must be of the right content and of the right quality to be acceptable to God for salvation” (Amato 2009).

I see it as an inoculation against sanctification, turning from evil and dedication towards God. Why bother once you are in? Refutation verses: Luke 8; Matthew 5:13; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 1 Timothy 6:21; 2 Timothy 2:18.

Misconception #2: Justification as a lightning bolt out of nowhere. This is related to Free Grace, Full Assurance, and some Calvinistic beliefs. To quote Matthew Mason “There is, therefore, never a time when an elect person is an object of God’s wrath, for unbelief does not hinder the elect from having a part in Christ, although everyone who is elect and therefore justified will eventually come to faith” (2005, 28). Of course unbelief hinders. Acts 16:31; Mark 9:24; Hebrews 3:19; Romans 11:19-23.

Misconception #3: Eternal Justification. Defined by Fred G. Zaspel (Zaspel, under Biblical Studies) in his article as “affirms that God pronounces elect sinners righteous from eternity, that their justification is not made actual or complete in time but in eternity past.” This would also negate the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. Our legal standing of being condemned by our sin which demands payment would not exist as it was dealt with before creation. Christ’s death would not need to be substitutionary.

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## 1 John 2

Cross references:

A. [1 John 2:1](#) : [Jn 14:26](#);

B. [1 John 2:2](#) : [Rm 3:25](#); [Heb 2:17](#); [1Jn 4:10](#);

C. [1 John 2:2](#) : [Mt 26:13](#); [28:19-20](#); [Mk 14:9](#); [Rm 1:8](#);  
 D. [1 John 2:3](#) : [Jn 13:35](#); [1Jn 2:5](#); [3:19](#), [24](#); [4:2](#), [6](#), [13](#); [5:2](#);  
 E. [1 John 2:3](#) : [Jn 14:15](#); [15:10](#);  
 F. [1 John 2:5](#) : [Jn 14:23](#);  
 G. [1 John 2:5](#) : [Jn 6:56](#); [14:20](#); [15:1-7](#); [Rm 8:1](#); [2Co 5:17](#); [Eph 2:10](#); [Php 1:1](#);  
 H. [1 John 2:6](#) : [Jn 15:4-7](#); [1Jn 2:24](#), [27-28](#); [3:6](#), [24](#); [4:13](#), [15-16](#);  
 I. [1 John 2:7](#) : [Mk 7:8](#); [Jn 13:34](#); [2Jn 5](#);  
 J. [1 John 2:7](#) : [Lk 6:47](#); [Jn 1:1](#);  
 K. [1 John 2:8](#) : [Rm 13:12](#); [1Co 7:31](#); [1Jn 2:17](#);  
 L. [1 John 2:8](#) : [Jn 1:9](#); [3:19-21](#); [8:12](#); [12:46](#);  
 M. [1 John 2:8](#) : [Jn 1:5](#); [12:35-36](#); [Rv 22:5](#);  
 N. [1 John 2:9](#) : [1Jn 2:11](#); [3:15](#); [4:20](#);  
 O. [1 John 2:10](#) : [Rm 12:10](#); [1Th 4:9](#); [Heb 13:1](#); [1Pt 1:22](#); [1Jn 3:10](#), [14-17](#); [4:20-21](#);  
 P. [1 John 2:11](#) : [Lv 19:17](#); [1Jn 3:15](#); [4:20](#);  
 Q. [1 John 2:11](#) : [1Jn 1:6](#);  
 R. [1 John 2:11](#) : [Jn 14:6](#);  
 S. [1 John 2:12](#) : [Ps 25:11](#); [Lk 24:47](#); [Ac 2:38](#); [10:43](#);  
 T. [1 John 2:13](#) : [1Jn 1:1](#);  
 U. [1 John 2:13](#) : [Jn 16:33](#); [17:15](#); [Eph 6:10](#); [1Jn 2:14](#); [4:4](#); [5:4-5](#); [Rv 2:7](#);  
 V. [1 John 2:14](#) : [1Jn 1:10](#);  
 W. [1 John 2:15](#) : [Jn 15:19](#); [17:16](#); [Rm 12:2](#); [Jms 1:27](#); [4:4](#);  
 X. [1 John 2:16](#) : [Rm 13:14](#); [Eph 2:3](#); [1Pt 4:2](#); [2Pt 2:18](#);  
 Y. [1 John 2:16](#) : [Gn 3:6](#); [Pr 27:20](#);  
 Z. [1 John 2:16](#) : [Jms 4:16](#);  
 AA. [1 John 2:17](#) : [1Jn 2:8](#);  
 BB. [1 John 2:17](#) : [Mk 3:35](#); [Eph 6:6](#); [1Th 4:3](#); [1Pt 2:15](#);  
 CC. [1 John 2:17](#) : [Jn 8:35](#); [12:34](#); [2Co 9:9](#); [1Pt 1:25](#);  
 DD. [1 John 2:18](#) : [Jn 2:4](#); [1Pt 4:7](#);  
 EE. [1 John 2:18](#) : [Mt 24:5](#), [24](#); [1Jn 2:22](#); [4:3](#); [2Jn 7](#);  
 FF. [1 John 2:20](#) : [2 Co 1:21](#);  
 GG. [1 John 2:20](#) : [Ps 89:18](#); [Mk 1:24](#); [Ac 10:38](#);  
 HH. [1 John 2:22](#) : [Jn 20:31](#); [Ac 18:5](#); [Eph 5:2](#); [1Jn 5:1](#);  
 II. [1 John 2:23](#) : [Jn 5:23](#);  
 JJ. [1 John 2:23](#) : [Jn 8:19](#); [16:3](#); [17:3](#); [1Jn 4:15](#); [5:1](#); [2Jn 9](#);  
 KK. [1 John 2:24](#) : [Jn 15:4-7](#); [1Jn 2:6](#), [27-28](#); [3:6](#), [24](#); [4:13](#), [15-16](#);  
 LL. [1 John 2:24](#) : [Jn 10:38](#); [Col 3:3](#); [1Th 1:1](#); [1Jn 4:15-16](#);  
 MM. [1 John 2:25](#) : [Jn 4:14](#); [1Tm 4:8](#); [2Tm 1:1](#); [Ti 1:2](#);  
 NN. [1 John 2:27](#) : [Jn 14:26](#);  
 OO. [1 John 2:27](#) : [Jn 15:4-7](#); [1Jn 2:6](#); [3:6](#), [24](#); [4:13](#), [15-16](#);  
 PP. [1 John 2:28](#) : [Lk 17:30](#); [Col 3:4](#); [1Jn 3:2](#);  
 QQ. [1 John 2:28](#) : [1Th 2:19](#);  
 RR. [1 John 2:29](#) : [Gn 18:19](#); [Dt 6:18](#); [1Jn 3:7](#), [10](#);  
 SS. [1 John 2:29](#) : [Jn 1:12-13](#); [3:3-7](#); [8:41](#); [1Jn 3:9](#); [4:7](#); [5:1](#), [4](#), [18](#);

## **Week 2 – When Jesus Speaks: Studying His Parables**

*Fresh eyes on Jesus' parables: discovering new insights in familiar passages.* Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

**“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”**

Philippians 1:4-6

SOURCES: SOTERIOLOGY: A Study Guide by Daniel B. Pecota (Global University Textbook); APOSTASY Compilation and commentary by Stella Paterson [http://www.ekklesia4him.net/Apostasy\\_study.pdf](http://www.ekklesia4him.net/Apostasy_study.pdf). The Salvation Equation: Personal study notes Pastor Orleen Haseltine ©2011. Biblegateway.com. “Life in the Son” Robert S

**Parable #7:**

**Matthew 25:14-30 (ESV)**

**What does this parable mean?**

**Standard view:**

**Alternative view:**

**What does it teach us about the Kingdom of God?**

**How does this glimpse into what the Kingdom of God is like affect my thinking? My actions? My life?**

**7**

**An Overdone and Underdone “Well Done”**

***The Five Talents***

***Matthew 25:14–30***

Wouldn't it be nice if you could hear God say “Well done” before you die?

