

Grow spiritually.



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**Live like a
disciple.**

Live as a disciple (Acts 11:25-26).

This is the lesson objective.

Follow Jesus like a true disciple.

This background information is for the leader.

There are numerous names for the people who follow Jesus, including ‘believer’, ‘chosen’, ‘Christian’, ‘disciple’, ‘the Way’, ‘saved’, ‘holy one’, ‘saint’, et cetera. There may be others. Each of these terms emphasize a different aspect of having a legitimate relationship with God. Each one is good.

The way that some use these terms may reflect their prejudices or misunderstanding of the Bible. For example, the terms ‘the Way’ or ‘Christian’ may have originally been coined by unbelievers as slurs to disrespect the early church. Today, the use of some terms to the exclusion of others might be used to dismiss or disregard how serious it is to claim to follow Jesus.

This lesson intends to flush out the question, “What does it really mean to follow Jesus?”

Read Acts 11:25-26 out loud.

²⁵ He went to Tarsus to locate Saul. ²⁶ He found him. He brought him back to Antioch. They stayed with the church for an entire year. They taught large numbers of people. For the first time, the disciples in Antioch got the title ‘Christians’.

Explore the names for Jesus people.

Question: *What are people who follow Jesus called in the Bible?*

They are called Christian, disciple, believer, chosen, saved, heir, redeemed, the Way (Acts 9:2, 19:6, 19:23), sanctified, saints, holy ones, and others.

Question: *Which of those names are the most popular today?*

Christian is clearly the most popular term for followers of the religion of the New Testament.

Question: *How often is the term ‘Christian’ used in the Bible? How often is the term ‘disciple’ used in the Bible?*

‘Christian’ appears exactly three times in the scriptures (Acts 11:26, 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16). None of these clearly define the term. It may be that it was a name applied to believers by outsiders (Acts 11:26).

‘Disciple’, on the other hand, appears 261 times. All are in the gospels and Acts. It is the preferred term by usage.

Question: *What does ‘Christian’ mean? What does ‘disciple’ mean?*

‘Christian’ means the people associated with the messiah. Just like an American is from America, and a vegan only eats vegetables, a Christian follows Christ.

‘Disciple’ can mean ‘student’, ‘follower’, ‘adherent’. It is related to the verb ‘learn’.



Question: *What is the difference between what people mean by 'Christian' and 'disciple'?*

When people call themselves a Christian, they typically mean that they believe. Or, they are identifying their religion as opposed to other religions, like Muslim or Buddhist. It is used casually, without much consideration for whether it is a serious claim. Most people, even those who are nominally involved in the faith, would not hesitate to call themselves a Christian.

People think of a disciple as a committed follower. Most people would hesitate to call themselves a disciple of Jesus. However, the disciples at Antioch were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). The two concepts cannot be separated.

Question: *Are you a disciple? Are you a Christian?*

Leave this question for personal consideration.

Read Mark 1:14–20 out loud.

¹⁴ After John's arrest, Jesus went to Galilee. He proclaimed the good news about God, ¹⁵ "The time has been fulfilled. The kingdom of God is near. Repent. Believe in the good news."

¹⁶ While he was passing by Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, Simon's brother. They were casting nets in the lake because they were fishermen. ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "Come. Follow me. I will make you into fishers of men." ¹⁸ They immediately dropped their nets. They followed him.

¹⁹ He went on a little further. He saw Jacob, Zebedee's son, and John, his brother. They were casting nets from their boat. ²⁰ He called them right away. They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the workers. They went away with him.

Discuss what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Question: *What do Simon, Andrew, and Zebedee's sons sacrifice to follow Jesus?*

They sacrifice everything: finances, profession, family, homes, comfort, familiar surroundings, and security.

There is certainly more to their decision than just a response to a few words (Luke 5:1-11, John 1:35-51). However, they did immediately drop everything to follow Jesus.

Question: *What is it that they think that they are going to do?*

They certainly did not fully understand the consequences of their decision. Jesus frequently criticizes them for failing to understand. However, they ultimately stuck to their commitment. They lead the church to taking over the entire world. This was because of their commitment.

Question: *Is this a special case, or must all believers make this level of sacrifice?*

Jesus called for others to give up everything (Luke 9:57-62, 14:25-27). He expected this from specific people (Matthew 19:16-21). The message of repentance was a call to give up everything (Acts 2:38).

Jesus expects everyone to give up everything. All Christians must practice this and teach it to others (Matthew 28:18-20).

Encourage each other daily (Hebrews 3:12-15).

This is the lesson objective.

Intentionally help others grow spiritually.

This background information is for the leader.

Read the entire book of Hebrews in advance, if possible. Provide a very brief overview, such as the following: The letter to the Hebrews argues that salvation through Jesus extends and improves Jewish law. Jesus is better than Jewish prophets (1:1-2), angels (chapters 1-2), Moses (chapters 3-4), priests (chapters 4-7), ritual sacrifice (chapters 8-10), and the law of Moses (chapter 8).

The recipients of the letter are in danger of either giving up or going back to Judaism (4:11-14, 12:4-29). The author warns them that this would be a terrible mistake. He urges them not to give up.

Read Hebrews 3:12-15 out loud.

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart that forsakes the living God. But exhort one another each day, as long as it is called “Today,” that none of you may become hardened by sin’s deception. For we have become partners with Christ, if in fact we hold our initial confidence firm until the end. As it says,

Oh, that today you would listen as he speaks!

Do not harden your hearts

As in the rebellion. (Psalm 95:7-8)

Do not turn away from the living God.

Question: *What is the author’s concern? What problem is he trying to protect or eliminate?*

The author seems worried that some are in danger of:

1. Falling into sin (3:13).
2. Turning away from God (3:12).
3. Developing a hard heart (3:12, 15).
4. Not holding firmly till the end (3:14).
5. Rebelling (3:15).

Perhaps some already have turned away from God. Others may follow. The author compares this to the rebellions of Israel in the desert. In particular, the Psalmist refers to the occasion when Moses struck the rock and became angry at the rebelliousness of the people.

Question: *Who is supposed to address these problems?*

The author wants the members to take responsibility to solve this problem. It is not the author’s responsibility alone. It is not the re-



Encourage each other daily.

sponsibility of people who are not there. He urges the people within the local congregation to address it themselves.

Question: *Exactly what behaviors are going on in this congregation that the author is worried about?*

Possible answers. We do not know. It could be lots of things: arguing, complaining, refusing to follow the leaders, giving up, denying the faith, or extreme sin. However, it sounds serious.

Read Hebrews 10:22-25 out loud.

Let us draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings, because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.

And let us hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess, for the one who made the promise is trustworthy.

And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works, not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near.

Spur one another on.

The author gives some specific suggestions to prevent giving up. Point out these expectations.

1. Draw near to God (10:22).
2. Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess (10:23).
3. Consider how we can spur one another on (10:24).
4. Do not give up meeting together (10:25).
5. Encourage one another (10:25).

Question: *Name some ways that we can specifically put this into practice.*

Direct the conversation toward viable solutions that can be implemented by a group. Have a regular time to pray and read the scriptures. Meet together regularly. Check on how other people are doing spiritually. Be encouraging. Use spurs when needed.

Find the right balance between challenge and encouragement.

Question: *How can a small group help spur one another on to love and good deeds?*

At first, it is difficult to get together with people and intentionally help each other spiritually. There are many reasons why a group can drift. With determination and focus, a group can help everyone become more spiritual.

People need direction (“spur one another on”) but they also need encouragement (“encourage one another”).

Question: *How can you find the right balance between giving direction and encouragement?*

Consider each situation, and respond appropriately. Listen first, speak later. Look for the right balance between sympathy, instruction, urging, and warning. Do what produces the best outcome.

Pick some of the following scenarios. Discuss how to help, and how to find a balanced reaction.

1. Someone used to come to the meetings and to church regularly. Their attendance has become irregular. They do not return phone calls. They do not look content.
2. Someone confides in you that they are having marriage problems.
3. Someone shares that they have neglected their relationship with God. They want to change, and ask you to help.

Pray together (Luke 11:1-4).

This is the lesson objective.

Regularly spend time praying with other believers.

This background information is for the leader.

Provide a very brief overview, such as the following.

Jesus prayed frequently. He was close to God. One day he prayed. His disciples observed this. One of them asked him to show them how to pray. So, he gave them some instructions about how to pray. Then he told them several stories to illustrate what he meant.

Read Luke 11:1-4 out loud.

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place.

When he stopped, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

So he said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, may your name be honored;

may your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread,

and forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And do not lead us into temptation.

When you pray, this is what you say.

Question: *Why did the disciples ask Jesus how to pray?*

Possible answers: They observed how close Jesus was to God. They wanted to be close to God themselves. They did not know how to do it. So, they asked someone they trusted to explain it to them.

Question: *What did Jesus expect them to do with his instructions?*

Possible answers: He did not intend this to be a ritual prayer. He did not intend anyone to repeat these exact words. Jesus is providing a model, or an example, on how to pray.

Jesus lists different elements that can and should be included in prayer. This does not mean that you must only pray about these things. The disciples asked for direction. Jesus gave them direction.

1. Address God (5:9).
2. Honor God (5:9).
3. Ask God to help you accomplish his goals (5:10).
4. Ask God to give you what you want (5:11-13).
5. Ask God to forgive you (5:12).



6. Ask God to help you forgive other people (5:12).

Jesus says that God will listen to you if you are persistent (Luke 11:5-10). God is like a father who likes to give things to his children (Luke 11:11-13).

Question: *Ask some of the children to name some of the favorite things their parents have given them.*

God is like that, just more so. You have to keep asking. God already knows what we are going to say and what we need.

Question: *Should we pray anyway?*

Yes. You can change God's mind.¹ Speaking with God is not worthless. Prayer is also about building a relationship with God. While God is all-powerful, he makes himself available to people. He is not so high that he is unapproachable. Approach him.

Actually pray together.

Pick one or more of the different elements of prayer listed above. Or, choose your own categories. Pray together different from traditional prayers. Here are some possible ways to pray.

1. Pray standing up.
2. Pray with eyes open.
3. Pray with hands lifted up.
4. Pray all at the same time.
5. Pray while holding hands.
6. Pray while walking around the house or room.
7. Pray loudly.
8. Pray quietly.
9. Pray silently.
10. Pray some other way.

Make prayer more like any conversation. Do not make prayer odd. Make it normal.

1. See Abraham's discussion with God (Genesis 18:16-33). See Habakkuk's argument with God (Habakkuk 1:1-2:20). Examine the psalms of lament, for example, Psalm 3, 4, 5, 22, 54, 120, and many others.

Reach out (Matthew 28:16-20).

This is the lesson objective.

Reach out to some people together.

This background information is for the leader.

Provide a very brief overview, such as the following.

Jesus taught the disciples with words and by example. Eventually, he was arrested and executed. This is what he told them would happen, but they did not fully understand at the time.

He rose from the dead. This helped his disciples understand everything that had happened. It gave him authority to repeat his claims. Now, they believed in a way that was previously impossible.

Among his final words were instructions about going out into the world to make disciples.

Read Matthew 28:16-20 out loud.

So the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain Jesus had designated. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted.

Then Jesus came up and said to them,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Disciples make disciples make disciples.

Jesus made an extreme statement about his authority: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18). Even the most proud, arrogant, and conceited rulers do not make such extreme statements. As the first to rise from the dead, Jesus made this statement because he actually had this much authority.

He gave his disciples four final instructions.

Question: *What are those instructions?*

(1) Go. (2) Make disciples. (3) Baptize them. (4) Teach them to obey everything that he commanded the disciples.

