

THE LIFE OF  
JESUS



BOOK 3





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# BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

In the Bible, God reveals His truth about how to have eternal life by becoming a believer in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The believer is a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a true child of God, and one who has been saved by God according to God's grace (undeserved favor). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

## *How does one become a Christian?*

- The Bible, God's word, says that eternal life (salvation) is a free gift of God which cannot be earned or deserved (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- However, we also find in God's word that all people are born sinners and cannot save themselves from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death and separation from God. God's requirement is perfection and no one is perfect (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:3-23; Ephesians 2:1-4).
- God tells us in His word that He is holy, meaning that He is perfect and that He is also just, meaning that He gives to sinners what is deserved, and because of His holiness and justice He must punish sinners. But thankfully, the Bible also says that God is loving and merciful and does not take pleasure in punishing sinners (Exodus 34:6-7; Ephesians 2:4-5).
- God has mercy on sinners by not giving them what they deserve. This is only possible because He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the God-man, to be the substitute for sinners bearing the penalty for their sin and satisfying God's justice (John 1:1,14; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 5:8).
- Jesus said that in order for anyone to have eternal life there must be repentance of sins and faith placed in His substitutionary death on the cross to pay for the penalty of one's sins. This faith must be in Jesus Christ alone, not depending on anything else including "good works" (Mark 1:15b; Acts 20:21; Ephesians 2:8-9).

## *What then is the response to these things if one desires to have eternal life and become a Christian?*

1. Pray and ask God to forgive you. The Bible says that you must repent of your sins, being ashamed of them, genuinely regretting and grieving over them, and firmly deciding to make an about-face and turn away from sin and your old lifestyle (Acts 3:19-20).
2. Pray and tell God that you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you. The Bible says that for you to become a Christian, you must place your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to become your substitute and who took the penalty for your sin upon Himself once and for all (John 3:36).



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# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

May 30, 2021 | Jesus Raises the Leader's Daughter and Heals the Afflicted

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- Read Matthew 9:1–8 and 14–17 to become familiar with the context of this passage.
- Read Matthew 9:18–34.
- Pray that God would transform your heart so you may receive His message as new wineskins receive new wine.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus's ministry opened a new age in God's work with humanity.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

A new age entails a new way of defining how God works among us. If we are to be impacted by God's work, we have to allow Jesus to define what that work is and how it is being done. We do not get to decide how He works.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*"And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, 'Never was anything like this seen in Israel'" (Matthew 9:33).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage's main point to your own life.



Q: *When does it become inappropriate or harmful to hold on to “the way we have always done things”?*

Q: *Can conservatism ever become idolatrous?*

The scientific revolution allowed for unprecedented advances in medical knowledge and practice. We are continually learning more about how the human body functions, how to diagnose illnesses, and how to treat diseases. It is amazing how far we have come. What amounted to a death sentence a century or more ago can now be cured with a pill or prevented with a shot. It can be quite alarming from our modern perspective to encounter the medical theories and practices from a bygone era. For example, it was once thought smoking cigarettes could be an effective treatment for asthma. Outdated medical practices simply have no place in modern society. Could you imagine a doctor continuing to hold to medical practices we know to be invalid?

A similar situation was emerging with the ministry of Jesus. In the passage prior to the text for this week’s lesson, Jesus asserted that His ministry was initiating a new age in the world, and His followers must be able to operate under the rules and expectations of this new age in order to receive Him and His message. He used an analogy that would have connected better with His audience than it does with us, but His point is easily grasped. He compared the ages to wineskins and His teaching to new wine. Jesus observed that no one would fill old wineskins with new wine. New wine needs to age properly before it can be consumed. Before the new wine was ready to be consumed, the old wineskins would have become cracked and unable to hold the wine anymore. In the same way, people committed to the way God worked before His arrival would not be able to hold the teachings of Jesus. In their commitment to the old age, they had become like old wineskins and were unable to hold Jesus’s teaching.

Holding on to the old age, which was prior to Jesus’s ministry, would be like a modern doctor holding on to antiquated medical practices. Jesus’s life and ministry change how we relate to God, and there is no holding on to or going back to the way things were.

Q: *What are some of the ways our society operates in opposition to the order of the new age ushered in by the ministry of Jesus Christ?*

Q: *Some people make an idol out of tradition or the status quo, but others make an idol of change. How is this idolatry also a challenge to the way Jesus has ordered this age?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The death of George Floyd and several other incidents over the past year have reignited concerns about racism within our country and have led to a national conversation over the extent of racism in our nation and the measures needed to combat it. Sadly, it seems this conversation has been saddled with the burden of worldly attempts to solve a spiritual problem. Even the newest and most radical “answers” are little more than dressed-up versions of measures that have been tried in the past and have failed. We keep trying to solve this issue by putting new wine into old wineskins. Christians have a far greater tool to fight racism, no matter what form it takes. According to Paul, Jesus, with His death upon the cross, has broken down the hostility existing between the races and has formed one new humanity united in the gospel (Ephesians 2:14–15). The problem of racism has been solved for us in the gospel! We just have to accept the solution of the new age Christ ushered in rather than running through the same unsuccessful strategies the world has already tried. We will never overcome racism apart from the gospel of Christ. As we engage the world around us on this topic, be an advocate for the solution offered and guaranteed by our Savior, Jesus Christ.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Matthew 9:18–34 shows how the people of Jesus’s time struggled with the transition between the ages. Jesus changed everything, and change is often hard to accept even when it brings the miraculous flourishing seen in these stories. These verses are meant to help us embrace the meaning of Jesus in a fallen world.

### 1. THE SUFFERING WOMAN

### 2. THE RULER’S DAUGHTER

### 3. THE BLIND MEN AND THE DEMON POSSESSED MAN

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will look closely at each of these stories to show how Jesus challenged the assumptions and expectations of the old age as He inaugurated the new age with His ministry.*

## 1. THE SUFFERING WOMAN

### ■ MATTHEW 9:20–22

Q: *According to Leviticus 15:25, What would this woman's illness have made her?*

Q: *How does this woman's plan to be healed contrast with what is said in Leviticus 15:19, 27?*

The woman in this passage had suffered for twelve years with an illness described simply as “a discharge of blood,” which according to the Old Testament, made her unclean. This is a foreign concept for us, but the “unclean-ness” caused by her illness prohibited her from participating in communal worship and made her an outcast in the community. Thus, she not only suffered physically, she suffered socially as well.

After such a long illness, the community, and perhaps even the woman herself, would have written her off as a lost cause. According to the Old Testament law, this woman had no hope of rejoining society and living a normal life. This was “old wineskin” thinking, however! The woman recognized something in Jesus’s ministry that helped her see that if she touched him, she would be healed and made clean. For her to touch anyone would make them unclean, but touching Jesus was the key to transforming her life.

Q: *What would your reaction be if you faced this woman's illness?*

Q: *Can Christians ever despair?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Christians can and will face trials and hardships in life. They can feel disappointment. But for Christians, pain and disappointment should never lead to despair. Just like this woman, our lives have been forever changed by the power of Christ. This transformation means our lives should be marked by joy in all circumstances, even when facing tremendous and long-lasting hardship (James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6). Despair is an “old wineskin” outlook once we have committed to following Christ. Following Christ can be costly, but we are called to joyfully pay the price. Memorize James 1:2 or 1 Peter 1:6 this week in preparation for the inevitable trials you will face when following Christ fully. Embracing the worldview behind these verses will keep you from despair.

Q: *According to Leviticus 15:28, how long does it take for a woman to be cleansed from her discharge?*

Q: *What steps are needed in Leviticus 15:29–30 for the woman’s uncleanness to be atoned?*

Although what is described in Leviticus 15 clearly underlies what we read in our passage, we cannot compare the two passages as easily as we would like. For example, Jesus said the woman’s faith “made her well.” Does this mean she was just healed, or does it imply she was also made clean in the Old Testament sense? Whatever the case, noting several contrasts will help us appreciate the point Matthew was making. According to Levitical law, the cleansing process takes eight days. But Matthew emphasized the instantaneous resolution to this woman’s illness. Levitical law requires two birds to be sacrificed for atonement, but Jesus did not indicate any need for the woman to carry out this ritual. Levitical law demands the woman who had suffered the discharge see a priest, but Jesus did not even make this demand of her. Since Jesus upholds the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17–20), we should not think He was unconcerned with these issues. Instead, these instructions find their fulfillment in Jesus in way greater than what is proscribed in the Old Testament. Holding to these requirements would be putting new wine—Jesus’s healing—in old wineskins—the Old Testament regulations.

Q: *How is what we have in Christ a better solution than what was provided for Israel in the Old Testament?*

Q: *Are you holding to inadequate rituals to resolve your guilt from sin?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The Old Testament provided a very limited way for people to restore their relationship with God. Their sacrifices were finite, so their restoration was always temporary. If a woman went through the cleansing process described in Leviticus 15 but then suffered a reoccurrence of her discharge, she had to start over again. The entire system suffered from an insufficient resolution.

In Christ, however, we are promised an eternal solution to all that would keep us from God. We do not have to

repeat the same rituals every time we sin or every year. We do not have to wonder if we have performed our duty satisfactorily. Like this woman, we merely need to place our faith in Jesus. This is a certain hope, one that was never quite available to the Israelites and is certainly not available to those who seek acceptance through the latest fashion, drug or alcohol use, money, sex, power, or anything else our world has to offer. If you are putting your faith in the things this world has to offer, commit this week to forsaking them for the only true Savior, Jesus Christ. If you have already placed your faith in Christ but are still ensnared by the world's inadequate solutions to your need for acceptance, jettison the world's "old wineskins," which never worked, for the perfect resolution to all our needs, Jesus Christ.

## 2. THE RULER'S DAUGHTER

### ■ MATTHEW 9:18-19, 23-26

Q: *How did Matthew refer to the man who approached Jesus?*

Q: *What drove this man to Jesus?*

Matthew referred to the man who approached Jesus on this occasion simply as a "ruler." We know from Mark 5:22 and Luke 8:41 that he was a ruler of the Synagogue named Jairus, but Matthew omitted this detail to make the figure more generic. We do not know from Matthew if he was a Synagogue ruler, a high-ranking Roman soldier, part of the Jewish ruling elite, part of the Roman governor's operation, or anything beyond the fact that he was a ruler. But as a ruler, he was part of the elite, who had little to do with Jesus. They were untouched by many of the difficulties facing the common man and not given to the sensationalism that often surrounded Him. But this ruler had an urgent need, one he knew he could not meet on his own. His daughter was dead, but he knew she had much more life to live. He decided to go to Jesus and throw his need at Jesus's feet. He had run out of options. He knew his notoriety and prestige could not save his daughter.

Q: *How did you come to see your need for Jesus?*

Q: *How can you show the elite in your community their need for Jesus?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Just as in Jesus’s day, the elite of our society seldom see their need for Jesus. They can afford all that money can buy. They have easy access to the best healthcare. They can shelter themselves from many of life’s hardships that could otherwise help them see their need for something beyond themselves. In our culture, this actually describes a great number of people, perhaps yourself and many of your friends. Wealth and status can often keep people from seeing their need for Jesus, but there will come a point when these things fail, just as they did for the ruler in this passage. And in these moments, they will be most able to see their need for Jesus. When that point comes, Christians need to be ready to sensitively speak up for the hope they can have in Christ Jesus. Listen this week to your coworkers and acquaintances. Are they at a point of being able to see their need for Christ if you share with them? If so, commit to taking that opportunity, because you do not know how often their need for Christ will be so obvious to them.

