

Lessons 151–160

The Teaching of Jesus

Unit **16**

Adult
Student Guide

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Answers Bible Curriculum

Unit 16 • Adult Student

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Contents

Introduction to Answers Bible Curriculum	5
151 Jesus Is the Christ	7
Prepare to Learn	8
Studying God's Word	10
Prayer Requests	12
152 Jesus Is Transfigured	13
Prepare to Learn	14
Studying God's Word	16
Prayer Requests	18
153 Jesus Is the Great I Am	19
Prepare to Learn	20
Studying God's Word	22
Prayer Requests	24
154 Jesus Heals a Blind Man	25
Prepare to Learn	26
Studying God's Word	28
Prayer Requests	30
155 Jesus Teaches in Parables	31
Prepare to Learn	32
Studying God's Word	34
Prayer Requests	36
156 God Seeks Followers	37
Prepare to Learn	38
Studying God's Word	40
Prayer Requests	42
157 Jesus Raises Lazarus	43
Prepare to Learn	44
Studying God's Word	46
Prayer Requests	48

158 Jesus Teaches on Prayer 49
 Prepare to Learn 50
 Studying God’s Word 52
 Prayer Requests. 54

159 Jesus Saves Zacchaeus 55
 Prepare to Learn 56
 Studying God’s Word 58
 Prayer Requests. 60



Introduction to Answers Bible Curriculum

Jesus demonstrated his authority in many ways during his three-year ministry leading up to his crucifixion. Jesus performed many miraculous signs and spoke authoritatively to the crowds. As God the Son, Jesus held authority over all things.

But Jesus didn't just have authority over physical things like sickness and storms. He also had the authority to forgive sins, to defeat death, and to fulfill God's atoning purpose. It was with this divine authority that he taught his disciples.

In the third year of his ministry, Jesus began teaching more plainly about his purpose as the Messiah. He instructed the disciples in private, and he publicly spoke in parables. Many failed to understand his teachings, but many repented and followed him, knowing him to be the Christ.

We encourage you to read the Prepare to Learn section before class each week. This will provide important background information, so that you will get more from each lesson.



Jesus Is the Christ

Lesson Focus

When Jesus asked his disciples who they believed he was, Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus acknowledged the confession by explaining that this spiritual truth had been revealed to him by the Father and that the church would be built on this foundation—Jesus is the Christ.

Key Passages

Matthew 16:13–28

What You Will Learn

- The significance of Peter’s confession of Christ
- The foundation of the church

Memory Verse

John 8:12 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.”

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

For most of the first two years of Jesus' ministry, he traveled around Galilee, speaking with authority and performing signs and wonders. Although Jesus had alluded to who he was and why he had come, few understood the truth of his mission. Through his third year of ministry, Jesus began to reveal more plainly what was coming.

One day, Jesus and his disciples were in Caesarea Philippi, a city north of Galilee at the foot of Mount Hermon. Jesus asked his disciples what people were saying about who he was (Matthew 16:13). The disciples reported that some people thought he was John the Baptist, some said he was Elijah, and others said he was one of the prophets. John had been beheaded by Herod Antipas, but as word about Jesus spread, some thought John had risen from the dead (Mark 6:14–16). Others thought he was Elijah, who must come before the Messiah (Malachi 4:5). They had obviously not heard Jesus apply that title to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14). Others thought he was a prophet, perhaps even thinking of the prophet spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:18. Ironically, the people thought John might be the Christ (Luke 3:15), but they didn't consider that Jesus could be the Christ.

But Jesus was not really concerned with what people were

saying. The real question was, "Who do *you* say that I am?" To that, Peter confessed that he was the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). This was a truth that was only known through spiritual revelation. In fact, Jesus told the disciples not to share that knowledge with anyone else. They were privileged to know many spiritual truths that would not become clear to others until Jesus' purpose was fulfilled.

However, the next passage Matthew records shows Peter rebuking Jesus for speaking of his death. Jesus in turn rebuked Peter, calling him Satan (Matthew 16:21–23). The same Peter who had confessed Jesus as the Christ told him he would not suffer and die. He clearly did not understand the mission of Christ. Jesus could not be the Christ without giving his life as a sacrifice for sins. Jesus told Peter that he was thinking about it as a man, rather than considering the things of God (Matthew 16:23).

Jesus went on to explain that to follow him was contrary to what the world would expect. Jesus explained that to follow him would require a denial of self and a commitment to living for Christ, even if it resulted in suffering and death. Jesus calls his followers to die to self in order to live with Christ (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:5–8).

Historical/Apologetics Background

The Roman Catholic Church has long used this passage (Matthew 16:13–23) to teach that Jesus built his church on the Apostle Peter, who became the bishop of Rome, and subsequently the first pope. This authority that Jesus gave to Peter as Jesus' representative head of the church has then been passed to each pope in what is called apostolic succession. Thus, the pope is seen as the supreme religious authority, the spokesperson of God. However, that interpretation is inconsistent with biblical teaching and cannot be historically corroborated. By the end of the first century, the apostles had died, and their disciples became the leaders of the church. Early in the second century, Ignatius argued that the best defense against heresy and disunity was the bishop. This marked a subtle shift toward centralized authority, and subsequent church leaders expanded the role of the bishop. The formal papal system of hierarchy was introduced by Gregory I, who became bishop of Rome in AD 590. He refused the title of pope for himself, but he organized the governing system that would become the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

Not only did the Roman Catholic understanding of a supreme pope not develop until centuries later, but there is no biblical evidence for such a view. First, the Bible is very clear that Jesus is the leader and foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20) and the head of the body (Colossians

1:18). Peter himself understood Jesus to be the cornerstone of the church (Acts 4:11–13). Neither did Peter teach that the defense against heresy was submission to a bishop. Rather, he taught that believers ought to seek the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:17–18), remembering what God had revealed through his Word (2 Peter 3:2) and being aware that some would twist the teachings of Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). Furthermore, Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for elevating him, Apollos, and Peter (i.e., Cephas) to the level of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:12–13). We can confidently reject the idea that Jesus founded his church on Peter.

There are three legitimate ideas that can be taken from this passage. The rock could refer to Jesus himself, the confession that Jesus is the Christ, or the apostles (of whom Peter was representative). Peter described the believers as stones being built into a spiritual house, founded on the cornerstone of Christ (1 Peter 2:6–8). However, it is his role and purpose as Christ that provides the foundation for the church. The two cannot be separated. Jesus was not just a man, teacher, or prophet. He is the Christ, and it is on this confession that the church is founded. Every blessing given to believers is based on the atoning work of Christ (Ephesians 1:15–23). There is also a sense in which the apostles played a foundational role in the church (Ephesians 2:19–22), but Paul

clarified that the foundation he laid as an apostle was in fact the foundation already laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10).

Jesus is the Christ, the foundation of the church and head of the body, and it is our confession of this truth that leads to salvation (John 20:31).

Studying God's Word

Who do you say Jesus is?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

Matthew 16:13–20

Who Is Jesus? Activity

For each of the statements below, explain why it is insufficient for a truly biblical worldview. Use the scripture provided to get you started.