Question: *What does Jesus mean by ‘make disciples’?*

A disciple is a student, a follower, a devoted person, a true believer. Jesus wanted them to go out and persuade people to be his disciples, just as he had persuaded them to become his disciples.

Question: *Who should implement this now?*

You should do it. The preacher should do it. The leaders should do it. The spiritually mature should do it. Someone else should do it. I should do it. Everyone should do it.

Note that Jesus says, “Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (28:20).



Reach out.

Question: *If they should obey everything that Jesus taught the eleven, what would this include at a minimum?*

It would include: (1) Go. (2) Make disciples. (3) Baptize them. (4) Teach them to obey everything that he commanded the disciples. Then those disciples would make disciples. Then those disciples would make disciples. This would continue forever like a chain reaction.

Question: *In fact, is this how churches typically work today?*

Yes. No. Maybe. I do not know. Churches that are focused on reaching out are more likely to grow and flourish.

Question: *How can we operate this way?*

We would have to take this seriously. We would have to coordinate with each other. This will take time, effort, trial, and error.

Reach out to some people together.

Make an attainable goal to reach out to some people together. Do not try to accomplish something so grand that it cannot be accomplished. Discuss it together. Provide some leadership and direction. However, let the group develop consensus about what to do.

Make sure that your plan takes you, the members, and someone else, to a higher spiritual level. Here are some reasonable examples.

1. Start a potluck every week after church. Invite guests to come. Build relationships with other people. Create a place for guests to get to know other people.
2. Choose people to go out to eat together after church. Develop relationships with new people. Integrate these people into the congregation.
3. Ask a guest to study the Bible together. Do a simple study together. Find out where that guest is spiritually. Help them to take it higher.
4. Invite someone to attend a meeting of the church.
5. Take your children, another member's children over to someone else's house for a family devotional. Sing some songs, pray, and read the Bible together.
6. Create your own plan.

Groups are more likely to implement what they believe in. Facilitate helping the group develop a reasonable, attainable plan. During later meetings, share with each other how this went. Wash, rinse, and repeat.

Read the scriptures daily (Psalm 119:97-104).

This is the lesson objective.

Have a deliberate plan to read the scriptures daily your entire life.

This background information is for the leader.

Read Psalm 119 in advance. Provide a very brief overview, such as the following.

We worship the creator of the world, the one and only God. God reveals himself to people through his written word. His written word is how we know what he wants. We must read the scriptures.

Psalm 119 is a poetic song about God's word. The author expresses how much he loves God's word. It has 22 parts, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each part has 8 verses. Those verses start with the letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Read Psalm 119:97-104 out loud.

Each verse in this section begins with the Hebrew letter Mem, which is like our letter M.

*O how I love your law!
All day long I meditate on it.
Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies,
for I am always aware of them.
I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your rules.
I am more discerning than those older than I,
for I observe your precepts.
I stay away from the evil path,
so that I might keep your instructions.
I do not turn aside from your regulations,
for you teach me.
Your words are sweeter
in my mouth than honey!
Your precepts give me discernment.
Therefore I hate all deceitful actions.*

Love God's law.

Question: *How much effort did it take to write a song with 176 verses, with each 8 verses starting with the same letter?*

Possible answers: It probably took a lot of effort.

Question: *Why do you think that the author did this?*

He must have loved God's word a lot.
He must have wanted others to do the same.



Read the scriptures daily.

Notice how often the author reads the law: all day long (119:97), at night (119:55), at midnight (119:62), at dawn (119:147), through the watches of the night (119:148), and seven times a day (119:164). That is a lot of reading.

God's word brings unexpected knowledge and wisdom. You can be wiser than enemies (119:98), smarter than teachers (119:99), and have more understanding than old people (119:100).

When you read God's word, you are getting direct instruction from God (119:102).

Love God's word more than honey (119:103) or gold (119:72).

Question: *What things help you read God's word more? What things keep you from reading it enough?*

Discuss successes and problems. Encourage everyone to help each other read the Bible regularly.

Encourage folks to share examples of how they were successful reading God's word. Do not let the discussion devolve into only examples of failure. Provide some suggestions that make it positive and likely that people will actually read more.

It is pleasant to read the scriptures. It brings success, spiritual wealth, change, and hope. The scriptures can be used to help children become spiritually mature. The scriptures bring hope to families. The scriptures help people change. The scriptures affect people who are far from God and bring them near.

Develop a plan to read the scriptures daily.

Love the scriptures just like the author of Psalm 119.

Develop a plan to read the scriptures daily. Encourage everyone to have a daily Bible reading. Do not just flip open a book of the Bible. Do not substitute reading a book other than the Bible itself. Read the actual scriptures daily according to some deliberate plan.

For example, read the gospel of John. Or read Ruth. Or read Nehemiah. Read it every day until you finish. Then reread it again. Do so ten times. Or develop some other plan. You decide.

Help the members follow up with each other. This would be a great case to develop mutual accountability.

Become spiritually mature (Ephesians 4:1-16).

This is the lesson objective.

Develop spiritual leadership habits.

This background information is for the leader.

Read Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon in advance, if possible. Provide a very brief overview, such as the following.

Paul wrote this letter from prison. This is probably his first Roman imprisonment, which happens during the last chapters of Acts. This letter is probably written after the events at the end of Acts.

During this time, he wrote four letters that we currently possess: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. These letters have similar themes and content.

Paul established the church in Ephesus. He knew the people there and visited with them on multiple occasions. He has some concerns about their beliefs and spiritual maturity. He wanted them to become and stay spiritually mature. He knew that leaders needed to be developed to insure long-term growth.

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 out loud.

I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Therefore it says,

*When he ascended on high
He captured captives;
He gave gifts to men (Psalm 68:18).*

Now what is the meaning of “he ascended,” except that he also descended to the lower regions, namely, the earth? He, the very one who descended, is also the one who ascended above all the heavens, in order to fill all things.

It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature.

So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.



Become spiritually mature.

But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love.

Become spiritually mature.

Paul gives numerous prescriptions for becoming spiritual mature.

Question: *What does Paul recommend that the Ephesians do to become spiritually mature?*

Expose each of these through discussion.

1. Believe the correct things (4:4-6).
2. Be capable of speaking the truth in love (4:15).
3. Distinguish tricks and deceit from the truth (4:14).
4. Trust in God (4:6).
5. Live a worthy life (4:1).
6. Begin the process of following God (4:5).
7. Be humble, gentle, and patient (4:2-3).
8. Be unified with other believers (4:2-4, 13).
9. Be a peacemaker, even when other people disappoint you (4:3).
10. Be equipped and built up (4:12-13, 15-6).
11. Know how to equip and build up (4:11-13).
12. Develop the church as an effective organization (4:11-13, 15-16).

Discuss how to become spiritually mature. (Consider these texts for ideas: Proverbs 2:1-22, Ephesians 4:1-16, Hebrews 5:11-14.)

Question: *What are some spiritual habits that will help you become remain faithful?*

Consider the topics discussed in previous weeks. Read the Bible. Pray to God. Maintain strong spiritual relationships. Be committed to God's church. Help others become Christians. Be involved in service to others. Discuss any others that are relevant.

Commitment to God will consume your time and effort. It can be an overwhelming task.

Question: *How can you find the time for commitment to God? What do you do if you struggle with the conviction?*

Allow discussion. Life is full of decisions. Everyone has the same amount of time. You have to decide what you are going to do with your time. God created the heavens and the earth, and everything in them. He does not ask you to do what is impossible. Decide to put him first. Remove the obstacles that prevent you from doing so.

Once you get started, help someone else do the same.

Become a leader in the church.

Question: *How do you become a leader?*

This is another open-ended question. Steer the discussion toward the more practical and attainable answers. Leadership is a gift (4:7-8). However, that gift is sought and developed by the person who receives it. The way that you become a leader is first *work* on your own spiritual maturity. Then *demonstrate* your reliability and competence through action. Then *pursue* leadership.

Question: *Do you want to be a leader?*

The church needs people who are spiritually mature to mentor and develop other leaders. Because this takes time and effort, people often avoid the commitment. This is a mistake.

Question: *Do you avoid leadership responsibility?*

The church needs leaders. Pursue leadership. Pursue the traits required by leadership. (Refer to the text, the previous discussion, and the answers given.) People often avoid leadership because it requires more effort, it involves accountability, and because people feel inadequate.

This congregation needs more people to lead groups like this one. This congregation needs lots of people to lead in order to do all the things required to become effective. Members are at all stages of spiritual development. They need people to mentor them to the next level.

Question: *What happens when a congregation operates like a “whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16)?*

That congregation will become a great place. People will flock to it. It will be a beacon of light to others. It will effectively change the world, one person at a time. This happens in the trenches, in groups like this one.

Work with other people. Have a mentor. Be a mentor. Collaborate. Consider leading a group in the future.

It is exciting to be part of a congregation that is pursuing spiritual maturity, where “each part does its work.”

Sometimes, people wish that their congregation had more effective leaders. So, become one.

Overcome sin (Galatians 5:19-21).

This is the lesson objective.

Avoid behaviors the scriptures forbid.

This background information is for the leader.

From the beginning, God has both given instructions on what *to do* (Genesis 1:28, 2:16), and what *not to do* (Genesis 2:17). The law was concerned about how individuals and the people of God were going to righteously follow God (Exodus 20:8-12) and at the same time avoid wickedness (Exodus 20:2-7, 13-17). The prophets complained about the things that God's people should have been doing (for example, Jeremiah 31:33-34) and the things that they needed to stop doing (Jeremiah 3:1-13).

Jesus and his followers identified what is right and wrong. Jesus and his followers urged those who wanted to follow God to get rid of the sin that separated them from God. This is why Dunker John expected people to name and renounce their sins (Matthew 3:6). John sternly criticized those who came thinking that this did not apply to them (Matthew 3:7-10). Jesus did the same (Matthew 4:17, 23:1-4, 25-29). His followers expected the same thing after his death (Acts 2:38-41).

Following Jesus is not just a ritual. It is a commitment to turn away from darkness and turn toward the light (Ephesians 5:8, compare Colossians 1:13-14, 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).

The scriptures include many lists of vices (Proverbs 6:16-19, Matthew 15:19, Mark 7:21-22, Romans 1:29-31, 1 Corinthians 5:10, 11, 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-7, Colossians 3:5-10, 1 Timothy 1:9-10, 2 Timothy 3:2-5, Revelation 9:20-21). None of these lists are comprehensive. However, they do cover a broad range of wicked behavior. Loving God includes rooting these things out of your life.

