

**TODAY** IN THE **WORD**<sup>™</sup>

A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

LEARNING FROM THE  
*Great Teacher*

AUGUST 2020

# Social Distancing and Jesus

## From the President of Moody Bible Institute

*One remarkable thing about Jesus was His ability to make authentic connections with people that changed their lives for eternity.*



One of the most unwelcome words coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic was “social distancing.” We all struggled with separation

from the people we loved. But isolation itself is not a new problem. A 2018 survey reported that loneliness levels had reached an “all-time high” in the United States. Nearly half of the 20,000 adults interviewed said they sometimes or always felt alone.

Loneliness is due not only to the absence of people in our lives but also to a lack of authentic connection. You can be a mom with children clinging to you, a college student with two thousand followers on social media, a doctor who sees dozens of patients, or a bus driver who interacts with hundreds of people every shift and experience loneliness.

One remarkable thing about Jesus was His ability to make authentic connections with people that changed their lives for eternity. The Gospels record more than 40 conversations between Jesus and individuals: the Samaritan woman (John 4), the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18–29), Jairus

(Mark 5:21–43), Nicodemus (John 3), Zacchaeus (Luke 19).

I love how Jesus met with Nicodemus in the middle of the night (John 3) and called the tax collector, Zacchaeus, out of the tree where he was perched (Luke 19:5). Jesus showed His love for people by spending quality time with them. He was never too busy to stop and hear their requests. In Mark 5, a crowd had gathered to hear Jesus when He was interrupted not once, but twice. A religious leader, Jairus, fell at His feet, begging Jesus to heal His daughter. At the same time, a woman touched Him asking for healing. Jesus allowed these interruptions to focus on individuals.

I am impressed that Jesus did not restrict His teaching time to the Temple. Instead, He went out to the places where ordinary people spent time. Jesus practiced the exact opposite of social distancing. He welcomed the curious, the seekers, the disturbed, and the desperate, getting up close and personal with all types of people. What can we learn from the great Teacher? To really notice the people around us: to see, to talk, to listen. Like Jesus, we are called “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). ■

# What Is a Disciple?

by Dr. John Koessler

*It is reassuring to realize that discipleship is not a life of sinless perfection but one of growth into maturity.*

Teachers, as well as learners, are essential to the life of the church. The term *disciple* comes from the Latin word meaning “pupil” or “learner.” In the ancient world, philosophers and rabbis gathered students to themselves. John the Baptist and the Pharisees had disciples (Matt. 9:14; 22:16) and so did Jesus (Matt. 5:1; Luke 19:39).

Discipleship is not a secondary commitment that we make after we come to Christ. If we have trusted in Him for our salvation, then we are disciples. According to Jesus, disciples hold to His teaching (John 13:35). They follow Jesus by imitating His example (Matt. 16:24). There is a fundamental order to the practice of discipleship. It begins with learning that leads to action. In other words, we don’t obey in order to become a disciple. We obey because we are Christ’s disciples. We cannot act on something we do not know. For this reason, all discipleship is grounded in God’s Word.

Discipleship demands a devotion to Christ and His teaching that takes

priority over every other commitment (Luke 14:26–27). Those who follow Jesus value the relationship they have with Him above anything else (Luke 14:33). However, the example of Jesus’ disciples in the New Testament also indicates that we don’t learn everything all at once.

Jesus’ early disciples understood more about what it meant to be His followers after they had walked with Him for several years. They were slow to understand some aspects of His teaching and sometimes failed (John 12:16). It is reassuring to realize that discipleship is not a life of sinless perfection but one of growth into maturity (Luke 22:32; Gal. 2:11–17).

We learn the art of discipleship differently than the apostles did. While they lived and traveled with Jesus, we learn how to follow by studying God’s Word and by observing mature followers of Jesus. Disciple-making is the primary mission of the church (Matt. 28:19–20). ■

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## For Further Study

To learn more about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, read *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* by John Koessler (Moody Publishers).

We hope these questions will help you consider (or discuss with others) what God is teaching you through this month's study of His Word. We've left a bit of room to write down your thoughts as well!

**WEEK 1:** Did you have a teacher who made a deep impression on your life? Who and why?

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**WEEK 2:** Who are the "students" in your life who need to hear the gospel or learn how to live with a biblical worldview?

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**WEEK 3:** What are some "why" questions you can ask to help start a spiritual conversation?

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**WEEK 4:** A closed question requires a yes/no answer. For example, *Do you believe in Jesus?* An open question invites discussion. What is one open-ended question you can ask a non-believer?

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Want more questions? Check out the Go Deeper section on our website or app!

# TODAY IN THE WORD™

## Lessons from the Great Teacher

*I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you.—John 13:15*

Many of us have been taught—at least once—a lesson that shaped our behavior, attitudes, and ultimately, destiny. For the apostles one such moment was certainly when their Lord and Teacher “poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him” (John 13:5). What a striking, even shocking, lesson in humility to those who had argued which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven or who would sit at right hand of Jesus. That lesson still surprises and humbles us today.

This month in *Today in the Word*, we’ll enter the classroom of Teacher Jesus. Together with the disciples, we’ll:

- Review Jesus’ lessons in humility and humbly follow His example
- Learn from the many ways Jesus taught: through parables, His answers to the Pharisees and Sadducees, His sermons, and His open-ended or rhetorical questions
- Emulate the love, empathy, and other tools of the Master Teacher

Thank you for joining us in this month’s *Today in the Word* “school of the Bible”! Let’s strive to be good students, following our Savior as He teaches, shapes, and guides us. ■

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# What Is a Teacher?