1. Jesus existed as a real person in history. (John 6:41–42)

2. Jesus was a moral person and a good example. (1 Peter 2:22; John 14:6)

3. Jesus was a good teacher. (Luke 18:19; John 3:1–21)

4. Jesus was a prophet. (1 Timothy 2:5–6; Hebrews 7:22–25)

5. Jesus was the son of God. (John 1:1, 10:20)

Peter Rebukes Jesus

Matthew 16:21–28

Application

1. Who do you say Jesus is?

2. Have you had any misconceptions about who Jesus is and what it means that he is Christ?

3. How can you ensure that your view of Christ is accurate and sufficient?

4. In light of our discussion today, how might your perception of church be inadequate?

5. Do you know anyone who has a false or inadequate view of Jesus?

6. Has there ever been a time that you (intentionally or unintentionally) thought you knew better than God?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Is Transfigured

Lesson Focus

Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a tall mountain, where they saw Jesus in his glory. Moses and Elijah also appeared and spoke with Jesus about his mission. Then the glory of God was manifest in a bright cloud and he spoke, verbally affirming Jesus and his work, calling him his beloved Son. As suddenly as the scene had occurred, all returned to normal and Jesus told the disciples not to tell what they had seen.

Key Passages

Matthew 17:1–13; Acts 2:29–36; 2 Peter 1:3–21;
1 John 3:2–3

What You Will Learn

- How the Father affirmed the Son
- How Jesus is better than the prophets

Memory Verse

John 8:12 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.”

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

About a week after Jesus rebuked Peter for objecting to the messianic plan, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain by themselves. As they were on the mountain, Jesus was transfigured before them. He became radiant, his face shining like the sun (Matthew 17:2), and his clothes became whiter than any clothes on earth could possibly be bleached (Mark 9:3). Then, as if that wasn't startling enough, Moses and Elijah appeared and began speaking to Jesus about his crucifixion (Luke 9:30–31).

True to form, Peter spoke up even though he didn't know what to say (Mark 9:6). He offered to build three tents, one for each of the three men standing before him: Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. Some have suggested that Peter was honoring Moses and Elijah, perhaps even as equal with Jesus, by offering to build a tabernacle for each of the three. However, the Greek word used here is the same word used for any temporary habitation made from cloth. Although some translations use the word tabernacle, it is not necessary to understand these structures to be places of worship. Alternatively, some scholars have suggested that Peter was simply expressing a desire to remain in that place, enjoying the glory and majesty of the scene. It could also be that there is little or no significance in the statement, since Peter didn't even know what he was

saying (Luke 9:33) and there is no clear connection drawn in this passage or elsewhere.

Regardless, God the Father interrupted him, drawing the focus back where it belonged. A bright cloud descended on the mountain and enveloped those present (Luke 9:34). The voice of God the Father spoke from the cloud and identified Jesus as his beloved Son, in whom he was pleased (Matthew 17:5). This is reminiscent of God's affirmation of Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3:17). God also affirmed the authority of Jesus, commanding that he be listened to (Matthew 17:5). When the disciples saw the transfigured Jesus, they were heavy with sleep, but they were able to witness the event (Luke 9:32). But when the cloud descended and the voice of the Almighty thundered, they fell on their faces, terrified (Matthew 17:6). Jesus reassured the disciples and told them to get up. When the men looked around, Moses, Elijah, and the cloud had left, and only Jesus remained.

As they descended the mountain, Jesus instructed them to tell no one about what they had seen until Jesus had risen from the dead (Matthew 17:9). This was not an unusual command, as Jesus had often instructed others to keep secret the truth about who he was. The time had not yet come for the mystery of godliness to be revealed. These three had just seen a glimpse of God's glory, but they still

did not understand the mission for which Jesus had come (Mark 9:10). They surely had many questions on that descent, but the only one recorded for us is about Elijah who

must come first. Jesus confirmed that Elijah would come first, and indeed had already come. The disciples understood that he was talking about John the Baptist (Matthew 17:11–13).

Historical/Apologetics Background

The account of the transfiguration is a short account with very few descriptive details. But what is described parallels many other biblical passages describing God, Jesus, or angelic beings. In the account of the transfiguration, Jesus is described as having a radiant face that shines like the sun and dazzling white clothes that were as light (Matthew 17:2). The glory of God was manifest in a bright cloud (Matthew 17:5).

When John saw his vision of the Son of Man, his face was like the shining of the full-strength sun (Revelation 1:16). We see this idea expressed further in the shining face of Moses. After speaking with God on Mount Sinai, Moses' face shone, and all the people were afraid to come near him. From that time on, Moses wore a veil over his face whenever he came from speaking with God (Exodus 34:29–34). Paul connected Moses' veiled face with the unbelief of the Israelites and explained that Christians do not wear a veil, but boldly reflect the Lord's glory as we are transformed into his image a little at a time (2 Corinthians 3:12–18).

Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). But God manifested his glory throughout history, and at the transfiguration, in what can only be described as a cloud. God came to Moses in a thick cloud on

Mount Sinai so that the people would recognize that God was speaking with Moses (Exodus 19:9 & 16). Just like at the transfiguration, the glory of the Lord dwelt in the cloud, and the Lord spoke from the midst of the cloud (Exodus 24:16). After the ark of the covenant was built, God appeared in a cloud over the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:2). The cloud of God's glory also covered the tent of meeting, and when the cloud lifted, the Israelites broke camp. In this way God dwelt with the Israelites and led them throughout their journeys (Exodus 40:34–38). Similarly, the presence of God and his glory is accompanied by a cloud throughout the Bible (1 Kings 8:10–11; Isaiah 6:4; Ezekiel 10:3–4; Revelation 15:8). In the New Testament, God's glorious presence is also depicted as a bright light (Luke 2:9; Acts 9:3–6). Although the term is not found in the Bible, this manifestation has been called the shekinah glory of God. Shekinah is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “the one who dwells.” Rabbinic literature used the term to describe the immanent presence of God.

We can praise God that he has manifested his glory, which is revealed in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4–6), the radiance of God's glory and exact imprint of his nature (Hebrews 1:3).



Studying God's Word

How is Jesus better than the prophets?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Jesus Is Transfigured

Matthew 17:1–13

The Law and the Prophets Activity

Skim through the book of Hebrews and locate the quotations cited from the Old Testament.

1. Record citations in the space provided. The first citation is done for you.

Hebrews 1:5 (Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14)

2. How many different books were cited?

3. What genres of books are cited from?

4. Choose two or three of the citations and explain how the Old Testament quotation pointed to the coming Messiah. Consider how it would have been received at the time and how the writer of Hebrews applied it to Jesus.

Believers Are Transformed

2 Peter 1:16–21

2 Peter 1:3–16

1 John 3:2–3

Application

1. How might you respond to someone who said that the transfiguration didn't really happen?
2. How does the event of the transfiguration reassure you of the hope you have in Christ?
3. Why is it important to understand that all the Law and the Prophets point to Jesus?
4. Which of the qualities mentioned by Peter do you need most to work on? How might you pursue that quality in your life?
5. Have you even been transformed—repented of your sin, confessed Jesus as the Christ, and submitted to him as Savior and Lord?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Is the Great I Am

Lesson Focus

Jesus revealed his identity as God when he proclaimed, “Before Abraham was, I am.” The Jewish leaders were astonished and upset because they knew Jesus was saying he was God. Jesus also described himself with word pictures that made the claim “I am.” I am the door; I am the way, the truth, and the life; and I am the good shepherd, to name a few. Jesus wanted people to know he was God.