Read Galatians 5:19-21 out loud.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; Idolatry and witchcraft; Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; Drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

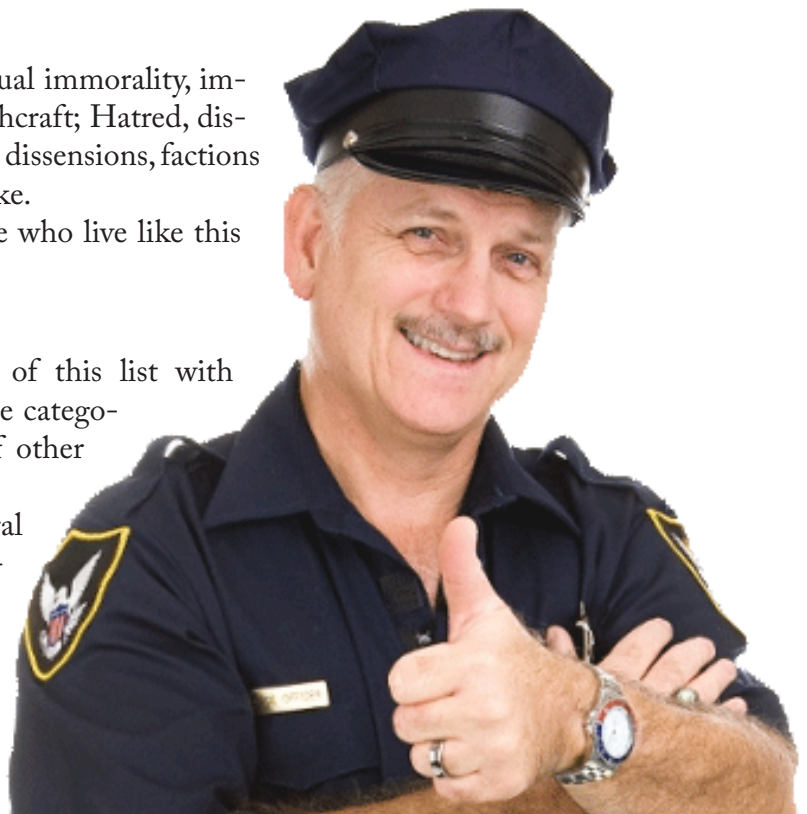
I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Discuss the categories within this list.

Some translations separate sections of this list with semicolons. This divides the list into three categories: sexual misconduct, mistreatment of other people, and wild living.

The first three terms refer to general sexual misconduct (sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery). Sexual misconduct is a frequent biblical target.

The next group refers to various ways that one person can mistreat others. They range from bad attitudes (hatred),



causing trouble (discord, fits of rage, dissensions, factions), and inappropriately placing yourself and your wishes over others (jealousy, selfish ambition, envy).

The third group refers to wild and out-of-control lifestyles (drunkenness, orgies).

Question: *What specific sexual behaviors does Paul have in mind?*

Adultery is a sexual relationship in which one or more parties are married to someone else (Hebrews 13:4). Immorality is a sexual relationship in which neither party is married (John 4:17-18, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). Homosexuality is a sexual relationship in which both parties are the same gender (Romans 1:26-27). Prostitution is a sexual relationship for hire (1 Corinthians 6:15-17). Lust is desire for a prohibited sexual relationship (Matthew 5:27-30). An orgy is a sexual relationship between a group (Galatians 5:21). Incest is a sexual relationship between close relatives (1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

Question: *What other behaviors would violate this prohibit?*

It would include pornography, flirting with married people, seeking sexual relationships outside marriage, sexual behavior other than intercourse, vulgar joking, obscene speech, et cetera.

Question: *Why is it so important to remain sexually pure?*

Immorality seriously violates the conscience. The consequences are great. Sexual misconduct creates a terrible model. It betrays the trust of others. It creates inappropriate liberties that leads to other liberties. It is addictive. Paul has other unlisted vices in mind (Galatians 5:21). He offers these just as a sample of the general type of things he has in mind. This list should not be considered comprehensive, only representative.

Question: *Why does Paul include such a long and varied list of relationship sins?*

Christians have to deal with other intimately. This brings out both the best and worst in people. If not managed, the church can become destructive when people mistreat each other. The source of all these problems is pride and greed.

Question: *What things are like 'drunkenness'?*

Alcohol abuse is not *like* drunkenness. Alcohol abuse *is* drunkenness. Abuse of legal and illegal narcotics, drugs, and other mind-altering substances are prevalent in our society. They are also prevalent in the church, the family, the community, the military, the workplace, educational institutions, and many other places. The church must help people overcome addiction.

Implement changes in your life.

Question: *How does a person overcome a sin that they are currently involved in?*

First, admit that it is wrong. Study the scriptures to determine what God expects you to do. Do not use the standards of the world to define righteousness. Stop making excuses and justifications. Stop calling something right that is actually wrong.

Next, openly confess. Confessing only to God does not work. God gives us relationships to help us overcome sin. These groups must become places where people can get help. You are not alone.

Finally, take repentance seriously. Make the big changes. Keep at it until you overcome it. Never give up. Learn from other people who have overcome the same problem.

Confess sin to your trusted friends in the church.

Loving God involves rooting sin out of your life. Pay constant and frequent attention to overcoming sin.

Be passionate about God (Deuteronomy 6:1-12).

This is the lesson objective.

Be openly passionate about seeking a deeply committed relationship with God.

This background information is for the leader.

God created the world and everything in them with his unlimited power (Genesis 1:1-2:3). However, the most important thing that he made was man (Genesis 1:28-31). Man is like God in a way different from any other created thing (Genesis 1:27). God wants a relationship with man. Even when man ruins what God gave him, God still seeks and provides redemption.

God expects people to love him and serve him above all else. He expects people to make this their greatest passion.

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5-6)

You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3)

This forms the basis for everything in life. There is really nothing else that matters.

God saved the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. He gave them a set of commands to govern their personal and national life. Just before they entered Canaan, Moses reviewed these laws with them. He urged them to follow all the rules diligently. However, throughout the history of the Jewish people, this text is considered the most fundamental and primary summary of everything that the law represents.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-12 out loud.

Now these are the commandments, statutes, and ordinances that the Lord your God instructed me to teach you so that you may carry them out in the land where you are headed and that you may so revere the Lord your God that you will keep all his statutes and commandments that I am giving you—you, your children, and your grandchildren—all your lives, to prolong your days. Pay attention, Israel, and be careful to do this so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in number—as the Lord, God of your ancestors, said to you, you will have a land flowing with milk and honey.

Listen, Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You must love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and all your strength.

These words I am commanding you today must be kept in mind, and you must teach them to your children and speak of them as you sit in your house, as you walk along the road, as you lie down, and as you get up. You should tie them as a reminder on your forearm and fasten them as symbols on your forehead. Inscribe them on the doorframes of your houses and gates.



Then when the Lord your God brings you to the land he promised your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give you—a land with large, fine cities you did not build, houses filled with choice things you did not accumulate, hewn out cisterns you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—and you eat your fill, be careful not to forget the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, that place of slavery.

The Lord is our God.

The basis of the command is the absolute rule of God. God is our God.

Question: *In what sense is God 'our' God?*

He is our God because we belong to him. He created us. He sustains us. He holds our fate in his hands.

He is our God because he belongs to us. He is the God that we believe in. He is the only God that we believe in. We have attached ourselves to him. He is accountable to fulfill his promises to us.

The Lord is one.

Question: *How is it that 'the Lord is one'?*

There is no other God but him. He is alone. The created things are not God, although frequently mistaken as so. There are other spiritual powers, but they are not God. We are not God. Some might think they are God, but they are not God. There are not multiple gods that compete with each other.

He is the Lord because he is the master that rules over all else. He has absolute, unlimited, incomparable power to do anything that he wants, whenever he wants, in whatever way he wants.

Love the Lord your God.

However, God still wants us to love him.

Question: *Why does God care what we do?*

God loves us. God loves me. He wants my attention. However, he wants my undivided attention. He wants me to love him more than anything else.

Love with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

The phrase “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” is an emphatic figure of speech. We must love God completely. We must love God with no competitors. We must love God as a first priority, before all other things.

Question: *How can you put this into practice? Why should you?*

This is not just a philosophical idea. It is rooted in conduct. The Israelites were expected to pass this on to their children, talk about it, wear it, and decorate with it (Deuteronomy 6:7). They were supposed to remember it permanently (Deuteronomy 6:12).

This is how God shows his mercy and compassion. Even though he created the world, he cares about me personally. He gives me everything. The terms are only that I give everything back. This is not an equal partnership. I am the beneficiary.

Jesus called Deuteronomy 6:4-5 the greatest command.

Jesus emphasized this. A teacher of law sought to challenge him by requesting that Jesus name the greatest command. Jesus referenced this text. He said that all the Law and Prophets hung on this text.

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they assembled together. And one of them, an expert in religious law, asked him a question to test him: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

Jesus said to him,

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Deuteronomy 6:5).

"This is the first and greatest commandment."

"The second is like it:"

Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).

"All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Question: *What other things may compete with our love for God?*

The list is long: family, children, girlfriend, boyfriend, grandchildren, spouse, power, politics, possessions, house, job, money, self, television, entertainment, hobbies, et cetera.

Question: *How do you make certain that your relationship with God remains first?*

Everyone has one and only one thing that is the most important thing to them. It is obvious. It is the thing they think about, talk about, spend their money on, care about, spend their time on.

Question: *What is that thing for you?*

Question: *What does the world and community think about people who are serious about their relationship with God?*

The world has always thought that this is crazy and extremist. This was true in the time of Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus, and now. Even the religious world resists making God a first priority.

Question: *How can I become enthusiastic about my relationship with God?*

Start by talking about it. Include it in your thoughts and speech every day. If necessary, do it habitually until it becomes personal. Help some other people to do so.

Make your relationship with God your first priority.

You demonstrate your priorities by the way you use your time and effort. You demonstrate your priorities by what you think and talk about. Everyone around you knows what your first priority is. You also know.

Make your relationship with God your first priority. Consider what he wants. Show concern for his preferences throughout every day. Put your relationship with God at the center of all your other relationships.

Get help from spiritual people. Help other people strengthen their relationship with God.

Put the church at the center of your life. Commit to the church, its meetings, its missions, and its programs. Find ways that you can help the church become mature.

Serve the needy (James 1:27).

This is the lesson objective.

Make lasting changes in the lives of needy people.

This background information is for the leader.

The book of James discusses numerous facets of Christian conduct. He frequently targets wealth, poverty, and social discrimination.

For example, James characterizes the rich as prideful. Wealthy people may think they are thriving when they are actually near destruction. “The rich person in the midst of his pursuits will wither away.” (1:11).

He warns disciples about overreliance on wealth and expected profits.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that town and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.”

You do not know about tomorrow. What is your life like? For you are a puff of smoke that appears for a short time and then vanishes. (4:13-14)

He criticizes those who treat newcomers differently based on physical appearance.

Do you pay attention to the one who is finely dressed and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and to the poor person, “You stand over there,” or “Sit on the floor”?

If so, have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives?

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him? (2:3-4)

James demands that faith must be coupled with consistent behavior. “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (2:17). The principle applies universally, but *the particular situation is appearance-based social discrimination.*

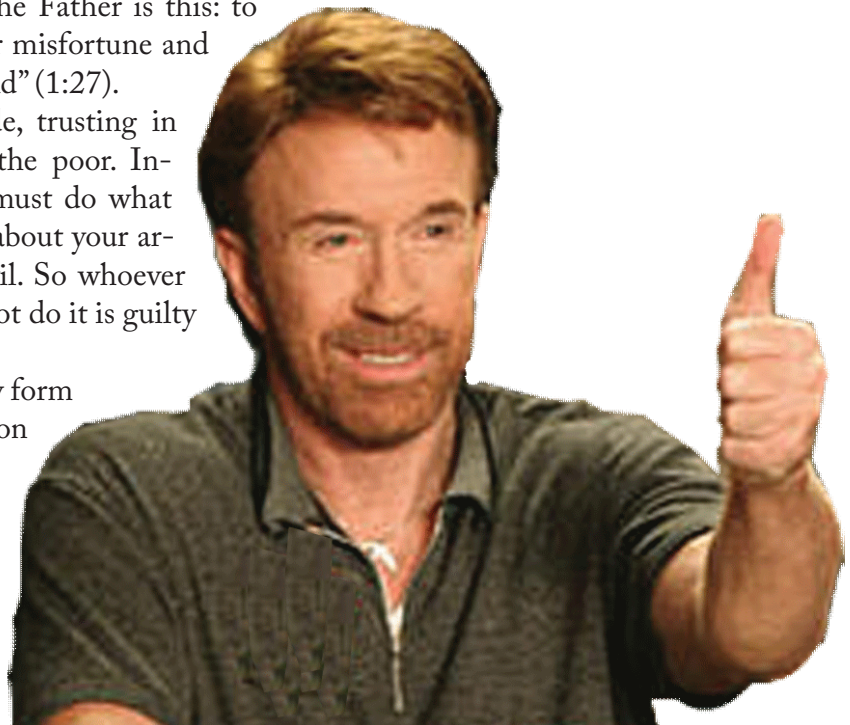
James recommends caring for the poor. This is the context of the text of this discussion. “Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (1:27).