Read Matthew 28:16–20

*He taught as one who had authority,  
and not as their teachers of the law. —Matthew 7:29*

Even as a young child, Amy Jensen McCaulley would gather her two younger brothers in the backyard and teach them Bible lessons. After graduating from Moody Bible Institute in 1980, Amy dedicated her life to teaching children from a biblical worldview. Recently, one of her first graders, now a grown married man with children, posted on social media a picture of a postcard Amy had mailed to him when he was in her first-grade class. She encouraged him to keep reading and follow Jesus. Why did this grown man save his teacher's card for so many years? He wanted to thank his teacher for her powerful influence.

Sixty times in the Gospels, Jesus is called *Teacher*. The Greek word for *teacher* is *didaskalos*, meaning an instructor who is acknowledged for mastery in their field of learning. Everyone who came in contact with Jesus' instruction, from demons to disciples to the gathered crowds, even the Pharisees, realized He was, indeed, the Master Teacher.

At the end of Christ's physical time on earth, after His resurrection, Jesus delivered one last lesson to His disciples. Matthew 28 details the important truths found in this final lesson. Notice that Jesus did not spend time walking down memory lane. Instead, He used every moment to teach them, even in this final moment, giving them lessons to last a lifetime. Sadly, some of the eleven gathered disciples doubted (v. 17). Even so, Jesus was intent on delivering His final lesson: "Go and make disciples," "baptizing" and "teaching" them (vv. 19–20). These final instructions, given with complete authority (v. 18), were intended for those who had learned from Him. He instructed them to go and become teachers themselves, sharing what they had learned from the great Teacher, their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (vv. 19–20).

► It's back to school this month as we learn from Jesus, our great Teacher. We hope you will learn from Jesus how to teach others the truth of the gospel and how to live for His glory.

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## Pray with Us

As we learn from Christ, the great Teacher, let's pray that the Lord will open our hearts for the lessons He wants to teach us from His Word this month.

# Check Your Mindset

Read Luke 6:17–38

*Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.—Luke 6:20*

Many of my college students are intimidated by the Teaching Elementary Math Methods course. They say, “I’m just not good at math. I’m worried I won’t be a good math teacher.” How did they develop such a negative mindset? My goal is that they will be able to teach mathematics with a positive mindset. Your mindset reveals what you believe about yourself in a specific situation. Being willing to learn and work through struggles produces a positive mindset and opens your mind to learning.

In today’s passage, Jesus taught His disciples the importance of developing a heavenly mindset because He knew their earthly lives as His followers would be difficult. Verse 17 describes the huge crowd that had gathered to hear from Jesus. But when this famous sermon began, Jesus looked specifically at His disciples (v. 20). He taught them the “blessing” that comes through difficult things: poverty, hunger, sorrow, and hatred (vv. 20–22). Certainly this upside-down view of life was surprising. The poor

would receive God’s kingdom, the hungry would be satisfied, those who weep would laugh.

While we may want great things in our lives right now, our true reward is in heaven (v. 23). That’s why Jesus was teaching those who listened to keep a heavenly mindset. They needed to view the hard things that happened in light of what was to come. Jesus then taught the same lesson in reverse, associating desirable things with the word “woe.” He said, “Woe to you” to those who are rich and well fed, to those who laugh and are flattered. Why? When we become too satisfied with the blessings of the present day, it’s easy to take our eyes off our eternal purpose. The lesson is clear: we need to maintain a heavenly perspective.

► What is affecting your mindset today? Are you suffering? Take comfort in Jesus’ promise that your eternal future is filled with hope. Are you content? Be wary of getting so comfortable that you neglect to turn your heart and mind to God.

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## Pray with Us

Pray for humility to accept Jesus’ hard lessons. Ask Him to help you develop a heavenly perspective and look at life’s trials and difficulties through the truth and hope of God’s Word.

# Be an Influencer

## Read John 1

*I am the voice of the one calling in the wilderness,  
“Make straight the way for the Lord.”—John 1:23*

A website called *Rate My Professor* allows college students to evaluate their teachers, rating them on their level of difficulty and expertise. Many students, when selecting courses, will look at those reviews and use that information to decide which course to enroll in. These student reviews are highly influential! What one student, who has been through the course, says carries significance for those deciding whether or not to enroll.

In his review of Jesus, John the Baptist declared Him “the Lamb of God” (v. 35), a statement that heavily influenced Andrew and John. Jesus then issued this life-changing invitation to His disciples to experience Him for themselves: “Come and you will see” (v. 39). He invited them to come, to walk alongside Him. After spending the day with Jesus, Andrew enthusiastically went to his brother Simon and proclaimed, “We have found the Messiah” (v. 41).

Both John and Andrew became influencers, sharing the good news

that the Messiah had come. Word of Jesus quickly spread to many others, including Philip, Andrew, and Peter. History now records the disciples’ day-to-day experiences as they walked alongside God’s Son and learned from His example. And Jesus’ influence did not stop with His death, resurrection, and ascension. His life has been recorded in the bestselling book of all time spreading from Jew to Gentile and to every continent.