❏: *What was the crowd doing when Jesus arrived at the ruler’s house?*

❏: *How did they respond to Jesus’s claim that the girl was only sleeping?*

Mourning is a natural reaction to loss, especially the death of family and friends. It is not surprising that a crowd of mourners had gathered outside of the ruler’s house. What was surprising was Jesus’s assertion that the girl was merely asleep. Didn’t He know that others had verified the girl was dead? Or was he daring to suggest the girl’s death was no more permanent than an afternoon nap? Whatever the case, Jesus’s statement provided momentary comic relief for the crowd. Had they known who Jesus was and what He was there to do, the relief would not have been momentary or comic. It would have been death-defeating, sin-conquering, eternal-life-giving relief. The crowd displayed an “old wineskin” reaction. Reaching out to her with only a helping hand, Jesus raised the girl from death to life. We are left to imagine the father’s grief turned to joy and the crowd’s laughter turned to awe. Jesus’s power over death is a clear indication that a major shift was taking place. While all humanity will taste death, death is not the final word! This is “new wine,” and it can only be accepted by “new wineskins.”

❏: *How is Christian grief different from the grief of lost sinners?*

❏: *How should Christians face death differently than non-Christians?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Non-believers exhibit a wide range of responses to death. Some weep almost inconsolably, others act as if death is of minimal significance. These responses, and everything in between, are merely worldly attempts to cope with the reality of death. Beyond coping, the reality is that in their minds death has the final say for non-believers, and that finality is something the human conscience was not created to bear. As Christians, our grief should be a model to an unbelieving world that death does not have the last word. We believe all will one day rise again, and those who have placed their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins will live with Him for eternity, and everyone else will suffer eternal punishment apart from Christ. This week prepare your heart as a believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ to face the death of those you are close to. This is a tremendous testimony for unbelievers.

### 3. BLIND MEN AND THE DEMON POSSESSED MAN

#### ▣ MATTHEW 9:27-34

🗨️: *How were the blind men healed?*

🗨️: *What did the crowds say after Jesus healed the demon-possessed man?*

After Jesus raised the ruler's daughter, Matthew included two healing stories. In the first, Jesus healed two blind men. He seemed to ignore them at first, which seems rather harsh, but His words brought His actions into greater light. When the blind men affirmed their belief that Jesus could heal them, their words were supported by their actions. They had followed Jesus down the road and into the house, which would have been very hard with their disability. There could be no doubt of their belief that Jesus was able to heal them.

The demon-possessed man also suffered from an impairment of the senses. He was not able to speak, even of his belief in Jesus's power to save. After Jesus drove out the demon, however, he spoke. Jesus was able to restore the faculties of these men, which at that time was extraordinary. Once a person's physical faculties left them, they could not rely on medicine to restore them. The crowd's response verified the unique nature of Jesus's ministry. No one had ever done this type of thing before. Their confession distinguished Jesus from all such prophetic activity in Israel's past. The prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, had worked miracles, but nothing compared to Jesus's ability to restore the human condition.

Q: *In what ways do you need Jesus's restorative work in your life?*

Q: *Do your daily habits affirm that Jesus is able to work in your life? Does the way you respond to problems show that you believe Jesus can work in any situation or do you believe you have to come up with the solutions to all your problems?*

**APPLICATION** – Jesus is not limited to addressing the physical limitations we encounter. He can also address the emotional and relational issues that occur and reoccur in our lives. We live in a society of unbelievable prosperity. Modern medicine has made tremendous advances. Yet, with all this affluence, our relationships with family members and friends appear to be in more turmoil than ever. Marriages are constantly ending in divorce. Relationships between children and parents or between siblings are often strained. Jesus can heal these relationships just as He restored sight to the blind and speech to the mute. If there are broken relationships in your life, allow Jesus to restore them with the gospel. The gospel teaches that none of us is perfect, neither you nor the person you are at odds with. You have a common need for Jesus to work in your lives. In fact, this is the basis for any flourishing relationship, whether it be your marriage or your relationship with family. Christ makes all the difference, just as He did for the blind and the demon possessed. Seek restoration for the broken relationships in your life through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Q: *What did Jesus say to the blind men after they were healed?*

Q: *What was the Pharisees' response to Jesus healing the demon-possessed man?*

Upon hearing of Jesus's ministry of healing, the Pharisees rejected the implications of the healings and instead claimed He was an agent of demons. As Jesus noted elsewhere (Matthew 12:24–28), this claim was preposterous. The real issue was that the Pharisees could not accept Jesus's ministry. They were "old wineskins," unable to hold the "new wine" Jesus's ministry implied.

This concern likely explains Jesus's prohibition on the two blind men. His command to keep quiet can initially be confusing. Why would Jesus want to keep them from telling others about Him? The most likely reason is that telling



the masses would have been akin to filling old wineskins with new wine. The Pharisees would counter their message by saying, “He heals by the prince of demons.” They would call into question the faith that healed these men. Jesus was warning these men that their message would not be received by those who lacked the faith they had.

This is a hard teaching for evangelistic, missional-minded Christians to accept, but it is pervasive throughout Scripture. In Ezekiel 15, the prophet addressed Jewish exiles who were intensely hopeful that Jerusalem, the Judean political and religious capital, would persevere through the Babylonian conquest. Ezekiel, however, said their hopes were unfounded. Jerusalem was like a vine on a tree. The vine is good for neither lumber nor fire. The city could not sustain and would not uphold the hope the exiles had placed on it. The city was an “old wineskin.” It could not hold the mercy of God. Jesus gave a similar teaching in Matthew 7:6, which states, “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.” Dogs have no appreciation for sacred things. Pigs are unconcerned with precious ornaments. Those whose hearts are committed to unbelief have no place for the gospel we hold so dear. In a similar vein, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

❓: *How can you judge between a persistent, faithful witness (Luke 18:1-8) and a wise stewardship of the time you have for a prophetic witness to the world?*

❓: *How do you see unbelief at work in your community, both locally and nationally?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – As you consider whether to be persistent in evangelism or whether you are dealing with old wineskins, you must begin by considering your own faithfulness to share your faith. If you rarely share your faith, you should not excuse faithlessness by arguing that you are surrounded by people who will never believe. God has called us to be faithful witnesses. Jesus’s message about old wineskins and the Pharisees is about being a good steward with your witness. If you are not sharing your faith at all, you are not being a good steward. If you are faithfully sharing but continue encountering people who reject the gospel, you need to consider whether you are dealing with people who are simply refusing to believe and, if so, whether you could better steward your witness for Jesus by sharing with others. This is a challenging question because there are certainly instances in which we need to persist even though the person we are sharing with is refusing to believe. There is no single set of guidelines, but perhaps you should commit to persisting with family and those you are obligated to be around, such as your coworkers. Jesus said the harvest is plentiful (Matthew 9:37). If you are not seeing much of a harvest, it may be worth considering whether you are trying to harvest a field of people who are refusing to believe (Matthew 10:17).

## NEXT STEPS

Jesus's ministry inaugurated a new age in history, but not everyone can accept the changes His ministry, death, and resurrection entail. Sometimes that even includes His followers! This week keep an eye out for "old wineskins," both within your own thinking and in those you regularly interact with. When you encounter these vestiges of holding on to a world without Jesus, confront them with the gospel.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

God, continually prepare my heart to be shaped by your will instead of the expectations of my culture.

Lord Jesus, help me to believe in your ministry and in your work. You have made all the difference, both in the world and in my life.

Father, help me to engage "old wineskins." May the life-changing power of your gospel be let loose throughout this world.



# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

June 6, 2021 | Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- How does your life show the value you place on the kingdom of heaven?
- Read Matthew 13:44–52.
- How does God’s judgment at the end of time influence your life today?
- Pray God would prepare your heart to sacrifice for His kingdom.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Participating in the kingdom of heaven will be worth any price we have to pay.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

We need to prepare now for the kingdom by living sacrificially.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to guide you through the interpretation of parables.*

Q: *Do you find the word “sacrifice” to be alluring or foreboding?*

Q: *Describe how Christianity influences your daily life?*

One of the most alarming changes within Christianity over the past couple of generations has been the development of therapeutic religion, which presents Christianity as a sort of therapy to help you through life. It provides support for dealing with loss, inspiration when you feel discouraged, and steps to help you through addiction. Who wouldn't want therapeutic Christianity?! The problem, of course, is that it offers only a faint glimmer of what biblical Christianity promises. Christianity will help you as you encounter struggles in life, but it also offers a comprehensive worldview. Christianity tells us where we came from, what went wrong, and where everything is heading. Therapeutic Christianity offers helpful tidbits for life. Biblical Christianity explains what life is all about.

The difference between these two visions of Christianity becomes clear in texts such as Matthew 13:44–52. Therapeutic Christianity has little use for rewards that will not be recognized until the end of the age. The concepts of sacrifice and self-denial do not appeal to those who are only looking to get out of a rut. Yet these are the subjects at the heart of Matthew 13:44–52 and its message of the coming kingdom of heaven. Biblical Christianity offers more than just help for today. It offers us something for tomorrow that is worth sacrificing for today.

Q: *How are you preparing for the kingdom of heaven?*

Q: *How do you see therapeutic Christianity at work in your culture, your church, and yourself?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – This lesson will challenge you to live for the kingdom of God. If, however, therapeutic Christianity is the extent of your faith, you will have great difficulty in living for the kingdom. Make an honest evaluation of your Christian faith. Can the things you find most appealing about the Bible and Jesus be marketed on dish towels and wall art? Could the concepts of sin and Jesus's death on our behalf be easily extracted from your beliefs without much notice? If so, you may have fallen into therapeutic Christianity. If this is the case, pray that God would help you receive the message of Matthew 13:44–52. This is a challenging text, but as it claims, eternity is in the balance.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Matthew 13:44–52 contains several parables about the kingdom of heaven. This lesson will consider the parable through these broad themes:

1. THE INCOMPARABLE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD
2. THE COMING KINGDOM OF GOD
3. TRUE DISCIPLES ARE STUDENTS OF THE WORD

### GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate Matthew 13:44–52 in more detail and show how it portrays the kingdom of heaven.*

## 1. THE INCOMPARABLE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### ■ MATTHEW 13:44–46

Q: *How can we avoid drawing the wrong conclusion from parables?*

Q: *What are the benefits of teaching with parables?*

Jesus's parables were an effective approach to teaching His disciples, but sometimes parables, by their nature, can be easily misunderstood. In these parables, Jesus introduced two rather unscrupulous characters. The first is someone who found a treasure on someone else's land. Rather than telling the owner of the treasure's existence, he hid the treasure and bought the property, and the treasure on it, for far less than it was worth. The second is a merchant who was looking for pearls. Upon finding an extremely valuable pearl, the merchant sold all he had to acquire it. The problem is that the merchant apparently deceived the owner about the pearl's true value. This parable in no way commends the behavior of these men. Jesus was not suggesting His followers should engage in shady business dealings. The actions of these men only serve to illustrate the main point He was making.

Q: *Why is it important for believers to behave with integrity?*

Q: *Why are we often tempted to sacrifice integrity for money?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Christians are called to be faithful witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, our actions and behavior are closely tied to the reputation of our Savior, and when we are unscrupulous in what we do, we portray our Savior in a negative light. Furthermore, our honesty, especially in monetary matters, reflects how we value our salvation in Jesus Christ. If we feel the need to cheat, lie, and steal, we evidently do not think Jesus is able to save us in the ways we need. As followers and representatives of Jesus Christ, and we need to be beyond reproach (1 Timothy 3:2).

Q: *What do the treasure and the pearl represent in this parable?*

Q: *What does the phrase “sells/sold all that he has/had” represent in this parable?*

These parables demonstrate the incomparable worth of the kingdom of heaven. No treasure on earth or any pearl in the sea can compare to the value of the kingdom of heaven. Like the two men in these stories, we must be willing to give up all we have to participate in the kingdom. Notice how Jesus described the attitude of the man in the field. He did not begrudgingly sell all he had. He did it with joy. He could abandon everything because he knew what he would receive was far better than what he had. The same is true for us. We can give up everything with joy because we know the kingdom of heaven will be far better.