I've been part of so many funerals during my pastoral ministry I think I should be excused from my own. Because I've participated in so many, I can easily tell you the top five most commonly heard expressions at funerals. Coming in at number 5: “Doesn't he (or she) look so peaceful?” For your information, this also happens to be number one on the list of the top five lies told at funerals.

Number 4: “If I never hear another bagpipe rendition of ‘Amazing Grace,’ it'll be too soon.” Number 3: “She is singing with the angels today.” And rounding out the top five is a two-way tie for first place:

- “Well done, good and faithful servant.”
- “I never heard him (or her) say a cross word to anyone.”

If you need me to break the tie between these two finalists, the award goes to the “Well done” statement—and not only because it comes directly from the Bible. The one about never hearing a cross word should be disqualified on the grounds that it simply isn't believable. Not that people are lying. In the grief of the moment, I have no doubt tears of sorrow fog the memory and the misty light of sentimentality shines only on the dearly departed one's finest moments.

However, if it were true the deceased person never said a cross word, and given the fact that I have heard it said of 99 percent of the people lying in repose, one must wonder why the world isn't a kinder place. That remaining 1 percent of crabby people (whose funerals I have never performed) must get around as miraculously as Santa on Christmas Eve, because the sound of cross words is as ubiquitous as blasting car horns in New York City during rush hour.

So “Well done, good and faithful servant” gets my vote as the number-one expression heard at funerals. Too bad it's a misunderstanding of the parable in which it is found.

I can sense your hackles rising, especially if you've said or heard this said about a departed loved one, so I should jump quickly to explain. The parable of the talents is found in a series of teachings and parables Jesus gave in response to the disciples requesting a timetable for the temple's destruction, which He had just predicted and which they assumed would signal the “end of the age” (Matt. 24:3). “Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ‘Do you see all these things?’ he asked. ‘Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.’ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’” (vv. 1–3).

In response Jesus gave many prophecies about world events and the disciples' upcoming persecution. What He said was couched in such apocalyptic language that many Christian teachers over the centuries have viewed Matthew 24–25 as a description of the so-called end times. Although there are many differences of opinion about the end times, the central dramatic event involves the second coming of Jesus. So scholars typically interpret Jesus' parables in this extended teaching section against that backdrop. Whether or not that should be the case remains an open question.

Regardless of how the end times will play out and when they began or will begin, Jesus used three parables and one dramatic scene to emphasize the importance of being ready at all times to account for one's faithfulness to the Lord. This parable of the talents is centrally located in that context. That's why Jesus began with the word *again*.

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work

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and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. (Matt. 25:14–18)

Then Jesus brought His listeners to that sobering moment of accountability when each of the three servants presented to the returning master the results of his efforts to steward the master's property.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (vv. 19–23)

Let's pause in the flow of the story here, because the third servant's report resulted in condemnation, not the "Well done" commendation. That will take us to another matter we'll consider in a moment. So before we dig into that, let's deal with what I consider a misunderstanding that leads to the "Well done" expression being overused at funeral services.

### **Pre- or Posthumous**

Here's the issue: because this teaching section in Matthew 24–25 is fraught with end times language and images, regardless of how they are understood, it has become impossible, apparently, for people to imagine this moment of accountability, commendation, and reward from the master as anything but a final scene in heaven. In other words, we conceive of no other occasion when a person will hear these words from the Lord than after his or her life on earth is over. Hence, it is the number-one thing said at funerals. And yes, it is appropriate to say it then, but not exclusively then.

This accountability moment that promises the hope of commendation and reward is *not* necessarily awarded posthumously—that is, after the soul leaves the body to meet the Lord. Why should we think that? According to the master's own words, the moment of commendation and reward occurred *before* the servants completed their service for the master. Note that the master clearly indicated more work on his behalf remained to be done: "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" (Matt. 25:21).

Rather than the commendation-and-reward moment occurring at the end of a person's life, it appears to be midstream—*prehumous*, if that is a word. This aligns with what Jesus had already said to His disciples about faithful servanthood when He led up to the parables told in Matthew 25: "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions" (24:45–47).

It also concurs with the other version of this parable recorded in Luke's gospel, in which some significant differences appear. Yet both imply that the commendation-and-reward moment occurred when there was still work to be done. Luke's version ends by saying, "'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities'" (Luke 19:17).

While we all certainly hope to hear "Well done" at our deaths, it does not appear that the commendation-and-reward moment occurs only when our work on earth is done. Why is this important?

### **The Father's Reassurance**

Think of how we imagine hearing these words of our Lord. That wonderful moment will bring relief and peace and will be a time when you can finally rest from your labors and enjoy the blissful experience of completion. Can it be we don't have to wait until we die to experience the sweet taste of that reward? What if we can enjoy that experience even in this life? Jesus seems to have confirmed that possibility when He promised "rest for your souls" to weary people if they work faithfully alongside Him in this life: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28–29).

We don't have to wait until we go to our "eternal rest" to experience a soul-resting commendation and reward from the Lord as His response to our faithful service. And just think: that means we can enter into His happiness in this life over who we are (though we are still in process) and what we have done (though we wish we could have done better)!

As a pastor, I have sat across the table from far too many people who choke back tears while describing their troubled relationship with a mother or father. I've seen grown men hang their heads and slump their shoulders in utter

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defeat as they say, “My dad never said ‘I love you’ or told me he was proud of me.” Even as adults they longed for some assurance that their fathers loved and prized them.

I understand how important that is. My dad rarely gushed emotional words of love. Although I was a sports star on my high school and college teams, he rarely attended my games. He couldn’t. People back then didn’t have as much freedom to break away from work to sit on the sidelines and watch their kids play sports. My parents didn’t applaud every breath I took or plaster every latest creation of mine on the fridge as if I was Andrew Wyeth. In fact, my dad was a stickler for excellence and didn’t applaud anything that was not worthy of acclaim just to make someone feel good. But I never felt I had to measure up to some standard in order to be acceptable to him. Why?

Fortunately, there were times—moments of commendation and reward—that fed my sense of worth and grounded me in the unshakable assurance of his love. Like the day he dropped me off for my freshman year at college. The car was unloaded. Packed boxes crowded my dorm room. My mind had already focused on the all-important question of where to hang posters of Jimi Hendrix and Pelé. So Dad and I said good-bye, and he left to travel the two hours back home. About fifteen minutes later, a knock sounded on the door. It was Dad.

“What are you doing back?”

He was a little awkward when he said, “I just had to come back, because I wanted to look you in the eye when I said I love you. I’m proud of you, boy.” Then he left again.

That was one of the most important moments of my life. I know what it feels like to have a father not just rattle off a few words of love but say them and mean them so deeply he had to turn around and drive an extra thirty miles just to tell me. That kind of affirmation and commendation can’t be shaken. You don’t have to hear it very often, because the stabilizing soul-rest it creates in a son lasts and lasts. According to this parable, we can experience that from our heavenly Father even before we die.

### **Risk and Reward**

If this “Well done, good and faithful servant” experience is truly a possibility in this life, then we should be careful to understand who Jesus considers a faithful servant. Unfortunately, teachers often use this parable as a “perfect” lesson on stewardship. The moral of the story, we are told, is to use wisely and productively the resources the Lord has placed in our hands. Of course, that should be our desire, but that is not the story’s moral. The key message is the part of the parable that is underdone.

Is the point really to be productive? No, the point is to *try* something, *anything* that will benefit the master to some degree. The first and second servants were not equally productive, yet they received the same commendation and reward. The master was angry with the third servant for letting fear render him fruitless. He was unwilling to take any risk with what he had been given. It turns out this parable is not so much about stewardship and productivity as it is about taking risks for the master’s benefit. That is what pleases the Lord.