Service is an alternative to pride, trusting in wealth, and discriminating against the poor. Instead of hoarding wealth, disciples must do what God expects. “But as it is, you boast about your arrogant plans. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin.” (4:16-17, emphasis mine)

These views of wealth and poverty form the context of the key text of this lesson (James 1:27).

Read James 1:26-2:13 out loud.

If someone thinks he is religious yet does not bridle his tongue, and so deceives his heart, his religion is



futile. Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

My brothers and sisters, do not show prejudice if you possess faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

For if someone comes into your assembly wearing a gold ring and fine clothing, and a poor person enters in filthy clothes, do you pay attention to the one who is finely dressed and say, "You sit here in a good place," and to the poor person, "You stand over there," or "Sit on the floor"?

If so, have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor! Are not the rich oppressing you and dragging you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme the good name of the one you belong to?

But if you fulfill the royal law as expressed in this scripture,

You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).

You are doing well. But if you show prejudice, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as violators.

For the one who obeys the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said,

Do not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).

also said,

Do not murder (Exodus 20:13).

Now if you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a violator of the law. Speak and act as those who will be judged by a law that gives freedom. For judgment is merciless for the one who has shown no mercy. But mercy triumphs over judgment.

Do not discriminate based on appearance.

Question: *Has anyone ever disliked or mistreated you just by looking at you? How did this make you feel?*

Permit people to give examples. It is obviously wrong when you are the target of discrimination.

Question: *Do you ever do this to other people?*

It is wrong to mistreat people based on appearance. James calls this sinful. It must stop. "If you show favoritism, you sin, and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (2:9). It is natural to look at people and react based on what you see. This behavior is reinforced at every point in our lives. The only way to resist it is with great deliberation.

Question: *Why is it wrong to discriminate based on appearance?*

Appearance is unreliable. People with enough money can disguise their actual appearance. Weakness is strength for the humble, but appearance does not show this. God says that appearance-based discrimination is wrong.

Seek ways to serve the needy.

The antidote to discrimination is not just to avoid discrimination. Christians must go out and seek ways to help people. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (1:27). This is not just a service project, anti-poverty social justice work, a political program, or an economic improvement plan.

Question: *What does the text say the purpose is?*

The purpose is to express religion that is “pure and faultless” before “God our father”. God wants us to see that widows and orphans are “in distress”, the to “look after” them.

Question: *Why would God want me to look after the helpless?*

There are many possible answers. God helped me. When I help others, it shows my gratitude. It separates me from those who think they are self-sufficient.

Make your service effective.

Sometimes Christians help from guilt or duty. Random acts of kindness have some value. However, it is better to “look after” someone by changing and improving their life permanently.

Question: *Have you ever tried to help someone, only to see your efforts were ineffective or wasted?*

Christians should help anyway.

Question: *How can we improve our service so that it does the maximum good?*

Choose methods of service that are long-term instead of only short-term. Use developed experience and expertise, instead of only serving out of inexperience and ignorance. Avoid serving only out of reflex. This takes more effort, planning, collaboration, and long-term commitment.

Things that work well usually involve a process of trial-and-error. Determine some ways that your group can serve. Think carefully about it. Implement it. Reconsider the effects. Then repeat this process. Keep doing this until there are significant constructive accomplishments.

Consider some of the long-term services in this congregation: the food pantry, military family support, marriage support, kids programs, hospital visitation, elder care, scouts, and others.

Consider what other effective programs we may want to develop, for example, substance abuse support, battered wife support, crisis pregnancy support, financial counseling, et cetera.

Question: *How can a small group cooperate with the rest of the congregation?*

Use your home for God (Romans 12:13).

This is the lesson objective.

Use your home as a center to promote God's kingdom.

This background information is for the leader.

The home was central to the growth of the early church. This was not peculiar to the first century. The home is central to all societies and cultures. If a church is going to have a significant effect on a community, the home of the believers is a critical component.

Several lists of virtues in the Christian Bible surround relationships within a household. This includes husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18-19, 1 Peter 3:1-7), parents and children (Ephesians 6:1-4, Colossians 3:20-21), masters and slaves (Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22-25, Philemon 8-20, 1 Peter 2:18-25), and widows (1 Timothy 5:3-16).

Numerous early conversions occurred within a home (see Matthew 10:11-14), or involved a household of close associates, including the Samaritans (John 4:40-41), Cornelius (Acts 10:24, 27), Timothy (Acts 16:1, 2 Timothy 1:5), Lydia (Acts 16:15), the jailer in Philippi (Acts 16:32-34), Titius Justus (Acts 18:7), Crispus (Acts 18:8, 1 Corinthians 1:16-18), Publius (28:7), Stephanus (1 Corinthians 16:15), and others.

Church meetings, spiritual discussions, and hospitality were frequently located in the homes of disciples, including the home of Jesus (John 1:39), the home of a disciple (John 20:10, 18-20, 26), the first believers (Acts 2:46), John Mark (Acts 12:12), Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3, Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 16:19), Mnason (Acts 21:16), some brothers (21:7), Philip (21:8), Paul's rented house (Acts 28:16, 23, 30-31), Aristobulus (Romans 16:10), Narcissus (Romans 16:11), Gaius (Romans 16:23), the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:6, 10-11), members of Caesar's own family (Philippians 4:22), Philemon (Philemon 1-2), and others.

The home was a center for Christian relationships, spiritual growth, and evangelism.

Read Romans 16:1-16 out loud.

Now I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, so that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and provide her with whatever help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many, including me.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Also greet the church in their house.

Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you.

Greet Andronicus and Junia, my compatriots and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.



Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord.

Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my good friend Stachys.

Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ.

Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.

Greet Herodion, my compatriot.

Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, laborers in the Lord.

Greet my dear friend Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother who was also a mother to me.

Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters with them.

Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the believers who are with them.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Paul had a close relationship with many believers in Rome through homes.

Aquila and Priscilla are important examples for using their home for God.

Paul first met the married believers Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-4). Paul “stayed and worked with them” (Acts 18:3) while teaching people in the synagogue.

Aquila and Priscilla left their home to travel with Paul (Acts 18:18). While in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla “invite Apollos into their house and explained to him the way of God more adequately” (Acts 18:26).

Paul leaves Ephesus, but later returns. While there, he wrote a letter to the church in Corinth. Aquila and Priscilla are still in Ephesus and “the church meets at their house” (1 Corinthians 16:19).

After a few more years, Paul writes to the church in Rome. He is back in Corinth. Aquila and Priscilla are no longer in Corinth, but with the church in Rome. Notice the hospitality of Priscilla and Aquila.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Also greet the church in their house. (Romans 16:3-5)

Question: *Why did Aquila and Priscilla use their home to serve God everywhere they went?*

They loved God. They viewed their home as an asset to use to bring other people to God. They may have been people of some means. So, they used their wealth to create a safe place for worship and instruction.

Question: *What type of feelings did Paul have about Priscilla and Aquila (see Romans 16:3-5)?*

They were his coworkers. He was in debt to them because they risked their lives for him. Paul believes there are many other Christians in other churches who share these feelings toward Aquila and Priscilla.

Question: *What is happening in the relationships and homes of the Roman church (Romans 16:1-16)?*

Allow for open discussion. Focus on as many of the following answers as appropriate.

There are other households in the Roman church besides that of Aquila and Priscilla, like Aristobulus (16:10), Narcissus (16:11), two women, Tryphena and Tryphosa (16:13, twin sisters?),

Rufus and his mother (16:13), a household of men, including Asyncritus (16:14), Philologus and his sister or wife, Julia (16:15), and Nereus and his sister (16:15). Some of these may be families, but at least some are Christians who have decided to live together.

Perhaps other people besides Priscilla and Aquila have church meetings in their homes. This may be the meaning of “and the brothers with them” (16:14) and “all the saints with them” (16:15).

There are people who work hard for the Lord or who are great assistants to Paul, for example, Phoebe (16:1-2), Mary (16:6), Urbanus (16:9), Tryphena and Tryphosa (16:12), and Persis (16:12). It is notable that the majority are female.

Paul has several relatives in the Roman church, including Andronicus and Junias (16:7), Herodian (16:11). Andronicus and Junias were likely a married couple. Perhaps they were influences in Paul’s conversion? Herodian was likely a Jew who had served in the court of a Herod family ruler.

There are people he considers “dear friends” or “loved”, including Epenetus (16:5), Ampliatus (16:8), Stachys (16:9), and Persis (16:12).

The mother of Rufus was like a mother to Paul (16:13).

There are many strong inter-relationships between the believers.

[Read Romans 12:9-13 out loud.](#)

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

[Hospitality is in this recommended conduct list.](#)

This is written to the same Roman church with deep relationships.

Question: *What specifically does Paul expect them to do when he insists that they “Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13)?*

Paul is not just referring to an attitude or passive disposition. He expects specific actions. They should open their homes for meetings, lodging for travelers, meals, temporary living, Christian tenants, Bible study, meeting with unbelievers, and other impositions.

Question: *What is difficult about having people in your home?*

You have to clean, prepare food, rearrange, and other inconveniences. People bring their problems into your home, like naughty children, rude comments, bad manners, and annoying habits. People may steal your possessions, abuse your home, defraud you, or otherwise try to take advantage of your hospitality. Having people into your home consumes your time and costs you money. Often, you must do most of the preparation before and cleanup afterwards.

You must be careful to balance how you open your home. Your family must be strong to handle invasions of frequent numbers of diverse people. You must manage how much your home is open, and to what extent your family has privacy. You must make sure that your hospitality does not work to the detriment of your own family.

Identify spiritual families you know that are highly hospitable.

Question: *How has their hospitality affected people around them spiritually? What can we learn from them?*

A home is a great place to support other believers, eat, meet, have spiritual discussions, read the Bible, make spiritual decisions, and build strong bonds. This is why the scriptures encourage believers to practice hospitality. Christians need more involvement than just occasional meetings.

Constantly reform your life (2 Corinthians 7:8-13).

This is the lesson objective.

Constantly reform your life toward righteousness and away from evil.

This background information is for the leader.

The scriptures encourage everyone to constantly change and reform.

Everyone must initially “turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). However, this is an ongoing process even after the beginning. “We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.” (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6)

Repentance was a key concept in Jesus’ teaching. “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matthew 4:17). The disciples included this in their teaching. “They went out and preached that people should repent” (Mark 6:12). The early church demanded this for new converts. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Repentance is specific, behavioral, and explicit to each individual. It is not just a general philosophical concept. Jesus and his followers confronted people about their particular need to change, including the Jewish leaders (Matthew 3:6-11, 23:1-36), the woman at the well (John 4:17-18, 39), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the rich ruler (Matthew 19:16-22), Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:18-24), the apostle Peter (Galatians 2:11-14), and many others.

The need to change goes back to the beginning. This is what God wanted Adam and Eve to do (Genesis 3:1-24). Samuel confronted Saul about his failure to follow God’s commands specifically (1 Samuel 15:1-35). Nathan confronted David about his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-14). The prophets constantly confronted the nations about many particular sins (for example, Jonah 3:1-10).

