

GOD'S SEARCH, OUR MISSION

JACKIE OESCH

**PERSONALITIES AND PARABLES
FROM THE BOOKS OF MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, AND JOHN**

LESSON 1: *GOD SO LOVED... THAT HE GAVE* – NICODEMUS
LESSON 2: *CAN THIS BE THE CHRIST?* – THE SAMARITAN WOMAN
LESSON 3: *I MUST STAY AT YOUR HOUSE TODAY* – ZACCHAEUS
LESSON 4: *LET HIM HEAR* – THE SOWER, SOIL, AND SEED
LESSON 5: *YOU GO, AND DO LIKEWISE* – THE GOOD SAMARITAN
LESSON 6: *AND THEY BEGAN TO CELEBRATE* – THE WAITING FATHER

**“I HAVE STORED UP YOUR WORD IN MY HEART...”
PSALM 119:11**

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GETTING STARTED

You are embarking on an adventure that will shape the rest of your life. Your journey will be unique to you and will be determined in part by your eager and enthusiastic desire to grow in your understanding of the book called The Holy Bible. Your commitment to the study promises to enrich your life as God speaks to you through His Word.

As you study you are encouraged to have some recommended supplies on hand:

1. This Bible Study unit: *God's Search, Our Mission*
2. English Standard Version of the Holy Bible (ESV). Note: If you are making a new purchase, look for a Bible, if possible, that has:
 - a. a cross-reference column preferably down the center of each page,
 - b. a Concordance usually found in the back of the Bible, and
 - c. a few basic maps also usually found in the back.
3. Pen or pencil
4. 3x5 or 4x6 index cards

With the three features listed in #2 you will be adequately supplied for your study and be ready to successfully navigate through these lessons. If, however, this is your first exposure to the Bible, you may want to consider beginning with the study entitled *Navigating the Bible*. This study provides navigational tools designed to help you develop skills and make you a more confident Bible student. *Navigating the Bible* may be downloaded at no cost or obligation from the CrossConnect Ministries website (www.crosscm.org). Although this study is recommended, it is not essential for success in studying *God's Search, Our Mission*.

Do not hesitate to mark up your Bible. It's your Bible to study. Make it your own with your notes, your underlining, highlighting, circling and arrows! You may choose to use a notebook or tablet for recording thoughts, questions, and tracking your journey through the study.

The study material is written so that you are able to learn on your own. With a degree of self-discipline you will cover the material with little or no difficulty. At the same time, you will acquire new information, share new insights, and ask some challenging questions that will beg for answers. Anticipating this response you are encouraged to seriously consider inviting a couple of friends to study with you.

May you find joy in your study. May your heart be receptive as God speaks to you through His Word. May these Bible stories reassure you of His great love given to you through His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Editor's note: For clarification, capitalized pronouns reference God. i.e. "...what He said."

INTRODUCTION

In the first three lessons you will be introduced to three New Testament Bible characters. Each of these people had an intimate encounter with Jesus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, the Woman at the Well was a Samaritan, and Zacchaeus was a tax collector. These three individuals were unlikely candidates for the Kingdom of God but these three individuals encountered Jesus and had their lives changed forever. Listen to their stories. Enter into their situations and watch as Jesus delights in bringing to them His Good News of eternal life.

In the last three lessons you will observe Jesus as a storyteller. Jesus used parables as a means of communicating spiritual truths to the crowds who eagerly gathered and listened to His teachings. To teach about being receptive to the Word of God Jesus told the story of the farmer who scattered seed. To teach about showing mercy to others He taught the story of the Good Samaritan. And, to teach about the steadfast love of the Father for those who stray He told the story of the father who lovingly waited for his son to return home.

Watch and listen to Jesus as the four Gospel writers reveal the heart of God. In the Gospels we join Jesus on His missionary journeys throughout the land of Canaan (Israel). As He travels from place to place He does so as one who is on a search for the lost souls of humankind. He searches for the lost until He finds them. It doesn't matter to Jesus if they come for a visit in the middle of the night, gather water in the heat of the day, or climb a tree in order to see Him.

As He teaches with parables Jesus reveals the heart of the Father who wants the ears of our hearts open to receive Him, who wants us available to bring His mercy to those in need, and who wants our arms outstretched to receive the lost who have been found! His journeys touched the hearts and lives of many, both those receptive to His teachings like the tax collectors and sinners and those who were critical and muttered at what He had to say like the Pharisees and teachers of the law, because He knew the heart of the Father that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). May you delight in knowing His Truth that saves.

LESSON ONE

GOD SO LOVED...THAT HE GAVE

JOHN 3:1-21 – NICODEMUS

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INTRODUCTION

This is a story about a man who came to Jesus. Who was this man? Why did he come to Jesus at night? What did he want to know? This story is not very long but within this story we are told about the all-powerful and divine love of God the Father. John 3:16 and 17 tell in a nutshell the story of salvation written for us to believe. Discover the setting in which Jesus declared these words to a man who kept asking, “How can this be?”

Watch for the visuals Jesus used to explain the things of God. So how does one enter into this Kingdom of God? Born again? Born of the Spirit? These concepts were difficult to understand but this man knew the reference Jesus made to the serpent in the wilderness. Listen carefully as these two men talk. The man had questions. If you had been in the room what would have been your questions? Take note of the two times the word “but” is used in verses 16-17. They clearly articulate what God wants for all people, and especially what He wants for you!

LESSON I

Part 1

INTRODUCTION: The story of Nicodemus is not long. Briefly told, a man came to Jesus late one night. He wanted to know who Jesus was and how he could get into this “kingdom of God” that Jesus referenced when He spoke to the crowds. Nicodemus was an unlikely candidate for becoming a Jesus follower. He belonged to a sect that considered Jesus a threat to the people of Israel because of their religious authority. Jesus repeatedly challenged their teachings as the teachings of man and not of God.

As you read the story envision yourself in the room with Jesus and Nicodemus. It’s late at night and Nicodemus is asking Jesus some questions. What questions do you think you would want to ask? As you listen in on their conversation, discover what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus that He is also saying to you.

ASSIGNMENT: Read John 3:1-17.

- What are we told about this man?
- Why did he come to Jesus? What did he want to learn?
- What did Jesus teach him?

TEACHING: To help understand Nicodemus’ visit with Jesus we need to know some things about the sect of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were highly respected within the Jewish community. They were known for their faithful teaching of the Law and for their tenacious adherence to the Law’s demands. Throughout the New Testament incidences arose in which Jesus publicly criticized this sect for their hypocrisy, for their deceitful and devious ways (Matthew 23). The Pharisees were guilty of wanting the admiration and respect of others so their *outward* appearance was of utmost importance to them. Jesus knew the hearts of these men, however, and declared that their hearts were far from God (Matthew 15:8).

EXERCISE:

1. Verse 1: Nicodemus was a _____. He was a Jewish religious leader, a _____ of the Jews.
2. When did he come to Jesus (verse 2)? _____
3. How does he address Jesus? _____
4. What does he know about Jesus? _____

TEACHING: Nicodemus addresses Jesus as “Rabbi.” The rabbi played a significant role in the Jewish community. Jewish boys attended school (yeshiva) where they were taught both the Torah, the study of the first five books of the Old Testament, and the Talmud, the religious foundation for the traditions of the Judaic community. The rabbi was known for his intellectual authority in translating the Law of Moses and the prophets. Every student from the yeshiva sought academic excellence in order to be chosen by a rabbi to become his protégé. Nicodemus considered Jesus a rabbi, one who chose His protégés and taught them as one having the authority to do so.

EXERCISE:

1. Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus was a teacher who had come from God (verse 2). Why did he think that? _____
2. What are some of the miraculous signs that Jesus had done? Review the Bible Study unit entitled *God’s Son, Our Savior*:
 - a. Matthew 14:13-21 _____
 - b. Mark 1:40-45 _____
 - c. Luke 8:22-25 _____
 - d. John 2:1-9a _____
 - e. John 11:38-44 _____
3. What are we told about Jesus’ miraculous signs in John 2:11?
 - a. What did they reveal? _____
 - b. What was the effect of His miraculous signs on others? See also John 2:23. _____

Because of His teachings and the miraculous signs He performed, Nicodemus concluded that Jesus had come from God and that God was with Him (verse 2).

4. At this point Jesus takes the lead of the conversation. He says, “I tell you the Truth.” Jesus is a rabbi who teaches truth. His Word, the Word that He speaks, is the Truth. Other rabbis interpreted the Law according to their teachings and traditions. Jesus, on the other hand, is about to declare God’s Truth. He teaches Nicodemus as He speaks of a particular miraculous sign. What is this miraculous sign in verse 3? _____

Part 2

TEACHING: Jesus’ words in verse 3 raise some questions. What is the kingdom of God? How does one become a part of the kingdom? What does it mean to be born again? Jesus wanted to nurture

Nicodemus's heart, his budding faith in who He was. So He built on who Nicodemus believed that Jesus was.

A definition of the kingdom of God is God's rule and reign in the hearts and lives of people. Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know and experience God's rule and reign in his own heart and life and thus belong to the kingdom of God. In order for this to happen, Jesus told him, a miraculous sign had to happen *within* him. Nicodemus had to be born again.

EXERCISE:

1. From Nicodemus' perspective, Jesus said that it was impossible for him to become a part of the kingdom of God. What was his response in verse 4? _____

And, Nicodemus was absolutely right! No person can have a second birth by entering a second time into his mother's womb.

2. Jesus responds with another teaching truth. What is his answer to Nicodemus (verse 5)?

And, Jesus was absolutely right! How can both be right? Nicodemus was thinking of a *physical* rebirth and Jesus was speaking of a *spiritual* rebirth. Jesus makes this very clear in verse 6:

“That which is born of the _____ is _____, and that which is born of the _____ is _____.”

3. Looking ahead to verse 9, what do you think Nicodemus was thinking as he listened to Jesus' teaching? _____

TEACHING: The Jewish people believed that as descendants of Abraham they were special, a chosen people of God. They believed that their ancestry, their connection to Abraham by birth, and their adherence to the laws and covenant of God was all that was needed. Nicodemus believed that his physical birth which connected him to Abraham and the promises of God was sufficient. Jesus, however, gave him a new paradigm that forced him to rethink his Jewish learning and traditions.

This rebirth, the concept of being born again, that Jesus was talking about demanded the rebirth of his spirit. Jesus was telling Nicodemus that being born as an ancestor of Abraham was meaningless unless one was born of water and the spirit. How then was one to be born of the Spirit? Their conversation continued...

EXERCISE:

1. What imagery does Jesus use in verse 8? _____

2. Does one understand the way of the wind? ____ Can it be seen? ____ Except for the sound it makes, can anyone know where it comes from or where it goes? ____ The wind is mysterious and yet you experience it. So, Jesus says, it is with those who are _____ of the _____ (verse 8).
3. Amazed Nicodemus finally verbalized his question (verse 9): _____

4. What did Jesus ask him (verse 10)? _____

Jesus was critical of Nicodemus, the Pharisees, and the teachers of the Law. He said they can accept the mysterious nature of the wind by experiencing it but cannot accept the mysterious nature of the Spirit to which others testify (verse 11).

5. In these next verses (11-15) Jesus speaks the truth with ultimate authority.
 - a. Verse 11: “We _____ of what we _____ and we _____ to what we have _____.”
 - b. Verse 12: “If I have told you _____ things and you do not _____, how can you _____ if I tell you _____ things?”
 - c. Verse 13: “No one has ascended into _____ except he who _____ from _____, the _____ of _____.”
 - d. Verse 14: “And as _____ lifted up the _____ in the wilderness, so must the _____ of _____ be _____ up...”
 - e. Verse 15: “that _____ in _____ may have _____.”