Q: *What is the relationship between faith and selling personal goods in this parable?*

Q: *If you were to trace how you spent your time and finances over the past month, what would it reveal that you value most?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – It is crucial that we maintain a biblical relationship between faith and works as we seek to apply this passage. Unlike the examples in these parables, the kingdom of God is not something we can purchase—for any price. Nor is the kingdom something we can earn through good works. We can only enter God’s kingdom through faith. Jesus’s parables get at the concept of value. Those who have confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior have declared that nothing else in this world compares to knowing Him as Savior. They can freely give of their time and possessions to serve His kingdom because His kingdom is what they value most. This parable shows it is a wise investment of their resources, because nothing else can compare to the kingdom of heaven. This week examine how you are spending your time or how you are spending your money. Do your spending habits demonstrate the value of the kingdom of heaven? If not, pray that God will help you strengthen your faith and transform the way you use your resources to reflect your faith and your confession in Jesus Christ.

## 2. THE EXCLUSIVITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### ▣ MATTHEW 13:47–50

Q: *What do the fish represent in this parable?*

Q: *What determines whether the fish are kept or thrown away?*

With this parable, Jesus continued teaching about the kingdom but drew out a much different point. The previous parables teach the value of the kingdom. The parable of the fish teaches the exclusivity of the kingdom. The current age is like the fishing net, which is far less discriminant than a rod and reel. The net is cast into the sea and whatever is hauled in must be sorted. Just as a net captures both good and bad fish, the world contains both the righteous and the unrighteous. The unrighteous, however, will not remain once the kingdom of heaven dawns.

Q: *How should Christians respond when they witness injustice in the world?*

Q: *What challenges emerge from living with unbelievers in the world?*



**APPLICATION POINT** – Injustice is a sad reality in the world and will continue to be as long as sin reigns in God’s creation. The reality of injustice in a fallen world demands two responses from the followers of Christ. First, whether our efforts are successful or not, we must call attention to injustice in the world and seek to resolve it. Standing against injustice is seldom popular in a fallen world, even among unbelievers who also claim to be standing against injustice. Yet, if we are to be the light of the world, we cannot help but oppose darkness wherever it occurs. Second, we must recognize that injustice will remain until the end of the age because God does not free the world of sin until then. When injustice prevails, we must retain a steadfast hope this will not always be the case. God will one day intervene and rid the world of sin, and injustice will disappear. Our task until that day is to remain faithful to our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

**Q:** *What do the men sorting the fish stand for?*

**Q:** *What does this parable teach us about the role of angels in the coming judgment?*

God’s angels will take an active role in dividing humanity between those who will be judged and those who will be spared. Angels occasionally carry out God’s plans on earth (Luke 1:11–19; Acts 8:26, 12:23), and they will accompany Christ at His return (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Here and in Matthew 13:41, the angels judge on Jesus’s authority. This shows Jesus to be filling the role of the divine judge.

**Q:** *How do angels help us understand our role in God’s creation?*

**Q:** *How can Christians develop an unhealthy obsession with angels?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Angels have become somewhat sensationalized. You can find a broad range of depictions of angels, from cute cherubic Christmas ornaments to burley, macho, rebel-without-a-cause types. There is something awe-inspiring about angels. John felt compelled to worship when he encountered an angel (Revelation 19:10), but the angel refused and instead directed John to worship God. Rather than prompting an unhealthy obsession with

angels, we should follow the angel's instruction and redirect our attention from angels to Jesus, the only one worthy of worship.

Q: *What happens to the evil ones who reject God's reign?*

Q: *What is implied by "weeping and gnashing of teeth"?*

Jesus declared that evil ones will be thrown into the fiery furnace. Since this is part of Jesus's own explanation of His parable, there can be little doubt of what He was saying. Unbelievers will experience eternal condemnation and torment in a place we know as hell. The phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" indicates hell to be a place of conscious torment and misery. Ironically, unbelievers reject God's rule in this life but will realize in eternity that they have rejected the one thing which makes joy and flourishing possible.

There are numerous attempts to alleviate the horrifying reality of hell in our culture, even among some who maintain the label "Christian." Some people challenge the concept of hell based on a misguided understanding of God's love. Others claim it is merely a place of frustration and anxiety, but this is clearly ruled out by Jesus's words in this passage. Some people have argued for what is known as "annihilationism," which claims that unbelievers will suffer for a time before being completely annihilated from conscious existence. The idea of a "fiery furnace," as seen in Matthew 13:50, could be taken as support for this position since what is thrown into a furnace eventually disappears. Extending Jesus's metaphor to this extent is not supported by the rest of Scripture, however, including the remainder of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 25:46 states, "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." We should also consider Matthew 25:41, Mark 9:43, and Revelation 20:10.

Q: *How should the reality of hell shape the lives of believers?*

Q: *In what sense should the reality of hell be a comfort to believers?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The doctrine of hell should incite a passion for evangelism among believers. There are eternal consequences for everyone who dies in rebellion against God. The doctrine of hell should also bring

some measure of comfort to believers. On earth, many evil deeds go seemingly unpunished, or what punishment can be identified pales in comparison to the evil committed. Horrific crimes often go unsolved and some even unnoticed. Even when those who commit these evil acts are caught, we are hardly capable of providing adequate and complete justice. For example, even if a mass-murderer is given capital punishment, he only has one life that can be taken even though he has taken multiple lives.

The doctrine of hell, however, shows us that God is concerned with justice. Any act of sin is ultimately against Him and will be subject to God's perfect judgment. No injustice is left undone. The doctrine of hell should liberate believers from the burden of righting every wrong, as if we could accomplish this anyway. We can freely forgive others who have sinned against us personally because we know God will judge every wrong deed. While we should seek justice to the degree we can, we need not ever think this responsibility rests only upon us. We can trust in God's commitment to justice and let go of a burden we were never able to fully bear.

### 3. TRUE DISCIPLES ARE STUDENTS OF THE WORD

#### ■ MATTHEW 13:51-52

Q: *Who were the scribes Jesus mentioned?*

Q: *What do "treasures new and old" represent in this parable?*

This passage concludes with a short parable describing true disciples. After the disciples affirmed that they understood these parables, Jesus described a true disciple for them. His description centers on the disciples' relationship with God's Word. Jesus's comments concerning a "scribe" may seem cryptic at first. Why have "scribes" suddenly entered the equation? Scribes were responsible for copying God's Word and were therefore well acquainted with it. Jesus was telling His disciples that true disciples are familiar with God's Word. For His disciples, God's Word included what we know as the Old Testament as well as Jesus's own words. As we look to apply this passage to our own lives, we include the entire New Testament as well. Jesus says true disciples are like the master of the house, who brings out both old and new treasures. For the disciples, this meant being committed to both the Old Testament and the new revelation coming from Jesus. We must be committed to both the Old and New Testaments. True disciples are also adept at applying God's Word to life. They can articulate the teachings of our ancient text and apply them to situations emerging in our contemporary moment. Thus, true disciples bring treasures both new and old from God's Word.

Q: *How would you gauge your confidence in applying God's Word in your life and to others?*

Q: *How could you become more confident at applying God's Word?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Before offering two practical tips to become more confident in applying it, the importance of reading and studying God's Word for yourself must be noted. If you never read and study the Bible for yourself, you will always struggle with this mark of discipleship. If you want to become more adept at applying God's Word, become a copious note-taker during your church services. Your church has recognized your pastors as being especially gifted at applying the Scriptures. Take the opportunity to learn from them when they are teaching God's Word and write down the things you learn. The great thing about this is it will cost you essentially nothing. You just need to become more attentive to what you are already doing. Another way to become better at applying God's Word is to read books about the Bible and your Christian faith. Exposing yourself, with discernment, to more applications of God's Word will naturally make you better at applying it yourself.


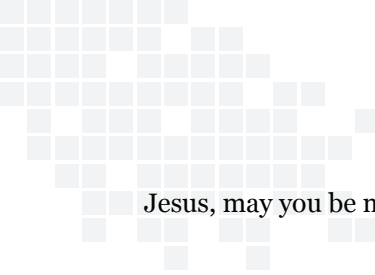
## NEXT STEPS

This lesson began by challenging you to live for the kingdom of heaven by moving beyond therapeutic Christianity. If you are only interested in therapeutic Christianity, you will not be interested in living for the kingdom, because it will demand sacrifice. The applications in this lesson will demand sacrifice. No one naturally wants to abandon everything in pursuit of the kingdom, leave justice in God's hands, or spend the time it takes to become a true disciple of God's Word. Those things take sacrifice. They will not happen on their own. Is God leading you make one of these sacrifices? If so, write down several action steps to take. Doing so may be your first step out of therapeutic Christianity and into true discipleship.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

Father, forgive me for limiting my faith to a self-help exercise.



Jesus, may you be my example in living sacrificially for the kingdom of heaven.

God, thank you for being a God of justice. Help me to lay down my burdens at the foot of the cross.

# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

June 13, 2021 | The Seven “I Ams” of Jesus Part 1

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- How would you identify Jesus Christ?
- Why is Jesus’s identity so important?
- Read John 6:25–40; 8:12–20; 10:1–18.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

John’s Gospel identifies Jesus as our Savior.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

We are in need of a Savior. There is nothing more important in this world than identifying our Savior.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life’” (John 8:12).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to guide you through the interpretation of parables.*

Q: *Why is identifying a person important?*

Q: *What are some of the most important things you would include in a description of someone?*

We may think describing someone would be as simple as stating basic facts, but it is hardly that simple. Descriptions can vary significantly from one context to another. For example, imagine you were trying to set up two acquaintances on a blind date. You would tailor the description of your friends to highlight their most attractive qualities. Now, if you were describing those same friends for a police report, your description would change significantly.

In his Gospel, John could have described Jesus in any number of ways. But all of humanity is in need of a Savior, and John knew Jesus to be that Savior. So, he highlighted Jesus's teachings that reveal Him to be just that.

Q: *Why is it appropriate to emphasize Jesus's role as our Savior?*

Q: *What are the implications of the Gospel writers' emphasis on Jesus's role as our Savior?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Jesus traveled many places and taught many people during His ministry. He healed the sick and lame. He disputed with the religious elites. Each of the Gospel writers, however, took measures to emphasize Jesus's saving and sacrificial death on our behalf. All the Gospels emphasize the final week of Jesus's life. One thing they did not want readers to miss about Jesus was that He died for them, and they needed the salvation He provides. As you interact with others concerning Jesus this week, make sure you identify Him as the Savior all the world needs.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The "I am" statements, each in a unique way, identify Jesus as the Savior of the world.

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- 
1. JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.
  2. JESUS IS THE LIGHT.
  3. JESUS IS THE DOOR.
  4. JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate four of the “I am” statements to understand Jesus’s message.*

### 1. JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.

#### ■ JOHN 6:25–40

🔍: *What Old Testament story is this passage related to?*

🔍: *What were the crowds seeking from Jesus?*

After they left Egypt, the Israelites found themselves in a vast wasteland. With no food or water, they would soon perish (Exodus 16; Nehemiah 9:15). In response to their grumbling, God fed them bread called manna. Every morning, the manna appeared on the ground like dew. The Israelites gathered what they needed and the rest melted away. This happened for nearly forty years. God sustained His people with bread from heaven.

When Jesus called the crowds to belief in His person and work, they asked Him for a sign akin to Moses’s bringing down bread from heaven. In response, Jesus said He is the bread that has come down from heaven. Just as manna nourished the Israelites, Jesus provides the spiritual nourishment all of humanity needs.

🔍: *Where do you turn for spiritual nourishment?*



**Q:** *How can you encourage yourself to go to Jesus for spiritual nourishment?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In search of spiritual nourishment, our modern world has tried to replace Jesus with one substitute after another. Some people turn to romantic relationships. Others turn to their work. Others will turn to drugs. Some people even turn to physical nourishment, such as comfort food or chocolate. None of these works, at least not for long. We each have an unquenchable need for God that we cannot fill on our own. Only Jesus can fill it.

What do you look to as a substitute for Christ? Many things are not intrinsically sinful, but if you look to them as a substitute for Jesus, they become idols. Make a list of the idols you have. Ask God to help you do whatever it takes to lay aside your idols and look to Him to fill your greatest need.