The idea of *repentance* is familiar to many people, but often misunderstood. It needs to be clearly defined. Repentance is not just sorrow, remorse, or regret. Repentance is not just admission and confession. Repentance is not paying for a crime by restitution. Repentance is not just an intention to change. Repentance is not self-improvement or group therapy. Repentance may include all these things and more. However, biblical repentance involves actual change away from what is evil and toward what is right.

Paul explains this to the Corinthian church. The Corinthian church was deeply troubled, including internal divisions (1 Corinthians 1:11-12), serious sexual misconduct (5:1-5), marriage problems (7:1-40), idolatry (10:14-22), drunkenness and gluttony during the Lord’s supper (11:17-22), and denying the resurrection of Jesus (15:12-19), among other problems. This resulted in a sequence of correspondences and visits between Paul, his coworkers, and the Corinthians.

Paul expresses encouragement at how the Corinthians changed (2 Corinthians 7:8-13). They



were sorry, but they were not *just* sorry. They also *repented* (7:9). Paul goes on to characterize what made their repentance different from merely being sorry. It involved a complete change in attitude and conduct until the problem was fixed (7:11). This demonstrates that repentance does not mean sorrow, but a complete change of lifestyle. Christians must begin with repentance. However, repentance involves continuous personal revolution throughout the course of life.

Zacchaeus offers an excellent example of this principle in practice (Luke 19:1-10). He was selected by Jesus as a dining partner (19:5-6). They ate together, but the content of their conversation is omitted (see the transition between 19:7 and 19:8). However, the effect of the conversation is clear. Zacchaeus admits his wealth is the result of cheating and financial fraud. So, he willfully commits to give half of his possessions to charity. Zacchaeus returns the funds to his victims by a factor of four (19:8). Jesus commends him as an ideal example of repentance (19:9-10).

Discuss the meaning of 'repentance'.

Question: *What do you think that 'repentance' means?* Allow people to openly discuss what repentance means. Invite discussion with examples. Some may focus on different aspects of repentance. Allow everyone to speak openly and freely, even if the answers are not all complete or accurate.

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-13 out loud.

For even if I made you sad by my letter, I do not regret having written it (even though I did regret it, for I see that my letter made you sad, though only for a short time).

Now I rejoice, not because you were made sad, but because you were made sad to the point of repentance. For you were made sad as God intended, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret, but worldly sadness brings about death.

For see what this very thing, this sadness as God intended, has produced in you: what eagerness, what defense of yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what deep concern, what punishment! In everything you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

So then, even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did wrong, or on account of the one who was wronged, but to reveal to you your eagerness on our behalf before God. Therefore we have been encouraged.

Repentance means more than sorrow. It means actual change.

Paul has already written to the Corinthian church about some serious problems. He is encouraged by their reaction to his previous corrections.

Question: *What is the difference between "godly sorrow" and "worldly sorrow" in Paul's mind (7:10)?*

Worldly sorrow is only remorse without change. Godly sorrow actually produces changes in conduct.

Note the list of noble reactions that Paul commends: "What earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter." (7:11)

Question: *How did the Corinthian react to Paul's challenge?*

They were highly alarmed at their behavior. They took what he said seriously. They went through significant efforts to identify their own contribution to the problem. They invoked justice on themselves. They continued until the problem was completely corrected. They replaced the evil behavior with its opposite. In the end, they were able to become innocent.

Question: *What is the object of Corinthian indignation (7:11)?*

The Corinthians felt indignation toward *themselves*. Paul commends the Corinthians because they took responsibility for their sin. They got upset with themselves. They made a commitment to change. They took whatever steps they needed to take, even when it caused them harm. They became indignant with themselves in the same way that someone takes offense toward another person. Finally, they made wholesale changes in their lives.

Question: *What would it look like to repent in this way?*

Discuss how avoid defensive, protection, secretive, or prideful reactions. Discuss the role of tradition and inertia in resisting change. Discuss how to welcome change. Discuss how to avoid becoming set in your ways as you become older.

Read Luke 19:1-10 out loud.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it.

Now a man named Zacchaeus was there; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to get a look at Jesus, but being a short man he could not see over the crowd. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, because Jesus was going to pass that way.

And when Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, because I must stay at your house today."

So he came down quickly and welcomed Jesus joyfully.

And when the people saw it, they all complained, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, half of my possessions I now give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone of anything, I am paying back four times as much!"

Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this household, because he too is a son of Abraham! For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Repentance involves a complete change of lifestyle.

Zacchaeus is a great example of repentance. Once he understands what he has done wrong, he voluntarily offers a solution. His solution does not take the easy way out. At great expense to himself, and without reservation, he solves the problems that he created. He presents a huge contrast to the rich ruler mentioned just before in Luke (18:18-23).

Question: *Why was Zacchaeus present when Jesus passed through Jericho (19:1-2)?*

We do not know. However, he positioned himself in a tree so that he could observe and hear (19:3-4). Apparently, the crowd was large enough that a short man would not otherwise have access. This shows some degree of initiative on the part of Zacchaeus.

Question: *Why did Jesus address Zacchaeus?*

The text also does not answer this question. Perhaps Jesus knew something about Zacchaeus. Perhaps there was something obvious from the appearance of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a tax collector for an occupying army in Judea. This put him in a position of power, and gave him the opportunity to extort and abuse the people. Typically, other Jews would not associate with someone like this. They feared tax collectors. However, social pressure strongly discouraged others from associating with tax collectors (19:7). Jesus did so anyway. In fact, he invited himself over to his home for a meal (19:5)!

Question: *What was the conversation between Jesus and Zaccheus during the visit?*

The text does not tell us. However, the response of Zacchaeus (19:9) suggests that Jesus confronted him about his extortion, bribery, and social abuse.

Question: *What is good about the words of Zacchaeus (19:8)?*

There are many good things. His plan is voluntary and not under compulsion. He recognizes the harm that he has done. He wants to cure the problems that he has created. He does not seek a minimal solution. His solution is a great expense to himself, perhaps exceeding his current financial ability. It implies a commitment to cease and desist the previous behavior. It is easy to picture Zacchaeus doing what the rich young ruler refused: "Then come, follow me" (18:22).

Question: *How difficult would it be to give away half of all your possessions?*

It would be quite difficult.

Question: *How did Jesus perceive the reaction of Zacchaeus (19:9-10)?*

Jesus was impressed. Jesus, and apparently Luke, considered Zacchaeus a great example. Jesus declared that the attitude of Zacchaeus allowed him to be rescued from his sin (19:9). Jesus considered Zacchaeus a success story for his purpose in the world (19:10).

Question: *What changes do you need to make in your life?*

Ask the question and just move on. Or, stop and have a discussion. Or, allow people to discuss this together privately at other times. This may be the perfect place and time for open admissions. It also may not be the right time or place. Use wisdom. Decide what is best for the group.

Get wise advice from other people (Proverbs 2:1-15).

This is the lesson objective.

Instead of making decisions unilaterally, get wise advice from other people for important decisions.

This background information is for the leader.

Proverbs contains discourse and sayings about wisdom, discretion, righteousness, and proper conduct.

The first nine chapters contain longer discourses about wisdom. Some of them are written in the form of a father's advice to his young son. Others are written as if wisdom itself is a person giving instruction. They recommend getting wise advice, refraining from association with wild women and adultery, and avoiding listening or following wicked people. These early sections commend the benefits of living a righteous life.

The remainder of the book contains collections of short, unrelated, popularly known sayings. They discuss many topics, from avoiding laziness, dealing with royalty, dishonest business dealings, to the characteristics of a righteous woman.

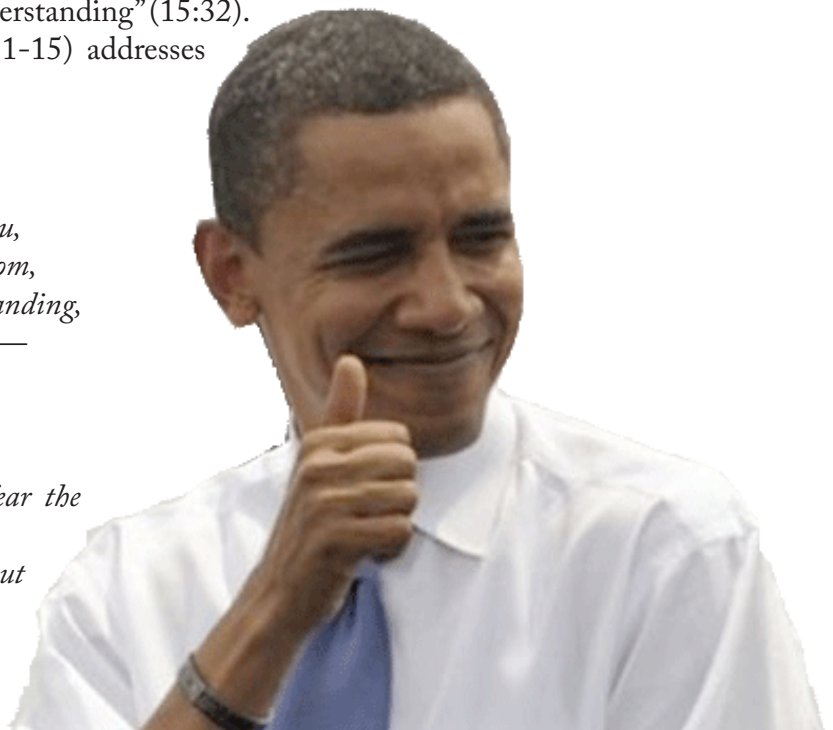
This includes several distinct sections: the proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16), thirty sayings of the wise (22:17-24:22), additional sayings of the wise (24:23-24:22), the collection of the men of Hezekiah (25:1-29:27), the sayings of Agur (30:1-33), the sayings of Lemuel (31:1-9), and the worthy wife (31:10-31).

Listening to advice, being humble, avoiding prideful reactions, and getting wise counsel are dominant ideas in Proverbs. "A fool spurns his father's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence" (15:5). "A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise" (15:12). "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (15:22). "He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise" (15:31). "He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding" (15:32).

This section for the discussion (2:1-15) addresses many aspects of accepting advice.

Read Proverbs 2:1-15 out loud.

*My child, if you receive my words,
And store up my commands within you,
By making your ear attentive to wisdom,
And by turning your heart to understanding,
Indeed, if you call out for discernment—
Raise your voice for understanding—
If you seek it like silver,
And search for it like hidden treasure,
Then you will understand how to fear the
Lord,
And you will discover knowledge about
God.
For the Lord gives wisdom,*



Get wise advice from other people.

*And from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.
 He stores up effective counsel for the upright,
 And is like a shield for those who live with integrity,
 To guard the paths of the righteous
 And to protect the way of his pious ones.
 Then you will understand righteousness and justice
 And equity—every good way.
 For wisdom will enter your heart,
 And moral knowledge will be attractive to you.
 Discretion will protect you,
 Understanding will guard you,
 To deliver you from the way of the wicked,
 From those speaking perversity,
 Who leave the upright paths
 To walk on the dark ways,
 Who delight in doing evil,
 They rejoice in perverse evil;
 Whose paths are morally crooked,
 And who are devious in their ways.*

Wisdom will save you from a lot of trouble.

Question: *In what ways will wicked men try to get you to “walk in dark ways” (2:13)?*

Some people who do not love God are not satisfied that they do not follow righteousness. They want you to join them. They will not stop harassing you until you do so.