Part 3

TEACHING: For Part 3 in this lesson we need to digress from the story. In John 3:14-15 Jesus is making reference to an Old Testament story. The story takes place when Israel was wandering in the desert shortly before they were ready to enter the Promised Land. The story is told in the Old Testament book of Numbers.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Numbers 21:4-9

- Where were the Israelites?

- What was the problem?
- What was the Lord’s judgment?
- What was the Lord’s salvation?

TEACHING (continued): Follow along on an early map if one is available in the back of your Bible. The people were traveling from Mt. Hor (located near Kadesh Barnea) to the Red Sea in order to go around the land of Edom. The inhabitants of Edom were ancestors of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. Previously, the Edomites would not permit Israel to enter the Land of Canaan (the Promised Land) by traveling through their territory (Numbers 20:21). So, the whole Israelite community set out on a different route. This time from Mt. Hor and the Red Sea they traveled the long desert trek to go around Edom and Moab in order to enter near Jericho.

EXERCISE:

1. What does verse 4 tell us about the people? _____
2. They spoke against _____ and against _____ (vs. 5a)
3. What were some of their complaints (verse 5b)? _____

4. What was the Lord’s response to their speaking out against Him and His servant Moses (verse 6a)? _____
5. In verse 6b what was the result of God’s judgment on Israel? _____

6. In verse 7 the people came to Moses.
 - a. What did they confess? _____
 - b. What did Moses do? _____
7. What was God’s instruction to Moses (verse 8)? _____

God’s promise was that anyone who is _____ can _____ at it and _____ . And, verse 9 tells us that is exactly what happened!

Note: The serpent on the pole was called Nehushtan and was destroyed during the reign and reforms of King Hezekiah because the Israelites had made it an object of their worship (2 Kings 18:4).

REFLECTION: The venomous snakes moved among the people. Their bite was deadly. But, the Lord made a way for His people to survive the poisonous venom. Regardless of the wrong they had committed

against Him and against Moses, regardless of their whining and complaining, regardless of whatever else they may have done, they simply had to look to the bronze serpent on the pole for life. By looking upon the serpent raised up in their midst God who could destroy them because of their sin was merciful and gave them life instead.

APPLICATION: This story holds application for us, too. What moves about us and seeks to destroy us? _____

The devil, the world, and our flesh are those things that are constantly creating battlegrounds in which we get bitten and left for dead. The sin in which we were conceived (Psalm 51:5) has become a part of our DNA and has made us less than the perfection God intended when He created humankind. Like Nicodemus Jesus wants us to experience spiritual rebirth, birth by water and the Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus that only through birth by water and the Spirit could anyone become a part of the kingdom of God and have eternal life.

Jesus wanted Nicodemus to understand that just as the serpent was *lifted up* on a pole for the salvation of those bitten in the desert so the Son of Man would be *lifted up* on a cross in order that “everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life!” The act of looking at the serpent was an act of faith. When the Israelites looked they were saved. When we look to Jesus for salvation that is also an act of faith, an act of saving faith, and we receive eternal life. Thus, one can belong to the Kingdom of God because the Son of Man was lifted up on the cross. Faith believes that all who look to His death receive a life that lasts for eternity!

Just as water is in all of life, so also in baptism with water and the Word we are reborn into a new life saturated with the Spirit who is the Living Water! What are we told in John 7:37b-38? “If _____, let him _____ to _____ and _____. Whoever _____ in _____, as the _____ has said, _____ will _____ rivers of _____.”

Part 4

TEACHING: The ultimate of God’s Good News of salvation is found in a nutshell in this next verse. These words cannot be overlooked. John 3:16 says it all. These words cannot be taken lightly but rather demand that each individual comes to grips with the truth that “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” The next verse gives

understanding to verse 16. In verse 17 we are told that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him, through His Son Jesus.

MEMORIZATION: Make sure that you write these verses on index cards and add them to your library of verses. The revelation of God’s promise throughout the Old Testament, first to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15, then to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, and then to all of His descendants, becomes a reality in these verses. Jesus is saying these words about Himself. He is the promised Messiah, God’s Son. He is the expression of God the Father’s love. The Father’s love for all people of the world is so great that He willingly gave His one and only Son in order that any and all people who believe that He is the promised Messiah, the Christ, would not perish but have eternal life.

We can be deceived into believing that rather than offering us eternal life that God the Father sits on His throne in heaven only to bring judgment on us. Verse 17 tells us the truth. We can rest assured that Jesus came to save us and not to condemn us. Jesus is saying that our sin, our wrongdoings can no longer condemn us because He came to take upon Himself the punishment of the Father for sin. Therefore, we are not condemned but given a new life free from fear, guilt and shame, free from judgment and condemnation. Sin is no longer the issue but unbelief is. “Whoever *believes* in Him shall not perish...” In Mark 16:16 we are also told that “...but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” And, to all of this, God asks, “Do you believe this?”

You may recall from the study unit entitled *God’s Son, Our Savior* that when Lazarus died Jesus spoke similar words to Lazarus’ sister Martha in John 11:25-26. He told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever *believes* in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” What was Martha’s response of belief in John 11:27? _____

On your index card write down your reflections on what it means that you are no longer under condemnation but are set free from death to live with Him now and forever (Romans 8:1-2).

SUMMARY: In this lesson we have been introduced to a man named Nicodemus. We have learned that he was a prominent Pharisee who was a part of the ruling council of the Jews. His desire was to learn more about Jesus. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that he wouldn’t be able to be a part of the Kingdom of God on his own but that he would need to be born again of water and the Spirit. He needed a spiritual birth. Jesus also made reference to the Old Testament story of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness so that those who looked upon the serpent wouldn’t die from the snake bites. As they *believed*

that by looking to the serpent they wouldn't die (physical death) so Jesus said that everyone who looks to Him and *believes* will not die (spiritual death) but have eternal life.

Part 5

REFLECTION: Take some time to reflect on Jesus' words to Nicodemus. You and I have had the opportunity to listen in on their conversation.

1. If it was only you and Jesus in the room, what might be one or two things He said that would really speak to your heart?

a. _____

b. _____

2. What might be something He said that would be disturbing or unsettling for you to hear?

3. What do you believe is the most important truth that Jesus wants you to know about Him and your Heavenly Father? _____

APPLICATION:

1. This lesson offers the Good News of salvation for all who believe. What is God's invitation to us who believe His Good News? What does Mark 16:15 tell us? _____

2. What becomes our message as we go throughout our world? _____

3. And, just as Jesus told Nicodemus, whoever believes your message will be saved! Who are those whom God is laying on my heart and nudging me to go and tell?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

MORE ABOUT NICODEMUS: So, what happened to Nicodemus? Did he believe? Did he leave the sect of the Pharisees that was constantly challenging Jesus and ultimately sought to kill Him? Scripture mentions Nicodemus a couple of other times. Let's take a look...

1. John 7:45-52

- a. What was the situation? _____
- b. What was Nicodemus' question? _____

- c. What was the accusation against him? _____
- d. Are you a Jesus follower like Nicodemus? Are you willing to come under attack for believing that He is the Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior of the world?
Your thoughts: _____

2. John 19:38-42

- a. What was the situation? _____
- b. Who was with Nicodemus? _____
- c. What did Nicodemus bring? _____
- d. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were both Jesus followers. Do you sense that Nicodemus was a maturing follower, bolder in his witness? Are you a maturing follower willing to take the risk and give witness to who Jesus is? Your thoughts: _____

PRAYER:

- 1. My prayer for my own personal relationship with Jesus Christ? _____

- 2. My prayer for my friends whom the Lord is laying on my heart? _____

- 3. My prayer as I join God in His mission to share the Good News of salvation to the whole world?

LESSON TWO

CAN THIS BE THE CHRIST?

JOHN 4:3-42 – THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus lived an intentional life. He *had* to go through Samaria. He was weary so he sat beside Jacob's well. And so, the story begins. The stage is set. He's ready for a woman who just happened to come to draw water in the heat of the day. Watch for Jesus' proactive approach as He opens the eyes of her heart to ultimately recognize Him as the Messiah.

Listen intently as Jesus teaches the disciples about the ripe harvest. He challenges them to open their eyes to see the harvest and to reap the harvest from what has been sown.

The woman didn't have complete understanding of Jesus and who He was, but that didn't stop her. She rushed home to share with those in town and enthusiastically extended to them the invitation to "come and see."

LESSON 2

Part 1

TEACHING: This next story is about a woman from the land of Samaria. We are not told her name. Sometimes she is simply referred to as “the woman at the well.” Locate a map showing Israel during the time of Jesus’ ministry. This may be a review for you or it may be new information. Judea is located in the south. Galilee is to the north and between these two territories is the land of Samaria. Situated almost in the center of Samaria is the city of Sychar not far from Mt. Gerizim.

In order to appreciate the story in this lesson we need to understand the relationship between the Samaritans and those who lived in Judea. When the Assyrians conquered the capital of the Northern Kingdom in Samaria they deported many Jews to Assyria and resettled the land with foreigners (2 Kings 17:24ff). These foreigners brought their own gods to worship and intermarried with the Jews who remained in Samaria. The result was a mixed race. To the pure Jew living in Judah this was considered to be an act of betrayal to the nation and their people. The people of Judah, therefore, would do whatever they could to avoid passing through Samaria and would rather choose to detour the land by crossing the Jordan River to the east and journey north until they crossed the Jordan once again to enter into the land of Galilee.

So, how did Jesus happen to meet this woman, this Samaritan woman?

ASSIGNMENT: Read John 4:4-26. Some things to look for...

- What was the focus of the conversation in verses 7-15?
- What do we learn about the woman in verses 16-18?
- What was the focus of the conversation in verses 19-24?
- What did Jesus reveal to the woman in verses 25-26?

EXERCISE:

1. We learn from verse 3 that Jesus left _____ and was on His way to _____. What does verse 4 tell us? _____
2. Jesus came to the town of _____ near a plot of ground that Jacob had bought and given to his son Joseph. What was located in Sychar (verse 6)? _____
3. What are we told about Jesus in verse 6? _____

4. What time was it? _____

Note: The Jewish day began at 6 a.m. and ended at 6 p.m.

5. Who came to draw water (verse 7)? _____

Note: We are told that Jesus' disciples had gone into Sychar to buy food (verse 8). That meant that He was sitting at the well in the heat of the day (verse 6). The normal time for women of the city to come and draw water was in the cool of the morning and evening. It was noon, however, the time when only those who were social outcasts would come to the well. This Samaritan woman apparently had a bad reputation and wanted to avoid encountering the chatter of others who came to gather their water.

6. What did Jesus ask her? _____

7. This woman immediately responded by giving Him reasons why He shouldn't be talking to her. What was her response (verse 9)? _____

In essence she said, "I can't give you a drink. You don't want a drink from me!"

TEACHING: This woman is having a problem with Jesus. There were several things that were socially unacceptable. In the first place this was a woman, a hated Samaritan no less. Second, meeting her at noon by the well was an obvious clue that her reputation was not the best. And, third, no respectable man would speak to a woman under such circumstances. But, Jesus didn't have a problem with any of these factors. It did not matter to Him that she was a woman, a Samaritan woman, a Samaritan woman of ill-repute. If these things that seemed so important to her and to the society in which she lived but were not important to Jesus, then what was important to Him? Listen carefully as the story unfolds. Watch for what Jesus considered important.