**Q:** *Did the crowds understand Jesus's point about work and bread?*

**Q:** *What did Jesus say about the will of God in this passage?*

At several points in these verses, the crowd failed to see the metaphorical nature of Jesus's message. In verse 26, Jesus said the crowds were preoccupied with the bread He had fed them rather than the sign to which the bread pointed. In verse 28, the crowd has become focused on the work or physical labor Jesus seemed to be calling for and missed His point, that they must believe in Him. In verse 34, after He identified the bread of God with a person, they asked Jesus for actual bread. These misunderstandings show an unwillingness to be open to His teaching.

**Q:** *Why was the crowd closed off to Jesus's meaning?*

**Q:** *What does their misunderstanding reveal about their worldview?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The crowds were operating on the basis of materialism. They were not open to the spiritual dynamic of Jesus’s teaching. Materialism is alive and well in our time as well, even within our churches. Materialism is the belief that nothing exists beyond the material world, which is an inherently atheistic worldview. While many churchgoers would deny a naturalistic worldview, they nevertheless frequently operate under this basic principle. It is impossible for faith in Christ to flourish under materialism, as seen in the repeated failure of the crowds to understand Jesus’s teaching.

How can a professing believer who faithfully attends church and would never consider denying the existence of God come to operate under materialistic principles? It is easy to pick up materialism from living in a materialistic society. We are confronted by it at every turn, and if we are unprepared, we can easily find ourselves under its control. The best way to combat the influence of materialism is to challenge it with the claims of Jesus Christ. When you encounter materialism in your workplace, ask yourself what that mindset makes of Jesus’s claim to be the bread of life. Can materialism offer what Jesus can?

## 2. JESUS IS THE LIGHT.

### ■ JOHN 8:12–20

Q: *How does Jesus help the world see?*

Q: *What does Jesus help the world see?*

Jesus’s claim to be the light of the world must be understood within the larger light-darkness theme in John’s Gospel. In the book of John, darkness represents sin and its power in the world. Those who walk in darkness are under the dominion of sin. They oppose God and are opposed by God. Thus, for Jesus to claim He is the light of the world says much more than that He helps us see as we move about and keeps us from bumping into things. The Light of the World, Jesus, overcomes the power of sin, frees us of the dominion of sin, and places us under His own dominion. To walk in the light is to live under the rule of God through the work of Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus is the light that brings life.

Q: *What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ?*

Q: *In what ways are you failing to follow Christ?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – You cannot “sort of” or “halfway” follow someone. You either follow them to the destination or you do not. The same can be said for following Jesus. You cannot follow Him with half a heart. To do so is to remain in darkness. Many people want to hedge their bets. They want to hold back from following Him in some areas of their life in case He turns out not to be all they expected. Or they want to follow Jesus and follow the world too. But we either follow Jesus and allow His light to shine on us, or we continue to grope around in darkness. If you are guilty of holding back from following Jesus, write down the areas of your life where you are particularly susceptible to withholding. Give the list to a pastor or close friend in church and ask them to walk with you as you struggle to follow Jesus with a whole heart.

Q: *What was the Pharisees’ main concern in this passage?*

Q: *What was Jesus’s response to their concern?*

In saying He was the light of the world, Jesus made a major assertion about Himself, God, and the world. The Pharisees challenged the validity of this claim by accusing Him of offering uncorroborated testimony. Their concern was legitimate, but there was a problem. Jesus was claiming an authority higher than any human can affirm in their own experience. If someone could affirm Jesus’s testimony, they would also share His supreme authority, which would call Jesus’s authority into question.

Jesus appeared to be in an inescapable quandary, but He did the only thing possible to verify His claim. He appealed to God the Father. God is the only one who could affirm Jesus’s authority and claim. Jesus said the Father affirmed His testimony, and the Pharisees did not accept His claim because they did not accept the testimony of God about Him.

Q: *Why do you believe in the testimony of Jesus?*

Q: *How would you defend your faith in Jesus to others?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Jesus acknowledged that Jewish law required two people to affirm someone’s testimony for it to be considered true. He met this requirement with His own testimony and the testimony of the Father on His behalf. We have two witnesses as well that verify the truth we believe about Jesus Christ. The first is the testimony of Scripture. The Bible claims Jesus to be the Light of the World, the Son of God the Father, and our only Savior. The second witness is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit affirms the witness of the Scriptures in our lives. Is your faith in either of these testimonies weak? If so, work to increase your knowledge and faith in them. For example, take some time and write down how you have felt the Holy Spirit testifying to you about the truth of Jesus Christ. This is a standard Christian practice otherwise known as “your testimony.”

### 3. JESUS IS THE DOOR.

#### ■ JOHN 10:1–18

Q: *Who are the thieves and nobles in Jesus’s extended metaphor about the sheepfold?*

Q: *How many roles does Jesus fill in this metaphor?*

In John 10:1–8, Jesus gave an extended metaphor comparing His followers and a sheepfold. This metaphor can be challenging to understand because the characters can fill different roles. Take, for example, those who are entering the sheepfold. If they enter by any other way than the door, they are thieves and robbers. Jesus likely had false prophets and illegitimate officials in mind. These clandestine figures appear to be counterparts to Jesus, because they are an attempt to hold sway over the sheep. They are unsuccessful at misleading true sheep. In John 10:9, however, the ones entering the sheepfold through the door become part of the flock. Thus, the ones entering the sheepfold can be both thieves and robbers, in contrast to Jesus, as well as sheep who become part of the flock.

Jesus also serves multiple roles within this extended metaphor. He is the gate who determines who enters the sheepfold (10:9). He is also the shepherd who enters the fold by the door and the one the sheep listen to.

Q: *How can you identify false teachers within the church?*

Q: *How can you keep yourself from teaching falsely within a church setting?*

**APPLICATION** – Compromise can be a wonderful concept. It can keep marriages together and businesses afloat. I recently heard a business analyst remark that the reason people fail in the workplace is seldom due strictly to incompetence but rather the inability to work well with others. Compromise is widely regarded as a virtue that keeps the world going.

Compromise is not always a positive thing in the church, however. Today, many voices from within churches claim we must compromise on our foundational teachings for the sake of relevance and growth. They want to abandon long held doctrines and views they think the world will find unacceptable in exchange for a continued hearing. The problem is twofold. First, the world has made no guarantee of a continued voice if doctrine is abandoned. What the compromisers are promoting is not a true compromise. The church would give with no guarantee of getting. Second, and more importantly, the church would be compromising its foundation. If the doctrines that identify the church are abandoned, the church has ceased to be the church.

Church members must always be aware of thieves and robbers who have entered illegitimately. Church members must know also what they believe and stand firm on those beliefs, whatever the cost.

## 4. JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Q: *How did Jesus distinguish Himself from the false shepherds?*

Q: *What was Jesus's goal after securing the sheep from His own fold?*

Jesus continued the sheepfold metaphor by proclaiming Himself to be the good shepherd. The good shepherd is characterized by his willingness to protect the flock at all costs, even his own life. The disciples would not have known this, but Jesus was not discussing a hypothetical in this instance. He died to secure our salvation. He is the Good Shepherd, the true owner of the flock.

Q: *Have you ever felt pressured to abandon your Christian convictions?*

Q: *How can Jesus's words sustain us through persecution?*

Jesus said the hired hand would flee rather than risk his life to protect the flock. Our role in protecting the flock is different from Jesus's, but we still have a responsibility to preserve the flock. You cannot behave like a hired hand when pressured to give up or compromise your faith. Doing so not only shows the lack of your own faith but will also endanger the faith of others. Take some time to count the cost of remaining faithful to Christ. Also, take time to count the cost of unfaithfulness.

## NEXT STEPS

John's identification of who Jesus is and what He came to do is essential for a commitment to Jesus Christ. After reading this lesson, take some time to reflect upon the four "I Am" statements covered in this lesson. What do they say about who you are? Write out four corresponding "I Am" statements describing who you are in Jesus.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

Lord Jesus, thank you for being the Good Shepherd.

God, help me oppose those who would sacrifice the flock by compromising our convictions.

Holy Spirit, confirm in my heart the validity of Jesus's testimony.



# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

June 20, 2021 | Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- In your own words, write an answer to Jesus's question in this passage—Who is Jesus?
- Read Matthew 16:13–20.
- Pray that God would help you receive the tremendous authority given to His followers in this passage.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The Christian confession centers on the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

The most important thing anyone can do is to understand who Jesus Christ is.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:16).*

## GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to prepare your heart to encounter Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.



Q: *How would you describe what it means to be a Christian?*

Q: *What distinguishes your beliefs from an atheist, a Mormon, or a Catholic?*

Matthew 16:13–20 has been one of the most pivotal biblical passages in all of Christian history and for different reasons at different times. It addresses two central topics in Christianity, the identity of Jesus Christ and the nature of His church.

What is a Christian? This is one of the most fundamental questions for anyone to ask and answer. Answers vary widely, even among people who claim to be Christians, and discerning Christians must recognize that many answers fail to correctly identify what Christianity is. For example, a US senator, who claims to be a Christian, tweeted on Easter 2021, “The meaning of Easter is more transcendent than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whether you are Christian or not, through a commitment to helping others we are able to save ourselves.” While many Christians were celebrating what they considered to be a non-negotiable fundamental of their faith, aligning with Christians over two millennia, this senator claimed the resurrection was a minor part of what Christians should be celebrating on Easter. His statement provides an example of the radically opposing views over the nature of Christianity. And not everyone can be right. In this instance, the senator expressed a view that is outside of true Christianity. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sin is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. Any denial or even decentralizing of this doctrine falls outside the bounds of what can be defined as Christian.

Q: *Is everyone who claims to be a Christian actually a Christian?*

Q: *How can we determine when differences in doctrine put people outside of the Christian faith versus when differences in doctrine are allowable within the Christian faith? (Primary, foundational issues versus secondary or tertiary issues, in which grace should be extended.)*

**APPLICATION POINT** – One of the main goals of this lesson is to encourage us to be critical of professions of Christianity. Not everyone who identifies as a Christian is actually a Christian. Part of the role of faithful

Christians is to affirm the teachings of Christianity and discern whether someone's confession of faith falls inside or outside of those teachings.

We do, however, have to allow for differences of opinion and interpretation within Christianity. It is important for us to determine what beliefs are primary versus what beliefs are secondary. Primary beliefs, such as substitutionary atonement and the Trinity determine the limits of Christianity. One cannot believe differently on primary doctrines and still be considered a Christian. Secondary doctrines, such as the method and timing of baptism and the organization of the church, may be a reason to attend one church or denomination over another, but differences of opinion on these matters does not put one outside the faith. There can even be a third level of doctrines for which even members of the same church would hold different views. Second and third level doctrines are important, but differences among Christians on these doctrines would not put a person outside of the Christian faith as is the case for denial of a primary doctrine. Our responsibility as faithful Christians is to differentiate between these levels of doctrine and know what we believe.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Jesus confirmed Peter's confession and established the authority of true confessors to evaluate the confessions of others.

### 1. THE CONFESSION

### 2. JESUS'S RESPONSE

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate Matthew 16:13–20 to understand its implications for identifying true believers and organizing authority within Jesus's church.*

## 1. THE CONFESSION

### ■ MATTHEW 16:13–16

Q: *Who did the disciples mention as popular suggestions for the identity of Jesus Christ?*

Q: *Why were these popular suggestions?*

When asked who the people believed Jesus to be, the disciples responded with a “who’s who” list of major figures from Israel’s past. The question, “Who do the people say I am” may be confusing to us. Didn’t the people think Jesus was Jesus? Why would He need to ask this question? In the Jewish mindset, the people would have expected major figures to come in the spirit and thus follow the example of previous significant figures. Think of a young basketball star modeling his game after a superstar of another era or a performer copying the style of a major performer from the past. Saying Jesus was following the pattern of Elijah, Jeremiah, or John the Baptist would have been a significant claim. But there is a problem. While the people may have recognized Jesus’s giftedness and ministry, to them He was just another in a long line of prophets. Their confession of Him was insufficient because they had not fully understood who He was. This failure to fully understand Him kept them from the blessing of a new life in Christ.