When we share how Christ has worked in our own lives, we influence others. Since September 2, 1981, my life has truly never been the same. Hallelujah! September 2 was the day of my salvation. Tell others how your life has been miraculously *influenced* by the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

► How has your life been changed by Jesus? Tell someone about it today, in a conversation, with a letter, or even on social media. While you might not write a bestselling book, you can certainly tell someone today Who has influenced your life.

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## Pray with Us

You may think you are not an influencer. But Christ is! Ask the Lord to show you someone who needs to hear about God’s work in your life. Your testimony can change someone’s life for eternity.

# A Life-Changing Lesson

## Read John 3

*Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.—John 3:3*

I remember one thing from the third grade: my teacher, Mrs. Howard, liked me. Although long division was very difficult, I was willing to tackle it because I wanted nothing more than to please Mrs. Howard. One day, I showed up to third grade only to learn that Mrs. Howard had suddenly retired. I was crushed. While those mathematics lessons have faded from my memory, Mrs. Howard's care for me as a person has stayed with me for a lifetime.

Twenty-nine times in the gospels, Jesus is addressed as "Teacher." For those students willing to hear, the lessons He taught them would never be lost. In John 3, Nicodemus (a Pharisee in charge of people's spiritual well-being) recognized that Jesus was a very different kind of teacher. Nicodemus approached Jesus at night and said to Him, "You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God was not with him" (v. 3). Nicodemus was compelled by what he had heard and seen of Jesus to risk

the critique of his fellow Pharisees and interact with this teacher who he felt had "come from God" (v. 2). Jesus used this opportunity to teach Nicodemus a life-giving message: he must be born again.

The lesson was confusing at first, and Nicodemus struggled to understand what it meant to be "born again" (v. 3). His questions were sincere, but Jesus observed, "You are Israel's teacher, and do you not understand these things?" (v. 10). Jesus challenged Nicodemus's understanding of salvation. This lesson would have lifelong results, not just for Nicodemus, but for all those he would influence. If anyone needed to know truth so he could share it with others, wouldn't it be "Israel's teacher?"

► Each of us has the opportunity to teach the most powerful life-changing lesson of all: "You must be born again." You don't need a teaching degree to share the good news that Jesus saves sinners. And you never retire from sharing the gospel!

### Pray with Us

Thank the Lord for the powerful lesson He gave Nicodemus in today's reading. May we have a teachable spirit and sensitive heart, open to the truths Christ teaches us in our walk with Him.

# Learning Through Experience

Read Mark 6:30–44

*He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.—Mark 6:34*

As a child, for me a trip to the dentist meant sitting in an electric chair that went up and down, choosing between cinnamon or bubblegum toothpaste, and taking home a plastic bag of goodies. My positive childhood experiences at the dentist gave me valuable knowledge and a good attitude toward oral hygiene that would last a lifetime.

Experience can be a powerful teacher. The New Testament Greek word *ginosko* means “to come to know” or understand. Jesus masterfully used real-life experiences to help His followers learn enduring lessons. In Mark 6:30–44 the disciples returned to Jesus after being given power to heal and cast out demons. Jesus and the disciples tried to rest, but large crowds continued to follow them. Notice Christ’s attitude of compassion as He taught late into the day. Verse 34 tells us that Jesus “had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

The crowds were so enthralled with His teaching, that no one thought

about how food would be obtained. Jesus told his disciples to meet the people’s need and feed them. Taking inventory, they found only five loaves and two fish (v. 41). In Jesus’ hands, that meager supply multiplied to feed more than 5,000 people.

Imagine, if you will, that dinner-time conversation! I am sure people swapped many stories the following days due to this once-in-a-lifetime experience. What’s most important about experiential learning is that it leads to greater understanding. The truth of Mark 6 is not just that dinner supplies could be miraculously fashioned out of thin air. The disciples and the crowd witnessed an all-powerful God who was able to meet their needs. They saw a demonstration of God’s love for people.

► What experiences in your life have taught truth to you? What have you learned about God through the way He has cared for your needs? Write down that story so you will remember and share it today!

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## Pray with Us

During your prayer time, remember circumstances when God showed His loving care for you. Praise Him for meeting your needs and in this way, teaching you about His character and His sovereignty.

# Asking the “Why”

Read Matthew 6:25–34

*And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.—Matthew 6:28*

*Why is the sun hot? Why must I take a bath? Why can't I do it by myself?* Anyone who has worked with preschoolers understands that their inquisitive minds want a lot of answers. Helping children have age-appropriate understanding is important. Teachers know that understanding the “why” can build knowledge and trusting relationships.

Jesus knows that we are often like children who need to learn basic lessons. He repeatedly asks His followers the *why* questions, helping them think deeply about their own beliefs, words, and actions. Seven times in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus asks “Why?” His “whys” are often followed by a “what” question because the *why* often reveals the *what*. Both questions, when asked together, reveal man’s need.

In Matthew 6:25–34, Christ teaches by asking both *why* and *what*: “And why do you worry about clothes? . . . So do not worry saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” (vv.

28–31). Jesus explains that just as God clothes the flowers with splendor, He also cares for the needs of His children. God is our heavenly Father who sees and cares for our needs. Asking this simple *why* question Jesus teaches us *what* is important: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (v. 33).

At times I fail to ask questions out of concern that I might offend someone or perhaps because the situation is none of my business. However, Christ calls us to be lovingly involved in one another’s “business” by asking important questions that lead people to a personal knowledge of Him. He knows that we, like preschoolers, need direction and guidance.