Part 2

EXERCISE:

1. In verse 10 Jesus seems to turn the conversation from being about her to being about Him and who He was. Jesus told her that if she knew who was asking her for a drink she would have asked and He would have given her _____.
2. Jesus has just made a profound statement about what He is offering her. What was her biggest concern (verse 11)? _____
3. By offering living water Jesus was declaring to her that He was the Messiah, the one who would forever satisfy her need for God. What was the problem Jesus was addressing? See Jeremiah

2:13a. “ _____
_____.”

4. Jesus knew that one of the hardest things she had to do each day was to leave her house and draw water from Jacob’s well. Coming in the heat reminded her of who she was and what she had become, namely a Samaritan woman who lived an immoral life. He offered her living water, water that would satisfy, which meant she would never have to draw water again. “Everyone who _____ of this _____ will be _____ again, but whoever _____ of the _____ that I _____ him will never be _____ again (verse 13-14a).”
5. In verse 14b Jesus even goes on to say that the water He gives will _____

6. Now Jesus has her attention. What does she tell Him in verse 15? _____
_____, so that _____ or have to _____.”

TEACHING: Jesus often used visual imagery to speak of spiritual matters. In Lesson 1 He spoke to Nicodemus about seeking the kingdom of God and uses the imagery of birth and wind to teach him about being born of water and the spirit. To this woman Jesus used the imagery of water to teach about the living water, the water that satisfies and becomes in one “a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” This living water that satisfies is a relationship with Him that satisfies.

EXERCISE:

1. He finishes speaking to her of the water that He gives and she wants it. What does Jesus tell her to do in verse 16? _____
2. What is her response (verse 17a)? _____
3. And, Jesus says to her, “ _____.”
4. What else does He say in verse 18? _____

Note: Jesus told this woman that He knew more about her than what she shared with Him. He revealed to her that He knew she was living a life of sin. But, regardless of the truth of what Jesus knew about her, He said nothing to condemn her (John 3:17).

5. The woman acknowledged that Jesus was a _____ (verse 19) but then quickly attempted to change the subject (verse 20). She wanted to talk about the correct place to worship. Our fathers, the Samaritans, worshiped on this _____ (Mt. Gerizim). The Jews, however, claim the correct place to worship is in _____.

6. Jesus wanted her to know that the place of worship was not the critical concern. He says in verse 22, “You _____ what you _____; we _____ what we _____, for _____ is from the _____.” Jesus was far more concerned that she knew *who* she worshiped than *where* she worshiped. He wanted her to know that those who worship the Father worship in _____ and _____ (verse 23). Worship is about the heart. It is not an issue of rights and wrongs. Worship flows out of a loving relationship with the Father. Those in a relationship with Him are true worshipers for with their heart they worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth (verse 24).
7. This woman knew the Messiah (Christ) was coming (verse 25). She believed that everything would be explained when He came. This is the critical moment when Jesus reveals who He is. He had declared all that He knew about her (verse 18) and withheld nothing and now He reveals to her who He is and withholds nothing. The One whom she and all of Israel waited for was with her saying, “_____ (verse 26).”

Part 3

REFLECTION: Let’s take a few minutes to stop and reflect on what we can learn from Jesus.

1. It is interesting to note that way back in verse 4 we are told that He “had to pass through” Samaria. He did? He could have gone around Samaria like other Jews did because of their hatred for the Samaritans. Then why does it say that he *had* to pass through Samaria? One can’t help but speculate that it was because of this woman that He *had* to go. What can we learn from Jesus? _____

2. There seems to be such a sharp contrast between Nicodemus who seemed to be the epitome of righteousness and the Samaritan woman who seemed to have nothing going for her. She was a woman, a Samaritan woman, an immoral Samaritan woman. Yet, we find nothing in Jesus that applauds the righteous Pharisee or condemns the immoral Samaritan. One’s sex or lifestyle was not Jesus’ primary concern. But, He desired that both live in a relationship with God the Father, established by the Spirit, with knowledge of Himself (Jesus) as the Truth. In John 14:6 Jesus spoke to His disciples and declared that He is the _____, the _____, and the _____. He goes on to say that no one comes to the _____ except through _____. Rich or poor, Pharisee or Samaritan, righteous or immoral Jesus wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the _____ (1 Timothy 2:4), to come to know Him, the One sent by the Father full of _____ and _____ (John 1:14).

What can we learn from Jesus? _____

3. One can't help but ask if the conversation could have ended with verse 25. How could it? Jesus was not about to withhold Good News from her. He revealed Himself to her which meant that she needed to come to grips with who He was. Would she accept and acknowledge who He said He was, namely the Messiah? What was she going to say about who He was? Without a doubt God's Spirit was at work in her developing a relationship with this One who declared Himself to be the Christ. What can we learn from Jesus? _____

APPLICATION:

1. Considering Jesus' ministry to this woman, I am challenged to consider my ministry to those around me who are lonely and left behind, poor and rejected, hurting and afraid. Jesus did not condemn her but received her and revealed Himself to her. What is one action I might take to receive others and bring them into a relationship with me as He did? _____

2. Am I inviting others into my life that through my life they might come to know Jesus, the Messiah called the Christ? What is one way I might live more intentionally in order to bring others into a relationship with Jesus? _____

PRAYER: O Lord, You challenge me when You ask me to think differently about my neighbor, those in my community, those who view the world differently than me, who lack opportunities for a brighter future, who endure physical and financial limitations, and who long for meaningful relationships. Grant me a heart like Yours that chooses to love and not hate. Teach me how to engage in relationships that You can use and bless for Your glory. Release Your Spirit that through words said and acts of kindness done others will know they are loved by You. _____

Part 4

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever experienced an "untimely" interruption? Most likely you have. In John 4:26 Jesus has just told the Samaritan woman that He is the Messiah and in verse 27 we are told "just then the disciples returned" from town where they had bought food. This woman who had come for

water at a time when she expected to see no one was first surprised to find Jesus and now is surprised again when several of His friends show up.

ASSIGNMENT: Read John 4:27-38. Notice that a couple of different things are happening at the same time.

- Jesus has a discussion going on with His _____
- The woman has a discussion going on with _____

EXERCISE:

1. What surprised the disciples in verse 27? _____
2. What two questions didn't they ask Jesus?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
3. The woman left (verse 28).
 - a. What did she leave behind? _____
 - b. Where did she go? _____
4. What did she tell the people (verse 29)? _____

5. What was their reaction to her message? Her question (verse 30)? _____

6. Meanwhile, back with Jesus and His disciples (verse 31)... What was the disciples' concern?

7. What was His reply to their concern (verse 32)? _____

8. What did the disciples think Jesus was talking about (verse 33)? _____

9. Like the birthing process and the wind with Nicodemus and the water with the Samaritan woman, Jesus again uses visual imagery to speak of spiritual matters. With the disciples He uses _____ (verse 34)? He uses food to speak of _____

10. In verse 35 Jesus proceeds to speak of the harvest and the ripe fields, other picture words. He tells them to lift up their _____, and see the _____. He declares that the fields are _____ for _____.

REFLECTION:

1. Imagine Jesus talking to His disciples and saying the words, “Lift up your eyes and see the fields!” Now go back to verse 30. Describe the picture of the harvest, the fields that are ripe!

While Jesus has been teaching His disciples, the Samaritan woman has been busy sowing! She left her water pot behind. As Jesus promised, “Whoever drinks of the water I give him will never be thirsty again (verse 14)...” One can’t help but wonder if Jesus ever ate the lunch that the disciples had brought.

2. The woman brought the people to Jesus and Jesus taught them. What a ministry partnership! One sowed and the other reaped. The woman sowed with her testimony: Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ? Jesus reaped with His teaching, with His Word!

EXERCISE:

1. What are we told in verse 39? _____
2. Why did they believe? _____
3. Many townies believed because of the woman’s testimony. Even more believed because of His Words. But something else happened in the hearts of these people. They said to her, “It is no longer because of _____, for we have _____ for _____, and we _____ that this _____ indeed the _____ of the _____ (verse 42).

REFLECTION:

1. Jesus stayed with these people two more days. One can’t help but wonder what it was that caused them to *know* and *declare* that He was the Savior of the world. Was it His winsome personality? Was it His ability to teach so they could understand? Was it the words that He spoke? What was it? Your thoughts: _____

2. The woman’s testimony brought them to Jesus but it was His words that enabled them to believe. We don’t hear anything more about this woman. Her testimony was enough. We do know that Jesus’ love and acceptance of her just as she was removed her shame and released her to partner with Him to bring a town to *know* Jesus as their Savior and to *declare* Him to be the Savior of the world! Your thoughts: _____

Part 5

APPLICATION: With which character(s) do I identify?

1. Am I like the woman?

- a. I really don't want to meet up with anyone I know because my life is a mess. Wrong choices have made it a disaster.
- b. I would rather change the subject than confront the reality of what I have become.
- c. I find it almost impossible to believe that the Messiah, the Christ, the Promised One would love me and not condemn me in spite of what He knows about me.
- d. Because He loves me I want to tell everyone so they can get to know Him, too.

How am I like the woman? _____

2. Am I like the disciples?

- a. I really am uncomfortable in this part of town with these kinds of people.
- b. I really don't understand what's going on here. We're talking about food to eat and You are talking about the will of Him who sent You and to finish His work, something totally different.
- c. Jesus, does anybody meet You without getting into a conversation with You? I don't understand how You pick Your friends.
- d. Sowing, reaping, harvesting... Opening my eyes and look at the fields! All I see is people, people everywhere coming to You...

How am I like the disciples? _____

3. Am I like the people from town?

- a. Who is this man? How did He know all of those things about her, all those things we've kept secret and ignored, all those things we have whispered about her behind her back?
- b. I'm really inquisitive. This woman is so excited about Him. She's never invited us to meet any of her male friends before. He must be different.
- c. He really is different. He's teaching me things I never knew before. I want Him to stay so I can learn more.
- d. I believe not just because of what someone else has said but I have heard for myself and I *know* that this man really is the Savior of the world!

How am I like the people from town? _____

ASSIGNMENT: Write out your story. Tell what you *know*! The woman went to town and told her story. She shared her testimony. Undoubtedly, she told it with energy, passion, and enthusiasm because the people responded to her invitation, “Come and see...” Her story aroused their curiosity about this man who told her everything she ever did. Could this be...? She shared what she knew, even if at the moment she only knew a little. Maybe you are just beginning to consider what your life would be like if you got to *know* this man called Jesus. What is your story? What is your past? Jesus was sitting by the well waiting for the Samaritan woman. Envision Jesus sitting by the well—or maybe sitting in your living room, or at Starbuck’s, or in your office, or wherever you might frequent—waiting for you to come. Write your story as He invites you come to *know* who He is, the Savior of the world.

After writing your story, find someone and ask them to listen as you tell your story. Be fearlessly bold in your witness.

MEMORIZATION: The Samaritan woman did not run home and slam the door shut in order to keep her encounter with Jesus to herself. She did not go home and hide. Instead, she could not help but share all that had happened. She was bold in her witness!

St. Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians while in prison. He asked the Christians to pray for him in order that he might be bold in his witness. Write Ephesians 6:19-20 on an index card and put to memory.