Key Passages

Exodus 3:14; John 8:12–59, 18:1–9

What You Will Learn

- How Jesus claimed to be God in the “I am” statements
- The word pictures Jesus used to refer to himself

Memory Verse

John 8:12 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.”

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

The scribes and Pharisees were offended at what Jesus was doing and saying—especially at his claim that he came from God and was sent by God (John 8:42). They questioned how he could say that those who would keep the word of Jesus would never see death (John 8:51), since even Abraham was dead (John 8:53). And yet, Jesus was claiming to be greater than Abraham. He answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

This enraged those arguing with him, and they picked up stones to throw at him. These scribes and Pharisees were well versed in the Old Testament and recognized God’s words to Moses at the burning bush when God said, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Of course, this is a name only the holy Creator God could have as it denotes complete independence and self-existence. In his self-existence, he is all-sufficient. He needs no one! It denotes eternity, one who always was and always will be. It could only describe the one true God. And this was Jesus’ testimony—I am God.

John recorded seven more instances where Jesus made the claim, “I am,” to confirm that he is God in human form and the promised Messiah who would save his people from their sins. How did Jesus, the God-man, describe himself?

- “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). He is essential to life—not just physical life but eternal life.
- “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). There is no other source of spiritual light or truth. He alone can explain all things.
- “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7). Salvation comes from no one else. Eternal life comes through him alone—the only door.
- “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11; see Ezekiel 34). There is only one good shepherd who gave his life for his sheep.
- “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). There is no resurrection or life without Jesus. He has conquered death forever.
- “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus again claimed himself to be exclusive—he alone promises eternal life with God the Father.
- “I am the true vine” (John 15:1, 15:5). We must abide in the vine—Jesus—in order to bear fruit. And just like a branch cut off from the vine cannot continue to grow, we can do nothing without abiding in Jesus Christ (John 15:4–5).

Jesus is God. His claims to be “I am” left no doubt in the minds of the unbelieving Jews. They accused him of blasphemy, and the Bible records several times when the Jews attempted to stone Jesus because he made himself equal with God (John

5:18, 8:59, 10:33). They did not succeed those times. But eventually God's perfect plan of redemption through Jesus would be fulfilled. And

Christ would be crucified because of his rightful claim that he is the great I AM, God in human form, the King of the Jews (John 19:19).

Historical/Apologetics Background

The truth that Jesus is God in the flesh, the second person of the Trinity, and fully divine is an explicit teaching of the New Testament (e.g., John 8; Colossians 1-2; Hebrews 1-2). And this has been the dominant, orthodox view of the Christian church since its inception. However, there have been challenges to this truth in the past as well as today.

Arius, a teacher in the early fourth century AD, did not believe that Jesus was truly God in the flesh. Arius taught that Jesus was a created being with divine attributes but was not divine himself. This view came to be called Arianism. The teachings of Arius had a significant impact on the early church, which resisted the heresy by creating many of the early creeds that defined the biblical, orthodox view of Jesus' nature.

Though Arius was labeled as a heretic, his ideas did not die out completely. In fact, there are modern-day groups that deny the full divinity of Jesus. One of these groups is the Jehovah's Witnesses. Founded in the mid-nineteenth century by Charles Taze Russell, this false religion claims several million adherents around the world. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus was the first creation of God, thus denying his deity and eternal preexistence. They also teach that before

his birth, Jesus was the archangel Michael. They claim that 2,000 years ago, God transferred the life of Jesus to Mary's womb. Though adherents to this false religion may seem sincere and persuasive, we must be on our guard against their teaching and point them to the biblical truth about Jesus.

Another group that denies the full deity of Jesus Christ is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), or Mormons. According to Mormon beliefs, the Heavenly Father dwells on a planet with his many spirit wives, producing numerous spirit children who await to inhabit physical bodies. Jesus was first begotten as a spirit, the firstborn offspring of Heavenly Father (Elohim) and one of his heavenly wives. Jesus' incarnation is taught to be the result of sexual relations between the Heavenly Father (who has a physical body) and Mary. Again, despite the good image that Mormons may have in their communities and the zeal with which they seek converts, their beliefs are opposed to God's Word, and we must seek to share the truth with them.

But the Bible is clear that Jesus is the great I AM. Jesus must be God in order to accomplish eternal salvation for sinners. The weak Jesus of the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses,

and others (e.g., Islam) cannot offer forgiveness of sins and save sinners. When Jesus is believed to be a mere

man, stripped of his deity, the atoning effect of his death is also stripped of any and all eternal significance.

Studying God's Word

Did Jesus ever claim to be God?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Jesus Is Before Abraham

John 8:12–59

Jesus I Am Activity

For each of the following passages, identify the metaphor Jesus used to describe himself (keeping the context in mind), write a short description of what you learn about Jesus, and identify any attributes of God that are connected to this description.

1. John 6:35, 6:41, 6:51, 6:58

2. John 8:12

3. John 8:58

4. John 10:7, 10:9

5. John 10:11

6. John 11:25

7. John 14:6

8. John 15:1, 15:5

Jesus Is God

John 18:1–9

Application

1. What did you learn about the unity of the testimony of Scripture as we examined these passages today?

2. As we have worked through this lesson, what doubts or questions have come to light?

3. As you consider one of the key ideas you learned today, is there a brother or sister in Christ you can share this with as a way to encourage him or her in the faith?

4. Some people believe that Jesus never claimed to be God. How can you use the passages we have studied today to show them the error in their thinking?

5. Once we have shown people that Jesus clearly claimed to be God, what is the next essential step we must take?



Prayer Requests

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Jesus Heals a Blind Man

Lesson Focus

Jesus healed a man who had been blind. The Pharisees objected to this healing because it had been done on the Sabbath. The man's parents refused to testify about what had happened for fear of the Jews, but the blind man boldly explained how Jesus had given him sight. After he was thrown out of the synagogue, Jesus revealed himself as the Son of Man, and the man worshipped him as Lord. Jesus had granted him spiritual sight as well.

Key Passages

John 9:1–41; 2 Corinthians 3:1–18, 4:1–6

What You Will Learn

- How Jesus healed a man born blind
- The response of the Jews versus the healed man

Memory Verse

John 8:12 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.”

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

We have been looking at passages that declare the deity of Jesus. We have seen the deity of Christ revealed through the confession of Peter (Matthew 16:13–20), the transfiguration and affirmation of Jesus (Matthew 17:1–12), and the claims of Jesus himself (John 8:58). The deity of Christ is also displayed in the miraculous healing recorded in John 9. This miracle concerned a man who had been blind from birth. The disciples wondered if the reason that this man was born blind was because he or his parents had sinned. Jesus replied, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:3). This man’s blindness was not a direct result of personal sin, but it was given that Jesus might heal his blindness, displaying the glory of God and his own deity.

Jesus spit on the ground to make mud, which he spread on the man’s eyes. Then he told the man to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The man came back seeing, which caused a stir among his neighbors. The neighbors took the man to the Pharisees, and he told them what happened. Because the healing occurred on the Sabbath, the Pharisees wanted to find this healer. As part of their questioning, the Jews asked the man’s parents to verify the account. The parents verified

that he had been blind from birth and he now could see, but they refused to speak to the healing itself because they were afraid of being thrown out of the synagogue (John 9:21–23). The healed man did not at first know who had healed him, but he believed him to be a prophet (John 9:17) and apparently had devoted himself to being his disciple (John 9:27).