► Pay attention to the open doors to conversations that God might be placing in front of you. Be ready to ask the “why” and “what” questions that will help others have a greater understanding of God’s work in their lives.

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## Pray with Us

As you pray today, think about the *Why?* and *What?* questions Christ asked in today’s reading from Matthew, chapter 6. How would you answer these questions?

# Meet the Target

## Read Mark 10:1–29

*With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.—Mark 10:27*

If you've ever played darts or tried your hand at archery, you know the goal is deceptively simple: get your dart or arrow in the bullseye. But it is harder than it may initially seem. In lesson planning, the most critical step is establishing the lesson's objective or target. Defining the target, or the desired outcome of the lesson, is essential for true learning to take place.

During Jesus' time on earth, every single thing He did and said was purposeful. In Mark 10, Jesus was teaching the Pharisees and "crowds of people" (v. 1). Many subjects were brought up, including reasons for divorce, receiving the kingdom of God like an innocent child, and the perils of riches.

One man in the audience, however, struggled to meet the target and learn what Jesus was teaching. The rich young ruler asked: "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 17). Jesus took a minute to review

what the man already knew, all of the commandments he had carefully learned (vv. 18, 19). From the young man's perspective, it seemed he had more than passed the test.

But Jesus showed him otherwise. Despite his efforts to keep the commandments, the young man was not meeting the target. Jesus reveals that he was unwilling to take the next step. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor" (v. 21). The text tells us that "he went away sad, because he had great wealth" (v. 22). By his actions, the rich young man showed that he was not as devoted to God as he had thought.

► What about you? Are you open to what God is teaching you? When work responsibilities are overwhelming, when a child is ill, when we just feel sad, or even when all seems well . . . remember your primary target: trust Christ and serve Him with all your heart.

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### Pray with Us

Today's devotional encourages us to trust Christ in all situations. Ask Him to give you faith to believe that "all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27).

# A Responsive Classroom

## Read John 4

*And because of his words many more became believers.—John 4:41*

New teachers are often trained in what education experts call “responsive classroom” techniques. The goal is to share important information in a welcoming way so your audience will respond well. A responsive teacher is sensitive to their audience’s needs and designs the learning situation to address those needs. Jesus was the epitome of a responsive teacher. John 4 gives an excellent example of such a teacher, as Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman in her comfort zone.

As a teacher, Jesus chose “to go through Samaria” (v. 4) so he could interact with His learner in her environment. This was a controversial route as the Samaritans were alienated from the Jewish people; most people would travel around that area. Instead, Jesus chose to go through Samaria because He knew the Samaritan woman would be there, and He knew of her greatest need—salvation.

As a responsive teacher, Jesus chose to engage His audience in a non-threatening manner. He used

a shared human need to begin a conversation: “Will you give me a drink?” Notice that all this required was a simple yes/no response. But that question opened the conversation to the greater need—her salvation. Jesus then shared truth, including her sin and her heart’s need: “The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband” (v. 18).

Through non-threatening dialogue, questions, and then sharing key truth, Jesus leads the woman to ask for what she needs: “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (v.15). Ultimately, Christ spends two days with the Samaritan community, “and because of his words many more became believers” (v. 41).

► How can you use “responsive teaching” to share the gospel? Consider the needs of your audience. Build relationship through being responsive to their individual situation. Listen well, and then be ready to share life-giving truth as God leads.

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## Pray with Us

The story of the Samaritan woman is a wonderful example of Jesus’ wisdom and love for people. Our prayer is that we’ll learn from our great Teacher how to interact with others with love, understanding, and truth.

# Practicing Awareness

## Read 1 Timothy 4

*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.—1 Timothy 4:16*

My spiritual mentor is now 87 years old and has faithfully served Jesus Christ as a teacher, pastor's wife, church planter, and missionary for most of her earthly years. She has been an incredible blessing in my life and to many others! The Apostle Paul had a similar relationship with Timothy. Even though Paul and Timothy were devoted followers of Christ in the early church, Paul knew how quickly people can become tainted by the world's teachings. Therefore, Paul warned Timothy, "Watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Tim. 4:16). Be aware of how your life reflects Christ to those around you.

Paul was teaching Timothy to be aware of the people and circumstances surrounding him. But verse 16, where this caution appears, is actually the last verse of the chapter. Throughout chapter 4, Paul describes a process for maintaining godliness that allows believers to guard their lives against the enemy. This process includes speaking truth to one another, avoiding false teachings,

sharing the hope of Christ, and pursuing godliness no matter one's age (vv. 6–10). Paul exhorts Timothy to train himself to be godly, not to neglect his gift, to be diligent, and to persevere because "we have put our hope in the living God" (v. 10). Timothy could not accomplish this without a deep sense of self-awareness; he needed to be mindful of his own sin, emotions, and behaviors. Likewise, we must recognize our need in order to grow. We must be aware that we are Christ's living messengers to the world. Paul presents it as a calling that we can fulfill with God's leading and guidance. This should encourage us to examine ourselves and ask others to help us keep a close watch on how we live.

► Today, reflect on these questions: "Who am I, and what am I like? Whom do I allow to speak truth into my life?" If you are in need of a spiritual mentor, ask your pastor to help you find one. Being mentored in the faith can be the first step in becoming a lifelong follower of Christ.