Remember, we are talking about the One who risked His reputation to associate with sinners (Matt. 9:10–11). The One who faced the charge of lawbreaker for healing on the Sabbath (12:9–13). The One who faced charges of blasphemy, because He not only healed a paraplegic man but also provided relief from the paralysis of sin (9:1–7). Obviously, He is not going to be pleased with someone who fears what he might lose if he tries to do something worthwhile for God. After all, He is the one who specifically denounced self-protection and promoted self-sacrifice: “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (16:25).

This parable’s point is not that commendable stewardship equals success and productivity. No, the point is to honor the master’s resources enough to make the master’s business goals your priority; try something—anything—to be productive for him. My guess is that if any of the servants had come back and said, “I did my best to make something out of the money you gave me, but things did not work out as I hoped,” the master would *not* have gotten angry at him. In other words, faithfulness means risk more than results.

In a world that places so much emphasis on success and productivity, average Christians like us can easily get the idea that good results equal success and poor results equal failure. That’s why we hear only the success stories. However, here’s the good news: in God’s kingdom, faithfully risking all you’ve been given for His purposes and glory, regardless of the results, pleases the Lord and gives you the experience of “Well done” well before your casket closes.

### **20/20 Focus**

1. 1. Even though the point of this chapter is that we don’t have to wait until our deaths to enjoy a sense of “Well done,” it’s still nice to think of that happening when we meet the Lord. Name a couple people you know who should get a resounding “Well done” at the end of their lives. Why? (How about writing them a note?)
2. 2. What might Jesus have had in mind when He had the master say to the faithful servants, “I will put you in charge of many things”?

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3. 3. Think of something you have been doing recently that leaves you wondering whether the Lord is pleased with your efforts: *Am I doing this well enough? Am I accomplishing anything worthwhile?* (If you're sharing in a group right now, be vulnerable. It will help.)
4. 4. Think of a time when you tried hard to do something good and right but failed. Based on the perspective presented in this chapter, can you hear what the Lord might be saying to you?  
*Lord Jesus, I know You don't require success in order to gain Your approval, but I often struggle with those kinds of thoughts. They bind me up and make me afraid. I second-guess myself all the time. Please give me a fresh revelation of Your grace toward me even when—especially when—I fail. Help me find relief in knowing that You are pleased with me as long as I am attempting to use Your resources in my life for Your glory and purposes. Amen.*

### Vision Check

Life is full of clichés. The trick is spotting them before they lead you into lazy agreement. They are not always wrong, but they should always be questioned.

Here's a famous Bible saying that is an ideal candidate for examination: "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18 NKJV). Read the preceding context (chs. 3–4) to identify the specific problem John was addressing and see if we should adjust the way we use that cliché. You'll find my thoughts to compare with yours on [dougnewton.com](http://dougnewton.com) or the Fresh Eyes app.

Newton, D. (2018). *Fresh eyes on Jesus' parables: discovering new insights in familiar passages.* Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

### Parable #8:

#### Luke 16:1-9 (ESV)

**What does this parable mean?**

**Standard view:**

**Alternative view:**

**What does it teach us about the Kingdom of God?**

**How does this glimpse into what the Kingdom of God is like affect my thinking? My actions? My life?**

## 8

The Taming of the Shrewd

*The Shrewd Manager*

*Luke 16:1–9*

How can such a confusing parable turn out to offer such clear good news?

You've probably heard the popular adage, "It's not the destination; it's the journey." There's a lot of truth in it. We should learn to enjoy the processes of life, the day-to-day comings and goings. Don't just live head down, nose to the grindstone, pressing on toward lofty goals. Stop and smell the roses. Breathe deeply. Enjoy your fellow travelers. We miss too many of life's joys and blessings when we are so purpose-driven, goal-oriented, and seminar-motivated.

However, this "enjoy the journey" can also be nothing more than a sequel to the ancient motto, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Embedded in this call to "smell the roses" is a long-recognized fatalism that does not square with truth. Ultimately, the destination validates the journey and brings the only lasting meaning to the things we attempt to enjoy.

As I write this chapter, one of my daughters has just delivered her third child. Believe me, for her it definitely was *not* the journey; it was the destination: *Get me to the hospital! There is one place and one place only I want to be, and I want to be there now!* What is it that helped her through the nauseating first trimester; the enormous discomforts of the third trimester; and the sharp, unrelenting contractions of a thirty-six-hour delivery? The promise of a destination that's worth it all. Holding a new gift from God in her arms.

For most people, life's journey consists of pleasant seasons to be enjoyed and dark days to be endured. The ratio of sunny to stormy days varies from person to person and even nation to nation. Certainly, wealthy nations have luxuries that make the hard times more bearable and often more avoidable. But all people go through extended hard times. And many people learn how to savor the smallest blessings and detect the slightest waft of a pleasant fragrance even amid the acrid atmosphere of war, destruction, drought, poverty, disease, and hunger. What makes that possible

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is a sustaining sense of something worth living for. A purpose. A distant landmark of promise, a horizon of hope for tomorrow.

My mom was eighty-six when she died. She lived in our home her final ten years. During her last four years, she dealt with (in chronological order) a separated shoulder that required months of therapy, the removal of her left lung at the same time my dad was dying, colon cancer and surgery, a heart attack, a stroke that robbed her of speech for the last three years of her life, and a broken hip necessitating more therapy.

George MacDonald referred to the body in old age as “undressing for its last sweet bed.”<sup>1</sup> But my mom’s plight was not just a matter of those creeping losses. She never did “rage against the dying of the light” as Dylan Thomas poetically urged. Her later days were a complete muzzling of all forms of communication. Imagine getting to the place where you can’t even make your right hand sign “Love, Mom” on your children’s Christmas cards. She heroically tried to enjoy the journey, but ultimately not much was left in her but the longing for release and repose at her final destination. For many old folks, waking up and facing a new day is harder than anything I have yet to do in life. The only things that keep them going are the destination and some perfectly timed sensations of the nearness of Jesus.

So join me in taking a somewhat countercultural position in affirming the ultimate importance of *the destination*. That perspective seems to fit a major theme of Scripture reiterated in numerous ways, as we are told to

- set our heart and minds on things above (Col. 3:1–2).
- be like the heroes of our faith, who pursued a kingdom beyond this earth (Heb. 11:13–16).
- be like Jesus, who endured the cross because of the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2).
- endure suffering patiently, knowing that we are achieving a far greater weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17).
- endure persecution, knowing that a crown of life awaits (Rev. 2:10).

If you happen to currently enjoy the privilege of a comfortable life on earth, one full of opportunities for travel, discovery, and pleasures of your choosing (i.e., a satisfying journey), do not be lured into the cultural trap of neglecting the future. Press on toward the prize of the high calling we have in Christ. Jesus—knowing Him, loving Him, serving Him, and joining Him—is your destination. Count everything else as garbage in comparison (Phil. 3:8–14).

Why am I getting preachy about this? There’s no way to make sense of the confusing parable we’re about to discuss without turning your mind from an “enjoy the journey” mentality and shifting toward a destination mentality. It’s a parable driven entirely by concern for future well-being and how to achieve it.

### Where the Confusion Sneaks In

As I said, this is a very confusing parable, because it seems to applaud the self-serving behavior of a person who sought to achieve a desired result through shady—or what is too graciously called “shrewd”—methods. Here’s what he did.

As the manager of a rich man’s possessions, he had been irresponsible and wasteful enough to get called into the corner office and be given a two-week termination notice. Now he had to think fast and develop a fallback plan before his final day at work, because he was a lazy bum too soft for hard work and too proud for panhandling (Luke 16:3).