The Pharisees mocked him, claiming superiority because they were disciples of Moses, to whom they knew God spoke (John 9:28–29). The man reasoned that the healer must be a man of God to perform such miracles, but the Pharisees pridefully rejected this conclusion. They claimed he had no right to teach them, since he was born in sin—an inaccurate statement according to Jesus (John 9:3)—and they were experts in the law. Instead, they cast him out of the synagogue (John 9:34).

After he had been cast out, Jesus found him and revealed himself as the Son of Man. The healed man immediately believed in and worshipped him (John 9:35–38). Jesus told him that he had come to give sight to the blind and to blind those who see (John 9:39). He had healed the man physically and spiritually, but the Pharisees were blinded to the truth of Jesus.

Historical/Apologetics Background

One interesting nugget in this account is found in the opening verses. When the disciples saw the blind man, they immediately wondered if his blindness was a result of his sin or his parents (John 9:2). This was a common understanding of the time. God told Moses that although he was merciful and slow to anger, he would visit iniquity to the fourth generation (Exodus 34:6-7). There are also clear examples of when sickness or disease were directly related to individual sin, like when Naaman's leprosy was applied to Gehazi and his descendants (2 Kings 5:27). Further, all sickness and disease is a result of sin in the general sense of the corruption that occurred after Adam and Eve sinned. However, there are also very clear examples of suffering that were clearly not a result of sin, as in the case of Job. Jesus clearly denied that the blind man's affliction was because of the sin of the man or his parents. He was blind so that God could be glorified through him.

In the middle section of this account, we see three types of responses to Jesus. First, we see the man who, having experienced the healing of Jesus, was receptive to the message that Jesus was the Son of Man (John 9:38) and was willing to receive the punishment of man (John 9:34). Second, we see the Pharisees, who so wanted to reject Jesus that they tried every way they could to discredit the miracle, and when that failed, they ridiculed the man and cast him out of the synagogue. Third, we see the man's parents.

While they were not adamant about rejecting Jesus, they were afraid of the judgment of men more than the judgment of God. As we've seen before, there are only two responses to Jesus. By failing to confess Jesus, they were rejecting him.

John 9 also includes contrasting ideas of light and darkness, which are often used in Scripture as a metaphor for understanding. Similarly, blindness and sight are used in both a physical and spiritual sense. Before healing the man, Jesus claimed to be the light of the world (John 9:5), and at the end, he speaks of the blind who see and the seeing who are blind (John 9:39-41). It is Jesus, the light of the world, who gives spiritual sight to those who recognize that they are blind. But those who, like the Pharisees, believe they can already see are blinded to their need for the Savior. Spiritual things cannot be discerned by the natural person but require the revelation of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).

Ironically, the man who could not see the works of Jesus was the one who was ready to believe in him. The ones who had witnessed the works of Jesus refused to believe he was the Christ. Jesus told his disciples if they couldn't believe him, to believe in the works the Father had done through him (John 14:11). His works were a clear testimony that he was sent from the Father (John 5:36). But the Pharisees refused to believe even the works they had seen. Their sight had made them blind, and their guilt remained (John 9:41).



Studying God's Word

Where does sight come from?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Jesus Gives Physical Sight

John 9:1–41

Spiritual Blindness Activity

1. Read Isaiah 6:9–10. What is this passage saying?
2. Read Matthew 13:13–15. Explain the context and how Isaiah 6:9–10 applies to it.
3. Read John 12:37–40. Explain the context and how Isaiah 6:9–10 applies to it.
4. Read Acts 28:25–28. Explain the context and how Isaiah 6:9–10 applies to it.

5. What additional citations or cross-references did you notice?

6. What can we conclude about spiritual blindness? Hint: also consider 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12; Romans 1:21.

Jesus Gives Spiritual Sight

John 9:39

2 Corinthians 3:1–18

2 Corinthians 4:1–6

Application

1. In light of our lesson today, what questions or comments do you have? Have you learned anything or understood something better because of this lesson?

2. How have you, like the blind man's parents, loved the glory of man more than the glory of God?
3. Has there ever been an occasion when you had to be willing to give up something of this world to follow Jesus?
4. Do you know any people who think they have spiritual sight but are looking to the wrong source for understanding? How might you approach them with the truth of the gospel?
5. How often do you ask God to give you understanding and insight into his spiritual truths?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Teaches in Parables

Lesson Focus

Jesus taught the crowds with parables to separate those who wanted the truth from those who didn't. A parable is an earthly story that depicts a heavenly truth. Jesus explained the deeper, spiritual truth in his parables to his disciples. But those who didn't want to hear were blinded to the meaning of Jesus' teachings.

Key Passages

Matthew 13:10–16; Luke 10:25–37

What You Will Learn

- Why Jesus taught in parables
- The meaning of various parables

Memory Verse

John 8:12 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."

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

One of the hallmarks of the teaching of Jesus was his use of parables. A parable is a story or narrative drawn from nature or human circumstances from which spiritual lessons can be made by comparison. Or to put it simply, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Depending on which ones you include, between 35 and 45 different parables of Jesus are recorded in the Gospels. Some of these were longer stories, including popular ones such as the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), and the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). Other parables were short, pithy statements, such as, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened” (Matthew 13:33).

But why did Jesus teach in parables? There are two reasons given in the Bible: to conceal and to reveal. Jesus said that he taught in parables to conceal the truth from certain people and to reveal it to others. By resorting to parables, Jesus effectively separated the truth-seekers from the merely curious. Those seeking the truth would say, “Explain to us the parable . . .” (Matthew 13:36). The truths were heard by unbelievers, but the meaning was hidden because they did not want to hear.

In this way, Jesus’ use of parables was a form of divine judgment. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 6:9–10 and explained that because the people’s hearts had become dull and because they had closed their ears and eyes, God was going to speak to them in a way that they would not understand. So Jesus taught them in parables. In a way only God could contrive, the very things that were useful to reveal and make clear the truths about the kingdom to those willing to hear were also used to conceal truths about the kingdom from those who would not believe.

About the middle of his ministry, Jesus started teaching the crowds almost exclusively in parables. Mark tells us that he did not speak to them without a parable and that when he was alone with his disciples, he would explain the meaning of his teachings (Mark 4:33–34). However, those who had persisted in rejecting his message were left in their spiritual blindness. The Apostle Paul later described those blinded to the truth as “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). They would never understand the words of Jesus (Matthew 13:13). But his disciples (except for Judas Iscariot) accepted his truth and so were given more to know, understand, and believe (Matthew 13:12).

Historical/Apologetics Background

The Bible often uses allegory as a literary device. In the Old Testament, God speaks of his people Israel using images of a vineyard (Isaiah 5:6–7) and a flock of sheep (Ezekiel 34). Jesus refers to himself as a shepherd (John 10:11) and a vine (John 15:1–6). Paul takes a historical event from the Old Testament (Hagar and Sarah) and uses it as an allegory for law and grace (Galatians 4:21–31). While the Bible uses allegories to teach truth, we must not confuse the literary device of allegory with the hermeneutic of allegorizing Scripture.

