

THE REAL JESUS: HIS MISSION

Week Two | July 15, 2018 | Who You Need to Be Connected To

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 10:38–11:13. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God's mission must be done through God's power.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Living a life on mission requires not just speaking about the Savior and living a life that reflects Him, but it requires an active dependence on Him as well.

MEDITATE

"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:11–13).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: How would you define a good father?

According to the U.S. Department of Census, 90% of homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes. Eighty percent of rapists motivated by displaced anger come from fatherless homes. The Center for Disease Control reports that 63% of children who exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human services, 71% of pregnant teenagers lack a father. Sixty-three percent of youth suicides are from fatherless homes. Fatherless boys and girls are twice as likely to drop out of high school, twice as likely to end up in jail, and four times more likely to need help for emotional or behavioral problems. After seeing these statistics, the one that is the most heartbreaking is that 43% of U.S. children live without their father.

In his book, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism*, Paul C. Vitz discusses Sigmund Freud's "projection theory" of religion. Freud argued that people believe in God because they have a desire for security and comfort. In short, they desire a father figure. So, they project these desires and invent the idea of a heavenly Father who is perfectly loving and will never abandon them. Freud says, "Religious ideas have arisen from the same need as have all the other achievements of civilization: from the necessity of defending oneself against the crushing superior force of nature." Religion, for Freud, is a coping mechanism and wish fulfillment.

In contrast to Freud's hypothesis, Vitz argues the opposite. He says fatherlessness does not lead to theism, it leads to *atheism*. Absence of or disappointment, hurt, or abuse by one's earthly father frequently leads to an intense rejection of God. To support his claim, he offers a biographical survey of influential atheists over the past 400 years, showing a consistent theme of fatherlessness in their lives. Is there a connection between what you believe about God and father absence? Yes.

In the book of Luke, Jesus uses two surprising metaphors to describe His followers—children (Luke 18:17) and lambs (Luke 10:3). Both of these images suggest weakness and complete dependency. Children and lambs are anything but self-sufficient. Left on their own, they will die. If He is sending us out on a dangerous mission, wouldn't He want us to be more like superheroes or great warriors? Why would Jesus want us to be weak and frail, unable to fend for ourselves?

Q: *What do you think? Why does Jesus want us to be like children and lambs rather than self-sufficient, strong warriors?*

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In today's lesson we will see that instead of choosing the strong, the autonomous, and the self-sustaining to join His mission, Jesus desires those who are needy, weak, and insufficient in their own power. In these verses, we learn that the life-force of mission for believers is being connected to our heavenly Father and living life in full dependence on Him. As we proclaim the gospel in word and deed, we don't do it in our own strength, but in His. We don't do it to earn His favor, but because we already experience the fullness of His favor through Christ.

1. DEPENDENCE ON CHRIST IS THE RIGHT CHOICE

2. DEPENDENCE ON CHRIST MUST BE PRACTICED

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

DEPENDENCE ON GOD IS THE RIGHT CHOICE

▣ LUKE 10:38-42

Q: *How are Martha and Mary different from each other?*

Q: *What do you think Jesus means when He says Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her?*

As a physician, Luke knew a lot about the effects of disease, both on the suffering person and on the community. In this passage, Jesus visits the home of two sisters named Mary and Martha. This is yet another aspect of Jesus' ministry that was extremely offensive to the religious leaders at the time. No Jewish teacher or rabbi would ever spend time with women like Jesus did with Mary and Martha. If a religious teacher entered a home, he came to spend time with the men and be served by the women. And as a rule, Rabbis only taught the Scriptures to men. In contrast, Jesus entered into the house of a woman and taught her the Scriptures, opening a world to her that she never before had access to.

Verse 39 says Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to His teaching. Sitting at someone's feet was the posture of a disciple. It was a privileged position to be able to directly receive teaching from the master. By allowing her to sit at His feet as He taught her directly, Jesus treated her with equal value, worth, and care as one of His disciples. He gave her dignity and opportunity. He showed that her spiritual growth and maturity was just as important as the men's and that she had direct access to Him. Jesus brought her near in a culture where women were often excluded.