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### Pray with Us

Ask God in prayer that together with Timothy in today's reading, you will persevere in godliness, "watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Tim. 4:16), and share the hope of Christ.

# Practicing Empathy

## Read Mark 8:1–13

*As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.—Psalm 103:13*

Anne Graham Lotz’s grandfather was a medical missionary to China for 25 years, where he established the Love and Mercy Hospital in Tsingianpu. She writes, “My grandfather was wise. He knew that ‘man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,’ and so all of his ambulatory patients were required to attend chapel every day in the hospital . . . Those who were unable to leave their beds were visited personally by someone who would share Christ with them.” Because of her grandfather’s care for their physical and spiritual needs, hundreds and even thousands of Chinese men and women received Jesus as Savior.

During His earthly ministry, it is easy to see that Jesus understood both the spiritual and physical needs of His followers. In Mark 8:2, Jesus showed empathy to a hungry crowd that had gathered to hear Him teach on a hillside: “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.” We can imagine the

crowd of people clinging to Christ’s every word. But after three days and no more food, there were certainly rumbling stomachs, headaches, and plenty of irritability.

Jesus knew that if He sent them home, many of them might faint along the way (v. 3). His empathy led Him to meet their physical needs. He told them to sit on the ground (v. 6), perhaps so they could be fed in an orderly fashion. Jesus fed the people spiritually, but first He met their physical hunger. He understood that both needs were important. As Christians, we must have genuine empathy and understand people’s spiritual and physical needs. If we want to lead others to Christ, we cannot turn a blind eye to someone’s physical needs.

► As you read Mark 8, notice Christ’s attitude toward those He is serving. Compare His attitude to the disciples’ attitude . . . and then to your own. Whom is God asking you to serve, and how will you respond?

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### Pray with Us

In response to today’s teaching from Mark 8, let’s pray that our actions will be driven by empathy and understanding of people’s spiritual needs. Lord, help us to be a godly example.

# Recognizing Needs

Read Luke 19:1–9

*Today salvation has come to this house.—Luke 19:9*

As a classroom teacher for sixteen years, I learned to recognize my students' social, emotional, and academic needs. Teaching to change lives was as much about what happened outside of the lesson plan as the lesson plan itself. As I spent time purposefully recognizing my students' interests and frustrations, our relationship grew and learning increased. Most importantly, I had more opportunities to share the gospel and see lives changed for good.

In Luke 19 we read the story of Zacchaeus. As chief tax collector, Zacchaeus had his financial needs met. He lacked nothing. Or did he? Why did he diligently make his way through the crowd and climb a sycamore tree to see Jesus (v. 4)? An even more intriguing question, with so many people suffering from poverty and physical needs, why did Jesus choose to spend time in Zacchaeus's home? Jesus saw past the exterior trappings of wealth, recognizing that Zacchaeus had a need only He could meet. Jesus' purposeful interaction with Zacchaeus

focused on meeting his emotional and spiritual need. While society rejected Zacchaeus, Jesus met him as a friend by sharing a meal with him in his home (v. 7). Jesus set an example of love and acceptance as He said, "I *must* stay in your house today" (v. 5).

Zacchaeus's salvation became Jesus' mission because even a wealthy tax collector needed to experience God's love. Christ's public recognition of Zacchaeus and His decision to spend time in his home showed that salvation was offered to all who believe (John 1:12). Every day, we meet people whose needs are not always instantly recognizable. Not everyone climbs a tree to see us. Ask God to give you an open eye and listening ear. May He open the door for conversations that will plant seeds for the gospel.

► Consider the people you interact with today, whether in person or online. What might their needs be? How might God want to use you to speak truth to them and encourage them this day?

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## Pray with Us

Coming to the Lord in prayer today, we ask Him to show us opportunities to share the gospel and to guide our conversations at home, in the church, and in the workplace.

# Enduring Understanding

## Read Luke 14

*All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.—Luke 14:11*

Did you ever sit through a class (or a sermon) and realize that you didn't pay attention? For whatever reason, you simply missed the point...or you chose to ignore it. Good teachers know that successful lessons will create what is called an "enduring understanding" in their students. The lesson will stay with them not only for the test but also for a lifetime. Luke 14 describes Jesus' visit at the house of a prominent Pharisee. After Jesus healed a man with a noticeable ailment, the Pharisees showed no response (v. 4). They did not rejoice over the miraculous healing. They did not fall on their faces in worshipful reaction to this miracle.

What had happened? Were they asleep during the lesson? Were they jealous? Apathetic? Offended that He had healed on the Sabbath? Jesus then took advantage of a second opportunity to continue His lesson (vv. 7–11). Noticing that the guests

had picked prominent spots at the table, He taught them a lesson intended to show them that one's position before God depends upon God's grace, not personal ambition. "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (v. 11).

Through parable, Christ challenged the assumption of the Pharisees that their place in God's kingdom was a certainty. Those who rejected Christ also refused God's invitation. Others would be invited in their place. The enduring understanding for us is to turn our tendency for self-exultation into humble action. Jesus says, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear" (v. 35). Are you listening to His message?

▶ Jesus has made a place for you at His table. He offers salvation as a free gift. How will you respond to His invitation?

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### Pray with Us

Let's pray we will learn and always remember the lessons of humility from today's Scripture. Thank the Lord for His vivid teaching through His parables that astonished listeners and changed hearts.