Soon after the completion of the New Testament, early Christians began interpreting the text allegorically. They proposed many symbolic meanings that neither Jesus nor the biblical authors ever intended. It wasn't until the time of the Reformation in the 1500s that a return to a more literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation began to take hold. Luther, Calvin, and others criticized the excesses of allegorical interpretation, but it remained popular among many Christian scholars and writers into the nineteenth century.

More recently, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there has been an increased interest in understanding the parables as the original hearers would have understood them, focusing on the main point of the parables—God's kingdom coming through the reign of the Messiah.

We must be careful in interpreting the meaning of parables. Sometimes,

as in the parable of the sower, Jesus provides the explanation (Matthew 13:18–22), but often the hearers are left to discern the meaning. Here are a few basic principles for trying to understand the parables of Jesus and interpret them properly:

- **Determine the main point of the parable.** Most parables have one main point, though they may have a couple sub points. To get to the main point, ask yourself a few questions: Who are the main characters? What occurs at the end? What or who gets the most consideration in the parable? To whom is the parable directed? What is the context in which Jesus gave it?
- **Recognize standard imagery used in the parables.** For example, God is often symbolized as a master, a father, a judge, or a king. A vineyard or a fig tree usually refers to Israel. The harvest refers to the judgment. An enemy is typically the devil.
- **Note striking or unexpected details of the parable.** Jesus' parables are filled with striking details, unexpected twists, shocking statements, and surprise outcomes. When such attention-getting components occur, pay attention because an important point is being made.
- **Do not press every detail for meaning.** The many details in a parable are usually given to make the story memorable and interesting. Typically, there is one

central figure (or two) and one main point. Attempting to interpret every individual detail will lead one to an allegorical reading.

- **Pay attention to the literary and historical context of the parable.**

The authors of the Gospels often give clues to the meaning of a parable by including information about why Jesus uttered that parable or by grouping together parables on similar topics.

Studying God's Word

Why did Jesus teach using parables?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

The Purpose of Parables

Matthew 13:10–16

Unpacking Parables Activity

When Jesus taught in parables, he was using a story as an analogy to point to a spiritual truth. As we seek to understand the parables in the Bible, we need to practice good hermeneutics (biblical interpretation) to avoid falling into error or stretching a text beyond what it was meant to convey. In this activity, you will find some broad principles for interpreting parables along with some examples from the text to illustrate those principles. In the spaces provided, summarize your findings.

1. Parables typically convey one main point. Read Matthew 13:33. What is the main point? Would this point change if there were eight measures of meal? Do the three measures of meal relate to the Trinity?

2. When parables come in groups, they often teach the same point in different ways. Look at the parables in Matthew 13:24–52. What is the common teaching of each of these parables? (Look at verses 24, 31, 33, 43, 44, 45, and 47.)

3. There are elements common to parables that are to be understood in different ways. What does the leaven represent in Matthew 13:33? What does the leaven represent in Matthew 16:5–12?

4. Some parables have one character intended to represent God. Read Luke 7:40–43. Which character in the parable is intended to represent God?

5. There is often one character who responds rightly and one who responds wrongly. Read Luke 18:9–14. What two responses to God are indicated in this parable?

6. Parables are given for a reason, and the context of the parable helps us understand the teaching. Read Luke 12:13–21. Why did Jesus tell this parable? Is this parable a condemnation of building barns?

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25–37

Application

1. As you think about what we learned about parables, what misconceptions do you see in how you looked at parables in the past? Or, what questions do you still have about approaching a parable to draw out its meaning?

2. In what way was the use of parables a kindness to those who rejected Jesus' teaching or did not understand it?

3. What is the danger in approaching the biblical parables as allegories, seeking to draw out extensive ideas from the smallest details in the stories?

4. How could using the parables of Jesus be a helpful evangelism strategy with those who are unsaved?



Prayer Requests



God Seeks Followers

Lesson Focus

Jesus taught his disciples what was expected of them, if they were to follow him. Following Jesus means a life of self-denial and sacrifice. True disciples of Jesus are men and women who are willing to put him first—above all the things and people of this world.

Key Passages

Luke 14:25–35; Matthew 8:18–22, 10:16–39, 16:24–27, 22:36–40

What You Will Learn

- What Jesus requires of his followers
- The difference between making disciples and discipleship

Memory Verse

Matthew 16:24–25 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

As we have seen throughout his ministry, Jesus came to seek the lost (Luke 19:10). The Pharisees were so concerned with their own apparent righteousness that they despised and avoided those considered to be sinners. But Jesus had come to call sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). We see this focus in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son (Luke 15:1–32). God is loving and merciful toward sinners, rejoicing when they are found (Luke 15:10).

But Jesus didn't just seek converts; he sought followers—true disciples. As Jesus taught, it became clear that what he asked of his followers was costly. And because of his demands, many turned away from him.

Jesus said the first and the greatest commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and others as yourself (Matthew 22:37–40). Love the Lord your God completely. That is the simple—but difficult—requirement of true discipleship.

Jesus asks much of his followers—more than just learning about him. He wants us to deny ourselves, to lose our lives, and to forsake the things of the world (Matthew 16:24–26). This is a call for submission and obedience to his Word

(John 14:23). This is a call to put Jesus above the people in our lives that are dearest to us—father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters—and to love the Lord Jesus Christ so much that we would be willing to give up our very lives for him (Luke 14:26).

Jesus said, whoever “does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). The biblical principle in this is not to get rid of all that you own but to live your life as evidence that you love God more than anything else. Jesus' disciples endeavor to live their lives so that nothing would distract from their love, obedience, and submission to their Savior and God.

Jesus requires that we put aside our own selfish desires and ambitions and that we mimic Christ in his obedience to God (Philippians 2:4–8). For his sake, we must be willing to forsake the world and all it offers (1 John 2:15–17).

If we are to be true disciples of Jesus Christ, we must live our lives with the intention and the longing to put Jesus Christ above everything and everyone else in our lives. Our strongest desire should be to please him—the one who died and rose again for sinners. As disciples, we should long for his fellowship and seek to know him better each day.

Historical/Apologetics Background

The gospel is not only the entry point into the Christian life but also the foundation and source for all we do as disciples of Jesus. The gospel—the good news of what God has graciously done in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to secure forgiveness of sins and perfect righteousness for all who trust in him—should inform, control, and empower all we do.

“Do-it-yourself,” “pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps” spirituality has no place in Christianity. We sometimes think that sanctification is really all about what we do, how we live, and how disciplined we are. While it is true that we have an active role to play in our sanctification, that does not mean relying on the flesh but walking in the Spirit—the Holy Spirit who indwells and strengthens us to do God’s will (Galatians 5).

Paul wrote: “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). These words assure us as Christians that what God started in us, he will finish. While some teach that we can achieve perfection in this life and be completely free from the presence of sin, Scripture is clear that it will not be completed until the Lord Jesus returns. Even Paul, at the end of his life, called himself the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). While Christians should experience ever-increasing victory over sin as they mature, it is not until we are glorified at the resurrection that

we will be perfectly conformed into the image of Jesus.

God’s purpose or goal for each of his disciples is Christlikeness (Romans 8:29). One way that God conforms believers into the image of Christ is through the work and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. When we were saved, we were indwelt by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:13). The indwelling Spirit of God gives us the inner spiritual resources to overcome sin. He gives us the desires and abilities to resist temptation and overcome it.

