

THE REAL JESUS: HIS MISSION

Week Four | July 29, 2018 | How to Live on Mission

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 12:13–13:9. 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

To participate in God's mission, you must be "heavenly minded."

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Those who are in Christ hold loosely to the things of the world and see their lives through the lens of His mission.

MEDITATE

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

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: Describe the picture that comes to your mind when you hear the word, “missionary.”

“Abandon your posts! Flee for your lives!” This is what Denethor, ruling steward of Gondor, yelled to the troops in the movie, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. When Denethor saw that his son—his heir—was dead and a massive Orc army was approaching the gates of the city, he was convinced it was all over, that the situation was beyond hope. He fell into something Tolkien considered a grievous wrong, despair. Despair is taking stock of a situation and, based on your own understanding, concluding that all hope is lost. You give up. You surrender. You abandon your post and flee.

As soon as Denethor gave the order for the troops to flee, Gandalf clocked him with his staff, knocking him out. Then Gandalf yells to the troops, “Prepare for battle!” Gandalf and Denethor had completely different reactions to the very real circumstances they were facing. Denethor, viewing the situation as an isolated circumstance, despaired and gave up. Gandalf, on the other hand, saw the danger in the context of a broader story and a bigger strategy. He had a much larger vision and was able to see that particular battle through a different lens. His perspective informed the way he faced the situation.

We are invited to participate in God’s mission of redemption. We are called to be part of a story that transcends our individual lives and includes a wide cast of characters. As we live life on mission, we will be faced with crippling obstacles and profound challenges. We will experience danger, pain, and persecution. However, rather than viewing our circumstances as Denethor did, with a myopic vision, we are called to see them as Gandalf does, as part of a greater story in the hands of a sovereign God. Rather than running away from what God has called us to at the first sign of danger, this change in perspective allows us to face it, to “prepare for battle,” because we know the battle has ultimately been won and Christ’s victory is secure. This is what being a “missionary” is all about.

II UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In Luke 12:13–13:9, Jesus does missionary training. All Christians are called to be missionaries, which requires us to view the world through a certain lens and live in a certain way. No matter what context we find ourselves in, we are called to live our lives on mission by holding loosely to the things of the world, viewing everything in light of God’s story of redemption, and being prepared for what we will face on earth and the promised return of Christ.

1. LET GO
2. STAY AWAKE
3. BE PREPARED

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.

LET GO

LUKE 12:13-34

Q: *Why does Jesus say we are not to be anxious about our basic needs?*

Q: *Rather than being anxious, what does He call us to do? What enables us to do this?*

In these verses, Jesus talks a lot about life. He completely reorients it and redefines its priorities, using real-life situations to do so. Verse 13 opens with someone from the crowd exposing their family conflict. He wants Jesus to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him. To even be asking such a question means that there has been a death in the family, most likely their father. Rather than going to Jesus for help in his mourning, this man went to Him for help in making his brother do what he wanted.

Instead of engaging in the family feud, Jesus goes to the heart of the problem, taking the opportunity to talk about centering your life on material possessions. He defines life beyond the way culture generally does. Life is not about stuff. Life is more than what you have. Your possessions do not determine the quality, success, or value of your life. Think about how much of our lives is really motivated by greed and the love of things.

To illustrate His point, Jesus tells the story of a man who has to build a bigger barn to hold all of his stuff. The point is not to stop being a hoarder and become a minimalist. Rather, the point is to stop defining your life

by material possessions and live in a way that keeps eternity in perspective. The house you had or the car you drove will mean nothing when you stand before God, so to place such importance on them now is foolish.

After Jesus says that life is more than material possessions, He swings the other direction and says it's more than the bare necessities too. Some people think the big stuff doesn't matter as long as we have the basic things we need to survive. But Jesus again broadens our definition of life. God sees our lives as far bigger than just our basic needs. If God meets the basic needs of ravens, and we are far more precious to Him than the ravens because we are His image bearers, of course He will be faithful to provide for us. Because we know how valuable we are to Him, we can trust His care for us.

Then, in verses 25–28, Jesus talks about worry. How much worry do we experience when it comes to material possessions and our physical needs? The reality is that we need things to survive. We need food, clothes, a roof over our head, a job, etc. Even though we know if God provides these things for the birds, He will provide them for us, we still face challenges. We still experience the panic of seeing the bank balance plummet and wonder how we will make it to the end of the month. We still feel the burden of affording housing or school tuition. At some point or another, we will all likely worry about how we are going to make it.

Sometimes we think worry is the same as being responsible or thinking ahead or protecting ourselves. But Jesus says it is a completely useless and utterly draining emotion. Worrying helps nothing and only harms the worrier. Jesus tells us to replace worry with trust in the God who cares for the smallest needs of the smallest parts of creation. Worry is based on the delusion of self-sufficiency. Trust is based on dependence on a God who “clothes the grass.” No good thing does He withhold from us and He is faithful to supply our needs. If you need help remembering these truths, just look at the grass and the birds.