# Empathy in Action

## Read Romans 12:9–21

*Rejoice with those who rejoice;  
mourn with those who mourn.—Romans 12:15*

During the Vietnam War, for the first time, people had the opportunity to visually “see” the realities of war. The nightly news showed footage of each day’s violence, and suddenly war became up close and personal. Horrified by what they saw, people wanted to take action. Fast forward fifty-five years, and we may seem almost complacent to the world’s tragedies. With technology’s steady stream of society’s most horrific images coming at us through our phones, computers, and television, our minds can easily become numb to the horrors around us.

In Romans 12 the Apostle Paul warns believers that it is very easy to become “conformed” to the world and its thinking (v. 2). But Paul also describes the “transformation” characteristics of a mind intent on serving and knowing the will of God. We are able to renew our minds in serving Jesus Christ. Verse 15 specifically describes how a Christian can and should respond with empathy

toward others: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

In other words, we are to let our actions and reactions genuinely support those around us, whatever state they may be in. To do so, though, we must be aware of their joys and trials. We must be willing to place ourselves in situations where we will have the opportunity to rejoice and weep with others. We are not called to complacency. In rejoicing and weeping, God calls us to choose relationship and action. Romans 12 could be titled the “Empathy Chapter” because it shows Christian love in action. Here Paul gives multiple and practical ways to demonstrate empathy.

► God will likely bring someone into your life who could use a little empathy. Read Romans 12 and prayerfully ask God to reveal who that might be and pray that you will, indeed, be ready to respond with love in action.

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### Pray with Us

To whom can you reach out today, and for whom can you pray? Ask God to show you how you can use the lessons we’ve been learning this month in your day-to-day interactions.

# Teaching Through Stories

## Read Matthew 13

*Whoever has ears,  
let them hear. —Matthew 13:9*

One of my favorite childhood books was *The Pokey Little Puppy* by Janette Lowrey. I remember sitting next to my father as he read the sad tale of that little disobedient puppy aloud, over and over again at my request. I treasured my worn-out book and loved to hear him read it again, even though I knew how it ended. Storytelling has a powerful influence.

As the great Teacher, Jesus understood the power of story to teach truth, change lives, and build relationships. The written word was not prevalent for the common man in the first century, so Jesus, in His infinite wisdom and creativity, used the power of story and oral tradition to share His life-giving message through parables. Christ shares five different parables in Matthew 13, the first time He has taught the people in this way. That is why the disciples question Him about His methodology in verse 10. He answered them, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them” (v. 11).

These parables contained important truths about God and His kingdom, and Jesus explained that the meaning would only be clear to those whose hearts were open and willing to learn. He compares faith to a seed (vv. 18–23). Some seed takes root and grows (signifying understanding), while other seeds fail, choked out by trouble, persecution, or the deceitfulness of the world. Through parables, Christ shared heavenly concepts using earthly illustrations. Though deceptively simple in style, they communicated powerful truth. Their meaning was hidden to those unwilling or unable to understand. The people were “amazed” by Jesus’ teaching (v. 54). Whether to a crowd gathered along a seaside or the disciples gathered in a home, Jesus was a powerful storyteller and teacher.

► When did you last take time to share God’s work in your life to tell your story? What theme, or big idea, runs through your story? Don’t be afraid to share it. There’s an audience that needs to hear.

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### Pray with Us

A story is a powerful teaching tool! Thank the Lord for His parables in today’s Scripture that amazed His audience and ask Him to use your story as you reach out to people.

## Questions & Answers

by Dr. Rosalie de Rosset, Professor of Communications and Literature

**Q** I've heard people say that God has told them something. That has never happened to me. How does God speak to us today?

**A** You aren't alone. If you polled a group of believers, you'd find many who have never heard God's audible voice. The Bible does record people who heard God's voice audibly: Adam and Eve, Moses, Samuel, Paul. Many heard God's voice at Jesus' baptism. Others, such as Hagar, Jacob, Elijah, David, and Mary and Joseph, heard a message from God through an angel.

You may have heard the story of a man trapped by rising flood waters. As the waters rose, rescuers came in a Jeep, then in a boat, and finally in a helicopter. Each time the man refused help, saying that God had told him *He* would rescue him. When the waters engulfed the man, and he awoke at the gates of Heaven, he asked God why He hadn't rescued him. God replied, "First I sent a Jeep, then I sent a boat, then I sent a helicopter!"

Have you ever read a passage of Scripture that comforted, challenged, or drew you closer to Christ? Suddenly, you realized God was speaking to you. Our God is a living God and still speaks to us today. He may use a passage of Scripture, a

sermon, or a friend's counsel. And, if He chooses, he could send an angel or speak audibly to you.