Scripture often speaks of our responsibility to obey Jesus, to pursue holiness, and yet it also speaks of the Spirit’s role in accomplishing our sanctification. For example, Philippians 2:12–13 tells us to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” and yet it tells us that ultimately it is “God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” We work and strive, but ultimately it is not our working that brings about our spiritual growth.

The demands of Jesus Christ on his disciples are strenuous. But those of us who accept the grace of the gospel realize that these demands provoke us to lean on God and the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish what he asks. The truth is, because of the influence of indwelling sin, we will continually have to fight the flesh (Romans 7:17–20). And as we meditate on these difficult truths, we understand Paul’s proclamation in Romans 7:24–25 where he clearly

shows the battle we are in, but that must always end with the gospel message. “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Studying God’s Word

What is the cost of being a disciple of Jesus?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Deny Yourself

Luke 14:25–35

Matthew 8:18–22

Matthew 22:36–40

Growing in Holiness Activity

Read the passages below and record what each has to say about pursuing holiness. Then describe the process of sanctification based on what you’ve learned.

- Romans 8:12–14

- Romans 12:1–2

- Galatians 5:16–26
 - Philippians 2:12–13
 - 2 Thessalonians 2:13–15
 - 1 John 1:8–2:6
1. How would you describe the process of growing in holiness (progressive sanctification) in light of your role and the role of the Holy Spirit?

Take Up Your Cross

Matthew 10:16–39

Matthew 16:24–26

Application

1. In what areas has it been the hardest for you to die to your own desires and live for Jesus?

2. Is it possible for someone to live like and look like a disciple of Jesus but not be a true disciple, fully submitted to Christ as Savior and Lord?
3. How does this idea of counting the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus relate to the parable of the sower that we discussed a few weeks ago?
4. What role should the cost of discipleship play in evangelism and seeking to call people to be disciples of Jesus?
5. We are commanded to teach others to obey the commands of Jesus. To what authority should we point them to know what Jesus commanded?
6. What role do you have in calling disciples (evangelism) and teaching disciples to obey (discipleship)?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Raises Lazarus

Lesson Focus

Jesus wasn't there when Lazarus died. He knew he would glorify God by raising Lazarus from the dead. But his disciples didn't understand until Jesus called Lazarus from the grave. Jesus is God and can bring the dead to life. He can also give eternal life to those who are dead in sin.

Key Passages

John 11; Ephesians 2:1–10

What You Will Learn

- The purpose for which Lazarus got sick and died
- How sinners go from death to life

Memory Verse

Matthew 16:24–25 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

Jesus came to do the will of the Father and to glorify him. He had power over nature (Matthew 14:25–30), over disease (John 9:6–7), and to forgive sins (Mark 2:5). His miracles showed that he was God in the flesh, the Creator, the Messiah, and the Son of God.

Jesus also confirmed who he was by raising the dead—something only the one true living God could do. Jesus found out by a messenger that his friend Lazarus, who was in Bethany near Jerusalem, was sick. Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary (John 11:5). Jesus had already shown that he could heal the sick, so the announcement that Lazarus was sick was probably accompanied by a request that Jesus heal him. His first reaction was to assure his disciples that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death. In fact, Jesus knew Lazarus' sickness would result in the glory of God—that the Son of God [Jesus] would be glorified through it (John 11:4). This is the same purpose Jesus gave for healing the blind man recorded in John 9 (John 9:3).

But another purpose for this miracle is revealed when Jesus stated clearly that the miracle he was soon to perform would strengthen the disciples' faith in him (John 11:14–15). After waiting two days, Jesus made his way to Bethany. Once there and amidst mourning

family and friends, he took control of the situation. For the glory of God his Father and so the people would believe God sent him, he called for dead Lazarus to come out from his grave (John 11:40–43).

As we reflect on Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, it is good to consider the resurrection from death—in the spiritual sense—that all believers experience when we hear Jesus calling us to follow him (Matthew 4:19). The analogy is made for us in Ephesians. Because of our sin nature, we were all children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). We have rebelled against the holy Creator God and are deserving of his eternal punishment (Romans 1:18–20). But it doesn't end there, just as it didn't end in death for Jesus' friend Lazarus. No, Paul told us that God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love for us, can make us alive together with Christ. God can make a sinner alive in Christ even though he is dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:4–5). God does this through the free gift of grace through faith in the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8).

This journey from spiritual death to eternal life is available to all who will humbly accept the truth of the gospel, to all who will turn in repentance toward God and in faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

Historical/Apologetics Background

Jesus delayed visiting Lazarus when he was sick, knowing that Lazarus would die. Though he could have healed Lazarus (even from a distance), he told his disciples that he was glad he was not there. Jesus anticipated the sign he would perform for his disciples, that they might believe (John 11:11–15).

But when Jesus arrived in Bethany and saw the family and friends of Lazarus grieving, why did Jesus weep (John 11:33–35)? He certainly knew that Lazarus would soon be alive again—it was for this purpose that he had come to Bethany. A closer look at the Greek words behind this scene helps us understand the emotions of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus.

Jesus was affected by the grief of his close friend Mary and the rest of the Jews who were lamenting with her and Martha. When we read that we are to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), we can clearly see that our Lord and Savior demonstrated that kind of empathy here. However, in contrast to the loud wailing of the mourners, the Greek word used for Jesus' weeping conveys a quiet bursting into tears. Jesus' tears were caused both by his love for Lazarus and by his grief over the deadly and unremitting effects of sin in a fallen world. Verse 35, though the shortest verse in the Bible, is rich with meaning. It emphasizes Jesus' humanity; he was truly "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3).

Additionally, we can infer from the text that Jesus was grieved over death as the result of mankind's sin. Because Adam directly disobeyed God's command not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God punished all humanity beginning with Adam (Genesis 3:19). John 11:33 says that Jesus "was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled." The Greek word for "deeply moved" here literally means "to snort like a horse," implying anger and indignation. It means that Jesus wasn't so much sad at the scene surrounding the tomb of Lazarus as he was angry. Jesus was angry and troubled at the ravages of the great enemy of man: death. Death is an intruder, and Jesus won't settle for this domination of death much longer.

As Christians, we often forget that death is an enemy. While it is true that when a fellow believer dies we do not sorrow as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13), we, nevertheless, must remember that death is unnatural. It is not what God created but came about because of Adam's sin and rebellion. In raising Lazarus, Jesus showed a small glimpse of this ultimate defeat of death. Jesus had the power to raise the dead, and soon thereafter, he went to the cross to defeat death. Death has been abolished (2 Timothy 1:10), and one day it will be destroyed forever (Revelation 20:14).



Studying God's Word

Have you ever been raised from the dead?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

Jesus Hears Lazarus Is Sick

John 11:1–27

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Jesus Raises Lazarus

John 11:28–57

.....

.....

Spiritual Resurrection Activity

Read the following passages, and draw some connections between the account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead and the new life given to sinners who repent and believe in Jesus.

- Psalm 51:5

- Romans 5:12

- Ephesians 2:1–10

- Colossians 1:13–14

- Colossians 2:11-14

- John 3:5-8

- John 10:25-30

1. Now that we have read the account of the raising of Lazarus and these passages about receiving spiritual life, write a short summary explanation of the parallel connections between the two.