Question: *Give examples of how people persuade you to do wicked things.*

This could get interesting. Monitor any examples given to allow free expression, but be careful about overly explicit answers. It may be helpful if people can be honest here. Some pretty crazy things happen. Proverbs gives an alternative: Listen to the wise words of wise people (2:1-5). Even though people may give good advice, its real source is God himself (2:6).

Question: *What keeps you from getting advice?*

You may think that you are smarter than everyone else, and thus do not need their advice. You may be too busy to get advice. You may not even think about getting advice. You may have an independent streak. You may not respect other people. You may consider that your business is your business alone, and no one else's. You may prefer to do things yourself, without anyone else meddling in your affairs.

Question: *What kinds of things should you get advice about?*

Get advice about everything, but particularly really important decisions (2:9). Give examples, like purchasing a home, finding a spouse, the best air conditioning system, how to read the Bible, or how to overcome a sin. Read this: “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed” (15:22).

Question: *How do you distinguish good advice from bad advice?*

Get lots of advice from lots of people. Measure the quality of the advice by the merits of the advice-giver. For example, if you want advice on how to deal with delivering a baby, you may want to talk to some mothers.

Question: *What if you do not like the advice that you get?*

You are responsible for your own life. However, you are crippled without the benefit of having the advice. Beware your own pride. Seek advice and search for it as if it were precious (2:2-4).

Question: *What are the benefits of advice?*

You follow God's plan when you get advice (2:6). Your likely victory is assured (2:7). You become more righteous (2:7). You avoid wickedness (2:12-15). You are protected from your own limitations (2:8). Fellowship groups create an avenue for mutual advice and encouragement. The relationships already exist, making it easier to accept the advice. Take full advantage of this resource.

Commit to meet with the church (Acts 2:42-47).

This is the lesson objective.

Commit to attend the meetings of the church.

This background information is for the leader.

Meeting regularly with other people who love God is critical to maintain spiritual growth. Despite claims to the contrary, people need other people. This was discussed in Lesson 1, Encourage each other daily (Hebrews 3:12-15, Hebrews 10:19-30).

This is valuable just on its merits. However, it is also a duty.

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:23-24)

The early church met frequently. This was one of the reasons that the early church was able to go beyond sustaining. They grew dramatically, even though local populations and civil authorities persecuted them.

There are reasons why people do not meet with the church regularly, or meet infrequently. People may not be committed to their relationship with God. They may be uninformed that they should be committed. Some may not be willing to make the sacrifices that God demands. Hopefully, these lessons have helped.

However, some people find their experiences with Christians dissatisfying. Perhaps their congregation is not warm, inviting, and helpful. Perhaps the relationships are shallow or unspiritual. Perhaps they have seen bickering, infighting, or scandal within a congregation. Perhaps they actually want to grow spiritually, but their experience does not help achieve that end. Perhaps they had a personal need, and the church failed to address it or meet it.

Your group should try to do well with these things. The goal of these lessons is to provide a means.

Peter addressed a large Jewish audience in some public place in Jerusalem during the Feast of Weeks. This occurred only seven weeks after Jesus rose from the dead. He accused them of being accomplices in murder (Acts 2:23). They should have known better, because they were aware of the messiah who would restore Israel (2:22-23, 36). Once they realized this, a large number of the audience decided to become Christians (2:37-41).

The text for this lesson discusses what they did right after this. It describes what they did in their meetings, the frequency, and its immediate effects.

Read Acts 2:42-47 out loud.

They were devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles.



Commit to meet with the church.

All who believed were together and held everything in common, and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need. Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people.

And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved.

The first Christians were devoted to teaching, fellowship, eating, and prayer.

Question: *In what arenas were the first Christians devoted?*

They were devoted to the apostles' teaching. This would parallel reading the scriptures daily. They were devoted to prayer. They met together regularly. They practiced hospitality at home. These are all things that you have put into practice together in this group.

Question: *How has this group benefitted you?*

People may express gratitude for the group.

Perhaps they have suggestions for how it could improve. Take note of the responses.

Question: *Why did Luke use the term "devoted"?*

It is not enough just to participate as a duty. It is better to have a high degree of commitment. The first Christians met together daily.

Question: *How frequently did the early Christians meet? Why?*

They met daily (2:46). They did it because they wanted to do so. They did it because they needed it. They did it because the new members were from all over the world (2:8-11). They also did it because they were mostly new to the faith. They realized that they needed more time to become rooted.

Question: *What did it feel like to these people?*

They were excited (2:43, 2:46-47). They made lots of sacrifices and adjustments to accommodate all the special needs (2:44). Their relationships became close very quickly (2:46).

The first Christians grew individually, numerically, and in community respect.

Question: *What was the effect of their frequent meetings?*

People had their needs met (2:45). People grew spiritually (2:46-47). The community respected them (2:47). They evidently were talking to other people about it, because large numbers of people wanted to join them every day (2:47).

You should be committed to meeting with God's people. You need it. They need it. Hopefully this group has helped make this clear.

Question: *What can this group do to help you become more devoted to the church?*

Have whatever discussion this question provokes. Take note. Welcome praise and criticism.

There are other people who need the relationships that you have developed within this group. Find other people to join the group. Develop leadership qualities so that you can help lead a group. If your group is doing well, then it "praises God and enjoys the favor of all the people" (2:47).

Continue to be devoted to attend the meetings of the church.

Give eagerly (2 Corinthians 8:1-15).

This is the lesson objective.

Generously and eagerly give your money away to support the church.

This background information is for the leader.

People love to give to things that they believe in. They just need to understand how to do it. They need to be encouraged to do it. They need a plan. They need to have their questions answered.

It took resources in the early church to organize and spread the gospel. The same is true now.

The church should discuss how we handle our money. This applies to every arena of finance, including handling our money responsibly, how to make more money, how to save, how to give, and planning for the future. The church should be a place where people mature in every way, including financially.

A small group is a great place to discuss giving. The people in the discussion have a vested interest in talking about it. They do not have any ulterior motives. They are in similar situations.

The church must advance God's causes. This will take great resources, including time, commitment, and money.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 out loud.

Now we make known to you, brothers and sisters, the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia, that during a severe ordeal of suffering, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in the wealth of their generosity.

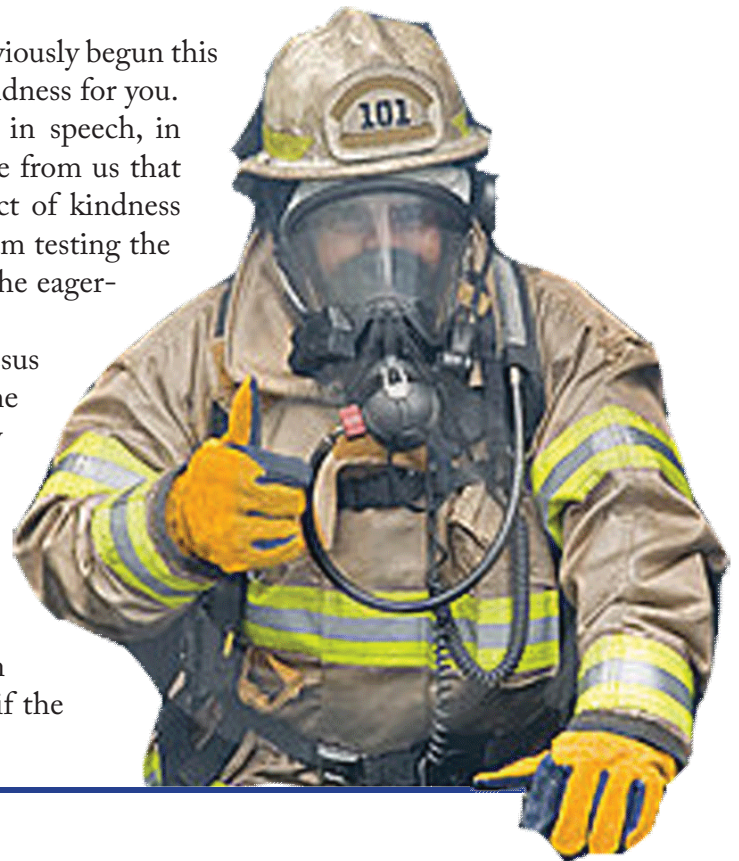
For I testify, they gave according to their means and beyond their means. They did so voluntarily, begging us with great earnestness for the blessing and fellowship of helping the saints. And they did this not just as we had hoped, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

Thus we urged Titus that, just as he had previously begun this work, so also he should complete this act of kindness for you.

But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in all eagerness and in the love from us that is in you—make sure that you excel in this act of kindness too. I am not saying this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love by comparison with the eagerness of others.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, he became poor for your sakes, so that you by his poverty could become rich.

So here is my opinion on this matter: It is to your advantage, since you made a good start last year both in your giving and your desire to give, to finish what you started, so that just as you wanted to do it eagerly, you can also complete it according to your means. For if the



Give eagerly.

eagerness is present, the gift itself is acceptable according to whatever one has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not say this so there would be relief for others and suffering for you, but as a matter of equality.

At the present time, your abundance will meet their need, so that one day their abundance may also meet your need, and thus there may be equality, as it is written:

The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. (Exodus 16:18)

The early church funded the needs of the mission.

Question: *Who was giving money away?*

The Macedonian churches were doing the giving. This does not include the Corinthian church. Corinth is in southern Greece. Macedonia is northern Greece.

Question: *Why were they giving money away?*

There was a particular need mentioned in other letters. The church in Jerusalem was suffering. The churches in other areas collected money to support them. Apparently, the Corinthian church did eventually participate (Romans 15:26).

With regard to the collection for the saints, please follow the directions that I gave to the churches of Galatia: On the first day of the week, each of you should set aside some income and save it to the extent that God has blessed you, so that a collection will not have to be made when I come. Then, when I arrive, I will send those whom you approve with letters of explanation to carry your gift to Jerusalem. And if it seems advisable that I should go also, they will go with me. (1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

But now I go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia are pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do this, and indeed they are indebted to the Jerusalem saints. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are obligated also to minister to them in material things. Therefore after I have completed this and have safely delivered this bounty to them, I will set out for Spain by way of you. (Romans 15:25-27)

Question: *What was the attitude of the Macedonian churches (8:2-5)?*

They gave generously (8:2). They went beyond what appeared possible (8:3). They did this voluntarily (8:3). They insisted on giving (8:4). They did this as a direct consequence of their love for the Lord (8:5).

Question: *Were the Macedonian churches rich?*

No. Apparently they were poor and in some difficult situation (8:2). Apparently, this is in contrast to the Corinthian church (8:8-9, 8:13-14)

Question: *What was the difficult situation?*

We do not know. Perhaps it was their own financial crisis, or some trouble with the authorities or other religious groups. However, it did not prevent them from giving out of their poverty.

How should we give our money away to support the church?

Our congregation has a budget. This is because we are attempting to advance the gospel. This takes support, including financial support.

Question: *How can we support the church?*

We can take the same perspective as the Macedonian churches. We can give generously and voluntarily. However, our giving is not limited to financial support. It just is reflected also in our financial support.

Question: *Do you have any questions about giving?*

This is a deliberately open-ended question. It will likely produce responses. For example, people may want to talk about how much to give. They may want to discuss certain ways the church spends its money. They may want to talk about their comfort or discomfort with conversations about money. They may want to discuss their own financial problems. One famous question is, "Should you give based on gross or net earnings?" Guide the discussion, but allow the group to openly discuss these matters together. There are a lot of good things that can happen in a group filled with people who love each other. Do not let the conversation stray too far into the negative, but if there are real issues, let people air them.

Question: *How can we give more to support the work of the church?*

This also is an open-ended question. Allow the group to discuss this with each other. Various things may come out of the discussion. Pay attention. Consider conversations that may be required privately outside of the meeting. You may also want to discuss the current state of the church budget.