These verses speak of the *mystery* of the Gospel. What is this mystery? Look for insights in these verses:

- Romans 16:25-27 _____

- Colossians 1:26-27 _____

- Colossians 2:2-3 _____

- Ephesians 1:9-10 _____

PRAYER: May these verses from Ephesians 6 become your daily prayer: Lord, whenever I open my mouth may words be given to me to boldly proclaim the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador...that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. Amen!

LESSON THREE

I MUST STAY AT YOUR HOUSE TODAY

LUKE 19:1-10 – ZACCHAEUS

OVERVIEW OF LESSON 3

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INTRODUCTION

This story really begins at the end of Luke 18 and continues through the first ten verses of Luke 19. It's the story of two men who wanted but couldn't see Jesus. Both were determined to see. One yells out and the other one climbs a tree. Jesus encounters both of them. Watch carefully as Jesus gives both physical and spiritual sight to these men. As you study, be as determined as they were to "see" Jesus.

Observe the reactions of different groups—those who were in front of the crowd as Jesus drew near to Jericho and those in the crowd who saw that Jesus had gone to the house of a "sinner." Observe the reactions of both "blind" men after they encountered Jesus.

And, don't forget to consider the sycamore tree. What purpose did it serve for one man? Consider what it might be like for you and me to live as trees eager and available to enable others to see Jesus.

LESSON 3

Part 1

ASSIGNMENT: In this third character story Jesus was on His way to Jericho. On the way He met a blind man begging along the roadside. Read the story as written in Luke 18:35-43.

- What was the man's problem?
- What did he ask Jesus to do for him?
- What did Jesus do?
- How did the man respond?

EXERCISE:

1. This man was a _____ beggar (verse 35).
2. When he heard all the commotion and realized Jesus was passing what did he cry out (verses 37-39)? "_____."

TEACHING: The beggar knew who Jesus was. He shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The words Son of David, the title by which he called Jesus, were words of faith for by these words he was declaring that he believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. He knew and believed that Jesus would have mercy on him. He knew that Jesus had the power that would enable him to see.

EXERCISE:

1. Jesus had the man brought to Him (verse 40). What did Jesus ask the man (verse 41)? _____
2. He replied, "_____."
3. Jesus gave him his _____ (verse 42) and immediately he _____ his _____.
4. And the man _____ Jesus, _____ God (verse 43).

ASSIGNMENT: Keeping this story in mind, read on in Luke 19. Jesus is now in Jericho where He met another man who couldn't see. His name was Zacchaeus (Zac-key'-us). Read his story recorded in Luke 19:1-10.

- What was this man's problem?
- What was his solution?

- What was Jesus' solution?

EXERCISE:

1. What are we told in verse 1? _____ One gets a sense that Jesus had no intention of stopping in Jericho.
2. Zacchaeus lived in Jericho (verse 2). What are two things we learn about him?
 - a. He was _____
 - b. He was _____

TEACHING: Tax collectors were also called publicans. Zacchaeus was a chief of the publicans. The publicans served Rome. In order to gain personal wealth these tax collectors often would impose illegal taxes on the people. They were considered traitors and were hated for their part in keeping the Jews under the oppression of the Roman emperor.

EXERCISE:

1. According to verse 3 what did Zacchaeus want to do? _____
2. But, what was keeping Zacchaeus from seeing who Jesus was?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
3. So, what did he do (verse 4)? He _____ ahead and _____ up into a _____ to _____ Him.

ASSIGNMENT: It is interesting to note that neither the blind beggar nor Zacchaeus was able to see Jesus. Underline all the words that have to do with vision and sight in these two stories. For example, in Luke 18:41 we are told that the blind beggar answered, "I want to *see*." (Hint: There are at least eight references.)

REFLECTION:

1. St. Luke included this story in his Gospel and of all things it's about a short man. One can't help but think that Zacchaeus' stature had caused him difficulty all of his life.
 - a. How might his stature have affected his sense of significance? Of value? Of purpose?

 - b. Who do you think gave this chief tax collector a sense of significance and value?

2. Now, a most significant person was about to pass by. Why was Zacchaeus so determined to “see who Jesus was?” Who was this man who had crowds following him? If he had any hope of seeing who Jesus was he was going to have to climb a tree. What would it feel like to be a grown adult and need to climb a tree in order to see because you were too short? _____

But, he really had no option. If he wanted to see Jesus he had to hurry and climb a tree!

Part 2

APPLICATION: Think for a moment about the sycamore tree. This may be an interesting way to think about the Zacchaeus story with you as a tree...

1. What did the tree offer Zacchaeus? _____

2. Sycamore trees are people who have cared for us enough to lift us up, encourage us, and help us see life from a different perspective. Who are those who have served as a sycamore trees in your life?
 - a. Recall a time when you have been lifted up and held. _____

 - b. Recall a time when you have lifted up and held someone enabling him/her to see what they could not have seen without your help. _____

 - c. This particular sycamore tree enabled Zacchaeus to see Jesus. What difference would it make in my life if I chose to be a tree for others in order that they might see Jesus and learn to know who He is? _____

 - d. How might I be a source of encouragement lifting others up in order that they might begin to see Jesus from a perspective different than what they have in the past and come to know Him as He is? _____

EXERCISE:

1. What happened when Jesus came by (verse 5)? _____
Jesus knew where Zacchaeus was. He also knew that this man wanted to know who He was.
2. What did Jesus say to Zacchaeus? _____

3. Do you sense urgency in Jesus' voice as He calls to him? What word(s) does Jesus use?

REFLECTION: Apparently Jesus wasn't just "passing through (verse 1)." How do you think Jesus viewed His life in the light of what was happening between Him and Zacchaeus? What was His priority?

APPLICATION QUESTION: What does Jesus teach me about my life as I...

1. make my plans? _____

2. schedule my day? _____

3. use my time? _____

EXERCISE:

1. How did Zacchaeus respond (verse 6)? _____

Zacchaeus came down at once. "Jesus wants to come to my house today!" If Jesus' *voice* communicates urgency, what do Zacchaeus' *actions* communicate? _____

2. What meaning did Jesus' words have for this short, chief tax collector up in the sycamore tree?

REFLECTION:

1. If I put myself in Zacchaeus' position as one feeling insignificant and small, not accepted and definitely unloved by his fellowman, how would I respond to Jesus' self-invite?

2. Do I think I would consider Jesus' visit an imposition on my plans for the day and feel put out? Would I become irritated and panicky wondering what the crowd would be thinking? Would I worry about what I could serve Him on such short notice? Share your thoughts:

-
-
3. Zacchaeus was a wealthy man. Undoubtedly he had household servants. Because one man wanted to see who Jesus was one can't help but wonder how many others had the opportunity to see who Jesus was! Share your thoughts: _____
-

PRAYER: O Lord, sometimes I feel like Zacchaeus. I feel small, insignificant, and neither recognized nor appreciated by others. I know that often my life is not exemplary. I make wrong choices which get me into trouble. Lord Jesus, be merciful to me, a sinner. But, I'm like Zacchaeus in another way. I'm curious. I want to see who You are. I want to become intimately acquainted with You. Jesus, come to my house today. Come and live in my heart. _____

Part 3

EXERCISE:

1. What was the crowd's reaction to what they saw (verse 7)? _____
2. How did the crowd regard Zacchaeus? _____
3. How did the crowd regard Jesus? _____

From the crowd's perspective Jesus' association with sinners was inappropriate behavior. They believed that associating with sinners made Jesus a sinner; He became one of them. They didn't believe that the sinner associating with Jesus made the sinner righteous and godly. The crowd was more eager to condemn Zacchaeus than to love him and let him live forgiven in a relationship with Jesus.

4. Just a thought... Do you think the blind beggar who followed Jesus was one of those who "muttered?" Or, do you think he went with Jesus to Zacchaeus' house? Or, do you think he might have gone back to his own house to think through this thing about "following" Jesus? Your thoughts and reflections: _____
-

MEMORIZATION: 2 Corinthians 5:21 speaks about the big exchange that happens when Jesus is invited into our lives of sin and wrongdoing. Write out this passage: _____

-
-
1. What is the exchange? For our sake [God] made _____ to be _____ who knew no _____, so that in Him _____ might _____ the _____ of _____.
 2. From the crowds perspective how do you see this passage applying to Jesus as He went into the home of this sinful man Zacchaeus? _____

REFLECTION: (Luke 19:8ff)

1. What was different about Zacchaeus? What caused him to stand up and boldly say (verse 8):

2. What made the life-changing difference in Zacchaeus' life? _____

3. What did Zacchaeus learn about who Jesus was that day? _____

DIGGING DEEPER: The Levitical law makes reference to deceiving ones neighbor when stealing and cheating. Leviticus 6:4-5 says that what has been stolen or taken by extortion among other things must be returned. Verse 5 says, "...He must make _____
_____..."

Ezekiel 33:14-16 gives some insight into the Law requiring that restitution be made for evil that has been done. This included giving back what had been taken. Then verse 16 says that "none of the _____ that he has _____ will be _____ against him. He has _____ what is _____ and _____; he shall surely _____."

This gives some understanding of Jesus' words when He declares that "today salvation has come to this house." Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham. He was a Jew who had strayed from the Law and Jesus' presence revealed to his heart what his heart already knew. He was a sinner. The crowd's declaration was true. Jesus, however, had found someone of the house of Abraham who had been lost.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. Has Jesus come to your house today? Jesus in your heart and life makes a difference. With Jesus in your life, your life reflects godliness and righteousness. How would you assess your life

because Jesus is living in you and at work making a difference in you? _____

2. With Jesus at work in you, how would you assess your life and reflect godliness and righteousness?

PRAYER: Jesus, You are the One who took my sin into Yourself. You exchanged Your righteousness for my sinfulness. I can only give to You my thanks and praise. Enable me to confess my sin not because the Law says I should but because Your love for me makes me want to confess and to live forgiven. _____

Part 4

REFLECTION: We've asked the question: What was it about Jesus that caused Zacchaeus to confess his wrongdoing and want to turn his life around? We recognized Zacchaeus was personally wealthy because of his kickbacks from Rome. Addressing his wealth acquired by ill-gotten gain, he declared to Jesus and everyone present that he would give up to half of his possessions to the poor. To those whom he cheated he promised to payback four times the amount. In essence, Zacchaeus was saying my wealth and possessions mean little to me for I have met you, Jesus! What had taken the place of wealth and possessions? What had replaced them? Your thoughts and reflections: _____

EXERCISE:

1. What did Jesus say to Zacchaeus in verse 9?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
2. And, what did Jesus say in verse 10? _____

TEACHING: Let's take a closer look at verses 9 and 10. In verse 9 Jesus says that today salvation has come to this house. In Psalm 27:1 we read 'The _____ is my Light and my _____...' The Lord is my Salvation. Salvation speaks of deliverance. The Lord is the One who saves me from my sinful self, from evil that wants to devour me, and from

eternal damnation. The Lord is the One who delivers me, who rescues me, protects me, and creates in me faith to believe so I am able to withstand all that wants to destroy me. The Lord is my Salvation. Back in Luke 19:9 Jesus is ultimately saying, “Zacchaeus, today the Lord has come to this house, the Lord, the One who is your salvation and your deliverer!” Then Jesus goes on to say, “...because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.” He is acknowledging that Zacchaeus is a Jew, an Israelite, a Hebrew, a son of Abraham, the very one He’s been seeking to save.