2. How does this relate to your own experience of salvation?

3. How does this understanding influence your worship of Jesus?

Application

1. As we have discussed these passages today, what has been most helpful to you?

2. How could you use the account of Lazarus to help someone understand that Jesus was not just a man but God in the flesh?

3. How does understanding our spiritual condition before we found salvation in Christ help us to offer God the worship he is due?

4. How does the world (the enemies of God) seek to quiet or cover up the witness that a Christian has regarding their resurrection from spiritual death? What can we do about it?

5. Many people claim that seeing a miracle would surely convince them that God exists. Based on the account we read today, is this a true statement?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Teaches on Prayer

Lesson Focus

Jesus used parables to teach his followers about prayer. The parable of the persistent widow taught that the disciples should pray always and not lose heart while awaiting the justice of the Lord. In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus contrasted a self-righteous attitude of prayer with the humble repentance of one who recognized his sin and need of the Savior.

Key Passages

Luke 11:5–13, 18:1–14; Matthew 6:5–13

What You Will Learn

- How believers must be persistent in prayer
- The difference between the heart attitudes of the Pharisee and the tax collector

Memory Verse

Matthew 16:24–25 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

Jesus came to live on the earth for the purpose of redeeming sinners through his death and resurrection. This is the gospel message that God revealed throughout the Old Testament and through the life of Christ. Although Jesus' ultimate purpose was to suffer and die to satisfy the wrath of God, he also lived a life full of purpose. During his earthly ministry, Jesus taught his followers, among other things, how to live a life that is pleasing to God. One aspect of a godly life is prayer.

Jesus provided a perfect example of prayer. As the perfect Son of God, Jesus had a perfect relationship with God the Father. Part of that relationship was communication through prayer. Jesus spent time in prayer often during his earthly sojourn. We are often told that he withdrew to desolate places to pray (Luke 5:16). On more than one occasion, he spent an extended amount of time in prayer (Luke 6:12). He gave thanks before eating (Mark 8:6), prayed for others (Matthew 19:13), and prayed about God's plan for his life (Matthew 26:39). As we saw a few weeks ago, he prayed before raising Lazarus from the dead so that people would understand that God the Father had sent him (John 11:41–42).

Not only did Jesus exemplify a life of prayer, but he offered specific teaching on the topic. As Jesus was teaching very late in his third year

of ministry, he gave a parable to his disciples to teach them that they should pray faithfully and patiently, not losing heart (Luke 18:1). A widow had been wronged and brought her case before the judge. The judge was unrighteous, having no fear of God or man. He did not at first provide a just ruling for the widow. But she continued to present her case before the judge until he eventually provided judgment so that she would quit bothering him (Luke 18:2–5). Jesus used this story to explain that God would be faithful to provide justice and that his disciples should remain patient and faithful in prayer, so that they might be found faithful when the Son of Man came (Luke 18:6–8).

Jesus told another parable to reveal the attitude behind the act of prayer. Some of his listeners were trusting in themselves for righteousness and were treating others with contempt because they seemed to be less righteous (Luke 18:9). In this parable, a Pharisee went to the temple to pray. As he prayed, he exalted himself, believing himself to be more righteous than others who were known by their evil acts (Luke 18:10–12). He was trusting in his works for righteousness. But another man, a tax collector, also went to the temple to pray. This man approached God in humility and repentance. He recognized that he was sinful and cried out to God

for forgiveness (Luke 18:13). Jesus explained that the repentant sinner was the one justified rather than the self-righteous Pharisee (Luke 18:14).

Prayer is an important part of the Christian life. As Jesus modeled in his own life and in the pattern he gave to

the disciples (Matthew 6:9–13), our focus in prayer should be to honor God and bring glory to him, trusting him to be faithful in fulfilling his promises and humbly looking to him for justification.

Historical/Apologetics Background

One day as Jesus finished praying, his disciples asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). Jesus responded by giving them a model prayer (Luke 11:2–4). This was not meant to be a magical chant or repetitive mantra. In fact, Matthew recorded the Lord's prayer immediately after Jesus condemned the Gentiles for praying with empty phrases (Matthew 6:5–13). Rather, this model prayer can be seen as a pattern for how to approach God in prayer:

Father—When we pray, we are talking to God, our Father. As Christians, we have an intimate relationship with the Father, adopted as his child (1 John 3:1), and we can approach the throne of grace boldly (Hebrews 4:16).

Hallowed be your name—Hallowed means to honor as holy. The first and primary focus of this prayer is to praise and honor the holy God. To reflect on the holiness of God is to reflect on who God is, on his attributes that set him apart from humanity. As we approach the throne, we must recognize that although he is our Father, he is still the holy and sovereign king. As we praise him, we orient ourselves in a posture of humility.

Your kingdom come—The first request, as it were, in Jesus' model

prayer focuses on the will and purpose of God. We should be concerned with the kingdom of God and its advancement. This demonstrates a heavenly focus rather than an earthly one. As children of God, our chief desire should be for God's will to be done.

Give us each day our daily bread—Here, we get to the petition section of the prayer. Notice, though, that the petition is for basic necessities, not earthly desires. God provides for the needs of his children (Matthew 6:31–33), and this petition demonstrates a reliance on God's provision.

Forgive us our sins—Our prayers should include a humble repentance, like that of the tax collector (Luke 18:13). God has promised to forgive, if we confess our sins to him (1 John 1:9). Our only hope for righteousness is the grace of God through Christ.

Lead us not into temptation—Finally, we should trust in God to deliver us from evil (1 Corinthians 10:13) as we seek to honor him in all that we do.

The pattern of the model prayer is glory to God. We begin by honoring him; we demonstrate our trust in his sovereignty, provision, and faithfulness; and we humbly repent and ask for his help in honoring him.



Studying God's Word

How should you pray?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Persistence in Prayer

Luke 18:1–8

Luke 11:5–13

Penitence in Prayer

Luke 18:9–14

Matthew 6:5–8

Pattern of Prayer Activity

Use the questions below to examine the model prayer found in Matthew 6:9–13.

1. Whom is this prayer addressed to?

2. Who is the first focus of the prayer?

3. What request is made in verse 11?

4. What pattern is demonstrated in verse 12?

5. What request is made in verse 13?

6. Considering the entire prayer, what is common about all the requests that were made?

7. Write a summary statement explaining the pattern of prayer we see in this model.

Application

1. How has our lesson today caused you to think differently about prayer?

2. As you were thinking about the pattern of prayer and how you typically approach prayer, what ways did you find that you should shift your focus, attitude, or approach?

3. Does your attitude toward prayer tend to more often reflect that of the Pharisee or the tax collector?
4. How can we defend against a wrong attitude in prayer?
5. How would you respond to people who interpret the parable of the persistent widow to mean that God will give them anything they want if they pray faithfully and persistently enough?
6. Is there a time you prayed persistently for something? Did you receive an answer or lose heart, or are you still praying persistently? How did you struggle and/or grow through that experience?



Prayer Requests



Jesus Saves Zacchaeus

Lesson Focus

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector in Jericho. As Jesus passed through, Zacchaeus climbed a tree to get a glimpse of him over the crowd. Jesus looked into the tree, called Zacchaeus by name, and told him that he was going to stay at his house. Zacchaeus responded joyfully and demonstrated his repentance by repaying anyone he had defrauded and giving half of his possessions to the poor.