Q: *What are some modern insufficient confessions of Jesus Christ you have heard?*

Q: *How do you respond when you encounter insufficient confessions?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – One of the things that brings me the most sorrow is insufficient confessions of Jesus Christ. If you are serious about your faith, you pick up on these all the time. “Jesus just wanted us to love others.” “I just want to follow Jesus to be a better person.” “Jesus’s main concern was helping the poor.” These confessions all distort the truth of who Jesus is and what He came to do, and they are all insufficient to make one a true follower of Christ. When you encounter insufficient confessions of Jesus (anything short of what Peter confesses), be prepared to challenge the person offering it with the truths of Scripture. Confrontation over religious and spiritual matters is often uncomfortable, but the alternative is leaving people unaware of what Jesus came to do and what marks a true confession in Him.

Q: *How was Peter's confession different from the peoples'?*

Q: *What does the word "Christ" mean?*

The word "Christ" comes from the Greek word *christos*, which is used to refer to the Hebrew term "messiah" or "anointed one." Beginning with Genesis 3:15, the Old Testament develops a messianic hope that centers on a key eschatological figure who will usher in the next age in which God's people would live under His blessing and rule. Israel's hope for the future centered on this figure even though they did not fully understand the nature of His mission. By acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, Peter was confessing his belief that Jesus was Israel's messiah.

There is more. Peter also confessed Jesus to be "the Son of the living God." This is an unbelievable statement coming from the mouth of a first-century Jew. They had been exiled from their land because of idolatry. They were determined to guard God's identity with absolute resolve. They would not put up with anything—or anybody—being given equal footing with God. Yet, Peter, in a moment of Spirit-filled clarity, recognized Jesus as God's Son. What would be seen as blasphemous to the culture and society around him became the central confession of his belief.

Q: *Why are Israel's beliefs about the Messiah important for you?*

Q: *Why is it important for Jesus to be the Son of God?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The New Testament shows Israel's messiah to be the Savior of the whole world. Jesus became our savior by creating a means of forgiving sin through His death on the cross that paid the price for our sin. Since sin is fundamentally against God, it carries an eternal weight no one but Jesus, who is Himself God, could carry. This is the most wonderful news imaginable for those who confess Christ as their Savior. We do not bear the burden of our own sin. If your heart is burdened by your sin against God, learn to rejoice in the

forgiveness offered by Jesus. You do not have to make up for or account for your own sin. You couldn't anyway, but Christ accepted that burden for everyone who believes in Him.

## 2. JESUS'S RESPONSE

### ▣ MATTHEW 16:17-20

Q: *What did Jesus attribute Peter's confession to?*

Q: *How did Jesus describe Peter because of his confession?*

Jesus attributed Peter's confession to God. If a school child answered a question, only to have the teacher tell him he did not figure out the answer on his own but that someone else had given it to him, we might think the teacher was challenging the child or degrading him in some fashion. But this is not the case for Peter's confession. By attributing his confession to the revelation of God, Jesus showed that Peter was responsive to God's revealed truth. This is a far greater compliment than Peter having reached this conclusion on his own.

Jesus called Peter blessed because of his confession. We can easily misunderstand the meaning of "blessed" today. We often use "blessed" to refer to material gain or some sort of generic prosperity. In the Bible, "blessed" can include these things but not necessarily. We would hardly say Peter became wealthy and lived an easy life because of his confession. Quite the opposite! The basic idea behind the word "blessed" is finding favor with God. God's favor does not always result in personal gain or a life of ease. What it does offer is satisfaction in the work God is doing in the world and our role in His work.

Q: *Are you open to revealed truth?*

Q: *How does God reveal Himself to us today?*

**APPLICATION** – The key to your flourishing is being open to revealed truth like Peter was. We cannot be certain how God revealed this to Peter, but the focal point, the full and final disclosure of God’s revelation today is the Bible. The key to finding God’s favor is identifying biblical truths and applying them to yourself. The goal of these lessons, the sermons you hear on Sundays, and the rest of the teaching sessions you encounter on a weekly basis is to identify biblical truths and apply them to your life. If you want to find God’s favor, you need to prioritize the times when you can be taught God’s Word. There is not a rule to follow when doing this. There is no magic number of teaching times you must attend every week or a certain percentage of Sundays you must attend every year. Hebrews 10:25 simply commands us to not neglect meeting with the body of Christ. The question is, how often do you want to allow God’s favor to find you?

Q: *What was the rock Jesus is referring to?*

Q: *Why did Jesus tell Peter his own name?*

Verse 18 may appear disjointed in the English text because Jesus was using a play on words in Greek. The Greek word *petros* means “rock.” Jesus was identifying Peter as the foundation of His church. The implication of this verse turned out to be one of the most critical and disputed matters within Christianity. The major dispute is between Catholic and Protestant theology.

Catholic interpretation of this verse emphasizes the role of Peter as the foundation of the church. From this verse, Catholic theology developed the idea of succession of leadership after Peter, which led to the establishment of the papacy. In Catholic theology, the role of Peter as the foundation of the church has been passed down from one pope to the next, from Peter all the way to Pope Francis, the Catholic Church’s current pope. The Pope, in this tradition, is the head authority for the church and Christianity. He has been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven and has universal and supreme jurisdiction over the church.

Protestant interpretation of Matthew 16:18 denies that the rock Jesus referred to was Peter. Instead, they say it is Peter’s confession that is the foundation of the church, thus doing away with the entire idea of a papacy.

Both interpretations miss part of the truth. Protestant interpretation has ignored the obvious word play in the original Greek that connects Peter with the rock. Catholic interpretation has essentially ignored the importance of Peter’s confession. Understanding this verse requires us to hold the confession and the confessor together. It is Peter as a true confessor of Jesus Christ that is the foundation of Jesus’s church. As more and more true confessors are recognized, they are added to this metaphorical foundation, and the church continues to be built. The true confessors of Jesus—who Jesus is and what He came to do—are the ones who have been entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Q: *Why is it better for Christianity to be founded upon true confessors of Christ than upon a single individual?*

Q: *How can Protestant and Catholics responsibly engage with one another while maintaining their commitment to the gospel?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Discipleship takes place within the church. If the church is made up of true confessors of Jesus Christ, then it is the church that can help you understand your confession of Him. This is the initial step in becoming a believer in Jesus Christ. The church can also help you understand the implications of your faith in Christ for every area of your life. Trying to do this on your own inevitably leads to poor or even non-existent growth in your faith. Even though this is the case, many professing Christians question the need for church involvement and church membership. Such a stance will only stagnate their growth in Christ if they refuse to join the congregation of like-minded confessors.

Q: *What does “the gates of hell” mean?*

Q: *What is the purpose of a city gate?*

After announcing Peter as a true confessor, Jesus declared that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church. This means the influence of Satan and sin will not be able to keep the church from identifying true confessors of Jesus Christ. This is wonderful news! We never have to wonder whether the church will be victorious. Furthermore, notice that it is the gates of hell that will not prevail. During armed conflicts in the ancient world, gates were a defensive weapon. It is important not to push His metaphor too far, but the way Jesus phrased this claim indicates that the church should be on the offensive. We are raiding the city of man to find true confessors of Jesus Christ, and nothing can stop us.

Q: *How should this claim motivate us for mission?*

Q: *Are you ever afraid to share your faith?*

**APPLICATION** – Jesus’s statement reveals that conflict between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of hell is inevitable, but it also reveals that we have nothing to fear. Jesus’s church will prevail. There could be no greater motivation for Christian mission. People who will become true confessors of Jesus are currently part of the kingdom of hell. Nothing can stop us from reaching them and converting them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Who have you been timid about sharing the gospel with lately? Commit to sharing your faith with them boldly.

Q: *What is meant by binding and loosing?*

Q: *What is the significance of the keys of the kingdom?*

The keys of the kingdom represent authority to preach and share the gospel. Since it is true confessors of Jesus Christ who hold the keys to the kingdom, every Christian is able to evaluate the confession of others and determine if they truly believe in the Lord Jesus. If a person claims to be a Christian or if an organization identifies itself as Christian, we cannot take them at their word. We have to evaluate their beliefs. We have to examine their actions.

Some people, even committed Christians, may scoff at this idea as judgmental, but judgment is a reality of God’s plan for His creation. Those who do not confess Jesus as Lord and Savior will endure God’s eternal judgment. We cannot sit idly by while people deceive themselves and others into thinking they will find God’s favor by any means other than truly confessing Jesus Christ.

Q: *Can you describe a time when you used the authority Christ has given you to challenge the claims of unbelievers?*

Q: *What are some of the difficulties in enacting the authority Christ has given us?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – One implication of the authority Jesus has invested us with is to protect the faith. We cannot allow non-Christians to promote false doctrine without challenging their authenticity. To allow this would risk the propagation of a false gospel and endanger the integrity of the Christian faith. We must protect the faith by challenging the message of those who claim to be of Christ but are not.



For example, there is a religious group in the United States known as the Christian Science Church. This name sounds somewhat ambivalent, if not positive. Who would be opposed to scientists confessing their faith in Jesus and using their skills as scientists to advance the gospel? The problem is, even a cursory glance at their confession reveals that they are far from orthodox Christianity. (Most scientists would say they are also far from science!) Remaining silent on their confession of the gospel is both dangerous to our witness as well as an abdication of the responsibility given to us by Christ. How can you pick up the role Christ has given you to protect the faith? To do this will demand a firm grasp of what it means to confess Christ and a critical evaluation of the claims of others. Challenge yourself to begin this two-step process.

## NEXT STEPS

Discipleship is another implication of the authority given to every true confessor of Jesus Christ. We have to reinforce the confession of those who profess Christ. We also have to encourage one another to live in a manner consistent with our confession. Discipleship sometimes happens formally and at other times informally. Whatever the case, commit to exercising the authority Christ has given you as a true confessor of Jesus Christ by practicing discipleship within and outside of your local church body and by sharing the gospel with others.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

Lord Jesus, help me to exercise the authority you have given me as a true confessor.

God, help me to go on the offensive against the gates of hell.

Father, give me discernment to identify insufficient confessions.

Jesus, help me find blessing in you.

# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

June 27, 2021 | *The Woman Caught in Adultery*

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- Have you ever been caught red-handed in a sin or crime?
- Read John 8:1–11.
- Pray that God would help you seek forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus forgives sinners.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our only hope for forgiveness is in Jesus Christ.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more’” (John 8:11).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+Use this section to prepare your heart to encounter Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Q: *How do you deal with guilt?*

Q: *How do you deal with other people's guilt?*

Experiences of overwhelming, uncontested guilt tend to stay with us. My first grade PE class was lined up along the backstop of a baseball field. I saw a rock, and for some reason that can only be understood in the mind of a first-grade boy, I decided to throw it over the backstop. I watched as it soared into the air until it was a small dot in the sky. Then it fell out of the sky right on top of Jessica's head. She was dazed at first and then collapsed into a screaming ball of tears. The teacher ran over and asked what had happened. About ten arms flung up, their fingers pointed straight at me. There was no denying it. I was guilty. The teacher told me to go straight to the principal's office. I will never forget the overwhelming sense of guilt I felt. I could do nothing to erase what I had done. I guess my posture and look of sincere remorse influenced the teacher. When I got past third base, she called me back and had me apologize to Jessica. That was the end of it. Just as I will never forget the guilt, I will never forget the relief I felt at forgiveness.

In John 8:1–11, we encounter a woman who bore the immense weight of her guilt. She had committed adultery, and there was no denying it. She could only bear her guilt and contemplate her punishment. Her situation is the same one we all face before God. In this story, however, we also encounter our Savior's wonderful capacity to forgive sinners.

Q: *What is our only option for dealing with the guilt of sin?*

Q: *How does knowing we can never undo our sin make the forgiveness offered to us in Jesus Christ even better?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –According to Romans 3:23, every human being has sinned against God. We all bear the enormous guilt of our sins. Our only option to erase that guilt is to embrace the gift of salvation offered to us in Jesus Christ. Many people, even professing Christians, go through life bearing an enormous weight of guilt

because of sin. The corrupting nature of sin even infiltrates our ability to receive forgiveness. If you are bearing the weight of sin, confess those sins out loud to God and express your confidence in His ability to forgive.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Jesus thwarted the impure motives of the Jewish leaders and offered the adulterous woman forgiveness.