In verse 10 Jesus says similar words. He says, “For the _____ (Jesus who is your Salvation, Zacchaeus) came to seek and to save what was _____ (namely, the sons of Abraham and today specifically, you, Zacchaeus).” In essence, Jesus says, “This is why I came. I came looking for those who are mine, the sons of Abraham. I also came to search for others who are lost, those who have no idea what life is all about, those who are caught up in their own ideology, those who have nothing by which to orient their lives. I have come searching for sinners, like you, Zacchaeus, sinners who were lost and now have been found!”

MEMORIZATION: The words of Jesus to Zacchaeus are for us as well. Write out verse 10 on an index card and begin to understand Jesus’ mission to the world. This is His purpose statement, if you will. This is why He came. From the beginning of time God has been on a mission to bring back to Himself all those He created. In Genesis 3:15 the Messiah was already promised and now this Messiah was in Zacchaeus’ home telling him, “You, Zacchaeus, are the very reason I came.” “You have been lost but now you are found.” “You could not see any more than the blind beggar could but I have been looking for you. I, the Son of Man, the Son of David, I have come looking for you in order to save you because there was no way on your own that you would ever be able to find me.” “Zacchaeus, I have come looking for you just as I came looking for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and just as I saved them with the promise of the Messiah, the Savior, you have been saved. I, the Messiah, have found you and soon I will give my life for you in order that you and whoever believes in Me will have eternal life (John 3:16).” “Zacchaeus, I did not come here to condemn you but that through Me you might be saved (John 3:17)!”

Part 5

EXERCISE: Let’s recall others who Jesus searched for and found...

Reference	Who was found?	Where were these individuals found?
Genesis 3:8-9		

Genesis 11:31-12:4		
Exodus 3:1-4		
1 Samuel 3:2-10		
1 Samuel 16:11-12		
1 Kings 19:19-20		
Nehemiah 1:1, 3-4		

REFLECTION: Many others have their stories written in the Bible that tell of where they were found by God. Most often God finds those who are lost simply doing their daily chores and carrying out their responsibilities. There’s nothing unusual about hiding when one is guilty or moving to a new location wondering if anything worthwhile will come from “this move.” There’s nothing unusual about being a shepherd and tending your sheep or serving the Lord in His church/tabernacle/temple. Nor is there anything unusual about dragging a plow behind oxen or serving a king. Regardless of where they were, God called them and their lives were changed. They willingly joined God in His mission to seek and save the lost.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. What would it take on my part to make His mission statement become mine? _____

2. Do I find myself muttering with the crowd or am I bold to take Jesus and make Him my guest, the guest of a sinner? Whose house might Jesus want to go to today in order to save what was lost?

3. Where might the people live that Jesus is seeking? A prison? A pregnancy crisis center? The homeless shelter? My neighbor? My own home? How might I be used by Jesus to find them?

4. Who are those who will help me find them? _____

PRAYER: Now it is time for you to talk to Jesus who has found you in the sycamore tree or some other place and has declared that He must go to *your* house today. You may choose to share with Jesus some of the following thoughts:

- Lord, show me what is crowding my spiritual vision so that I find it difficult to see who You are.
- With You, Jesus, as a part of my life, enable me to make restitution with others and my past releasing me to forgive others as You have forgiven me.
- How will I ever be able to keep to myself the news that today salvation has come to *my* house!
You have come searching for *me* in order to save *me*!

Lord, give me Your heart that passionately searches for the lost. Give me Your eyes to see them that by bringing You to their house they might come to know who you are and be saved. _____

LESSON FOUR

A SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW

MARK 4:1-8 – THE SOWER, SOIL, AND SEED

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus often told stories. He used common ordinary things that people were familiar with to teach spiritual truths. These stories were called *parables*. This study includes three of the many parables Jesus told. The first parable is about a sower who went out to plant his crop. Much of the meaning rests in the condition of the soil where the seed falls. The nugget of the story is found in Jesus' words, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Keep in mind that this story is recorded in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. Using all three accounts will give additional meaning and understanding to what Jesus is saying. This lesson uses Mark 4:1-20 as its central reading.

LESSON 4

Part 1

TEACHING: In Lessons 1 and 2 we learned that Jesus used visual imagery in order to explain spiritual truths. With Nicodemus He used the visuals of birth and wind. With the woman of Samaria He used water. Like birth, wind, and water Jesus often used common, ordinary things of life to help those who heard Him understand the spiritual truths He was teaching. In Matthew 13:34 we are told that all these things _____ said to the _____ in _____; indeed, He said nothing to _____ without a _____. In verse 35 Matthew goes on to say what had been prophesied about Jesus and what He fulfilled: “ _____

_____ (Psalm 78:2).”

INTRODUCTION: In Lessons 4-6 we will become acquainted with three of the many *parables* that Jesus taught. Parables are stories. The stories, like the visuals, were based on the ordinary things of life. They were another means He used to communicate spiritual truths. It is interesting to note that no parables are found in the Book of John. Rather, John used I AM statements in which Jesus again used the common and ordinary things of life to teach who He was. Review some I AM statements of Jesus. What are the visuals He used?

Reference	I AM statement	Visual
John 6:35, 48, 51		
John 8:12		
John 10:7		
John 10:11		
John 11:25		
John 15:1		

ASSIGNMENT: Now let's take a look at several parables found in Matthew 13.

EXERCISE:

1. Read the following parables. Identify the visual Jesus uses to connect with the people. You will notice that in each of these parables He begins with the phrase “ _____
_____ ”
 - a. Matthew 13:24-30 – Visual: _____
 - b. Matthew 13:31-32 – Visual: _____
 - c. Matthew 13:44-45 – Visual: _____
 - d. Matthew 13:47-52 – Visual: _____
2. Parables hold a moral or spiritual truth. Read each of the parables again and see if you are able to identify the truth Jesus wants to teach. If you find this difficult, please proceed to the next section. You won't be left behind!
 - a. Verses 24-30 – The truth: _____
 - b. Verses 31-32 – The truth: _____
 - c. Verses 44-45 – The truth: _____
 - d. Verses 47-52 – The truth: _____

OVERVIEW: In the parables of these next three lessons we will:

1. look at the story as Jesus tells it;
2. identify the common, ordinary things of life that were familiar to the Jewish people of Palestine; and,
3. search for the spiritual meaning of the parable that gives application to our lives.

Part 2

ASSIGNMENT: Read Mark 4:1-8. This parable is also recorded in Matthew 13:1-9 and Luke 8:4-8.

Find, read, and bookmark these references for your study.

- Where is Jesus?
- To whom is He telling this parable?
- What common, ordinary thing does Jesus use that these people living in an agrarian community would understand?
- What is the end of the story?
- Did you notice any major differences in the stories found in Matthew and Luke?

EXERCISE:

1. Jesus had been sitting by the lake (Matthew 13:1). The scene changes, however, from alone time on the beach, enjoying the peace and quiet to what according to Mark 4:1b? _____

2. To accommodate the crowd, Jesus got into a boat. The crowds had gathered along the shore. What did He begin to tell them (verse 2)? _____

3. He began to teach the crowds with parables (verse 2). Mark chose to record one of them.
- a. Who is the first character in the parable (verse 3)? _____
 - b. What was he doing? _____

Note: The seed was sown by hand from a bag that the farmer draped across his shoulder. As he walked the farmer would cast the seed. He would plant carefully not to waste the seed but he also planted liberally in order to yield a high production crop.

4. As the farmer sowed (scattered) the seed, where did some of the seed fall (verse 4)? _____

5. What happened to the seed that fell on the path? _____

6. Where did other seed fall (verse 5a)? _____

- a. What was the problem with the rocky places? _____
- b. So, what happened to the seed (verses 5b-6)? _____

- c. What did the plant lack (verse 6b)? _____

7. Where did still other seed fall (verse 7)? _____

- a. What was the problem this time? _____
- b. What happened to the plant? _____

8. Finally, where did the remaining seed fall (verse 8)? _____

- a. And, what was the result?
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____
- b. What was the size of the crop (verse 8b)? _____

9. How does Jesus end the story (verse 9)? _____

OBSERVATIONS:

1. Jesus is sitting alone quietly by the lake. Then we are told that such large crowds were pressing in on Him that He got in a boat, sat down, and taught the people gathered on the shore. The water between the boat and the shoreline magnified His voice for the crowds to hear. If you have ever been on the shoreline of a lake, you know that voices can travel far because of the inability of the water to absorb sound.
2. Maybe Jesus came out of the house to sit by the lake in preparation for the crowds that would be gathering to hear His teachings. Was He anticipating the crowds that gathered? Was He excited about another full day of teaching? Your thoughts: _____

3. The story Jesus told it is not difficult to understand. A farmer went out to scatter seeds. Some fell on hard, packed ground. Some fell on rocky places with shallow soil and although the seed sprouted the plant began to wither because it had no root from which to draw moisture, especially in the heat of the day. And, some fell in the soil among the thorns and the thorns grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good, cultivated soil and yielded a crop much greater than what was sown. Everyone who heard this parable knew this was a story about what actually happened when a farmer scattered his seed.
4. So, why did Jesus tell this story? If you were in the crowd and you heard Him tell this story, what do you think would be going through your mind? Maybe you'd be thinking something like... "So, go on, Jesus, tell us more." Maybe you would be disappointed that you came all this way to hear His teachings and now He has just told you about a farmer planting seeds and you don't have a clue as to what He is trying to teach you! Your thoughts: _____

5. Jesus ended by saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This one sentence holds the profound truth Jesus was teaching. This was the point Jesus wanted to make. One's anatomical ears heard physical sound but ears of the heart listened for and longed to hear the deeper things of the Spirit of God. In the Old Testament to hear is to both hear *and obey*.

Part 3

ASSIGNMENT: Read Mark 4:10-12, Matthew 13:10-17, and Luke 8:9-10.

EXERCISE:

1. What did the disciples and others gathered around Jesus want to know (Mark 4:10)? _____

2. What question did the disciples ask in Matthew 13:10? _____

3. In Luke 8:9 what did the disciples want to know? _____

TEACHING: All three references speak about the “secrets of the kingdom.” Find and underline these words. Jesus seemed to indicate that not everyone who was following Him and heard Him teach were eager to find out the secrets of the kingdom. They were listening for different reasons. There were always those who followed Him looking for ways to criticize and accuse Him of what He said. The secrets, therefore, were not something that everyone knew. Isn’t that the very nature of a secret? Jesus seemed to be telling His disciples and those who were with Him that secrets of the kingdom were contained in this parable. If Jesus’ listeners wanted to learn those secrets they had to listen with the ears of their hearts for understanding. The kingdom secrets weren’t out there for just anyone but for those who were eager to learn, Jesus was eager to teach. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

EXERCISE: Jesus tells the meaning of the parable to those gathered around Him. Imagine yourself crowding in close so that you would be able to hear as He explains.

1. The farmer throws out the seed. What is the seed (Mark 4:14)? _____
2. Identify what each Gospel writer says about the different soils and what happens to the seeds

a. Matthew 13

Soil #1 Path	Verse 19:
Soil #2 Rocky	Verses 20-21:
Soil #3 Thorny	Verse 22:
Soil #4 Good	Verse 23:

b. Mark 4

Soil #1 Path	Verse 15:
Soil #2 Rocky	Verses 16-17:

Soil #3 Thorny	Verses 18-19:
Soil #4 Good	Verse 20:

c. Luke 8

Soil #1 Path	Verse 12:
Soil #2 Rocky	Verse 13:
Soil #3 Thorny	Verse 14:
Soil #4 Good	Verse 15:

APPLICATION QUESTION:

- As I consider the soil of my heart, my heart's ears, on which soil has the Word fallen? _____

- The seed (the Word of God) needs soil (a heart) in order for the seed to take root and grow. The soil needs to be prepared to receive the kernel. With God's Spirit at work within you, where do you see Him working the soil of your heart so that His Word is able to take root and grow?