Key Passages

Luke 18:18–34, 19:1–27

What You Will Learn

- How Jesus demonstrated love toward Zacchaeus
- How Zacchaeus responded to Jesus

Memory Verse

Matthew 16:24–25 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

As Jesus approached Jerusalem for the Passover, he traveled through Jericho, which was customary. There was a certain man in Jericho named Zacchaeus. As a chief tax collector, he was despised by his fellow Jews. Tax collectors were seen as traitors because they collected money from Jews to pay Rome. Additionally, they were generally dishonest in their business practices, collecting more than was due to Rome in order to pad their own pockets. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, so he likely oversaw a district with several tax collectors reporting to him.

Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was, but he could not see beyond the crowd (Luke 19:3). He so desired to see Jesus that he climbed a sycamore tree. This would have been an undignified position, but Zacchaeus was seeking to see who Jesus was. Jesus continued on his way until he reached the place where Zacchaeus was perched. He looked up at the man, called him by name, and told him to come down so he could stay at his house (Luke 19:5). Zacchaeus received him joyfully, hurrying down from the tree to host the Son of Man. As we have seen before, the people were upset that Jesus would associate with a sinner (Luke 19:7). But Jesus had come to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10) and to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). We are not given

many details about how the visit proceeded, but we know exactly how Zacchaeus responded.

Zacchaeus repented of his sin and trusted in Jesus for salvation. There is no doubt that his was a genuine repentance. Jesus declared that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house (Luke 19:9). But we can also look to the change in Zacchaeus' life as evidence of his repentance. Zacchaeus determined to make amends for his unrighteous past. He decided to repay fourfold anyone he had cheated and to give half of his goods to the poor (Luke 19:8). Unlike the rich ruler who loved his wealth too much to sacrifice it for the sake of following Jesus (Luke 18:18–30), Zacchaeus immediately set about making restitution for his wrongdoing and replacing his greed with generosity.

Interestingly, Zacchaeus imposed on himself a punishment much more severe than what was required by the Mosaic law. A Jew who had cheated a neighbor was required to restore what he took in full plus one-fifth (Leviticus 6:1–7). But Zacchaeus chose a restitution reserved for one who stole a neighbor's sheep and was unable to return it (Exodus 22:1). Zacchaeus was not just going through the motions of righteous deeds; he went beyond the minimum requirement because he had been changed by his encounter with Christ.

We have seen accounts of those who gave up everything to follow Jesus (Luke 5:27) but in this case, we see someone who repented of his former life after encountering the Savior. Zacchaeus recognized his

wrongdoing and willingly turned away from his transgression. Zacchaeus was changed because he encountered Jesus and trusted in him for salvation.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Repentance is a major part of the Christian life. The Christian life begins with repentance, as we saw in the conversion of Zacchaeus. The first words of Christ that Mark recorded was a proclamation of the gospel along with the imperative to repent (Mark 1:15). Peter told those at Pentecost to repent (Acts 2:38). Paul explained that his mission was to proclaim to Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God (Acts 26:20).

But repentance is not a one-time action. Conversion happens once, but repentance should characterize the Christian life. David repented when he was confronted of his sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 51). Peter wept when he realized he had denied Jesus (Matthew 26:75). Josiah led the people to abolish their idols and high places and to follow God (2 Chronicles 34:29–33). Jonah repented after being punished for disobeying God’s command (Jonah 2:7–9). The church of Ephesus was called to repent and do the works they had done at first (Revelation 2:5).

Repentance, most simply, is turning away from sin and toward God (Proverbs 28:13; Ezekiel 18:30–32). But true repentance is not just behavioral reform. Rather, it is a transformation of the mind and heart (Joel 2:13; Psalm 51:10). The

Greek word translated as repent, *metanoeo*, means to think differently. The Hebrew word, *shuwb*, means to turn back. John called his listeners to repent and to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8). Paul preached the same message (Acts 20:21, 26:20). Repentance is not the change of behavior, but it will result in such fruit. Neither is repentance a feeling of remorse or regret. You can be sorry or feel bad about a sin, but if there is no change in attitude and action toward that sin, biblical repentance has not occurred. Repentance begins with a godly grief (2 Corinthians 7:9–11) and a heart broken over sin (Joel 2:12–13), leading us to forsake the transgression and replace it with its God-honoring counterpart. Godly grief leads to salvation; worldly grief leads to death (2 Corinthians 7:10; e.g., Judas Iscariot).

True repentance begins with a conviction and confession of sin (Psalm 51:3), requires a contrition of heart (Psalm 51:17), and results in a change of heart (Psalm 51:10). The internal change is evidenced by an outward change in behavior (Romans 6:4). Jesus instructed his disciples to proclaim to all nations the gospel, which he defined as the death and resurrection of Christ

and repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:46–47). The Christian life begins with repentance and should continue to be characterized by repentance as we replace the old man with the new man (Ephesians

4:22–31), putting away what is earthly and being renewed after the image of Christ (Colossians 3:5–17). As Martin Luther said, the Christian life is one of repentance.

Studying God's Word

What does repentance look like?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

The Response of the Rich

Luke 18:18–30

Luke 19:1–10

Active Repentance Activity

What does each reference below teach about dealing with sin?

- Psalm 51:3–6 —
- Joel 2:12–13 —
- Proverbs 28:13 —
- Ezekiel 18:30–32 —
- Ephesians 4:22–32 —

For each account below, identify the action that accompanied repentance and then answer the questions below.

- 2 Chronicles 34:29–33 —
 - Jonah 3:6–9 —
 - Luke 19:1–8 —
 - Acts 16:30–34 —
 - Acts 9:1–22 —
1. Considering all these things, what does biblical repentance look like?

2. Where do you need to practice biblical repentance in your life?

The Anticipated Kingdom

Luke 18:31–34

Luke 19:11–27

Application

1. Is there anything in your life that you have failed to surrender to Jesus?

2. Do you tend to grumble about interacting with those whom you consider to be worse sinners than you? How might you work toward a more compassionate view of others?
3. How have you demonstrated true repentance in your life? Do you consistently bear fruit in keeping with that repentance?
4. What do you struggle with most in bearing fruit keeping with repentance?
5. When you think of the parable of the minas, which of the servants do you identify as?
6. What does it look like to be a faithful servant awaiting your King?



Prayer Requests

Unit 16 Syllabus

- Lesson 151** Jesus Is the Christ Matthew 16:13–28
- Lesson 152** Jesus Is Transfigured Matthew 17:1–13; Acts 2:29–36;
2 Peter 1:3–21; 1 John 3:2–3
- Lesson 153** Jesus Is the Great I Am Exodus 3:14; John 8:12–59, 18:1–9
- Lesson 154** Jesus Heals a Blind Man John 9:1–41; 2 Corinthians 3:1–18, 4:1–6
- Lesson 155** Jesus Teaches in Parables Matthew 13:10–16; Luke 10:25–37
- Lesson 156** God Seeks Followers Luke 14:25–35; Matthew 8:18–22,
10:16–39, 16:24–27, 22:36–40
- Lesson 157** Jesus Raises Lazarus John 11; Ephesians 2:1–6
- Lesson 158** Jesus Teaches on Prayer Luke 11:5–13, 18:1–14; Matthew 6:5–8
- Lesson 159** Jesus Saves Zacchaeus Luke 18:18–34, 19:1–27
- Lesson 160** Unit Review