Apparently, he had enough time to contact a few clients and discount their bills substantially enough to believe it might create a network of friends who would help him weather the storm until he found another job he could slither into. Here’s how Jesus described his shrewd scheme:

“I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.”

So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, “How much do you owe my master?”

“Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,” he replied.

The manager told him, “Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.”

Then he asked the second, “And how much do you owe?”

“A thousand bushels of wheat,” he replied.

He told him, “Take your bill and make it eight hundred.” (vv. 4–7)

In the next verse, Jesus used a word that sparks much confusion. He said, “The master *commended* the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly” (v. 8).

The word *commended* makes us cock our heads as we struggle with what seems to be an approved behavior. The rich master valued and surprisingly approved the shrewd strategy of this admittedly dishonest manager. But even more shockingly, on the surface Jesus seemed to have joined that commendation by acknowledging that “people of this world” do a better job of being “shrewd” than God’s people (v. 8). The Greek word translated “shrewd” in this verse usually has a very positive connotation—doing something beneficial—and is ordinarily translated “wise.” Then Jesus went so far as to urge people to use monetary leverage to make friends for an ulterior purpose like the dishonest manager (v. 9).

Jesus seemed to have been saying that just as the dishonest manager connived a way to use money to make friends and secure his future welcome, we should do something similar to gain “friends” and ensure our welcome into an eternal home. Why does Jesus seem to have applauded such scheming?

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Hoping to clear up the confusion, some commentators provide very helpful information about first-century business practices and the meaning of “friends” in this culture of hospitality. That is important information. But I want us to try to solve the puzzle by simply sticking to the text.

### Contrast not Comparison

Unlike many of Jesus' parables, this one flows seamlessly from the story of the parable (Luke 16:1–8) to Jesus' commentary on it (vv. 9–13). It's hard to know—and, apparently, it's not important for us to know—where one ends and the other begins. Jesus seemingly didn't want us to draw a sharp line. Consequently, His commentary can help us understand the story's point. When we do that, we discover Jesus was not making a comparison at all. Instead, He was making a stark contrast.

- He talked about gaining welcome into people's earthly homes versus welcome into eternal dwellings (vv. 4, 9).
- He contrasted the shrewdness of worldly people with the lack of shrewdness of God's people (v. 8).
- He distinguished between trustworthiness and dishonesty (vv. 10–12).
- He concluded with a very strong contrast between serving God and serving money (v. 13). I say “a very strong contrast” because scholars tell us that in this culture it was common for slaves to serve two masters who had a cooperative agreement. So when Jesus said, “You *cannot* serve both God and money,” He was claiming that it is impossible. There can be no cooperative agreement whatsoever between these two masters.

Jesus emphasized all these points of contrast when He turned to the listening and sneering Pharisees (v. 14), looked them in the eyes, and made a final, most telling contrast, one that helps us understand the parable: “What people value highly is detestable in God's sight” (v. 15).

That one comment clarifies the parable, for it tells us *not* to see the rich master's commendation as a good thing. Yes, the master valued and commended the dishonest manager's actions. But now we know, because Jesus spoke plainly about the stark contrast, that the rich man commended something that God detests. Ah, good to know. Now we can return to the parable and work through it, reassured that we are not supposed to admire or emulate the shrewd manager.

### Take God Out of It

Based on what we just discovered, we now realize that the rich master in the story *does not* represent God. Because so many parables position a master, king, or father as a God figure, it becomes habitual to assume that the authoritative figure in any parable represents God. This is not always the case, and it is definitely *not* the case in this parable.

In this parable, nothing about the rich man gives insight into God's nature, values, or behavior. Because of what we have already seen, we know that both the dishonest manager and the rich man are part of and functioning within an ungodly value system.

### The Use of Possessions

As we have already seen, this parable must be read as a study in contrasts. Since it kicks off with a focus on accountability for the use of the rich man's possessions, we should concentrate on that as the fundamental contrast Jesus sought to illustrate. The shrewd manager's use and misuse of his master's possessions were detailed and clear: he was wasteful, corrupt, self-serving, and self-protecting. With whom is he being contrasted? The contrasting party is only implied. Jesus was calling His disciples to function differently, as bona fide “people of the light” (Luke 16:8). They were to use their heavenly Master's possessions in a way exactly opposite of what the shrewd manager did. If they lived by a contrasting set of values, they were promised eternal well-being, though not necessarily immediate well-being (v. 9).

So what way is the exact opposite of how the shrewd manager used the rich man's funds? The opposite of wasteful, corrupt, self-serving, and self-protecting. What kind of practical use does that imply? Here we must bring in the larger context of Jesus' teaching about the use of money and possessions. When we do that, there is no doubt He was talking about serving the poor, those who can do nothing for us and who cannot make it without us. All the gospel writers made this clear, but Luke elevated that theme through some of Jesus' quotations that he uniquely selected for his gospel.

- “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (4:18–19).
- “But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor” (12:31–33).
- “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (14:12–14).

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Then Luke continued emphasizing poverty relief in the book of Acts when he called special attention to the early Christians' Spirit-created concern for the poor.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. . . . There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (4:32–35)

These and many other allusions to poverty relief in Luke-Acts create an unmistakable context for understanding what Jesus considered the faithful use of worldly wealth in this parable.

If you are like me, this emphasis on rescuing the poor is not anything new, but my commitment to kingdom values like that constantly needs renewal. I tend to drift away from them. Everything we have been given belongs to God, not us, and is to be used in ways that fulfill our Master's desires. The Lord wants us to be as "shrewd" as the dishonest manager. But that shrewdness with its animal instinct for selfish gain must be tamed by a compassionate heart for those who God prioritizes: those who are poor in some way. This is a challenge, yet in that very fact we also find incredibly good news.

### **Divine Poverty Relief**

In my prayerful preparation for writing this chapter, one morning I found myself disappointed in myself for a variety of reasons. A month earlier I had suffered a severe bicycling accident that resulted in eight rib fractures, a life flight to a trauma center, and a long recovery time. Consequently, I was less focused and productive than I wanted to be about meeting some of my deadlines. I felt like I lost steam and concentration. To top it off, I knew I had allowed the deadlines to rob me of devotional times with the Lord.

Then in my prayer time that morning—the first one I'd had in more than a week—as I sheepishly approached the Lord, asking for His help with this parable, I sensed Him saying, *I don't expect anything of the "people of the light" that I am not doing Myself. After all, I am the light. I am all about giving everything I have to those who are poor. If I am expecting you to regard the poor with generosity, wouldn't I be regarding you in the same way? When you are poor in effort, when you are poor in strength, when you are poor in wisdom or diligence or conviction, don't come to Me in shame. Come to Me in confidence and faith. I already am the kind of person I want you to be. So when you are poor in spirit, guess what? That's exactly when I plan to give you the kingdom of heaven. There's a reason I made that My very first beatitude.*

Perhaps this parable leaves you overwhelmed with the standard of self-sacrifice Jesus set, unsure about the cost, but certain about having fallen short. If this challenging parable ultimately presents us with the Master's demand, then it also reveals His nature. When you lack the necessary compassion, He will provide you with the resources of heart and mind necessary to handle His wealth—material or spiritual—in ways that please Him. Consequently, in this life we get to sample the riches of God's eternal kingdom, our eternal home into which we will one day be welcomed. This one truth makes the journey almost as grand as the destination.

### **20/20 Focus**

1. 1. If you're like most people, something strikes you as wrong about the behavior of the shrewd manager, even though the rich man commended him. Don't just "feel" that way; try to put it into words. Things often become clearer when you hunt for the right words.
2. 2. Why do you think the master commended the dishonest manager? What impressed him? What did Jesus want us to be impressed by?
3. 3. Ultimately, hearing Jesus call the worldly values and resulting behavior of the shrewd manager "detestable in God's sight" brings us relief. What do you think falls into that category of detestable values?
4. 4. For a refresher in what God highly values, read aloud Jeremiah 5:23–29; 22:3–5. Where might your values need to align more closely with the Lord's?