1. WHAT ABOUT THOSE BRACKETS?
2. SEEK JUSTICE FROM A PURE HEART.
3. JESUS'S RECORD OF SIN.
4. GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING.
5. JESUS FORGIVES SIN.
6. JESUS GIVES GRACE WITHOUT IGNORING SIN.

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate John 8:1–11 more closely to understand its message and draw applications from it for us.*

## 1. WHAT ABOUT THOSE BRACKETS?

🔍: *What notes does your Bible contain for John 8:1-11?*

🔍: *Why do some people question whether John 8:1-11 belongs in the Bible?*

When you turn to John 8, the first thing you are likely to notice, depending on the translation you are reading, are brackets or some other notation around the text of John 8:1–11. The notation informs you that many of the earliest manuscripts do not contain this passage (7:53 is also absent). A similar situation occurs at Mark 16:9–20.

Most of us probably do not spend a lot of time thinking about how we got the Bibles we read in our devotions and take

to worship services. Your Bible is the product of a company that makes every effort to faithfully translate the Bible into English. Today, numerous companies produce Bibles. The English Standard Version (ESV), the translation used in these lessons, is produced by Crossway, a publishing company located in Wheaton, Illinois. The Bibles produced by companies like Crossway are based on manuscripts of the Bible that were copied, by hand, hundreds of years ago. The note in your Bible is a reference to these manuscripts. Some of these manuscripts do not include John 8:1–11, going from John 7:52 straight to John 8:12. Some of these manuscripts include John 8:1–11 after John 7:36, John 21:25, or Luke 21:38. (Chapter and verse numbers, of course, were a more recent addition to the Bible and do not appear in these ancient manuscripts.) This creates quite a conundrum for people who believe the Bible is God’s revealed Word. Does John 8:1–11 belong in the Bible or not?

This lesson will not answer this question directly but instead caution against two insufficient approaches to this problem. There are some people who want to simply point at the passage and say, “See, it’s in here and that settles it.” Those who make this response are typically skeptical of newer translations and believe the attempt to question the authenticity of John 8:1–11 is the project of modern scholars who want to destroy God’s Word. This response, however, is simply a denial of how modern Bibles are produced. It is an attempt to delegitimize the process which produced the very Bible they are pointing to.

There are others who want to point to the word “earliest” in the note and say, “See! The earliest manuscripts do not include John 8:1–11, so it must have been added later.” This response is also insufficient. While the age of a manuscript is important, this cannot be the sole factor to determine what was originally in the Bible. For instance, some of the manuscripts in which John 8:1–11 does not appear contain marks or signals that perhaps indicate that the scribe who copied it knew of other manuscripts that did include it. That being the case, the reading of John that includes John 8:1–11 is at least as early as the manuscripts that do not include it, even though none of those manuscripts survived. There are numerous other reasons to refuse to allow this issue to be settled by what the earliest manuscripts contain.

🔗: *How should we approach John 8:1-11 and Mark 16:9-20 devotionally?*

🔗: *What patterns of interpretation for other Scriptures can show us how to responsibly deal with John 8:1-11?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – When studying and seeking to apply passages like John 8:1–11, it is important to remain cautious. Allow your conclusions to be guided by other passages of Scripture. Avoid drawing insights that cannot be verified by other passages of Scripture.

## 2. SEEK JUSTICE FROM A PURE HEART.

### ☒ JOHN 8:1-6

Q: *What Scripture were the scribes and Pharisees referencing?*

Q: *Why were the Jewish leaders bringing this woman to Jesus?*

The Pharisees had caught this woman in adultery. Her sin was punishable by death, and they were ready to enact this judgment. It is just to seek judgment for sin. Sin is an offense to God and must be accounted for. But there are multiple indications that the scribes and Pharisees were not seeking justice with pure motives. Although Jesus was a popular figure, He held no official position among the Jews or the Romans. The Jewish leadership did not need His permission to carry out the woman's sentence. Furthermore, Leviticus 20:10, the law to which the Jewish leaders are referring, called for the death of both the man and the woman. If the Pharisees had caught this woman in the act, they should have been able to produce the man who was guilty of adultery too. Finally, John directly stated the leaders were not sincerely seeking justice (John 8:6).

The scribes and Pharisees frequently approached Jesus with the wrong motives. For example, in Luke 11:53-54, the scribes and Pharisees tried to convince Jesus to teach, not because they wanted to learn from Him but because they wanted to catch Him saying something blasphemous.

Q: *Why do your motives matter?*

Q: *Do impure motives glorify God?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Jesus's teaching frequently focused on the heart. Right actions are important, but Jesus recognized that many people do the right actions but with the wrong heart. One way we could think of this is in terms of love. The scribes and Pharisees rightly wanted justice for the woman's adultery, but their true motive was to condemn Jesus. They did not love justice. They loved their own power and influence. This week, do a motive check on your spiritual life. What activities do you do because of your commitment to Christ?

### 3. JESUS'S RECORD OF SIN

#### ❑ JOHN 8:6, 8

Q: *What did Jesus do when the Jewish leaders confronted Him about this woman's sin?*

Q: *What do you think Jesus wrote on the ground?*

The most perplexing aspect of this passage is Jesus writing on the ground. John does not tell us what Jesus wrote, nor does he explain why He wrote it. We can suggest ideas, but every suggestion is ultimately based on speculation.

Many people wonder what Jesus wrote on the ground, but perhaps the key to understanding what Jesus was doing is that He wrote it on the ground. Words carved into stone are permanent. Ink on paper is permanent. The words Jesus scribbled in the dust on the ground in the midst of the temple likely did not last an hour. They were not permanent. We can say this for sure. Perhaps then, there is reason to speculate that He wrote something related to sin. Perhaps He wrote the woman's sin on the ground and maybe even the sins of the leaders who accused her. This would show the record of sin in this world is not permanent. Something could be done, had to be done, to provide forgiveness of sin.

This proposal for understanding the message of John 8:6, 8 is similar to what Paul claimed in Colossians 2:13–15, which states, “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” In this passage, Paul said the record of sin has been canceled by nailing it to the cross. The record of sin was rendered void. It was not permanent. Paul said, as is the situation in John 8, that the cancelation of sin disarms and shames the rulers and authorities, though Paul probably had cosmic or supernatural beings in mind whereas the authorities in John 8 were Jewish leaders. Again, the suggestion that Jesus wrote something related to sin in John 8:6 and 8 is speculative, but the idea is consistent with the rest of what we see in John 8 and with other Scripture.

Q: *Are you able to forgive others who have sinned against you?*

Q: *Why is it harmful spiritually to hold grudges?*

**APPLICATION** – Christ died so that our sins may be forgiven and no longer held against us. If only Christ’s followers would hold lightly to the wrongs committed against them! Do you hold grudges against those who have offended you? Holding grudges is a poor reflection on the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. The followers of Jesus must learn to keep their record of wrongs in the sand. Doing otherwise places a greater emphasis on the wrong committed against you than Jesus placed on the wrongs committed against Him. Give up the grudges you are holding against others, and, if possible, use your forgiveness toward others as an illustration of the greater forgiveness available in Christ Jesus.

## 4. GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING.

### ▣ JOHN 8:9

Q: *Who was the first to drop their call for corporal punishment against the woman?*

Q: *Why did the scribes and Pharisees drop the case against the woman?*

The woman’s accusers were repudiated by Jesus’s response. They all realized that they too had sinned against God and had been shown grace. Reflecting on grace can turn our vindictive outlook on the sins of others upside down. John noted that it was the older accusers who were the first to drop their accusation. The older men were able to look back over a longer life of sin and forgiveness. They could see more easily the grace that had been shown to them. The younger men followed their example.

Grace should change our outlook on the sins of others. In the parable of the ungrateful servant (Matthew 18:21–33), Jesus told of an ungrateful servant who was forgiven an incredible debt but then refused to forgive just a small debt owed to him. Upon hearing of it, the master held him accountable. Jesus’s point is clear. Those who have been shown great mercy should be able to show mercy to others.



Q: *How does the grace shown to you in Jesus Christ differ from the grace shown to the Jewish leaders?*

Q: *How does grace change the way you respond to the sins of others?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – If you are unable to show grace to others, it is a sign that you have never experienced grace yourself. Make a practice of being understanding of the shortcomings of others. Also, be quick to forgive the sins of others against you. These are challenging demands, especially in a world as broken as ours, but your ability to show grace reflects the grace you have been shown.

## 5. JESUS FORGIVES SIN.

### ■ JOHN 8:10-11

Q: *Why did Jesus ask the woman who in the crowd had condemned her rather than telling her directly?*

Q: *How did the woman address Jesus?*

After calling attention to the grace shown to the Jewish leaders, Jesus showed grace to the adulterous woman. The Jewish leaders could not condemn her to death because they were not without sin themselves. Now, the woman only had to worry about the condemnation of the man who had not sinned. Jesus said that He did not condemn her either, not because He was a sinner, like the Jewish leaders, but because He would die in order to forgive sin and raise to life to show His victory over sin.

This point coincides remarkably well with 2 Corinthians 5:21, which states, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus became sin so that this adulterous woman might become the righteousness of God.

Q: *Would you describe yourself as a gracious person?*

Q: *How does Jesus's forgiveness free us from the burden of sin?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Jesus Christ forgives sinners. This is the most wonderful news the world has ever known. Even for this woman, who committed a sin as harmful and intentional as adultery, Jesus stood ready to forgive and not condemn. Many people in the world believe they have messed up so badly that God is not able to forgive them. Their sin is just too great. But nothing could be further from the truth! If you are holding on to the guilt of sin, now is the time to appeal to Jesus for forgiveness. He has taken on sin so that we might be righteous before God.

## 6. JESUS GAVE GRACE WITHOUT IGNORING SIN.

Q: *Did Jesus deny the sin this woman was caught up in?*

Q: *Does the forgiveness we have in Jesus Christ eliminate our sins?*

Jesus denied the Jewish leaders' desire for capital punishment, but He did not ignore the adulterer's sin. He told her to "go ... and sin no more." Grace does not eliminate sin. Sin always has a price that must be paid and consequences that must be endured. This woman had to go back to a husband she had betrayed, children she had disgraced, and a community who knew her transgression. Furthermore, although John does not detail it here, Jesus would pay the penalty for this woman's adultery on the cross. Sin always has a price that must be paid, no matter what grace is extended.

The price of sin can be seen throughout Scripture. Isaiah 53:4–6, for example, states, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." Clearly, forgiveness and grace are not free for Jesus.

Q: *Since salvation comes through Christ by faith, what keeps the gospel from becoming a license to sin without consequence?*

Q: *How can you love God more?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Some people use the phrase “just as if I had never sinned” in an attempt to explain the doctrine of justification. This statement is easy to understand, but it misses quite a lot in the doctrine of justification and misconstrues other elements. While this statement gets correct our verdict before God, it ignores the fact that Jesus suffered and died for our sin. Justification did not mean “just as if I’d never sinned” for Jesus. The cost for Him was quite high.

As Christians, we would never want to add to the sufferings of Christ. We will never be without sin in this world, and Jesus died so that all our sins would be forgiven. But we should never view His grace and forgiveness as a license to sin. To do so would be an indication we do not truly understand the gospel.

## NEXT STEPS

How can you escape the tremendous feelings of guilt associated with sin? The answer is to learn to love Jesus more. Loving Jesus keeps you from loving sin. Loving Jesus helps you embrace His sacrifice for your sins. Loving Jesus keeps you from turning to legalism and feeling the despair of never being able to deal with sin on your own. If you are trying to bear the burden of your sin, give it up and turn to Jesus in love.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.*

Holy Spirit, help me to trust in your work as the inspirer of Holy Scripture.

Jesus, thank you for paying the price of my sin and offering me complete forgiveness and freedom from guilt and condemnation.

Father, I thank you for establishing the plan of my salvation from the beginning of creation.

Jesus, help me to love you more as my Savior.

# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

July 11, 2021 | *The Demand for a Sign*

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

-In what ways do your culture and friendship circles distract you from growing in your faith?