While Mary sat at Jesus' feet, Martha was busy maintaining the cultural standards of an ideal hostess, which were closely tied to those of an ideal woman. To honor Jesus and earn His favor, she worked and worked and worked. She sought to make everything perfect for Him. She wanted to serve Him. While Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to His teaching, the text says that "Martha was distracted with much serving" (Luke 10:40). She was playing a juggling game, trying to cook and clean and take care of their guest of honor.

Anyone who has done housework knows it can be an incredibly frustrating and unending task. You clean the floors only to have them get dirty again, sometimes within the hour. You wash dishes only to use them again for the next meal. You do laundry only to find the clothes back in the hamper a few days later. You are constantly reminded of the futility of your labor, which more than often goes underappreciated by those around you. It feels defeating, discouraging, and sometimes enslaving. The routine never ends and you never get ahead. Your accomplishments are almost immediately taken away from you.

In light of the cycle of futility Martha was experiencing, Jesus says that Mary had chosen that which will not be taken away from her. By sitting at Jesus' feet to receive His words, a work was being done in her life that didn't get undone a few hours later. Instead, she was being slowly but surely transformed into the image of Christ. Jesus was constructing something in her that could never be torn down or taken away. The good work He began in her life would be brought to completion.

In a world where our work is never ending, our responsibilities only increase, and the fruit of our labors often unravel or go unnoticed, how refreshing it is to know that God's work in our lives is just the opposite! The

investment we make in our walk with Christ is never wasted, and it will never be taken away from us.

But, is Jesus saying that work isn't important? Is He suggesting we shouldn't care about our responsibilities or that we should ignore the mundane, everydayness of life? Should we all become monks who live a separate existence and pray all day? Certainly not. Jesus is saying something very similar to the message of the writer of Ecclesiastes.

The book of Ecclesiastes discusses all the things that are futile and worthless in this life. It hits on work, knowledge, riches, notions of progress, etc., showing how even our best projects eventually fade away like grass. However, instead of teaching us to give up on life, the writer says we need to keep it in proper perspective. Ecclesiastes 3:14 says, "I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it, God has done it, so that people fear before him."

Only when we understand it is God's work, not our own, that lasts for eternity can we be free from the idolatry of false expectations of our own efforts. We are then able to work hard and be faithful with the responsibilities God has given us without finding our identity or self-worth in them. We then can see our work for what it is—an opportunity to live out the eternal work God has done in our hearts in our ordinary lives.

🕒: *Do you feel like Martha, "anxious and troubled about many things?" Why?*

🕒: *Do an inventory of your day. What do you spend the most time doing? What are your priorities? How do you prepare for your day? How do you recharge at the end of the day? What motivates you? What do these things reveal about your heart? Are you a Martha or a Mary?*

🕒: *How does dependence on God's work as the only thing that lasts encourage you to be faithful with the responsibilities you've been given without finding your identity in them? How does it sustain you in a life on mission?*

DEPENDENCE ON GOD MUST BE PRACTICED

📖 LUKE 11:1-13

Q: *What are the specific things Jesus prays for in this prayer?*

Q: *What do you think Jesus is teaching about prayer through the story in verses 5-8?*

After reading about Martha and Mary and dependence on God being the “right choice” because it leads to that which can never be taken away, Luke continues this theme in chapter 11 with Jesus’ teaching on prayer. What does it mean to depend on God? Is it some kind of mystical feeling? Is it merely a sense of insufficiency? While recognizing our need for God is very important, dependence is far more than a feeling. It is also a practice.

As sinful people, we naturally resist being dependent. In fact, Adam and Eve’s temptation was to be “like God,” to live independently from Him and to have His power for themselves. They didn’t want to be creatures who needed their Creator. They wanted to be peers with Him. We, too, find the idea of being dependent on someone else offensive to our pride. Even when the Holy Spirit reveals the truth of the gospel to us, walking in restored dependence on God can still feel unnatural and counterintuitive. The best way to grow in it is not to wait until the feeling comes, but to practice it. As we practice dependence, we become more dependent. Jesus teaches us that prayer is a key way to practice dependence on God.

In verse 1, we read the disciple’s request, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Clearly, prayer is not something innate in us, but something we have to learn. We need to be taught how to do it. Because of sin, talking to ourselves is natural, but talking to God is not. In fact, we live our lives according to our own voice. We have to learn how to break out of our own self-referential voice and direct our voice to God. The good news is this is something that those who are in Christ can learn! As Thabiti Anyabwile puts it, “There’s no shame in not knowing how to pray or feeling uncomfortable in prayer. There’s only shame if we don’t ask to be taught and as a result spend years of our Christian lives ineffective in prayer.”