Give generously and voluntarily to support what you believe in.

Take risks in your relationships (John 4:4-26).

This is the lesson objective.

Move beyond superficial relationships.

This background information is for the leader.

This woman at the well is a contrast to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a highly respected member of the Jewish leadership council.

Jews looked down on Samaritans as heretics. This woman was an outcast in her own community as well. She came by herself to draw water from the community well. Drawing water and chatting at the well was a social high point. In her village she was likely ostracized because she was an unmarried woman living openly with a sequence of men.

As Jesus and the Samaritan woman talked, she attempted to turn the conversation to theological topics (4:19-26). But Jesus focused on other issues.

When talking to Nicodemus, Jesus established that God is a gift-giver (3:16). He did the same with this woman (4:7-10). The foundation of our relationship with God is not what we do. It is what God does. This requires dependence on God. We are dependent on what he will do for us. The woman's sins made her self-reliance foolish. She discovered that the son of God was willing to "give" what she could not earn.

In both conversations, Jesus promised the gift of eternal life (3:16, 4:11-15). He brought the conversations to this point by delving into their personal business.

Read John 4:4-26 out loud.

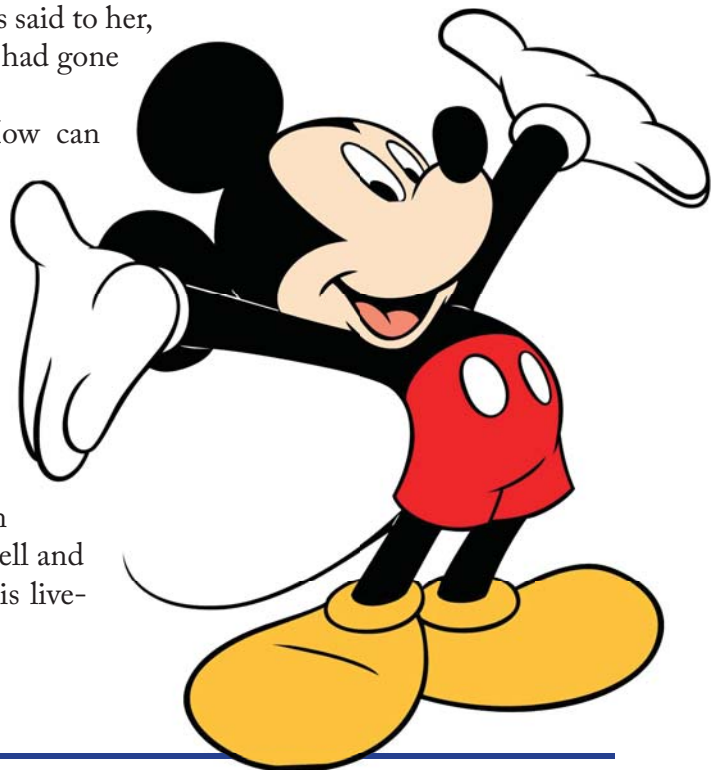
But he had to pass through Samaria. Now he came to a Samaritan town called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, so Jesus, since he was tired from the journey, sat right down beside the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." (For his disciples had gone off into the town to buy supplies.)

So the Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you—a Jew—ask me, a Samaritan woman, for water to drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you had known the gift of God and who it is who said to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said to him, "you have no bucket and the well is deep; where then do you get this living water? Surely you're not greater than our ancestor Jacob, are you? For he gave us this well and drank from it himself, along with his sons and his livestock."



Take risks in your relationships.

Jesus replied, “Everyone who drinks some of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks some of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again, but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

He said to her, “Go call your husband and come back here.”

The woman replied, “I have no husband.”

Jesus said to her, “Right you are when you said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the man you are living with now is not your husband. This you said truthfully!”

The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you people say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews. But a time is coming—and now is here—when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (the one called Christ); “whenever he comes, he will tell us everything.”

Jesus said to her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

Jesus got personal with the woman.

Note that the woman was surprised that Jesus spoke to her (4:9). The disciples were also caught off guard (4:27). Not only did Jesus speak to her, he got into the intimate details of her life (4:17, 39). He visited her hometown (4:40). People in her community believed in him because of her.

Question: *Did the woman anticipate where the conversation with Jesus was going?*

No. She did not know why he was talking to her in the first place (4:9). She thought that Jesus was talking about actual water (4:11-12). She hoped that Jesus’ promise would make hard work unnecessary (4:15).

Question: *How did the woman respond when Jesus addressed her immoral conduct (4:17-18)?*

She changed the subject to a safe, less uncomfortable, religious topic (4:19-20). She did not respond directly to his accusation.

Jesus answered her religious question: The Jews are right, and the Samaritans are wrong (4:22). However, he denies that this is the real question. What really matters is that those who worship God do so “in spirit and in truth” (4:23, 24). He repeats this point twice.

Question: *What is different about worship that is “in spirit and in truth”?*

Jesus expects his followers to worship God sincerely, deeply, and in actuality. Worship must be done correctly, but more importantly, it must be the product of devotion.

Question: *By the end of the conversation, how does the woman feel about the conversation?*

She appears highly enthusiastic about Jesus. She realizes that Jesus is special, so she asks about the messiah (4:25). Jesus admits that he is the messiah (4:26). When she returns to her village, her natural reaction is to help other people follow him on the basis of her words (4:39). This reaction is not just in spite of Jesus’ confrontation. It is because of his confrontation: “He told me everything I ever did” (4:39).

Question: *What does Jesus do to move the relationship from a superficial to a deeper conversation?*

Jesus begins the conversation by asking for help (4:7). Jesus plays off of the woman's questions, statements, and answers (4:9, 11, 12, 15, 17, 19, 20, 25). Jesus does not jump directly into her personal problems. He moves slowly from talking about water, "living water", multiple sexual partners, true worship, and finally to his identity. Jesus was not afraid of getting personal. Jesus knew how to get personal without causing offense. Jesus was a master at conversation. Jesus was excellent at listening. Jesus knew how to build relationships outside typical boundaries. Jesus took risks. Jesus cared about people. Jesus offered people things that they wanted and needed.

Explore how we can imitate Jesus' example here.

Question: *How can you move beyond the superficial into a deeper communication?*

Take risks by getting involved in intimate details about others. Allow other to do the same with your life.

Question: *Have you ever taken a risk that pushed a conversation beyond the superficial relationship into a deeper level of friendship?*

Allow members to share examples.

Question: *What obstacles hinder deeper relationships?*

It is dangerous to get too personal. People may not respond well. It requires skill to delve into personal issues without giving offense. Challenging others may invite others to return the favor. It is easier to just avoid addressing obvious, but difficult, subjects.

Question: *What has helped you to take risks and move to deeper relationships with people?*

Allow examples.

Question: *What barriers stand in the way of your developing a deeper relationship with God?*

Allow examples.

Follow up at the next care group meeting with these questions. Did you go deeper in your conversations since the care group last met? Were people responsive and open to go deeper? If so, how? Have you made more space for God? How has that impacted your faith and your relationships with others?

Care for family (Ephesians 5:15-6:9).

This is the lesson objective.

Keep your family spiritually healthy.

This background information is for the leader.

Family is basic to God's original plan for humankind (Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18-25).

There are many instructions in the Bible about how to care for and maintain a healthy spiritual family. For example, there are many lists of household relationships in the Christian Bible (1 Corinthians 7:1-40, Colossians 3:18-4:1, Ephesians 5:15-6:9, 1 Timothy 5:1-16, Titus 2:2-10, 1 Peter 2:13-3:7).

These lists discuss how different groups of people living in the same community or household should relate to each other.

Examine one of these lists.

Read Ephesians 5:21-6:9 out loud.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church—he himself being the savior of the body. But as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to sanctify her by cleansing her with the washing of the water by the word, so that he may present the church to himself as glorious—not having a stain or wrinkle, or any such blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one has ever hated his own body but he feeds it and takes care of it, just as Christ also does the church, for we are members of his body.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

This mystery is great—but I am actually speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each one of you must also love his own wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.

Honor your father and mother (Deuteronomy 5:16).

This is the first commandment accompanied by a promise, namely,

That it may go well with you and that you will live a long time on the earth. (Deuteronomy 5:16).

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart as to Christ, not like those who do their work only when someone is watching—as people-pleasers—but as slaves of Christ doing the



will of God from the heart. Obey with enthusiasm, as though serving the Lord and not people, because you know that each person, whether slave or free, if he does something good, this will be rewarded by the Lord.

Masters, treat your slaves the same way, giving up the use of threats, because you know that both you and they have the same master in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Note the pairs of relationships.

The opening statement characterizes all these relationships.

Question: *How do these relationships involve submission?*

Everyone has an obligation. That obligation is difficult. It runs counter to natural tendencies.

Question: *What are the different relationships between the people?*

The woman must submit to the man, but the man must love the wife. The children must obey, but the father must be gentle. The slave must obey, but the master must also be gentle. The world finds these different relationships offensive. The world believes that this is immoral and inappropriate. The world thinks that this is a former patriarchal, male-dominated, domineering world view.

Question: *Is this true?*

No. (Listen carefully to what people say here. This is a great teaching opportunity. Do not engage in controversy. Instruct with all gentleness.) It is God's design for the family. Each party attempts to help the other become more spiritual. The husband does not domineer his wife. He loves his wife as he does his own self. If you want to have a godly family, you must accept these directions.

Maintain spiritually healthy families.

Question: *Give examples of how a husband and wife can put this into practice.*

Allow different families to share how they have grown spiritually together. If there are any families in distress, this can be a great opportunity for people to share their successes. Perhaps someone will have a question about their family. Listen carefully. There may be a need for conversations outside of the meeting.

Parents and their children must have a great relationship. Fathers must be gentle and caring. It is the parents responsibility to maintain a good relationship with their children. The parents are the mature ones.

Question: *How can families maintain closeness together?*

Give some suggestions for healthy families. Spend time together. Show interest in the other person's interest. Talk about spiritual things. Present your family as glorious. Do not put each other down. Always speak positively about each other.

Question: *How do you take care of your family in difficult circumstances?*

Discuss, for example, deployed soldiers, families in crisis, families with special needs children, financial challenges, or any other situations. Discuss how the group can help people with special challenges.

Question: *How can you help your family become more spiritual?*

Be more spiritual yourself. Commit to the church and its activities. Share your faith together. Pray together. Read the Bible together. Have regular family devotionals. Talk about spiritual things.

Move people from one spiritual position to another (Luke 19:1-10).

This is the lesson objective.

Move people from one spiritual position to another.

This background information is for the leader.

Review related material.

Jesus had many great interactions with people. There are several that demonstrate how Jesus moved people from their current spiritual position to their needed spiritual position. One was discussed in another lesson: the woman at the well (John 4:4-26). We will discuss another in a future lesson: Nicodemus (John 3:1-21). We could discuss the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22), John's disciples (John 1:29-51), the blind man (John 9:1-41), or others.

This lesson focuses on Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).

By looking at Jesus' interactions with individuals, observe his style and methods. Discuss the observations together. Then, determine how to imitate Jesus together.

This lesson, along with the next lesson, are designed to put these observations into practice right away, in tangible and practical ways.

Members are at different points in their spiritual journey. The leader may be at another position. You must figure out exactly how to put this into practice, along with other people.