Instead of building our lives on our possessions or reducing our lives to bare-bones survival, Jesus illustrates that our lives are valuable to the Creator and He lovingly sustains us. Since our lives are held in His hands, we don't need to spend them trying to survive on our own or earn a sense of value. Instead, we are free to seek first His kingdom, knowing God will provide all the other things, from the bare necessities to the undeserved blessings.

Q: *What would make you consider yourself rich? What would make you consider yourself broke? Are those things in line with what Jesus says in this passage?*

Q: *What things do you worry about? What are the effects of worry in your life? How does worry keep you from being able to live missionally?*

STAY AWAKE

LUKE 12:35–48

Q: *How does Jesus say we should live? How does He say we should not live?*

Wake up. Be alert. See what's going on around you. You're in a war zone. You can't be sluggish, apathetic, naive, or blind. You can't float on the surface or live in an alternate reality. This is the way Jesus tells His followers they are to live missional lives. Being on mission means being in a war zone. Of course, we already know the outcome of the war, so we don't live in suspense or fear. However, we are called to be vigilant and see things through the lens of God's story of redemption.

We are called to be watchful for the coming of Christ. When we know the end is coming, we live the present so much better. We take advantage of every moment and see it's worth. Because the end is coming, that moment is a precious gift. At the same time, because the end is coming, that moment is a blink of an eye compared to all of eternity. As the Psalmist prays, "Teach us to number our days that we might gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). There is something about being aware of the end that teaches us how to live in the present in the most wise and fruitful way.

In verse 40, we are told that we don't know exactly when Jesus will return, so we are to stay ready for His return at all times. Titus 2:13 says the return of the Lord is our "blessed hope," meaning that which we long for with happy anticipation. Instead of placing our hope of happiness on earthly possessions or circumstances, we are called to find it in the coming of Christ and the promise that we will soon be with Him in glory.

So, instead of worrying about our possessions, Jesus calls us to trust God's care for us and set our gaze on His return. When we do, we are able to truly live life on mission, seeking first the kingdom. This perspective doesn't make us so heavenly minded we are of no earthly good. Instead, heavenly-mindedness should make us of the most earthly good. As He says in verses 43–44, we are called to be faithful stewards who are doing His will, proclaiming the gospel with boldness and living kingdom-shaped lives, knowing we will enjoy our ultimate reward for an eternity in heaven.

In verses 45–48, Jesus says we cannot claim to belong to Christ, to be His servants, without doing His will. Living transformed lives on mission is not an option for Christians; it is a command. It is not a unique calling given to a few individuals; it is a call all believers must obey.

Q: *In what ways have you “fallen asleep” in life? If Jesus came back today, would He find you awake, alert, and seeking first His kingdom or would He find you preoccupied with other things?*

Q: *In the parable Jesus tells in verses 42–48, which servant do you believe you are?*

BE PREPARED

■ LUKE 12:49–13:9

Q: *What does Jesus say we should be prepared to face in this life?*

Jesus is incredibly honest and realistic. He doesn't paint pictures of unicorns and rainbows to describe the life of a Christian and the Church. He tells us what it's really going to be like and urges us to be prepared. When we face these things, we shouldn't think God has abandoned us or that something is wrong with our faith. Instead, we should see God has not abandoned us because things are exactly as He said they would be. Likewise, there isn't anything wrong with our faith, because we know those who are in Christ will experience suffering and persecution. He tells us we shouldn't doubt God's goodness when we find ourselves in overwhelming situations. Rather than falling into despair like Denethor, we should see these circumstances with a Gandalf-like vision. Instead of abandoning our posts, we should prepare for the battle.

In verses 49–53, Jesus says we will face distress. Yes, those who are in Christ have the deepest, truest peace there is because their relationship with God is reconciled. However, as Christ *followers*, we too will experience the cross. We too will be abandoned by those who are offended by Christ in us. Following Jesus is costly. For many, it costs them the approval of their family or friends. We are called to be peace makers and to seek reconciliation. As we learned last week, we are to be humble and gracious rather than arrogant and offensive. However, at the end of the day, the cross divides.

We must be prepared to lose even “good” things that are precious to us for the sake of the truth of the gospel and obedience to God’s will. In her book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, Rosaria Butterfield, a former tenured English professor at Syracuse University and active lesbian, recounts her conversion story as a “train wreck.” While some people suggest coming to Jesus is like finding the missing puzzle piece of your life that makes everything perfect, she says “This was my conversion in a nutshell: I lost everything, but my dog.” She says, “Conversion put me in a complicated and comprehensive chaos. I sometimes wonder, when I hear other Christians pray for the salvation of the ‘lost,’ if they realize that this comprehensive chaos is the desired end of such prayers.” The cross doesn’t “complete” our world; it turns our world upside down. It ultimately heals and restores us, but, like any surgery, it does so through a scalpel.