- What are those things that threaten your heart making the soil for the Word hard and shallow? What is it that wants to choke the Word out of your life? _____

Part 4

SUMMARY: In a nutshell Jesus describes the outcome of the seed on the condition of the soil. Luke 8:12 tells us the seed that falls on the hard soil of the heart doesn't have a chance to survive and become a plant because the _____ comes and takes away the Word from their _____, so that they may not _____ and be _____.

With the second soil Jesus tells us that these individuals at once receive the Word with joy when they hear it. The plant, however, lasts only a short time because it has not developed a root to anchor and stabilize the plant, keeping it supplied and strengthened with nutrients from deep in the soil. Matthew says that when _____ or _____ arises on account of the _____, immediately he _____ (Matthew 13:21b).

The third soil receives the Word but the seed has fallen among the thorns. The _____ of the _____ and the _____ of _____ and the _____ for other _____ enter in and _____ the _____, and it _____ unfruitful (Mark 4:19).

Finally, the good soil! St. Luke tells us in verse 15: As for that in the good soil, they are those who, _____ the Word, _____ it fast in an _____ and _____ heart, and _____ fruit with _____. This is a promise!

TEACHING: In the light of this summary, keep in mind the crowd to whom Jesus was speaking. We can almost assume that every type of heart-soil was present as He spoke. The disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables (Matthew 13:10). In Luke 8:9 they asked Him what this parable meant. They wanted to know the hidden secrets of the kingdom of God. This is what good soil searches for. This is the heart that hears the Word and holds on to it. This is the heart that hears the Word and accepts it. This is the heart that hears the Word and obeys it.

In Matthew 13:16 Jesus says to those gathered around Him, “Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.” The secret of the kingdom of God was before their eyes. Jesus was the One who was ushering in the kingdom of God! Prophets and righteous men longed to see the Messiah, the Christ, the Promised One but were not able to see or hear Him, the One who was the Word, Jesus Christ!

Now we need to go back to the explanation of the parable. What are we told about the seed (Luke 8:11)? Each of the three Gospel writers says the same thing about the seed. The seed is the _____. Our next reference is John 1:1-2 where we are told that the Word was from the beginning, and John 1:14 says that the _____ became _____ and _____ among us.

The Word is the spoken Word of God but John reminds us that Jesus *is* the Word. The farmer scatters the seed and the seed lands on different soils. Jesus is saying that that is how different hearts will receive Him. He will not be welcomed by some hearts because of the evil one. He will be welcomed by others

but it will be short lived. As soon as they realize that there's a cost to receiving Him into their hearts they want no part of Him. For others He will be choked out of their lives by their constant worry about the cares of this life or are deceived by wealth and have no need for Him because of the desire for things. But, those who receive Him, who embrace and welcome Him into their hearts and lives and invite Him to bring to them the secrets of the kingdom, those He enables to produce a crop that multiplies a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown!

APPLICATION QUESTION: Where do you see yourself in this picture? Has Jesus, the Word made flesh, been welcomed into your heart and embraced as the One who holds all the secrets of the kingdom of God, as the One who wants to share all His secrets with all of us? Give yourself time to reflect on this and journal some of your thoughts: _____

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, keep working the soil of my heart. Keep the evil one far from me. Give my faith roots that anchor me in my relationship with You. Be a shield around me protecting me from all that would seek to choke my understanding of who You are and from all that would deceive me into thinking that something holds greater value than knowing You. Continue to reveal to me the secrets of the kingdom that I might understand, accept, and retain You all the days of my life, and having persevered, produce a crop that gives glory and honor to Your most holy Name. _____

Part 5

INTRODUCTION: We have one major piece of this parable to deal with before we complete our lesson. The question is: Who is the farmer? We were told about the seed and the different types of soil but we have not identified the farmer. Each of the Gospel writers simply says, "A farmer went out to sow his seed." Mark 4 says in the explanation of the parable, "The farmer sows the Word."

REFLECTION: Consider for a moment that *you* are the farmer. You are the one scattering the seed. You are the one who is sowing in order that you might harvest a crop that produces a hundred, sixty, and thirty times what was sown.

1. Where is the soil where you are scattering seed? _____

2. What are you sowing? _____

3. What do you expect to harvest? _____

4. Are you sowing generously in order to reap a bountiful harvest? _____

APPLICATION: If you and I are the farmers, who are those with whom we are sharing the love of Jesus? Where are we mixing and mingling or are we staying pretty much to ourselves? The farmer may have the seed in his huge sack but unless he scatters seed he will have no harvest.

1. Where are those places I mix with others and choose to sow the seed of the Word?

2. Where am I scattering the seed, sharing the truth about Him and His desire to rule and reign in the hearts of us all? _____

3. If I am the farmer, am I generously scattering the Word or am I more cautious and reluctant? Do I let my fear of wasting the seed on the paths and rocky soil keep me from enthusiastically casting far and wide in order that the Word bears an abundant harvest? What do I do well?

What do I need to do differently? _____

4. Have I ever considered the potential of what is in my seed sack? What could God’s Spirit do with the seed of His Word as I intentionally release it into my neighborhood, my community, my circle of friends, and all those other places where good soil is waiting for seeds? Some of your thoughts: _____

MEMORIZATION: God promises a crop! A bountiful harvest! He’s looking for farmers who will gladly go and scatter seed today. The memory verses for this lesson are from Isaiah 55:10-11. If you have already memorized them then use this for a review. If not, write these verses on your index card and relish this promise of God as a word of encouragement, hope, and a promise that He will enable you to bear a crop of a hundred times what you have planted! He tells us through the prophet Isaiah: “For as the _____ and the _____ come down from _____ and do not _____ there but _____ the _____, making it bring forth and _____, giving _____ to the _____ and _____ to the _____, so shall my _____ be that goes out from my _____; it shall not _____ to me _____, but it shall

_____ that which I _____, and shall
_____ in the _____ for which I _____ it.”

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, it is much easier to read the parable than to see in my mind the witnessing opportunities. I find it hard to believe your promise to produce a crop. I find it so difficult to speak out and generously scatter seed. I feel as though I know so little and need to know so much. I fear being alone and yet know that you promise to be with me. I would rather stay home and yet I know that You have sent me. Grab hold of me and release me from all that binds my heart in fear. Keep me mindful that it is all about You, the Word made flesh that dwells among us, the Word of God! _____

LESSON FIVE

YOU GO, AND DO LIKEWISE

LUKE 10:25-37 – THE GOOD SAMARITAN

OVERVIEW OF LESSON 5

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INTRODUCTION

In this next parable we are shown compassion in action. Read the verses carefully. Observe the man in Jesus' story who treated the injured sojourner. Catch his attitude. Also consider what Jesus was communicating to the man who asked the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and then proceeds to ask another question, "And who is my neighbor?" Have you ever asked these questions?

Jesus knew the heart of the man who wanted to test Him. He knows the heart of those who live compassionate and mercy-filled lives. He knows the importance of relationships and the value of human life to His heavenly Father. He finishes His encounter with the man with the words, "You go, and do likewise." Jesus left no room for rebuttle. One who is merciful will receive mercy (Matthew 5:7).

LESSON 5

Part 1

TEACHING: Lesson 5 is the study of a parable about love, love for God and love for one's neighbor. For the orthodox Jew the Torah, the supreme law, was the Law of Moses which included the Ten Commandments and the Levitical laws all found within the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. This Law of Moses was God's divine law given for guidance and direction as to how the Jewish community was to live. The more meticulously an individual kept these laws the more respect the person received from the community.

As you recall from the study of Nicodemus, the Pharisees were considered to be experts of these laws. Jesus, however, was in constant conflict with these men because they had lost sight of the purpose of the Law. They failed to understand why God had given the Law. They used it for self-aggrandizement rather than as a guide for loving God and for loving their neighbor. Jesus brought to the Jewish community through His life and teachings the law of love which had been buried under all the prideful obedience to the mundane do's and don'ts of what had become *their* laws.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Luke 10:25-28.

- Who came to Jesus?
- Why did he come?
- What was his question?
- What was Jesus' response?

EXERCISE:

1. Who came to Jesus (verse 25a)? _____
To develop a clearer picture of what is taking place, what are we told in Matthew 22:34-35a?

2. He came to _____ Jesus. Other translations use the word *tempted*. These experts wanted to challenge Jesus in order to find fault with Him and discredit His teachings and ultimately discredit Him as the Messiah. Their question and Jesus' response almost sound like a game entitled "Stump the Professor."
3. Back to Luke 10... So, the expert asks Jesus the question (verse 25): _____

4. Jesus turns the question back to the expert (verse 26). What does He ask? _____

5. Immediately the expert was able to respond with how the Law read (verse 27): “You shall _____ the _____ your _____ with all your _____ and with all your _____ and with all your _____ and with all your _____ (Deuteronomy 6:5), and your _____ as _____ (Leviticus 19:18).
6. And Jesus answered (verse 28): _____

REFLECTION:

1. If you were one of this man’s peers and were also an expert of the Law, what do you think would be going on in your head right now? _____

2. This Pharisee asked a question that implied if he did enough of the right things he would be able to save himself. He asked, “What must *I do* to inherit eternal life?” What do you think he was expecting Jesus to say? _____
3. Thinking that Jesus would praise him for his righteous living he was taken back when Jesus answered his question with another question. Jesus directed him to reference what the Law said. After all, he was an expert. What was the summary of these two Old Testament Laws?

Part 2

TEACHING: The Commandments given in Exodus 20 are sometimes divided into two tables, or divisions. The first table includes the first four commandments:

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.

These four commandments all speak about our love for _____.

The second table includes the last six commandments:

5. Honor your father and mother that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

These six commandments speak about our love for our _____.

RELECTION:

1. Jesus affirmed the expert by telling him that he answered correctly but then He seemed to deflate the Pharisee's self-confident pride when Jesus said, "Do this and you will live." Knowing and doing are two different things. The man *knew* the right answer but Jesus knew that he was not *doing* what the Law demanded. Romans 3:20 reminds us all that "for by _____ of the _____ no human being will be _____ in His sight, since _____ the law comes _____ of _____."
2. How did this expert in the Law feel now? Have you ever thought that if you were good enough you would "inherit" eternal life, be saved, and go to heaven when you die? _____

3. How do you think Jesus would respond to you? _____

ASSIGNMENT: Read Luke 10:29-37.

- What was the expert's new question?
- Who are the characters in Jesus' story?
- What question does Jesus ask the man?
- What words does Jesus leave with the man?

EXERCISE: Jesus' words "do this and you will live" were convicting. If he did what the Law said he would live but the truth of the matter is that he acted without love toward his neighbor.

1. We learn this man had difficulty with Jesus' words in verse 28. What are we told about him in verse 29? _____

2. Jesus knew the man thought his strength was in keeping the Law but Jesus also knew where the man fell short. The expert reveals where he is vulnerable to keeping the Law. What question does he ask Jesus (verse 29)? _____
3. In answer to his question, Jesus told a _____.
4. Where was the man going (verse 30)? _____
 Jerusalem was situated high on Mt. Zion. The trek from Jerusalem to Jericho was a sharp and dangerous descent. This was a steep road known for its thieves and robbers.
5. What happened to him along the way? _____
6. What did the robbers do to him? _____
7. What was his condition when they left him? _____
8. A new character briefly enters the story (verse 31). Who is it? _____
9. What was his encounter with the man along the roadside? _____

TEACHING: By passing by on the other side the priest was keeping the Levitical law which said: “A priest must not make himself _____ for the dead among his people... (Leviticus 21:1).” The priest in Jesus’ parable kept the Law by avoiding the man.