Read Luke 19:1-10 out loud.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

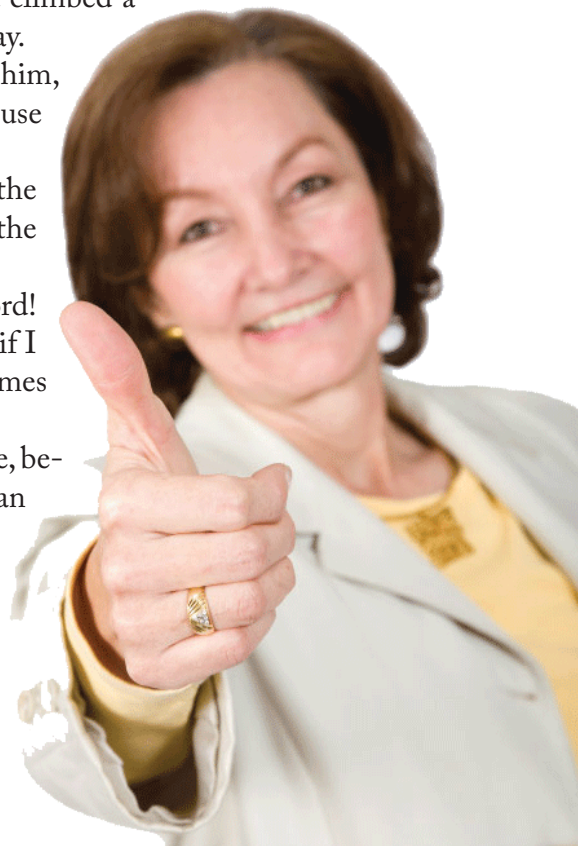
But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

What is the methodology of Jesus?

Question: *Why did Zacchaeus come to hear Jesus? Why did he bother climbing up into the tree?*

Jesus' activities and teaching provoked crowds of people to come to him. They attracted some of the most unlikely



people. Zacchaeus knew something about Jesus. He was perhaps intrigued, or even challenged, by what he knew.

Question: *What things can we do to attract people to Jesus?*

Serve. Talk to people about Jesus. Create a reputation of changed lives.

Question: *Why did Jesus speak to Zacchaeus (19:5)?*

The text does not say. However, Jesus felt that he “must” do so. Speculate why Jesus chose Zacchaeus. Jesus was paying attention to what was going on around him. He listened to other people and watched them.

Question: *Why did Jesus invite himself over to Zacchaeus’s house?*

We do not know. However, Jesus apparently wanted a more personal relationship with Zacchaeus.

Question: *What did Jesus say that caused Zacchaeus to repent?*

We do not know what he said. The text skips past the scene with Zacchaeus in the tree directly to Zacchaeus’s repentance. However, Jesus *must* have said some direct things. This either lead to Jesus confronting Zacchaeus about his defrauding people, or what Jesus said provoked Zacchaeus to confess it.

Question: *How did Jesus treat Zaccheaus?*

He loved him by telling him the truth. He built a personal relationship with him. He paid attention to him. He listened to him.

Jesus moved Zacchaeus from casual observer to repentant follower.

Imitate the methods of Jesus using foyer evangelism.

Our congregation has many guests each week. We also have many people who attend occasionally, or who return after a long absence. Some of these folks walk in the door, sit through the service, get up at the end and leave, and that is it. Their connection to the congregation is marginal.

Some of these people want more. Some may not. We cannot know a person’s expectations or potential until we get to know them.

Small groups must work together to try to pull some of these folks into deeper relationships with God.

Question: *Would you be willing to help meet people in the auditorium and foyer?*

Get a reaction from other members. Gauge their enthusiasm.

Each group meet and greet guests before, during, and after the worship service on Sunday. Each member should team up with at least one other person.

Greeters should do the following things.

1. Listen to the guest.
2. Pay attention to what the guest wants to talk about, especially to anything special.
3. Try to build a relationship with the guest. Capitalize on any opportunity.
4. Have a spiritual conversation about something with the guest.
5. Look for a way to connect the guest more with the congregation.

Following are some ways that the greeter could connect the guest. Choose one or more ways to connect the guest where possible.

1. Invite the guest to lunch today, have dinner later, coffee, or any other event.

2. Sit with the guest at the worship service.
3. Invite the guest to join you at at some small group meeting.
4. Invite the guest to attend Sunday school.
5. Invite the guest to get together to study the Bible together privately.
6. Help the guest get involved in anything that interests them: children's ministry, teen events, music, service projects, or anything else.
7. Exchange contact information with the guest, then follow up later.
8. Introduce the guest to other people.

Afterwards, write down what happened on paper. Discuss what you wrote down with the group at the next meeting.

Make plans about the who, what, when, and where. What part of the service should each team function: before, during, or after the worship service? What part of the building should they function: the auditorium or the foyer? Agree on the date.

WORKSHEET. *How did Jesus move Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)?*

What is the methodology of Jesus?

Zacchaeus came to hear Jesus because _____. Zacchaeus climbed the tree because _____.

Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus because he _____ (19:5)?

Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus's house because _____ (19:5)?

Before Zacchaeus repented, Jesus told him _____ (19:6-8).

The way that Jesus treated Zacchaeus was _____.

When you greet a guest at the worship service, you should.

1. Listen to the guest.
2. Pay attention to what the guest wants to talk about, especially to anything special.
3. Try to build a relationship with the guest. Capitalize on any opportunity.
4. Have a spiritual conversation about something with the guest.
5. Look for a way to connect the guest more with the congregation.

Following are some ways that the greeter could connect the guest. Choose one or more ways to connect the guest where possible.

1. Invite the guest to lunch today, have dinner later, coffee, or any other event.
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5. Invite the guest to get together to study the Bible together privately.
6. Help the guest get involved in anything that interests them: children's ministry, teen events, music, service projects, or anything else.
7. Exchange contact information with the guest, then follow up later.
8. Introduce the guest to other people.

My time to meet guests is during the Sunday morning worship service on Sunday, _____.

I am going to meet a guest in the _____.

The person that I am going to do this with is _____.

WORKSHEET. Scenario One.

Read this worksheet silently. Understand the situation fully. *Two people will greet Sally and Philip during the worship service, at the time when everyone meets the people around them.* Two people will play the role of Sally and Philip. Everyone else will observe.

You have just three minutes. *Yes, three minutes.* That is all.

This is the background for Sally and Philip.

Philip and Sally Knight used to go to church regularly. The church they were part of split because of a financial scandal involving some of the staff. Philip and Sally used to be very involved in church activities. They were spiritually devastated by the trouble in the church. They observed many people saying and doing really mean things to each other.

They believe in the Bible and want to love God. However, Philip now has developed a drinking problem. He and Sally love each other. They argue a lot about the kids, money, and his drinking. Sally is overly aggressive. Philip deals with confrontation by withdrawal, sarcasm, and passive resistance.

They both know that they need to change. They find it difficult to share what is really going on. Because of the church scandal, they find it difficult to trust religious people in general.

Just this morning, they were fighting on the way to church. Sally thinks that Philip fails to discipline the children. Philip believes that Sally is not willing to let children be children. Sally believes in strong discipline. Philip believes that parents must support and encourage children.

Sally and Philip do not share these details with the greeters.

These are the instructions for Sally and Philip.

Sally and Philip should be friendly and interested. *Sally and Philip must initiate the greeting, not the greeters.* Do not wait. Beat them to the punch. Ask questions about the ministerial staff, the leadership structure, and finances. Sally should do most of the talking, but Philip will speak some, too.

Sally should correct Philip when he says something she thinks is incorrect. Philip should be mildly sarcastic.

The two of you both should express an interest in the Bible. Ask if there are any good Bible studies.

In particular, Sally and Philip are most interested in being part of a church that will not let them down with any major scandals, controversies, or angry confrontations. The more disclosure that they get about the situation, the better they will feel. *Sally and Philip want full disclosure of information.*

The greeters intend to meet the people they are sitting beside during the worship service.

The greeters only know that they are sitting beside Sally and Philip during the worship service. They intend to meet them during the meet-and-greet break.

WORKSHEET. Scenario Two.

Read this worksheet silently. Understand the situation fully. *Two people will greet Colin and Mary in the foyer before worship.* Two people will play the role of Colin and Mary. Everyone else will observe. You have no more than ten minutes.

This is the background for Colin and Mary.

Colin and Mary Shanahan are a military family. Both are in the military. They just relocated to Fayetteville. They live on base. They have been married for six years. They have three children.

Colin and Mary have their lives in order. They are disciplined, serious, fiscally responsible, highly motivated, and hard working. They have a strong moral code, but did not get their morality from the Bible.

Neither has a religious or Christian background. Because a friend encouraged them to do so, they began reading the Bible about a year ago. They read together every night. They have read the entire Bible. They are now going back and studying in more detail. They are currently in a fairly intense study of the gospel of John.

Colin and Mary are not Christians, but want to become Christians. They have been to several area churches. In their opinion, religious people are fairly shallow. They wish that someone would just take them under their wing, teach them what they need to do, and help them be successful spiritually.

Colin and Mary should not share these details with the greeters.

These are the instructions for Colin and Mary.

Colin and Mary should act somewhat reserved and formal at first. They should warm up quickly if the greeters are warm and friendly. Wait for someone to greet you.

Colin and Mary do not think that they are Christians. *They should express that they want to become Christians.* Colin and Mary like people who tell it like it is. They do not mind it when people are straight with them. They want someone to teach them “the truth,” whatever that is.

Colin and Mary should respond positively to any invitation. They are ready to get involved, but need someone to help them get started.

Colin and Mary should state that they want a great children’s program for their kids. This is really important to them. They work hard at parenting, and find it challenging. They especially want to make sure that their kids are taken care of spiritually.

The greeters are meeting people in the foyer several minutes before the worship service.

Colin and Mary walk in about ten minutes early with their children.

WORKSHEET. Scenario Three.

Read this worksheet silently. Understand the situation fully. *Two people will greet Malik in the auditorium right after worship.* One person will play the role of Malik. Everyone else will observe.

These greeters saw Malik in the back, sitting by himself. They have seen him here before. They moved to the back of the auditorium just to meet him before he can leave. They have no more than 10 minutes.

This is the background for Malik.

Malik Ingram is an unmarried, young, single, Special Forces soldier. He is physically fit. He joined the military because he wanted to make the world a better place. During his last deployment, he suffered a serious combat injury to his leg. The recovery has been slow, but he hopes to fully recover.

He grew up going to church regularly, although his mother's faith is far more serious than his own. He has not paid much attention to spiritual things since joining the military after high school.

He has been to church here twice before. He typically leaves immediately after the service. He has no relationships in the congregation. He feels like he needs more, but he is also busy with his recovery.

Malik lives with his girlfriend. He has had many similar relationships. Malik believes that this immoral relationship is wrong.

Malik's injury is what brought him to church. He realizes that life is short. He wants to hedge his bets with God. On one level, he wants to have a great relationship with God. On another level, he does not want this to take a lot of effort or involve sacrifices. Malik wants to have his cake and eat it, too.

Malik should not share these details with the greeters.

These are the instructions for Malik.

Malik will talk, but he really just wants to go home to watch sports. *He should mention that he is hungry.*

Malik is a people-pleaser. He will agree to do things that he never intends to do. He will accept any invitations. However, *he will not actually follow through unless it is something right now.*

Malik will gladly talk about his injury if someone asks what he does. He will talk about his lack of spiritual motivation. Malik will also volunteer that he is ashamed of his immoral living situation. He will discuss these things only if the other person brings up spiritual matters. *Malik is open only when someone else asks.* He likes it when other people show interest in his life.

Malik loves sports. *Malik responds well to things that involve sports, whether watching or participating.*

The greeters are trying to meet people in the auditorium right after the worship service.

Malik is sitting in the back. He intends to leave right after church.