*Lord Jesus, this was a hard chapter for me to read. I am prone to neglect the poor—to see them as victims of their own poor choices; to absolve myself of responsibility based on my own needs for money, shelter, and safety; and to take wise steps to secure my own future as my priority. This parable calls me to a different value system. I'm going to need the Holy Spirit's help to live out those values, especially since I'm often unaware of the times I'm caught up in the world's values. Please help. Amen.*

### **Vision Check**

Our instincts are notoriously untrustworthy, especially when compared with the trustworthiness of God's Word. Yet sometimes your gut makes you wonder whether the widely held understanding of some portion of God's Word is correct. In those times, it is appropriate to question—humbly!—whether the common point of view is correct.

Here's a controversial contemporary issue to consider. Read Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 14:34 about women keeping silent in church. How does your gut react to that? The point is not to force your opinion to change but to let your mind follow your gut long enough to rethink the issue in relation to the whole counsel of God. Maybe something

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new will come to mind. Maybe not. At least you're giving the Lord a chance to help you see something with fresh eyes. Feel free to compare your thoughts with mine on [dougnewton.com](http://dougnewton.com) or the Fresh Eyes app.

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### Parable #9:

**Luke 15:1-7; Matthew 18:10-14 (ESV)**

**What does this parable mean?**

**Standard view:**

**Alternative view:**

**What does it teach us about the Kingdom of God?**

**How does this glimpse into what the Kingdom of God is like affect my thinking? My actions? My life?**

### 9

What “One” Are We Talking About?

#### *The Lost Sheep*

*Luke 15:1–7; Matthew 18:10–14*

How far can you stretch a parable?

Here's something you'll never hear: “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” sung as the bride walks down the aisle. Or “Pomp and Circumstance” at a funeral. Or “Hail to the Chief” at the grand opening of a neighborhood fast-food restaurant. Context is everything in determining what is appropriate.

On our wedding day, just minutes before my bride's father was to escort her down the aisle—the prelude music was already playing, and I was about to step onto the platform with the officiating pastor—my jokester soon-to-be father-in-law greeted his daughter, wearing crusty farm boots, bib overalls, a flannel shirt, a crumpled cowboy hat, and a huge smile on his face. I had no idea what was going on out in the church lobby, but my wife-to-be was mortified! After a good laugh, her dad quickly changed and the wedding proceeded with the one desired “hitch.” Context is everything. Weddings call for tuxedos and cummerbunds, not yee-haws and bandanas.

However, most music, dress, and activities are like elastic. They fit many contexts just fine. On that same wedding day, our “very Christian” ceremony featured music from Motown and Mendelssohn. Both were appropriate—just not as the bridal processional. Nevertheless, it's always important to ask, “Is this appropriate?” or you may wind up coming as a Tootsie Roll to an Overeaters-Anonymous Halloween party.

Many of Jesus' parables are also elastic. Even though they have a specific context in Scripture, they also can be properly applied in various settings. The parable of the lost sheep provides a case in point. Matthew and Luke recorded very similar versions of this parable, but each chose to refer to it for a different reason. In other words, this parable “stretched” to fit more than one context. I want to demonstrate how that works in this chapter and why it is important to take advantage of its elasticity.

#### **Elastic Threads**

Let's first review how similar the versions are. The story line is essentially the same with only slight but interesting variations. So I have interlaced them. Luke's version is in roman type and Matthew's is in italics.

*What do you think? Suppose one of you has (If a man owns) a hundred sheep and loses one of them (and one of them wanders away). Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country (on the hills) and go after (go to look for) the lost sheep (the one that wandered off) until he finds it? And when he finds it (if he finds it), he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.” (truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off)*

You can see the story in both is the same. A person is missing just one of his one hundred sheep, but he leaves the ninety-nine to search for it. He finds the sheep and rejoices. Matthew's version differs only by explaining how the sheep got lost (“wanders off”) and leaving out the element of community celebration (“calls his friends and neighbors together . . .”) mentioned by Luke.

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However, the two versions differ significantly in another important way. Matthew and Luke referred to this parable for different reasons. That's why I talk about this parable as having elasticity. Matthew introduced the parable after Jesus focused attention on the nature of children and their need for protection. Immediately after the disciples questioned Jesus about the kingdom of heaven's ranking system—"Who, then, is the greatest?" (Matt. 18:1)—He invited a child to stand with Him as an object lesson for several points He made in response (vv. 2–10):

- "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."
- "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."
- "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."
- "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."

While these comments seem random on the surface, they are tied together by the way they flip upside down the common attitude toward children, who often went unnoticed, unprotected, and unrespected in Jesus' day.

In contrast, Luke included this parable as part of Jesus' reaction when the Pharisees muttered about Him sharing meals with tax collectors and "sinners" (Luke 15:1–2). It was the first of three parables (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son), which all illustrate heaven's joy-filled response when lost people are found and repent (see chapter 3 of this book). Jesus implied His sharing meals with scorned sinners—a very important element of building relationships in this culture—was part of seeking and finding the lost.

### **Forsaking for Seeking**

Here again, looking only at the surface, the contexts for the two versions of the parable are markedly distinct. One refers to honoring and protecting children. The other defends the evangelistic value of associating with common sinners. However, just as a single elastic band can stretch to fit various objects, as Matthew and Luke demonstrated, Jesus' parable also stretches to fit various circumstances. Nevertheless, we can still identify a shared theme. What is that theme? Go to great lengths to protect or rescue persons who tend to go unnoticed.

But that's not all. Jesus also valued going to great lengths on behalf of *the lost one* even if it means leaving behind *the sheltered ninety-nine*. But a shepherd is responsible for the whole flock! To leave them alone for the sake of just one lost sheep would have seemed risky. That act of turning away from them would have felt negligent and uncaring. Nevertheless, Jesus' emphasis on *the lost one* implies this.

On my very first Sunday as the pastor of a renowned college church in my denomination, I entered the pulpit to preach without a suit and tie and continued to do so the remainder of my eleven years there. In many churches around our country this would have been no problem. But in this rather traditional setting, many of the longtime members did not appreciate this. I "heard" about it occasionally. Even though I always came clean and pressed, I knew my lack of decorum for a Sunday service disturbed some people. However, this "lost sheep" parable stretched to fit this situation, so their approval and Sabbath equilibrium could not be my concern. Of course, I did not want to cause offense, but they were among the ninety-nine. They were well cared for. Their lives were stable and relatively healthy. My concern was for the scores of people to whom the doors of our church were culturally closed because of its reputation as a highbrow congregation. My preaching in semi-casual dress, along with other gradual adjustments in the "air" of our environment, sent a message that we were a congregation of common people who wanted no one to feel out of place or not good enough to attend.

While this is trivial when compared with horrific injustices on a global scale, it is one example of how Jesus' elastic parable of the lost sheep can stretch over thousands of situations. In order to focus rescuing attention on one person or group, you will often have to forsake a large group of others who are already within the "fold" of care and privilege. Let me go even further. The lost sheep parable, along with its important elasticity, illustrates as well as any portion of Scripture the nature of our prime directive as Christians. Simply put, our mission is to find the one nobody notices, serves, or offers rescuing hope to.

### **From Teddy to Tornadoes**

Of course, we can think of noticing and rescuing people—seeking *the one*—in terms of spiritual salvation. Where do we go to provide gospel ministry to those who have never heard? That's how this parable is most often applied, and that application is certainly most important. However, we should never minimize the importance of demonstrating a gospel witness in practical, seemingly non-spiritual ways. Our second-nature impulse should be to feel deeply and serve especially the needs of the unnoticed.