**Q** What did Jesus teach about family values? I know the Apostle Paul taught on that subject, but did Jesus?

**A** It might be helpful to clarify what we mean by *family values*. Some use the term to describe family friendly content that does not include sinful behavior like sex outside of marriage, drunkenness, foul language, or blasphemy. Jesus often addressed these types of behaviors. He spoke of marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:1–13). He taught that "what comes out of the mouth" (Matt. 15:10) defiles us and erodes the beauty of our fellowship with God. While Jesus didn't create a check list of do's and don'ts, He did teach His followers to help the needy and outcasts of society. Encapsulating the core of His message, He said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Jesus valued family. He showed His Father's tender heart by comparing it to the compassionate behavior of good earthly fathers (Matthew 7). He told parables about obedient and disobedient sons (Luke 15). His heart was moved by parents

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**“Feeling afraid is different from being ruled by fear. Being ruled by fear means that something other than the power of God is leading us.”**

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who asked Him to heal their children (Mark 5). He stressed the value of women, children, and “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40). And in the midst of unthinkable torture on the cross, He gave the care of His mother over to a friend and disciple (John 19:26–27). Perhaps the best family value He taught was that our Heavenly Father loves us and calls each of us His child (John 1:12).

**Q** During the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, I told a Christian friend I was afraid. She said it is a sin for a Christian to be afraid. Is that true?

**A** We often fear things that are beyond our knowledge or control. In Scripture, God told His people, dozens of times, “Do not be afraid” (Gen. 15:1; Deut. 3:22; Josh. 10:8). But it’s important that this admonition was almost always followed by an encouraging reminder of His strength and comfort. This command was never followed by “If you fear, you are sinning.”

God created us with a wide range of emotions, and He is not surprised when we become emotional. D. L. Moody experienced paralyzing fear when the ship on which he was traveling began taking

on water. He later recalled, “I had thought myself superior to the fear of death, but on the sinking ship it was different . . . as my thoughts went out to my loved ones at home, and as I realized that perhaps the next hour would separate me forever from all these, I confess it almost broke me. It was the darkest hour of my life. I could not endure it.” Moody returned to his cabin and prayed for peace and deliverance. Later, a passing vessel came to the ship’s aid, and all on board were rescued.

Fear can sometimes be useful. It can keep us from walking to the edge of a cliff, from driving across water-covered roads, from walking down a dark alley at night, and other choices that would risk our safety. However, if fear keeps us from leaving our homes or paralyzes us, something different is at work (Ps. 46:2). Feeling afraid is different from being ruled by fear. Being ruled by fear means that something other than the power of God is leading us. We can put our fear in perspective when we realize that God is with us (Isa. 41:10). There are times when we may pass through fear, but our Father never tells us to stop and make camp there. ■

# Important Questions

## Read Mark 4:1–20

*The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you.—Mark 4:11*

Change came slowly to our 55-year-old Christian school. As a new principal, I started to question the formal faculty dress code, especially when I saw one of our teachers, Miss Russell sliding feet first down the tall tunnel slide with her kindergartners, dressed in her required blouse, knee-length skirt, heels, and hose. I wrote to the school board laying out reasons why it was time for a change in the dress code, which was unanimously approved. When I asked a school board member why it was still in effect, he commented, “No one ever asked us to change it.” I am so glad I asked the question!

In Mark 4, Jesus was teaching through parables. Parables have been defined as earthly stories which relay heavenly truths. The crowd gathered to learn from Jesus was so large that Jesus taught from a boat on the lake (v. 1). In the Parable of the Sower (vv. 4–20) Jesus vividly described those who heard the gospel and their various responses. Some would hear the truth and respond with life-giving

change, while others would not respond at all. He used imagery the crowds would understand.

Notice that later, when they were alone, Jesus did not scold the disciples for asking follow-up questions (vv. 10–11). Instead, He gave further explanation; their questions prompted Him to clarify critical meaning. While Jesus wanted all people to hear the gospel, not everyone would be ready to listen and believe (vv. 14–18). He used additional parables to magnify His message: no matter the response, we have a responsibility to share the gospel. What if the disciples had not asked questions? What if they had walked away without understanding Jesus’ message?

► Are you ever afraid to ask questions? Jesus encouraged His followers to learn, to ask so they could understand. Never be afraid to admit your confusion to God. And bring your questions to trustworthy Bible teachers who can help you understand and, in doing so, deepen your faith.

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### Pray with Us

Again, as we read some of Christ’s parables, we see the disciples asking their Teacher difficult questions. During your prayer time, have the courage to ask God difficult questions you’re facing.

# Asking the Right Questions

## Read Matthew 16

*You are the Messiah,  
the Son of the living God.—Matthew 16:16*

Did you ever sit in class and become nervous when a teacher asked you a question you didn't know how to answer? Teachers know there is an art and science to asking purposeful questions. Closed questions require a "yes" or "no" answer or a factual reply. Open questions require more content in the explanation. Asking closed questions is only the starting place for helping a student think more deeply.

As we learn from the Great Teacher, we should understand the art of asking purposeful questions. Good questions help us get to know a person and can open the door to faith conversations. God set an example with the first question He asked Adam in Genesis 3:9: "Where are you?" God gave Adam a *closed* question. He knew exactly where Adam was . . . both his literal location in the Garden and his figurative location—where Adam was in relationship to Him. So why did God ask the question? To reveal truth. Often God asks questions to get people to examine their motives and actions.

In Matthew 16 Jesus asked His disciples a *closed* question, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" He then immediately followed this question by asking Peter an *open* question, "But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am?" Christ's question was aimed at Peter's heart by asking for his personal declaration of faith. Peter gives not just one answer but two (v. 16), clarifying his answer to Jesus with more explanation. Jesus' question to His disciples was intended to engage them in a spiritual conversation, to help them understand His identity. Because we desire to serve others, we must be prayerfully willing to ask loving but sometimes tough questions.