-Read Matthew 16:1–12.

-Pray that God would help you seek to understand Jesus rather than deny Him.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

We can only receive Jesus in faith, not disbelief.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Growing in your faith demands keeping Jesus at the center.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah” (Matthew 16:4).*

## GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to begin considering why some people receive Jesus while others refuse.

Q: *What does it take to understand the message of a book or a work of art?*

Q: *What keeps some people from understanding art, music, or writing?*

Avid art lovers will tell you that true art communicates in ways mere words cannot. Understanding art, however, is an art in itself. It first requires you to jettison your skepticism. If you think of the meaning of the objects depicted, you will never be willing to appreciate the intricacies of the piece that point to what the artist wished to say. Understanding art also requires looking at details and understanding them in light of the whole. You have to look long enough to see past the obvious, but you can never forget what is obvious.

Interpreting art provides a good illustration of why the Jewish leaders were not able to understand Jesus. Since their hearts were closed off to Jesus, they would never be able to understand Him or His ministry. They would miss signs as plain as the evening or morning sun.

Q: *How can you open your heart to the meaning of Jesus?*

Q: *What keeps you from understanding Jesus?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Life contains endless distractions that can keep you from understanding the importance of Jesus. With so many things vying for our attention, it is challenging to keep our focus on Christ. If we are going to understand Jesus, however, we must keep our relationship with Him at the center of our lives. If we allow ourselves to put Him aside for a more opportune time, that time will never come. Behavioral scientists say it takes doing a task twenty to thirty times before it becomes a habit. What do you need to focus on in order to get and keep Jesus at the center of your life? For the next month, focus on making one of those things a habit.

## ☐ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The Jewish leaders did not need a sign, because they refused to believe in Jesus. Because they were more concerned with worldly matters, the disciples were endangered by their teaching.

## 1. WHY NON-BELIEVERS FAIL TO UNDERSTAND JESUS

### 2. WHY BELIEVERS FAIL TO UNDERSTAND JESUS

#### GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate Matthew 16:1–12 and reflect on our need to open our hearts to Jesus and His message.*

## 1. WHY NON-BELIEVERS FAIL TO UNDERSTAND JESUS

### ■ MATTHEW 16:1–4

Q: *What two groups were aligned against Jesus on this occasion?*

Q: *Why was this an odd alliance against Jesus?*

Since all the Jewish authorities were opposed to Jesus, it can be easy for us to think of them as being the same. This was not the case, and the disagreements between the Pharisees and Sadducees occasionally even overshadowed their disagreements with Jesus and His followers (Acts 23:6–7). So, the original reader of Matthew’s Gospel may have been surprised by the alliance of these two opposing parties. This alliance shows how far those who oppose God are willing to go. It is reminiscent of Psalm 2:1–2, which states, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.” The rulers of this world will, despite their differences and mutual distaste for one another, align themselves against God and Jesus Christ. The alignment of the Pharisees and Sadducees is just one example of the larger cosmic conflict between God and His enemies.

Q: *How do you see this conflict playing out today?*

Q: *How can you prepare yourself for increasing hostility from the world?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The cosmic conflict that appeared in Jesus’s time continues to appear today. Governments and massive corporations seek to coerce Christians into abandoning long held beliefs. As our culture continues to modernize, it will only increase the pressure to conform to its morality rather than God’s. If we are going to remain faithful, we must know our beliefs now and resolve to hold to them no matter the cost.

Q: *How did the Pharisees and Sadducees test Jesus?*

Q: *Did the Jewish leaders believe Jesus could produce signs on demand?*

The Jewish leaders requested a sign from Jesus to authenticate His message. When God told Moses to lead the Israelites, Moses questioned whether the Israelites would believe him. In response, God gave Moses two signs, two unnatural occurrences produced on demand, to show the Israelites (Exodus 4:1–9). This is related to what the Jewish authorities were asking. It is difficult to judge what the Jewish leaders were anticipating, but it seems they were hopeful that Jesus would fail to produce the sign and thus be exposed as a fraud or hoped to match whatever sign He produced in a manner similar to Pharaoh’s magicians. Jesus, however, treated this as an authentic request and chastised the Jewish leaders for requesting a sign. The basis of His rebuke was that the signs of His ministry should have been evident to all who were watching. He called them a wicked generation and refused them.

Q: *What are the dangers of looking for signs today?*

Q: *What was the greatest sign Jesus gave to us of the authenticity of His ministry?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Human beings are naturally given to sensationalism. This is partly why we are held in awe by the most tragic headlines appearing on the news. It is why simple occurrences in the nighttime sky conjure visions of alien life forms and why we flock to movies that routinely suspend the laws of physics and reality. We

yearn to see something out of the ordinary. Jesus warned us against allowing this urge to spill over into our spiritual life. There will always be imposter religions, and if we are caught up in sensationalism, we will inevitably be led astray. Even sensationalism outside of our religious and spiritual context can lead us away from true belief. Aside from the sign of Jonah, God has given us something far greater than a sign to validate or invalidate religious teaching. He has given us His inspired Word. If you are driven by sensationalism in determining what you believe, exchange that sensationalism for testing all things by the truth of God's Word. Testing every teaching may not have the same thrill factor, but it will keep you closer to God's vision for your life.

❓: *Why did Jesus refuse to give a sign to the Jewish leaders?*

❓: *Why did Jesus discuss Palestinian weather patterns with the Jewish elite?*

Jesus may, at first, appear to be evasive in His response to the Jewish leaders, but that is not the case. Rather than comply with their request for a sign, Jesus confronted them with their unbelief. The signs that validated His message were plain for all to see. The Jewish leaders simply refused to make the same deductions they would make when interpreting the weather. The Jewish leaders did not lack necessary evidence. They just refused to believe. Any sign Jesus produced would only have been met by denial. Nothing can be done, even by Jesus, for those who refuse to believe.

❓: *Would signs or miracles make you follow your Christian convictions more thoroughly?*

❓: *Why is it hard to consistently follow Jesus?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The Jewish leaders' request may resonate with many people, even professing Christians. We can think, "If only I saw a miracle, then I would know Christianity is real, and I would live out my beliefs more consistently." This is a dangerous place for a Christian to be for two reasons. First, we fail to live what we believe. This is even worse than the Jewish leaders. At least their refusal to follow Jesus matched their refusal to believe. Refusing to act consistently with our convictions shows a callousness to God that exceeds even that



of unbelievers. Second, we fail to see the signs of God's providence all around us. Just as Jesus told the Jewish leaders, signs of God's work are all around us. We have become so intertwined with the secular world we simply cannot see them. We do not need miracles. We need to repent and pray that God would open our eyes to how He works in the world.

Q: *What sign did Jesus offer the Jewish leaders?*

Q: *Who was Jonah?*

Jesus did offer the Jewish leaders a sign, but not the kind they had in mind. Jonah was an Old Testament prophet who disobeyed God's command. God told him to go to Nineveh and announce His pending judgment on the city. But Jonah refused and fled to the sea. After being tossed overboard in a frantic attempt to abate the terrible storm God sent, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish appointed by God. His life was preserved, but Jonah was in the fish for three days and three nights. Jesus said this would be similar to His death and resurrection. He would die and be raised to life three days later. So, His resurrection can be thought of as the sign of Jonah. The Jewish leaders would not have understood Jesus's remark at this point, but soon, Jesus would rise from the dead so that all the world might hear of Him and believe.

Q: *What are the evidences for Jesus's resurrection?*

Q: *How does the resurrection verify everything about Jesus and His gospel?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central event in all of human history. Jesus's resurrection changes everything, even the most entrenched assumptions of the human heart. It is so vital to the Christian faith that Paul says without it, we are stuck in our sins and our faith is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14, 19). If you struggle with knowing your faith is real, examine the resurrection of Jesus.

In 1998, Lee Strobel published his investigation into the resurrection of Jesus under the title *The Case for Christ*. Strobel was an atheist when he began researching this book, intending to discredit the resurrection. As

he investigated, however, he became overwhelmed by the evidence and confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior. You could start your examination of the resurrection by considering his experiences as he recounts them in *The Case for Christ*, but there are hundreds of other resources available as well that can help affirm the truth of the resurrection.

## 2. WHY BELIEVERS FAIL TO UNDERSTAND JESUS

### ■ MATTHEW 16:5-12

Q: *What prompted Jesus's warning to beware of the Jewish leaders?*

Q: *What example did Jesus use when He explained the metaphorical meaning of bread?*

After His confrontation with the Jewish leaders over signs, Jesus warned His disciples to beware of their teaching, but the disciples completely misunderstood His warning because they were more concerned with physical things than with spiritual ones. Jesus told them to beware of the “leaven” of the Pharisees, meaning their teaching, but the disciples thought He was referring to real bread because they had forgotten the bread for their journey.

Q: *How can Jesus's mode of teaching help us disciple others and share our faith?*

Q: *Why do we struggle to prioritize spiritual matters in our lives?*

**APPLICATION** – The disciples had forgotten their bread for the journey, a significant oversight in a culture without fast food and grocery stores on every corner. Jesus saw this as an opportunity to teach them. The world is full of illustrations of the gospel and Christian doctrine if we have eyes to see them. I was recently with a missionary who

told me about a waiter he was wanting to share his faith with. The missionary was trying to find an appropriate way to begin a conversation about the gospel. As he watched the waiter serving others, a connection dawned on him. The waiter was very attentive and diligent about his work. My friend took a chance and compared him with Jesus, the greatest servant and waiter there ever was. My friend told me the waiter still has not accepted Christ as his Savior, but his initial conversation seems to have warmed his heart to the gospel. My missionary friend continues to speak with the waiter and prays he will one day accept Christ as Savior. Look for things in the world around you to use as a means of sharing the gospel with others.

Q: *Why did the disciples need to beware of the teaching of the Jewish leaders?*

Q: *What sign indicated that the disciples might be susceptible to their teaching?*

The Jewish leaders refused to believe in Jesus. The disciples were strangely unattuned to spiritual matters, and Jesus knew they could easily be led astray by those who would cater to their worldly needs and desires. Thus, Jesus warned them of becoming attracted to the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Q: *In what areas are you susceptible to the false teachings of your society?*

Q: *Why are we drawn to the teachings of the world?*

**APPLICATION** – Jesus warned the disciples to beware of the teaching of the Jewish leaders, and we need to beware of the false teachings of our culture as well. Our culture is quickly secularizing, and for years it has been pushing moral and religious standards that stand far outside the bounds of Christianity. We have become so wrapped up in our culture that we are hardly aware when it is widely out of step with our Christian beliefs and pulling us out of step as well. As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to be aware of how we allow our culture to shape our view of the world God has made. Some of us may need to consider stepping completely away from the productions of our culture.

Nearly every movie and TV show has for a long time challenged essential elements of a Christian worldview and morality. Almost every major sporting league is trying to steer the culture further away from anything resembling Christian morality. Some people will see any call for Christians to step away from the wider culture as defeatist, isolationist, or non-missional. How can we minister to a culture we do not know or understand? Others will claim that withdrawing from our culture is legalistic. Such concerns are warranted to some extent, but it is also possible to see stepping away from culture as a way to avoid the leaven of the Pharisees.

## NEXT STEPS

How will you beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees? Drawing back from your engagement with the engines of cultural production can be difficult, but it is a step many Christians need to take, at least in some measure. Write down a plan this week to withdraw from one cultural institution you know is undermining your faith. Use the extra time you gain as a result to strengthen your faith. Read a Christian book. Attempt to engage a neighbor with the gospel. Try to enact your plan for a month and keep a journal of your experience. You may be surprised to see how the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees has worked its way into your life.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

Father, I praise your name for laughing as the nations rage against you.

God, make me attuned to how you are moving in the world.

Lord Jesus, help me to be open to your ministry in the world and to the gospel you proclaim.

Jesus, keep me from the leaven of those who do not believe in you.



# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

July 18, 2021 | Parable of the Good Samaritan

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- Write down how you would define the word “neighbor.”
- Read Luke 10:25–37.
- Pray for God to help you redefine your concept of “neighbor” through this study.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God demands that we love the whole world, even at great personal expense.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Christians are concerned for the welfare of others.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:27).*

## GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to think reflectively on the neighbor-neighbor relationship.

Q: *What makes a good neighbor?*

Q: *What challenges do neighbors present that are different from family or coworkers?*

“Good fences make good neighbors.” This saying displays the challenge of maintaining good relationships with your neighbors. Neighbors are not part of your family, but, for most Americans, you cannot get away from them. You can leave coworkers at work, but neighbors are part of your home life. If you need some space from friends, you don’t have to invite them over, but neighbors are always right outside your door. Given the unavoidable nature of having neighbors, it is mutually beneficial to maintain a friendly relationship, but unlike your friends, you typically cannot choose your neighbors. It is little wonder that so many people want good fences. It makes it easier to pretend our neighbors are not there.

Q: *How does your commitment to Christ alter how you view your neighbors?*

Q: *How should your commitment to Christ alter how your neighbors view you?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Our relationship with our neighbors is one of the strangest relationships we have because of their proximity to our home life. Our commitment to Christ, however, does not allow us to wall them off. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors and to have compassion on them. Furthermore, Jesus expanded the definition of neighbor far beyond our typical understanding. How can we love our neighbor? We can start by making an attempt to get to know them. This is the only way we will know how to minister to their needs like the good Samaritan.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The parable of the good Samaritan shows us who our neighbors are and how we can love them.

## 1. WHAT SHALL I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE? 2. WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

### GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate Luke 10:25–37 and reflect on how the gospel is demonstrated by how we are neighborly to others.*

## 1. WHAT SHALL I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?

### ▣ LUKE 10:25–29

🗣️: *What initiated Jesus’s parable of the good Samaritan?*

🗣️: *Where else did Jesus validate how this lawyer summarized the law?*

This passage begins with the most crucial question a person can ask. “What shall I do to inherit eternal life.” Jesus, recognizing His challenger was well versed in the laws of the Old Testament, threw the question back at him. And the lawyer answered remarkably well. His response mirrors Jesus’s own when He was asked what the greatest commandment was (Matthew 22:36–40; Mark 12:28–31). There is nothing wrong with the lawyer’s response, and Jesus affirmed the truthfulness of his answer. Yet, there was still a problem, because the lawyer continued to feel the need to justify himself.

🗣️: *Is knowing theology a good thing?*

🗣️: *When can knowing theology be dangerous?*



**APPLICATION POINT** – The lawyer’s response shows the danger that often accompanies right theology. It is awesome to know even the finest details of the Bible and what it reveals about God, but if that knowledge fails to produce right actions, we are no better off than someone who knows no theology. If we enjoy taking in knowledge about God and His Word, we need to commit ourselves to applying that knowledge to our lives. We cannot be satisfied with mere knowledge.

Q: *What did Jesus say in response to the lawyer’s request to receive eternal life?*

Q: *Does this produce a difficulty for salvation by faith in Christ alone?*

The gospel says salvation is available only through faith in the work of Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation and receive eternal life. Jesus told the lawyer that if he kept the great commandments, he would receive eternal life. This may appear to be a contradiction until we recognize everything keeping the great commandment entails. There is no way a person can always love God and love others in the manner Jesus described. The law shows us how much we need the gospel.

Q: *If statements like these show us how far we are from earning eternal life, is there any value in pursuing these commandments?*

Q: *Does the grace shown to us in Jesus Christ ever excuse sin?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The gospel promises eternal life by laying our sins on Jesus and granting us credit for His righteousness. Although we are freed from the guilt of sin, our sin does not go unpunished. Although our righteousness is not our own, we were created to do good works. Our desire, as followers of Jesus, should always be to keep the Great Commandment. Never think that since we are saved by grace, we have a license to keep sinning. Such a mindset is rooted in a heart that has not truly embraced the gospel.

Q: *Upon hearing Jesus affirm his response, what did the lawyer do?*

Q: *Why did the lawyer ask Jesus who qualified as his neighbor?*

The lawyer believed he was basically cleared by the Great Commandment, but he was bothered by how open ended the “neighbor” stipulation was. Surely, he was okay to identify some people as non-neighbors and forgo loving them. Luke informs us this was an attempt to justify himself. The lawyer knew he had not loved everyone as he ought, so he was wanting to justify his actions.

Q: *Why do we feel an innate need to justify our sinful actions?*

Q: *How does justifying ourselves obscure the gospel?*

**APPLICATION** – No one likes to be guilty and held accountable for wrong actions. If we do something wrong, we want to justify our actions by showing that what we did wasn’t really wrong in those circumstances or with those alternatives. But we cannot justify ourselves before God. Justification can come only through the life-giving power of Jesus, not through any excuse or rationalization we devise. When we attempt to justify ourselves, we are replacing Jesus as we try to be our own savior. We are never further from the grace of Jesus Christ than when we attempt to justify ourselves. Instead of trying to justify our sins, we need to own our mistakes and flee to His grace. Not only is this the only justification that matters, it is also a far greater testimony to the gospel.

## 2. WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

### ☒ LUKE 10:30–37

Q: *How did Jesus identify the man who acted neighborly to the man in need?*

Q: *What distinguishes the three individuals who encountered the man in need?*

The Samaritans were a group in Palestine with roots to the old northern Israelite kingdom. The northern kingdom broke from the southern kingdom during the reign of Rehoboam, the son of King Solomon. The northern kingdom was consistently rebellious against God from its inception. None of the kings of the northern kingdom were faithful to the God of Israel. The nation was exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and upon moving most of the Israelites out, the Assyrians moved many foreigners in. The remaining Israelites married these refugees and their descendants become known as the Samaritans. Since the Samaritans were ethnically distinct, it did not take long for them to become theologically distinct as well. They recognized only the Pentateuch as Scripture, and they set up their own religious sites.

In his attempt to justify himself, the lawyer asked who his neighbor was. Jesus answered his question by describing a neighbor in terms of what does not define a neighbor. He identified the individual who helped the man in need as a Samaritan. In doing so, Jesus showed that “neighbor” is not limited by national, ethnic, or theological differences. The Samaritan would have had none of this in common with the man in need, but he stopped to help him because they were neighbors.

Q: *Are nationality, race/ethnicity, and theology used to identify “non-neighbors” today?*

Q: *What other illegitimate factors do you see used to establish “non-neighbors”?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Sociologists have long recognized that humans tend to congregate around people with whom they share a similar background. Middle-class people tend to look for middle-class neighborhoods. Many cities and towns are still divided between hite neighborhoods and Black neighborhoods. As Christians, it can be easy to allow these cultural dividing lines to become the lines that separate between our neighbors and our non-neighbors. This approach is clearly contrary to the illustration Jesus provided in this parable. Make an effort to abolish these false dividing lines and seek a neighborly relationship with someone outside of your social and racial/ethnic category. Doing so is a wonderful testimony to the power of the gospel.

Q: *How did the Samaritan tend to the man’s wounds?*

Q: *How did the Samaritan arrange for the man to stay at an inn while he recovered?*

After identifying who our neighbor is, at least in terms of noting illegitimate lines used to exclude others from being our neighbor, Jesus discussed how we should love our neighbor. The Samaritan tended to the victim by treating his wounds with oil and wine, extravagant items during this time. Since the Samaritan was carrying these things with him, it is possible he was a merchant on his way to a distant market. Whatever the case, the Samaritan cared for the man in need from his own personal supply. He also footed the bill for the victim's stay in the inn. The Samaritan acted as a true neighbor by having compassion on the man despite the personal cost to him.

Q: *What is the best way for you to care for your neighbor through your personal finances?*

Q: *What are the dangers of using your personal finances to care for your neighbor?*

**APPLICATION** – Giving financially to help others in need is challenging. I'm no mathematician, but every dollar you give to help someone else is a dollar you do not get to spend on yourself. Dollars you cannot save for the future. Dollars you cannot utilize for your own personal comfort or entertainment. Dollars that, used responsibly, could have a great impact on the kingdom of God. Compassionate generosity pleases God and shows our devotion to serving Him and not ourselves. Consider ways to begin giving to others out of compassion. This may be something you should consider including in your monthly budget. Doing so will encourage you to give but give responsibly.

Q: *Of the three travelers on the road in Jesus's story, which one likely had the longest journey?*

Q: *Why did people travel with animals?*

The Samaritan showed compassion to the man in need despite personal hardship. We cannot know for sure, but it is likely the Samaritan had the longest journey ahead of him. And the Samaritan stood the greatest risk of rebuke and rejection upon entering the inn. Nevertheless, despite personal hardship, he took the man to an inn where he could recover. Since the man was too weak to walk to the next village, the Samaritan placed the victim on his own animal. The Samaritan was not escorting that animal down the road for the fun of it. The animal was likely carrying the Samaritan or at least a large quantity of his goods. By placing the injured man on the animal, the Samaritan was

resigned to walk and likely had to carry whatever load his animal had been carrying. Having compassion upon the victim of the robbery came with personal hardship, but once the Samaritan saw his neighbor in need, he made a choice to endure it in order to love his neighbor as himself.

❓: *What excuses do you typically use to avoid helping neighbors in need?*

❓: *Do you ever wish you could just give money to something rather than becoming personally involved?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Have you ever noticed it is always easier not to do something? If you are looking for the path of least resistance through life, you will never be willing to have compassion on others at the cost of personal hardship. Yet bearing the burdens of others is at the heart of the command to love your neighbor as yourself. Just as you have to budget money to help others in financial need, you also need to budget your time. Your day off will always be busy. Even if you complete your to-do list, you will likely be looking forward to some time to rest. But the needs of others seldom recognize when you are busy or when you need rest. Helping others always requires sacrifice, and Christians need to ensure they are willing to pay that sacrifice when the opportunity to help a neighbor arises.

❓: *Was the Samaritan finished caring for the man in need when he dropped him off at the inn?*

❓: *How do the Samaritan's instructions to the innkeeper illustrate an enduring concern to care for the victim?*

You could not blame the Samaritan if he had dropped the victim off at the inn and then continued on his way. His act of mercy had likely put him severely behind schedule. His family may have been worried about him. He was on a road frequented by robbers, after all. But the Samaritan stayed the night to care for the victim and then even expressed a desire for his care to continue. He told the innkeeper he would be back to check on the man he was leaving. This illustrates a commitment to long-term care. The victim did not cease to be the

Samaritan's neighbor once his immediate need was met. The Samaritan made a long-term commitment to secure the man's welfare.

Q: *What are your long-term commitments to serving your neighbors?*

Q: *Why are we hesitant to make long-term commitments?*

People in our society are more and more hesitant to make long-term commitments to serving others. We prefer to get our service done over a weekend and check back a few months down the road—another attempt to meet needs on our schedule. But this will always falter because the needs of others do not check our schedule before arising. Serving your neighbor often demands more than helping out on a single occasion.

## NEXT STEPS

There is a growing refugee crisis around the world. There are many places where certain people are not safe in their own country. There are other places where people have been forced out of their country and have nowhere else to go. No matter what your opinion is on the refugee crisis and what our country's refugee policy should be in response, thousands of refugees arrive in our country every year. The care they are able to procure from the government hardly ever makes enough headway for them to successfully assimilate into our country. Some of these refugees are Christian brothers and sisters who are in need of our help. Others are non-believers who are in need of our help and in need of the gospel. The refugee crisis is one clear instance of neighbors who are in need. If you live in a city or community in which refugees are being placed, consider becoming involved in the programs helping them. This is a wonderful way to show our love for our neighbor. If there are not refugee placements in your community, consider what other community-wide issues your church could become involved in as you seek to be neighbors to those in need.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*



Father, help me to love you with all of my heart, my soul, my strength, and my mind.

God, help me to see the needs of my neighbors and give me the resolve to meet those needs.

Lord Jesus, you met my greatest need. You are my greatest neighbor. Help me reflect the glory of your name as I seek to be a neighbor to others.

God, give me your wisdom as I seek to make long-term commitments to serving others.









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