I don't know how, but somehow through my family's and church's influence I picked up that empathetic impulse at a very early age. I remember when I set my teddy bear upright against my pillow as the final act of making my bed each day. I felt sorry for Teddy when I walked out the door to go to school, because he would be there all by himself. I often apologized to him before shutting off the light. As I grew older, my concern for Teddy's loneliness transferred to guys like David, the challenged kid whom classmates mocked, and Steve, one of only two African American kids

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in my school of hundreds of second-generation white ethnic students with names like Przechlowski, Reitano, and Franklin Eberhard Gladstone III. I sensed that being Christian meant passing by the cool kids' lunch table and sitting beside the lone kid with the dingy white T-shirt.

True Christianity . . . it's always about leaving the ninety-nine with their advantages and privileges and showing special care for *the one*, the unnoticed, the minority—whoever that one may be, wherever that one may be, and wherever that one may be there. Jesus made that clear. It's the heart of this parable; it's the heart of God.

This special care for *the one* is often spiritualized to such a narrow degree that we miss some desperate needs and great opportunities for demonstrating and dispensing God's life-giving love. Let me give you a great example along with a provocative proposal that seems to run counter to conventional wisdom and common practice among God's people.

It's amazing how people of all faiths, political ideologies, ethnicities, and social classes pull together in the aftermath of major natural disasters, like earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornadoes. Local and national media outlets cover the events and their human impact for days and weeks. Professional athletes, Hollywood celebrities, and famous singers launch efforts that raise millions of dollars. Churches and other nonprofit organizations spring into action to send workers and truckloads of donated goods. And of course, government and public relief agencies provide life-saving and rebuilding assistance, usually with mixed reviews but on a massive scale. The stories of lost loved ones and destroyed homes and businesses tear at our hearts.

When Ken Fraley emerged from the bathroom where he had sheltered his wife and two small children in the tub under a mattress, he couldn't believe his eyes. He had seen pictures on television after other tornadoes, but nothing prepared him for what it would feel like to open the door and see only the concrete pad and part of the chimney of the once two-story brick farmhouse he and his dad had built together twenty years ago. He hung his head. He wasn't sure how to prepare his family, so he just opened the door a little wider and reached out for his wife's hand.

The kids weren't old enough to understand, but his wife, Jenny, felt flattened by a swirl of thoughts that came all at once in no order of importance: "Is the picture of us at Disney World gone? How can I get the girls to dance class tomorrow? Where's the dog? How are we going to make it with Ken out of work for the past two months? Oh no, my sister's wedding is next week, and she's counting on me for the wedding cake!"

We all know that people caught in these kinds of disasters, as tragic as such situations are, will be the focus of much attention and assistance. Because the governor or president can declare a state of emergency, people like the Fraleys will be eligible for all sorts of relief and resources. New clothes, food, temporary shelter, low-interest loans, and other benefits come from being in the spotlight of national coverage and compassion. But what if I tell you that the Fraleys' loss was an isolated event and not part of a widespread disaster that affected thousands of people? They live way out in the country in western Iowa, and the tornado that destroyed their home touched down for fifteen seconds.

There will be no national media coverage. Sure, they might receive some local attention and gestures of kindness. But they will receive nothing on the scale of help that occurs after a major tornadic storm like the one that flattened Joplin, Missouri, in 2011, and triggered a flood of compassion and care from thousands and thousands of people.

### **The Shadows of Singularity**

My point is this: all around our nation, when a large enough disaster hits and makes the regional or national news, when hundreds or thousands of people fall victim to winds and waves of destruction, when first responders risk their own lives to rush to their rescue, when cameras and correspondents solicit attention that generates massive relief and rebuilding efforts, the needs get noticed. Yet numerous other families endure similar destruction but are never noticed, because they had the ironic misfortune of not suffering as part of some widespread disaster. Theirs was just one relatively small disaster that did not register the tiniest tremor on anyone's Richter scale.

At the very time bright lights of compassion shine on thousands, people all around our homes and towns and cities suffer just as tragic losses but do so in the shadows of singularity:

- A stray bullet from a gang-related skirmish outside her home pierced Maria Escobar's living room window just above where she was coloring a picture of a unicorn and struck her thirty-eight-year-old mother below her left eye, killing her instantly. She, her little brother, and her mom had recently relocated to St. Louis from San Antonio after an unwanted divorce. Kids who lost a parent during a major disaster will be in the eye of compassionate help. But who's going to notice Maria and her brother? Who will give them a home? A hope? A future?
- Janelle Shipley's husband wandered away . . . again. She thought for sure he had been taking his medication but apparently not. She hopped in the car and began driving to all the places she thought he might be. She kept looking at her watch; she was supposed to have been on her way to work fifteen minutes ago. Her boss had warned her, "Another day coming in late and I'm going to have to let you go." But what could she do? Her husband or her

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job—their only income? She kept driving. If only her husband had gone missing during a major flood while the whole nation was in “rescue mode,” her boss might have been more compassionate.

During those times of widespread devastation, when compassion abounds and mobilizes people of all faiths and backgrounds to respond, shouldn't Christians also look for *the one* whose situation will never make the evening news and who will have to face it all alone?

### A Provocative Proposal

So here's my application of the lost sheep parable. I think it is in harmony with, if not the actual theme of, Jesus' spirit of compassion. When any disaster strikes that gains attention and compels compassionate action and your heart and likely your church want to join the relief efforts in some meaningful way, do this: match your efforts to respond to the spotlighted needs with some effort to find and rescue a person or family who otherwise will not be noticed and will have no help. If you're going to raise relief funds, fill a couple of trailers with emergency supplies and deploy your church van with a team of volunteers to go to the affected city, don't stop there. Match that effort by looking for some unnoticed family in western Iowa—or wherever—that was crushed by some isolated tragedy.

Not long before I began to write this chapter, hurricanes slammed the city of Houston, Texas, and then the entire state of Florida and created historic floods and destruction. The national news media focused on these areas for days—and rightly so. But did you know that during the very same season, devastating floods and landslides hit numerous places in Africa, killing hundreds more people, destroying countless more homes, devastating thousands more families? Probably not. We were focused on Houston and Florida. But what about the unnoticed others? Who will rescue them? Because of our wealthy culture's advantages, the existence and responsiveness of public and private relief agencies, and a strong national government, victims in our nation are like the ninety-nine within the fold of compassionate assistance. What about those who are not?

As a pastor, I have officiated many funerals. Sometimes the bereaved family will notify the public: “In lieu of sending flowers, please make a donation to your favorite charity in memory of our dearly loved husband, father, and grandfather.” Their intent is for money to go where it is needed most, toward humanitarian needs rather than flowers.

During major disasters that marshal generous donations and volunteer hours, what if our churches went so far as to say, “In lieu of (or in addition to) sending relief to those major disaster areas, we will honor those wonderful efforts by sending relief to where no help at all is going right now—to places of isolated disaster and people no one is noticing.”

I suppose the question still remains: Is Jesus' parable of the lost sheep elastic enough to fit the application I am making? If so, is your compassion elastic enough to wrap around *the one* I am talking about?

### 20/20 Focus

1. Matthew's and Luke's completely different uses of the same parable support the idea that certain portions of Scripture can be properly understood as elastic (i.e., they can be applied in different ways). But what cautions would you offer to make sure we never stretch Scripture too far?
2. There was at least one time when the apostle Peter stretched Scripture to make a point. In Acts 4:11, he changed one three-letter word as he quoted Psalm 118:22. Look up both verses in the NIV to spot that key word. How and why did he stretch that verse to fit the situation he was in?
3. This chapter focuses on the “shadows of singularity.” Try to put into your own words what that means.
4. List three or four problems in the media's limelight currently that are receiving lots of attention and triggering lots of social action and human kindness. Then counterbalance that attention by identifying someone suffering (or some kind of problem) no one is noticing.