The same for the Levite in Luke 10:32. What did he do? _____ The Levites were set aside by God to be His priests. Aside from showing a little more curiosity the Levite in the parable responded the same as the priest. Both men passed by on the other side.

Part 3

EXERCISE:

1. Who came along the road next (verse 33)? _____
 Recall from Lesson 2 some of the hatred that was going on between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews were direct descendents of Abraham and considered the Samaritans a mixed race because during and following the exile they intermarried with foreigners who had inhabited the land.
2. What does the Samaritan man do?
 - a. He _____ to where the man _____ (verse 33).
 - b. What happened to the Samaritan when he saw the man? _____
 - c. What steps did he take to help the man (verse 34)?
 - i. _____

- ii. _____
 - iii. _____
 - iv. _____
- d. On top of everything else, what does he do in verse 35? _____

- e. What does he tell the innkeeper? _____

REFLECTION: “But a Samaritan...came to where the man was...and went to him (verses 33-34).” These words demand our attention. Coming to the place where people are is not necessarily an easy thing to do. For example, if we encounter someone who has a different opinion or viewpoint, we argue insisting that they come to where we are. When someone’s lifestyle is governed by immorality we insist they change their behavior and get their act together. Is our attitude toward those individuals much different than the priest and Levite who withheld mercy and passed by on the other side? When an acquaintance is consumed by an addiction we tend to “pass by on the other side.” How can we be a neighbor who helps the one lying helplessly by the roadside of our lives without coming to where these individuals are? How can we care for them without seeing them with eyes of compassion? How can we help without becoming involved with them in the condition in which they are found? Your thoughts and reflections: _____

EXERCISE:

1. Now Jesus has finished telling the story. What question does Jesus ask the expert in the Law (verse 36)? _____

2. The expert answered (verse 37): _____
3. And Jesus told him: _____

SUMMARY: We have completed the overview of the parable. Simply stated, a man was robbed and left for dead. Two passed by without helping him but a Samaritan was passing by who stopped, took pity on the man, and did for the man everything the man could not do for himself. He willingly paid the price the man owed for his care.

REFLECTION: As you reflect on these verses (25-37), with which character(s) do you identify? the expert in the Law? the victim? the priest or Levite?

1. What about the expert in the Law? When are those times you want to test God or tempt Him? Or, when would you like to trap Him in His own words? Are there times when you think you are more righteous than others? When are the times you'd like to pick your own "neighbors," those with whom you associate? Your thoughts and reflections: _____

2. What about the victim? Maybe you feel like him, beat up by life and helplessly left on the road to die. You thought at least the church members would have helped you out. You've lost your faith in your fellowman and now can only hope someone will take pity on you. Your thoughts and reflections: _____

3. Then there are the priest and Levite? Maybe because you identify with these characters you feel guilty. All too often you find yourself avoiding difficult situations because they demand too much from your already overbooked life. As one who belongs to a church, serves, and volunteers so much time, you just don't have time for anything more. Your thoughts and reflections: _____

Part 4

TEACHING: The Samaritan hated the Jew and the Jew hated the Samaritan. Yet, we are told that the Samaritan had mercy on the man. What does mercy mean? Why would Jesus use this type of a relationship in order to answer the question, who is my neighbor?

One acting unmercifully might have said, "You deserve what you got. I am out of here. I owe you nothing. I don't know you and have no obligation to you. After all, we are enemies." What is interesting is that is exactly the way his fellow Jews, the priest and the Levite, responded to his situation. They acted unmercifully toward their brother, their Jewish neighbor.

The Samaritan, however, acted with mercy. Mercy says that you will not receive what you deserve. Mercy says that I will love you as I would want to be loved. Mercy steps forward and acts with compassion toward the helpless and the hopeless. It's interesting to observe a couple of phrases in verse 33. "But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, _____; and when he saw him, he had compassion. He _____ to him and bound up his wounds..." The

others saw him and passed by but the Samaritan came to where the man was. Mercy is not put off by the condition of others. Mercy demands nothing before it goes into action.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. Who are those in my life who have acted mercifully toward me when I have needed compassion and forgiveness rather than judgment and condemnation? _____

What did they do to show mercy toward me? _____

2. Who are those to whom I have been the Good Samaritan? Who are those to whom I have gone to a difficult place in their life and brought mercy? _____

3. Daily we are given opportunities to bring mercy to people's lives. Bringing mercy enables us to bring Jesus to people. Who might be someone I know who is living a life that lacks hope and promise? _____

What might I do to help that person by offering to do for them what they cannot do for themselves? _____

REFLECTION: Once again, we look at the characters in the story. In particular we consider the victim left for dead along the road, the one stripped of his clothing, beaten, and robbed. It is the man abandoned, powerless, and destitute without any hope of rescuing himself.

1. Do I see myself as this man? Has sin robbed me of physical strength, financial capabilities, a good reputation, purpose and significance? Am I lying hopelessly in the ditch of my own wrongdoing? As I consider my life what kind of spiritual condition am I in? Your thoughts:

2. Do I see a shadow? Is someone looking down on me? Has someone found me? Is someone tending to me, loving me and soothing my sorrows and healing my wounds? Who is this merciful Samaritan? Is this Jesus lifting me and taking me to the inn? Your thoughts: _____

3. Is this what mercy looks like—one who takes my sin, my wrongdoing, my inadequacies, my difficulties, everything negative about me and takes it into Himself that I need to bear it no more? Is this the mercy that pulls me from the ditch and gives me a new life to live? What has just

happened? _____

Part 5

EXERCISE: God speaks of mercy. He speaks of Himself as being merciful and He calls us to live lives of mercy. Look up these references that speak of our merciful God. What do we learn about God’s mercy and the mercy He would have us show to one another?

Reference	What do we learn about mercy (love)?
Psalm 23:6	
Psalm 27:7	
Luke 6:36	
Psalm 52:8	
Deuteronomy 4:31	
Psalm 103:11	
Hosea 6:6	
Matthew 5:7	
Micah 6:8	
Ephesians 2:4	

MEMORIZATION: Keeping in mind the picture of the Lord coming to us as the Good Samaritan, turn to Ephesians 2:4-5. This speaks of God’s love for us coming as both mercy (not receiving what we do deserve) and grace (receiving what we don’t deserve). Enjoy these words: “But _____ being rich in _____, because of the great _____ with which He _____ us, even when we were _____ in our _____, made us _____ together with Christ – by _____ you have been _____.” Write this verse on an index card

and jot down times when someone grants you mercy and look for opportunities in which you have the opportunity to show mercy to others.

REVIEW:

1. Tell the parable in your own words: _____

2. Which character was a neighbor to the man and why? _____

APPLICATION:

1. The Samaritan was the neighbor. He was the one who acted mercifully. We might say that he acted neighborly or did the neighborly thing. Consider your neighbor to be you. The Law said that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. How do I treat myself? Do I treat myself mercifully? Do I forgive myself and take care of myself? Do I make good choices and decisions for myself? Am I wise, recognizing that I can only live as God's child in His mercy? My thoughts: _____

2. Am I a good neighbor? To whom am I to act mercifully? To the man next door? The secretary at the office? My child's teacher? A difficult professor? Do I show mercy to them as a good neighbor who recognizes that God's mercy given to me is a means for me to give them God's mercy? My thoughts: _____

CHALLENGE: Tell a child, a spouse, a friend, or someone close to you the parable of the Good Samaritan. Share what this story means and what it means to you. Invite them to read the story with you.

PRAYER: Lord, You give me countless opportunities in which to show mercy to other. Often I withhold mercy for foolish reasons. I ask You to forgive me. Open my eyes to see those in need and give me a heart like Yours, filled with compassion and mercy. Enable me to understand that You found me. I was lost and hopeless but in Your mercy You acted mercifully toward me. You took upon yourself all the responsibility for my condition. You took upon Yourself my dirt and filth and restored my soul. You took all of my wrongdoing to the cross. You paid the price in order that I might be set free. In Your great love You made me alive to live with You forever. I can only give to You my thanks and praise. _____

LESSON SIX

AND THEY BEGAN TO CELEBRATE

LUKE 15:11-32 – THE WAITING FATHER

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INTRODUCTION

This parable is the story of a son who left home and squandered his inheritance on reckless living. You may find yourself identifying with this young man. On the other hand, you may know the heart of this father waiting for his son to return home. And, still others may understand the anger of the older brother.

As you study Luke 15 remember Jesus' audience. Jesus was speaking to those who could identify with the younger brother for they were regarded as the tax collectors and sinners. At the same time, the scribes and Pharisees were also among those present and we are told that they were grumbling. The parable demands that we consider the heart of the father. Listen carefully as Jesus masterfully tells the story to those who drew near to Him.

The Father could only celebrate for "my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And to the older son He could only repeat and encourage his son to join in the celebration and to be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

LESSON 6

Part 1

INTRODUCTION: Luke 15 contains several parables Jesus told to His followers. The first two verses tell us who some of Jesus' followers were. In verse 1 we are told that _____ and _____ all gathered to hear Him. Others continued to follow Him as critics. They were the _____ and _____. You will recall when Jesus went to the home of Zacchaeus that the people _____ (Luke 19:7). They complained because Jesus had gone to be the guest of a _____. Things are no different in Luke 15:2. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were more upset with the company Jesus kept than with what He had to say.

EXERCISE: Beginning with verse 3 Jesus tells three different parables:

1. The parable of the lost _____ (verse 3-7) The teaching in verse 7: _____

2. The parable of the lost _____ (verse 8-10) The teaching in verse 10: _____

3. The parable of the lost _____ which begins at verse 11. This parable is the study for Lesson 6.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Luke 15:11-16.

- What did the son want?
- What did the father give him?
- What did the son do?
- Where did the son end up?

EXERCISE:

1. What are we told in verse 11? _____
2. What did the younger son tell his father (verse 12a)? _____

3. What did the father do (verse 12b)? _____
4. What did the son do (verse 13)?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____

- c. _____
5. Everything he had was gone. He spent it all. Now what happens (verse 14a)? _____

 6. What is the condition of this man (verse 14b)? _____
 7. What did he decide to do (verse 15a)? _____
 8. What job did he get (verse 15b)? _____
 9. Describe his desperate condition (verse 16): _____

REFLECTION: Remember Jesus' audience. Tax collectors and sinners were listening to Him. Imagine how He must have captured their attention as He told this story. To some He was telling *their* story for they considered their lives ruined and in shambles. They were living desperate lives, morally and financially bankrupt, not knowing where to turn. They saw themselves living as society's derelicts trapped in the filth of their own life's sty.

TEACHING: Keep in mind that Jesus was telling the story of a Jewish father and his son. The consequences of the son's lifestyle reduced him to an existence among the pigs. According to the Law of Moses the pig was a forbidden meat. What are we told in Leviticus 11:1-3, 7-8?

1. What were the qualifications for edible meat (verse 3)?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
2. What was the problem with the pig (verse 7)? _____
3. According to verses 7b-8 what were God's instruction to the Israelites? _____

Undoubtedly, the Pharisees and teachers of the law regarded these tax collectors and sinners no better than unclean, and certainly without religious piety and pride.