Jesus grants the request and shows them what prayer is. His demonstration of prayer doesn’t mean this is the only way to pray, but that there should be certain priorities and perspectives that shape the way we pray.

In verse 2, Jesus calls God “Father.” That means the person we are talking to is not a far-off deity, but an intimate, loving Father. It also means we are not strangers to Him, but beloved children. We can act toward Him the way children act toward their father. We can converse with Him with respect for His authority, though without the

distance of formality.

We then see the heart's desires of the disciple, that God's name would be honored and that His kingdom would come. This is the mission of God—to make His name great on the earth and restore what was lost and corrupted by sin. Christians who are called to be part of this mission have hearts that are shaped by this mission. Above all else, this is what they long for.

Then, we are invited to bring our needs before God. These are physical needs (daily bread), forgiveness from sins, and protection from temptation. By asking God for these things we remind ourselves that we are dependent upon Him for each of these things. Despite our hard work, our daily bread does not come from us, but from the hand of God. We can do nothing to earn the forgiveness of sins, and the ability to forgive others is not something we can do on our own. Even though we actively seek our fulfillment in Christ alone, we need His help to resist the temptation of sin. We are like lambs who cannot navigate through a world of wolves without a Shepherd. We are like children who couldn't last one day on our own without the care of a Father.

In verses 5–13, Jesus tells a story to illustrate the posture of heart we should have when we pray. We are to be persistent in prayer. The word “impudence” means a lack of sensitivity, lack of awareness of what is proper, or rude. In the story, the neighbor shamelessly bangs on the man's door at a culturally improper time without thinking twice about it. Jesus' point is not that we aggravate God when we pray to Him, but that if a regular neighbor would get up in the middle of the night even if he is ticked off to give his neighbor what he needs, how much more will a loving Father who does not sleep eagerly respond when we call?

We shouldn't be afraid to cry out for our Shepherd like a lamb or ask our Father over and over again like a child. Children and lambs don't care about being a burden. They aren't insecure about being shot down. They simply ask and receive. In fact, Jesus returns to the metaphor of a child and a father in verses 11–13. No father would look his hungry child in the face and give him or her an evil substitute. If our fathers are imperfect (even the “good” ones) and yet we do see that they give us good things and not harmful things, how much more should we expect our heavenly Father, who is perfect, to give us good things?

Charles Spurgeon says, “Remember this: if any other condition had been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there.” We can know we are cared for by a perfect Father who withholds no good thing from us. This truth should give us freedom to pray to Him with persistence as children who are fully dependent on Him.

Q: *Discuss this idea: the only way to be a prayer warrior is to be like a child.*

♀: *What are the things you usually pray for? Do your prayers reflect the priorities of God's mission?*

♀: *Do you quickly grow discouraged in prayer? Why or why not?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

♀: *Do you find yourself trying to growing more independent and self-sufficient or more dependent on God? What does evidence of this look like in your life?*

♀: *What are practical ways you can grow in the discipline of prayer? Is there someone who can hold you accountable as you seek to grow in this area?*

♀: *What kind of a father did you have? What kind of a father does the Bible say God is? How is that similar to or different from your experience with your own father?*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Father, thank You that I can call You “Father.” Thank You that I can come before You as a child and know I will never be turned away.
- Holy Spirit, show me the ways I seek my own autonomy and self-sufficiency instead of pursuing dependence on God.
- Jesus, thank You for teaching me what dependence on the Father looks like through Your life, death, and resurrection.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 10:42 “Mary has chosen the good portion” also echoes many Old Testament passages (like Psalm 16:5; Psalm 27:4; Psalm 73:26; and Joshua 18:7) that refer to the greatest possession being close fellowship with God.

LUKE 11:2 “Hallowed be your name” means “May your name be honored and treated with reverence.”

LUKE 11:4 This prayer, “forgive us our sins,” is not the initial prayer of salvation, but reflects a life of continual confession of sins. Forgiving the sins of others is fruit of salvation, evidence that a person has been forgiven by God.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and Preaching the Word (Luke).*