*Lord Jesus, I am grateful for how the regional and national media can rally people to humanitarian causes, especially in times of widespread crisis. But I want my compassion and my church to be controlled and directed by Your Spirit, not the secular media. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and the will to act on behalf of those whose situations and suffering have not attracted attention. Amen.*

### Vision Check

God's Word is not rigid. It's alive. That means it can move and stretch. Its truth is fixed, but its application varies. It's elastic enough to cover more than the immediate scriptural context. It's good to imagine other situations to which its truth might apply.

For example, think about the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1–13). Readers often assume that the immediate application of this parable is to Jesus' return. While that does seem to be the case, think about the main points Jesus was making about these virgins. Imagine how you could apply these principles to circumstances and occasions other than the second coming. Bring your ideas to [dougnewton.com](http://dougnewton.com) or the Fresh Eyes app to compare them with mine.

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### Parable #10:

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### Luke 10:30-37 (ESV)

**What does this parable mean?**

**Standard view:**

**Alternative view:**

**What does it teach us about the Kingdom of God?**

**How does this glimpse into what the Kingdom of God is like affect my thinking? My actions? My life?**

### 10

Streetlights

#### *The Good Samaritan*

*Luke 10:30–37*

What if some parables had a second chapter?

Some people have called me a creative person, especially regarding my writing skills. To whatever degree that's true, I know some of it came from my dad. Not that he was great shakes as a writer. But he had a habit of inventing words—so many words that my two brothers and I put together a *Dictionary of Erfisms* for my parents' fortieth anniversary. *Erfisms*? you wonder. His middle name was Erford. Anyone with a name like that is destined for a life of eccentric elocution as an accidental neologue (one who makes up words). For example:

- *fizgig*: a euphemistic word for a laxative. The mere use of the term usually caused the desired result in my red-faced dad.
- *gingkos*: a versatile term of either endearment or exasperation that follows the exclamation “You . . .” depending on the prevailing mood of the observer of gingkish behavior.

My dad liked everything neat. He stacked his pocket change in order on the bedroom bureau every night. He thought that even though the English language includes verbs like *bollix*, *muss*, and *jounce*, it is not rich enough to provide words that fit every situation where one is in the act of putting something out of order. So he created new words that offered more precise nuances:

- *shuck*: to make a minute adjustment to the position of any heavy object, as in “Shuck it this way a hair.”
- *squudgin*: to twist, shift, or rumple any cloth surface or flexible object. Always follows the command, “Don't . . .” as in “Don't squudgin the tablecloth.”

You may not be someone who makes up quirky words, but most people have a creative streak in some area of their lives. You may be able to look at an empty vase and a handful of wildflowers and “see” how to arrange them into a lovely bouquet. Some people possess an ear for music and have taught themselves how to play piano or guitar. Although most people require detailed recipes when they cook, you might have a knack for experimenting with ingredients and spices to make new dishes.

My wife and I spent many years in the South and marveled at the way some of our friends could transform a simple report about going to the grocery store into an elaborate drama full of action and description that rivaled a bestselling novel. And even though laziness might be the underlying motivation, some people can invent new ways of completing menial tasks more quickly and with less effort. What creative person first thought of carving an inclined plane helically around a cylindrical rod to produce an object that holds wood together? Then some other creative person like my dad came along and invented a name for it: a screw.

One of my major purposes for this book has been to show that most of us could be more creative in our interaction with Scripture if we gave ourselves a little nudge. I want to offer one more example of what I mean and how to do it using the famous parable of the good Samaritan. This classic drama conveys Jesus' answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29), and is central to the gospel message.

As you know, the parable tells of a victim of a violent robbery who was left to die not only by the thieves themselves but also by two Jewish passersby: a priest and a Levite. Then a despised Samaritan—a character Jesus introduced to shock His Jewish listeners—came along and provided life-saving compassion and comprehensive care.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the

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man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. “Look after him,” he said, “and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.” (vv. 30–35)

Clearly, Jesus painted a portrait of self-sacrificing, risk-taking love as the only true fulfillment of the law of love. For generations God’s people have examined under a magnifying glass every detail of this incredible picture of mercy and grace.

It’s worth trying to understand why the priest and Levite did nothing to help. And we often try. The Samaritan’s multi-faceted act of compassion and rescue should be analyzed and imitated by every Christian in every generation in every cultural context. And we have those components—emergency response, thorough care, and ongoing support—clearly spelled out. The way Jesus used a Samaritan as an unlikely hero was one of His many attacks on ethnic prejudice. It highlights a primary goal of the gospel toward which Christians are called to work: to tear down *all* dividing walls of hostility, not just ones between God and people and between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:14–16). Retrofitting the story for a new generation and culture is appropriate creative interaction with the text, and it is done often and done well.

### Experimental Variations

However, there’s another way to interact creatively with biblical texts that I call “experimental variations.” Scientists do this in their research. As they test hypotheses, they change one component of the experiment, called the variable, and observe what happens. What happens if we heat the solution five degrees more? What happens if we heat the solution before we mix in the chlorine rather than after? What happens if we freeze the solution and store it for twenty-four hours before we heat it? They learn new things by making slight adjustments.

Similarly, experimental variations to a particular biblical passage can trigger creative interactions with the text and with God’s Spirit that produce fresh insights. Ask yourself, *What would happen if I changed just one story component?* Let’s do that with this parable by imagining what happened the days *after* the Samaritan rescued the victim and resumed his journey. You’ll see how that raises a new set of questions about how love should act.

### The Next Three Days

Imagine the following scenario: the Samaritan mounted his donkey and headed once again toward Jericho. He passed the place where he had rescued the wounded traveler, grateful to God for his opportunity to save a person’s life.

Not more than a mile farther down the road, he couldn’t believe his eyes when he saw the form of another wounded traveler lying beside the road. When he saw him, he took pity on him and showed the same care to this traveler as he had to the one the day before.

The innkeeper was somewhat surprised to see the Samaritan bringing another wounded victim to his inn for care. But again the businessman was promised a return visit and reimbursement for any expenses beyond another two denarii (silver coins).

The Samaritan stayed the night and left the next morning, but not before taking a minute to count his money and calculate whether he had enough left for the time he planned to spend in Jericho.

By now he was two days overdue for his business in Jericho, and he hoped his friends would not be worrying about him. So he picked up his pace to make up for lost time.

About three hours down the road, but less than halfway, his heart sank when he saw in the distance the form of another man lying in the road. Worry shot through his mind: *I can’t believe this. Could this be yet another victim?*

Sure enough. It was! *What shall I do? My time and money are running out.* He wished he hadn’t noticed the victim. But there he lay in the middle of the road. There was no getting around the reality. He saw the wounds, heard the man’s faint cry, and compassion welled up inside him, so he stopped, dressed the wounds, lifted the man onto his donkey, and returned to the inn.

The innkeeper, now quite confused and perhaps a little suspicious, reluctantly gave another room to yet another victim—reluctantly because the Samaritan now had to ask for special considerations, since he could not advance the innkeeper any money. He could only promise to pay the bill on his return. The innkeeper was not at all pleased.

The next morning, under considerable pressure from how his tardiness jeopardized his business and reputation, the Samaritan rode as fast as possible toward Jericho again. He felt deeply troubled. *What if I see another wounded traveler?* The worry did not let up. Step after step, he feared what was around the next curve. *I cannot be delayed again!*

Then sure enough, from a man lying off in the bushes, he heard a faint moan for help. “No way! I can’t do this anymore!” the Samaritan shouted in agony, as he looked with longing to the other side of the road.

There you have it—an experimental variation on this famous parable that makes one hypothetical adjustment to the story: What if the same thing happened to the Samaritan numerous times, not just once? This question is worth asking for several reasons.