Then, in verses 54–56, Jesus says we should be prepared for hypocrisy. There are seemingly religious people who He says gaze at the sky and predict the weather. In other words, they wax and wane about ideas and concepts, but there is a gap between their ideas and their lives. They hear the Word but they do not do it. Jesus says they are “hypocrites.” They might know right things, but not allowing that truth to be appropriated in their lives means they are not virtuous. They have not been transformed by that truth. Think about how common this is in the church!

Another thing we should be prepared for is strife in the church. In verses 57–59, Jesus says that, out of anger and injustice, we will be tempted to run to secular authorities to help brothers and sisters work out their problems instead of pursuing godly justice first among ourselves. Think about how many people have left the church never to return because they have been burned by strife and injustice. Church hurt can truly be some of the worst hurt. Jesus says we shouldn’t be surprised by strife. We should recognize that sinful people, who are all a work-in-progress, will make a mess of things from time to time. Rather than being blindsided by it, we should know it is a real possibility and guard against it. When it happens, it shouldn’t cause us to crumble or abandon our posts, but persevere in pursuit of unity and reconciliation as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In Luke 13:1–5, Jesus says we should be prepared to face disasters. We will hear of persecution and tragedies. We will hear of corruption and injustice that will cost the lives of our brothers and sisters. When this happens, we are not to doubt God’s goodness or His loving care for His children. We should not despair. Instead, we should see it through the greater vision of the mission of God. We should set our hope on Christ’s return, reminding ourselves that our ultimate happiness and security is in Him. This vision should lead us, like Gandalf, to work and to pursue the mission rather than running away from it. We should recognize that true life comes through repentance, which reconciles us to God, instead of self-preservation.

Finally, in verses 6–9, Jesus says we should have a realistic understanding of ourselves. We are imperfect. Our hearts are “work zones” that are not completed all at once, but slowly transformed and rebuilt over time through the work of the Spirit. We will have seasons of stubbornness when we allow sin to take root in our heart. When that happens, we will not bear fruit. Yet if we are in Christ, we know God will not abandon the work He started in our

hearts. He will be faithful to pursue it to completion. Yet He does so with patience, giving us time to respond and the opportunity to obey. One day, however, our lives will be over and we will give an account to Him. Did we persist in our stubbornness and live a life of fruitlessness? Or did we redeem the time and follow Him in obedience?

- ♀: *What distress have you experienced in life as a result of the cross? How have you processed it in light of the gospel?*
- ♀: *What causes you to be discouraged by the church? What encourages you to not run away but to pursue unity with grace and humility?*
- ♀: *Do you see yourself in Jesus' description of a hypocrite? How can you guard against hearing the Word and not doing it?*
- ♀: *Describe God's sanctifying work in your life. What evidence of God's patience do you see? What evidence of your own stubbornness do you see?*

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.*

- ♀: *Is there a specific shift in perspective you feel called to make as a result of these passages? Is there a way you should live differently in light of them?*
- ♀: *Have you learned more about Jesus, who He really is rather than who you assumed He was, through the study of these passages?*

- Q: *Of the trials Jesus says we should prepare for, which is the most scary to you? Based on what Jesus teaches in the passages we read today, how do you think you should face that fear?*
- Q: *How do these passages prevent you from having an idealistic picture of life? How do they strengthen your faith in an authentic way?*

PRAY

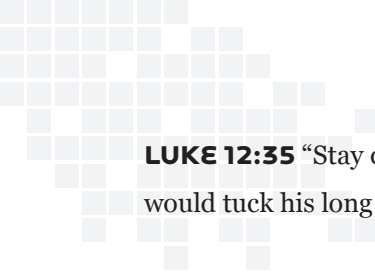
+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Jesus, thank You for speaking to real life and that Your word has the power to transform my real life. Please help me to not be discouraged or lose heart when I experience trials, suffering, and obstacles. Help me set my hope on You, remember that you are coming soon, and redeem the time You've given me to participate in Your mission on earth. Help me not be stubborn and lethargic, but obedient to your voice and alert to the advancement of the kingdom.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 12:19–21 Jesus is not saying wealth in itself is a sin, but the love of wealth is. Those who have wealth will be tempted to complacency, self-sufficiency, and greed. Those who want wealth will be tempted to think it will truly satisfy and make them happy.

LUKE 12:29 Jesus is not saying we are not to work or to be responsible. On the contrary, we are called to be stewards who recognize that the harvest ultimately comes from God rather than from our own hands. This passage specifically addresses worry associated with the fear that God will not provide.



LUKE 12:35 “Stay dressed for action” literally means “Let your loins stay girded.” A man who was prepared to run would tuck his long robe into his belt. This verse uses that image to describe the way we are to live—always ready.

**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).*