Part 2

REFLECTION: Looking closely at this son we see in the opening scene an arrogant, ungrateful son who wanted nothing more to do with his father. We are told that he set off for a distant country, a country that allowed him to abandon all of the values and traditions of his father and the community in which he was raised. No longer would he have to abide by the rules. He became the epitome of disobedience and rebellion. He had chosen for himself a life of debauchery. He had become a slave to his lifestyle and now sat in the sty of emptiness, humiliation, and defeat.

ASSIGNMENT: Continue reading the parable. Read Luke 15:17-24.

- What did he realize when he came to his senses?
- What was his plan?
- What was he prepared to tell his father?
- What was his father's reaction to his returned?

EXERCISE:

1. What are we told in verse 17? _____
2. What did he realize?
 - a. About his father's hired men? _____
 - b. About himself _____
3. What is his plan (verse 18-19)?
 - a. Where is he going to go? _____
 - b. What is he going to tell his father?
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____

REFLECTION: What had just happened? What was going on inside of this young man? What brought this turnaround in his life? His father wasn't there to beg him to come home. We aren't told of anyone or anything else that would have caused him to "come to his senses." In verse 17 he recalled what he knew. He knew that his father's hired servants had more than he had. They had food to spare. He knew that he had nothing!

What else did this prodigal son know? Who was he? In spite of all he had done he was still a son! He was his father's son! He knew that the best for him was at his father's house! What power exists in sonship! However, the son did not believe he was worthy of sonship at this point! Nevertheless, what a tenacious hold the father had on his son in the son's most desperate time! He belonged to the father and the father was his! The relationship that he had with his father would not be destroyed by his wild living and bankruptcy. The relationship was greater than anything he could do. This becomes more obvious as the story continues.

EXERCISE:

1. So, we are told (verse 20) that he _____ and _____ to his father.
2. What was the father's reaction to his son's return (verse 20b)?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

3. Notice the father’s exuberance upon seeing his son. Filled with compassion he *ran* to his son, *threw* his arms around him and kissed him. Compassion left no room for doubt that he was glad to see his son again. The son confessed. He told his father exactly what he had said he would. How far did he get in his confession? Compare verses 18 and 19 with verse 21.

4. The father just wanted to celebrate! What were his orders to his servants (verse 22-23)?

- a. _____ (the robe of honor)
- b. _____ (the ring of inheritance)
- c. _____ (the sandals of prestige)
- d. _____

5. According to verse 24, what was all the hoopla about? Why the feast and celebration?

Part 3

REFLECTION: Sounds like a party to me!

REVIEW: Before we continue with the parable we need to remember who else was listening as Jesus taught. We talked about the tax collectors and sinners. Luke 15:2 will help us recall Jesus’ audience.

Who are the others? _____ and _____ What were they muttering about? _____

ASSIGNMENT: Read Luke 15:25-32.

- Who is the new character that is introduced?
- What was his reaction to what was going on?
- What was the response of the father?
- What is the lesson of this parable?

EXERCISE:

1. Who has been working out in the field (verse 25)? _____
2. What did he hear as he came near the house? _____
3. He asks the servant what's going on and the servant tells him that your _____ has _____, and your _____ has _____ the _____, because _____ has _____ him back _____ and _____ (verse 27).
4. How did the older brother respond to this news (verse 28a)? _____
5. So what did his father do (verse 28b)? _____
6. What does this son tell his father?
 - a. (verse 29) _____
 - b. _____
 - c. (verse 30) _____
 - d. _____
7. And now, we are brought into the heart of the father. How does he reply to his son's accusations (verse 31-32)? "Son, _____ are always _____ me, and all that is _____ is _____. It was fitting to _____ and be _____, for this your _____ was _____ and is _____; he was _____ and is _____."

REFLECTION: Those who have never left home in order to “get away from it all” may find it easy to identify with the feelings and reactions of the older brother. He finds it hard to celebrate with his father because he believes if anyone should get a party with the fatted calf it should be him! He is the one who served faithfully. He is the one who didn't squander his father's property on prostitutes. He is the one who stayed home and worked in the fields. He is the one who deserves a “thank you appreciation” party for all of his faithfulness and hard work. The father, however, sees it differently. The father is so happy that his young son is home safe and sound. He just must celebrate. He can't help himself! Why (verse 24)? _____

Part 4

TEACHING: At this point in our study we need to look at the characters and discover the spiritual truths Jesus is teaching us in this parable.

- a. The young son represents those who have fallen away and no longer live in a relationship with their Heavenly Father. Often in their destitute condition they come to an acute awareness of their need for the Father's home and long to return to Him.
 - b. The father is God, our Heavenly Father, the One who created us to be His own. He is the Waiting Father, the One constantly on the lookout for those coming down the path and returning home. We are told that while he was still a long way off his father saw him. How long had the father been watching and waiting, hoping for his son's return?
 - c. The older son represents those who remain faithful to the Father but find it difficult to celebrate with Him when those who have fallen away return home and come back into a relationship with Him. They are the ones who strive to keep every law perfectly. They are the ones everyone admires because they would never behave as his brother did. They are above reproach.
2. Those who remain home are a constant source of rejoicing for the Father but the Father will leave the flock (Luke 15:4), search the house (Luke 15:8), and keep watch (Luke 15:20) doing whatever it takes for the sake of the lost. To the tax collectors and sinners this story brought Good News! Their Good News: No matter what condition I am in and no matter where I might be lost, the Heavenly Father is out looking for me and He will not give up until He finds me!
- Your thoughts and reflections: _____
- _____

To the Pharisees and teachers of the law this just doesn't seem right. This lacks justice from their point of view. They have spent a life time doing whatever it took to live righteously. Now Jesus told them a story that says God, the Father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob calls them to celebrate because one of those who has left home has returned home and has been brought back into the family? Your thoughts and reflections: _____

APPLICATION:

1. Which character(s) do you identify with in this story? _____
 What about that character captures your attention? _____

2. What is the Good News Jesus brings to you as you come to know that He is searching for you and He promises to look for you until you have been found? _____

3. What is the challenge for you if you know that you have been lost and now found and brought into the Father's house? _____
4. What is your challenge as you relate to your neighbors, your friends, and family? _____
5. How are you going to participate with the Father on His mission to seek and save those who are lost? _____

REVIEW: Many of the lesson's key points culminate in Jesus' words at the end of the parable with the words of the Father: "We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Watch for a similar statement or thought in these review passages:

1. What does Jesus tell Nicodemus in John 3:16-17? _____
2. What does He say to the Samaritan woman in John 4:14? _____
3. What does He say to Zacchaeus in Luke 19:10? _____

REFLECTION: There is one character that we need to consider once again. This is the Father. The Father calls us to join Him in His mission. Opportunities are all around us to be like the Father, compassionate and gracious to others. Consider for a moment your life as you watch for someone to return who has turned his back on the Heavenly Father. Envision yourself leaving everything behind and sending out an all-points bulletin (APB), gathering the troops to help in your search and rescue mission, to help bring the spiritually dead that He can make them alive again, to help find the lost one, rejoicing as you carry him/her safely back to the Heavenly Father. Your thoughts and reflections: _____

Part 5

MEMORIZATION: St. Paul encourages us to remember our former life, our life at birth before we were brought into the household of faith. Turn to Ephesians 2:12. Write out the verse on an index card. We are called to remember! Verse 12 tells us to remember our former condition:

1. You were _____ from Christ.
2. You were _____ from community.

3. You were _____ to the covenants of promise.
4. You were without _____.
5. You were without _____ in the world.

St. Paul goes on to say in verse 13 “but now.” That’s the way our lives once were *but now* a change has happened. Something is different. Write out verse 13 on the other side of your index card. Be mindful of the life lived *before* Jesus and the life I now live *with* Jesus:

“*But now* in _____ you who once were _____ have been _____ by the _____ of _____.” I am no longer an outcast, an outsider, a foreigner *but now* I am included, embraced, brought near because of the blood of Christ that was shed and now covers over me. His blood covers over us all! Thanks be to God!

TEACHING: The Pharisees muttered. The teachers of the law muttered. The Jews muttered. Constantly they followed Jesus around muttering as they attempted to corrupt His message and destroy His ministry. They feared that the Law of Moses which they clung to was being replaced by something else, by someone else. Jesus came not to destroy the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17) but to keep it perfectly as no human being could. He came to fulfill the law of love as no human being could.

While the Pharisees and others muttered the tax collectors and sinners invited Jesus into their homes. They sat at His feet eagerly listening to His teachings. Their lives were touched by Jesus who said, “Where are they? Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin (John 8:10-11).” Others were invited into His presence and held in His arms. He called the children and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Luke 18:16).” To those bound up He set free with the words, “You are set free from your infirmity (Luke 13:12).” To Jews who believed Him He said, “If you hold to My teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:32, 36).”

APPLICATION: He calls and invites each of us. He welcomes us into His family. Whether a prodigal son bearing the stench of sin or the older son overcome with resentment and demanding justice, He calls us to Himself and opens wide His arms of welcome drawing us into Himself for we are His. He is rejoicing because he has us back home safe and sound (Luke 15:27).

1. What burden has this relationship with your Heavenly Father lifted for you? _____

2. What bondage is He releasing as He touches your life with His grace and tender mercy?

3. What battle is He fighting for you because the Truth of His Word has set you free? _____

PRAYER: “O give thanks to the Lord for He is Good and His mercy endures forever.” Use this prayer time to give Him your thanks and praise for He has done marvelous things...

1. Thank Him for mercifully carrying the burdens of your life: _____

2. Thank Him for setting you free and enabling you to stand tall: _____

3. Thank Him for faithfully fighting your battles for you with the Truth of His Word:

UNIT REVIEW

**GOD'S SEARCH,
OUR MISSION**

REVIEW

Congratulations! You have completed the study *God's Search, Our Mission*. You have become acquainted with three significant New Testament characters and have studied three of Jesus' many parables. We have learned that since the beginning of time God has been on a mission searching for the lost. The desire of His heart is that all would be saved and come to know Truth. We also know that He is inviting us to join Him in His mission, thus His mission becomes ours! This invitation holds purpose and meaning for our lives as we reach out to our neighbors, coming with God's love to where they are, and endeavoring to do for them what they cannot do for themselves. This invitation holds purpose and meaning for our lives as we embrace the sinners and eat with them for we know that God's love is not selective, not based on a code of law, but offered freely to all. We can say the words Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house" for as He told Nicodemus, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him!"

Once again it is time to review. Remember, this is not a test, only an opportunity to affirm you and your progress as you continue this exciting journey that is shaping your life. As you study you are learning the facts of the stories and the truths about God and humankind. You are also discovering how to apply the facts and truths to your life lived in this 21st Century.

1. Who were the three personalities we studied? Where are their stories found? What is a truth to be remembered?

Personality	Reference	Truth

2. What were the three parables? Where are they found? What is a truth to be remembered?

Parable	Reference	Truth

3. What is one *truth* about Jesus that you gleaned from your study of the personalities?

4. What is *something you learned about God* as you watched Jesus interact with these personalities? _____

5. What is one *application* that you will follow up on as you consider the different personalities the Lord has brought into your life? _____

6. What is one *truth* about Jesus that you gleaned from your study of the parables?

7. What is *something you learned about God* as you listened to Jesus teach the parables?

8. What is one *application* that you will follow up on as you consider the different personalities the Lord has brought into your life? _____

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