### A Valid Variation

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Basic research on the actual text reveals that this road was known to be very dangerous. It is reasonable to wonder how a person might respond to more than one occurrence of a desperate rescue situation. So it's historically valid.

It's also emotionally valid. My experimental Samaritan represents what people soon discover when they commit themselves to lives of compassion for the needy: the desperate problems never let up and soon threaten to drain them dry of time and resources. Even the most compassionate people are prone to pass by like the priest and Levite out of sheer exhaustion.

Finally, it is conceptually valid. The parable Jesus told answered not only the question “Who is my neighbor?” but also “How does true love behave?” Jesus painted the picture of thorough and tender caregiving. My experimental version that imagines the realistic possibility of serial robberies puts fresh eyes on this compassion question. How does love behave in cases of chronic violence and victimization?

### Greater Measures

Put yourself in the experimental Samaritan's situation. By the time he had faced the same problem three times, and now a fourth, what might he begin to think? *I need a solution other than just loading these people on my donkey and trying to rescue them all by myself.* This is where the fresh eyes technique of “experimental variations” takes us: to deal with the fact that real life often presents us with rescue challenges that one person can't handle alone. In other words, love faces the prospect of ineffectiveness and refuses to stop until it develops strategies to solve bigger problems.

Think about that for a minute. If you faced this experimental but true-to-life situation, what solutions might love propose? Two strategic solutions come to my mind.

### Rescue Teams

The experimental Samaritan needs help. He needs a team of on-call people who share his sense of compassion and his conviction that prioritizes desperate people's needs over his own. He would need to create an organization to take responsibility for developing and deploying that kind of person into the . . . Oh, wait a minute. I think one already exists. It's called the church.

Now do you see how this fresh eyes technique logically leads to another creative way of looking at the parable? Go back to the parable and ask these questions: What insights might I gain if I think of the priest, Levite, and Samaritan as different types of churches and the victim as a type of human need? What is my church avoiding or too busy to notice? Do our benevolence ministries go far enough to fully care for and restore damaged people? Yes, we serve a meal at Thanksgiving to needy people, but does that really do much to alleviate their struggle to make ends meet? In other words, take all the ideas that are commonly taught about the ways individuals should show love to broken people—emergency response, thorough care, and ongoing support—and apply them to your church.

So, for example, among the greatest problems that trap people in economic poverty is consumer debt. People trapped in consumer debt are like people who can never keep their heads above water, because their bills keep pushing them back under. For years, my wife and I have encouraged God's people to model gospel love by periodically helping to pay other people's credit card debts to give them a chance to keep their heads above water. We believe in this.

In his book *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Shipler documented how the smallest problems, like the need for eyeglasses or dental work, can derail working people's attempts to rise above poverty. When we come alongside a family and offer to make monthly payments on one of their debts until it is paid off, that usually frees them up so they can get their car repaired and get to work, pay for more reliable childcare, or accelerate their debt reduction in other areas. Although it's not a cure for poverty, this not only helps provide a better chance for them to keep their heads above water and gradually make it to dry ground, but it also is one of the best ways to demonstrate the nature of the cross of Christ: substitutionary debt payment. That is, Jesus paid our debt on our behalf.

### Streetlights

If people keep getting robbed and beaten on the road, then put up streetlights! Even though this solution falls into the category of “Duh,” the church often overlooks streetlight strategies (i.e., prevention programs). We should show love through prevention as much as through rescue. In fact, even if you successfully develop and deploy hundreds of teams of rescuers but do nothing to address the cause, you have not done what compassion ultimately calls for—protecting people from harm.

Prevention efforts are usually not as sexy, as they say. But the city councilperson who crafts and champions legislation for funding city streetlights to protect hundreds of people in high-crime areas is engaging in an act of love perhaps greater than the Good Samaritan's. Keeping young girls from being seized for sex trafficking is to be desired over having to rescue them after being broken. Love that prevents wounds should usually be preferred over love that tends them. Of course, God sometimes chooses not to prevent pain or hardships in order to reveal His glory through people by developing their godly character or displaying divine power. But generally speaking, divine love agrees

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with Ben Franklin's classic words of wisdom written when he campaigned for fire safety: "An Ounce of Prevention is worth a Pound of Cure."<sup>2</sup>

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that around the same time the flooding in Houston in 2017 captured our national attention, hundreds more people died from flooding and landslides in Africa. The enormous effects of the Texas hurricane could not have been prevented. But many of the African floods could have been, because they were due not to a massive hurricane but to poor drainage systems. It was commendable that our public, private, and nonprofit organizations poured relief resources into Texas, but churches especially should be looking across the oceans and tackling the prevention needs in chronically under-resourced areas where deadly disasters could be minimized.

Just as the church answers the call to develop and deploy rescuers, we need to equally emphasize the ministries of prevention. And we need to applaud the people in our congregations who engage in prevention missions as much as those involved in rescue work. People who devote themselves to making other people safer, people who commit themselves to education and job training, people who prayer-walk their communities and initiate reconciliation projects are all doing kingdom work that's like installing streetlights in a dark and dangerous world.

### Back to the Starting Point

Do you see how this fresh eyes technique opens the window to a host of thoughts you might never have had without creatively thinking beyond the limits of the actual text? Of course, when engaging in creative interaction with Scripture, you must be careful to remember—or research—what's scriptural and what's not. Never entertain ideas that contradict other biblical texts and truths. However, in this case, there is value in opening the aperture wider to let this parable shed more light on how love should behave.

But finally, that raises a question. If broadening this parable beyond the text's original scope in order to see that prevention and not just rescue is important, why did Jesus limit the parable to one Samaritan rescuing one victim? My guess is He left the story where He did to confront us with an unconditional personal challenge. Ultimately the systemic changes needed to rescue people and prevent evil on a larger scale depend on the existence and responsiveness of individuals who love like the good Samaritan in one-on-one missions of mercy and grace.

My dad had a name for a person like that—a "good egg."

### 20/20 Focus

1. 1. Compassionate disciples sometimes want to walk "on the other side" of the street to get a break from people's problems. Once we start caring about hurting people, it seems like there's no end. In those times we can feel frustrated, angry, disillusioned, discouraged, or extremely fatigued. Do any of these feelings describe where you are at this point? Which one(s)?
2. 2. Jesus clearly wanted us to notice the thorough steps of compassion the Samaritan took. Think of some type of prevention ministry (e.g., preventing divorce, preventing consumer debt, or preventing teen pregnancy) and list some steps that are necessary if those ministries are to be thorough and effective.
3. 3. Name a couple of problems where you (or your church) are in rescue mode but you wish you were doing more about prevention.

*Lord Jesus, I'll admit I can be like the priest and Levite and want to avoid people who need help. I've gotten to the point where I am tired and discouraged. The needs keep coming, but I've run out. I'd love to feel I'm doing more than providing bandages. Could You point me in the direction of some new effort that might promote prevention? I'd love to pour some of my limited energy and resources into that. But still, give me the grace to bandage wounds. Amen.*

### Vision Check

In scientific experiments you introduce one new variable to discover something you didn't know before. You can guardedly do the same with Scripture. In this chapter, we imagined what the Good Samaritan might need to do had he come across multiple victims over the span of several days. If you try this, remember that the variable is not in the text, so you shouldn't turn your thoughts into a "new doctrine." But you might gain some new insights worth pondering in light of other portions of Scripture.

Try this: read John's version of the feeding of the five thousand, which includes the interesting detail about the five loaves and two fish coming from a boy (John 6:1–15). Try imagining what might have happened if the boy had only three loaves and one fish to bring. Then try another variation of the amount. What thoughts come to mind? Compare your thoughts with mine on [dougnewton.com](http://dougnewton.com) or the Fresh Eyes app.<sup>15</sup>

Newton, D. (2018). *Fresh eyes on Jesus' parables: discovering new insights in familiar passages.* Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

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