▶ As you read Matthew 16, ask yourself, what is God's intention with each question? Consider the conversations you might have today. How might God use you as His servant leader to ask important and needed questions that will lead others to know and follow Jesus Christ?

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### Pray with Us

Imagine yourself in Peter's sandals, facing Jesus' question in today's reading: "Who do you say I am?" As you pray, tell the Lord who He is in your life and thank Him for your salvation.

# Provide Feedback

Read Matthew 17:14–21

*Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed . . .  
Nothing will be impossible for you.—Matthew 17:20–21*

When you were in school, did you ever get a paper back from a teacher covered with red marks. Maybe you took one look at it and threw it in the garbage or stuffed it into the abyss of your desk. As an educator, I have seen some teachers spend hours overgrading papers. They give too much feedback all at once, and it's usually wasted because the student never reads it. There is, indeed, an art to giving feedback.

Jesus knew how to provide the right amount of feedback at just the right time. In our Scripture reading today, we see an example of how and when Jesus critiqued His disciples. A large crowd had been waiting for Jesus near the foot of the mountain where He had gone with Peter, James, and John and where the disciples witnessed the Transfiguration. In the meantime, a man with a demon possessed child begged the disciples to cast out the demon. Even though they tried to help the child by performing this miracle, their efforts failed.

When Jesus learned about the incident, He used harsh words: “You unbelieving and perverse generation. How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” Jesus sounds like a frustrated teacher with students who just aren’t paying attention. His much needed feedback used very direct language. He was honest with His followers about their lack of faith.

Notice what happens in verses 19–20. The disciples respond to the feedback with a question, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” This was encouraging! Here they showed that they wanted to learn. Hooray! Jesus seems to change His tone in verses 20 and 21 as He responds, “If you have faith . . . nothing will be impossible for you.”

► What about you? Are you open to receiving feedback from God’s Word and from God’s people? Pray that you will be open to receiving biblical feedback that will help you grow in faith.

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## Pray with Us

Our prayer today is that we’ll have humility to receive correction and even rebuke from God’s Word. Ask Him to open your heart to change and to help you grow in faith.

# Choosing to Rejoice

Read Luke 10:1–23

*Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you,  
but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.—Luke 10:20*

Anyone who teaches will tell you that not every day is easy. You can have the most carefully prepared lesson plan, the most tried-and-true activity on your agenda, and still your students may be irritable and inattentive. A key part of training future teachers is cautioning them that their attitude will be key. They must learn to maintain a positive spirit even when the going gets tough.

In Luke 10, Jesus appoints 72 messengers to go and do the work of the kingdom, spreading His message of salvation. He sends them “like lambs among wolves” (v. 3) two by two (v. 1). He let them know their work was important: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (v. 2). Jesus gave them practical instructions on where to stay, what to wear, and what to eat. He told them what to expect, in good situations and in bad (vv. 10–15).

They would not be going in their own power, but with His full authority behind them. When the

people rejected them, they were rejecting God Himself (v. 16)! The seventy-two returned to Christ elated from what had happened and amazed by the result of their God-given authority. They said, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name” (v. 17). As a wise teacher, and perhaps knowing human tendency toward pride and boastfulness, Jesus reminded them, “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (v. 20). Jesus emphasized that no matter what reception they received while doing His work, what would last for eternity was their personal relationship with God. In that alone, they should rejoice!

► We must remember that each and every day we have the opportunity to rejoice over what is most important—our own salvation, and each new sinner saved by God’s grace. Today, remember Christ’s words, and genuinely choose to rejoice.

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## Pray with Us

“Rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). May these words of Christ to His disciples define our relationships with others and our worldview, no matter what happens.

# Problem Solving

## Read Mark 11:12–26

*“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. —Mark 11:22*

As a professor at Moody Bible Institute, I enjoy training the next generation of teachers. We tackle all sorts of subjects, one being how to engage children in mathematics. New teachers must understand how to help children approach “word problems.” Children often jump in and try to solve the problem without reading and understanding it. Sound familiar? We can make the same mistake when we jump in to solve problems without a purposeful approach.

In Mark 11, Jesus was giving His disciples principles for daily living and problem solving. The day before had been a long one, during which Jesus had experienced hunger and righteous anger as He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple. The next morning, Peter seemed astonished that the fig tree Jesus had cursed the previous day had actually withered. In this section, Jesus teaches them foundational truths for addressing life’s problems: faith in God, prayer, and forgiveness.

Of course, the disciples had no idea what was ahead for them in

the days to come. Peter would deny Christ, and they would all witness Christ’s death and resurrection. But in only four verses, vv. 22–25, Jesus gives Peter a workable approach to facing whatever life would bring: “Have faith in God” (v. 22). As His followers, we are to realize the power of believing in God (v. 23). We should pray diligently with faith (v. 24). And if we have someone to forgive, we should do so immediately. Don’t let your prayers be hindered by the weight of unforgiveness (v. 25).

These lessons, which happened right before Christ’s arrest, would follow Peter and the other disciples through difficult days to come. Jesus’ words promised them that faith in God could move mountains. Jesus knew problems would arise, and faith would be the solution.

► Do you get so wrapped up in solving your own problems that you jump ahead to devising your own solutions? Today’s reading reminds us to place all situations in God’s hands and look to Him for answers.

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### Pray with Us

Is God calling you to a deeper life of faith and obedience? We hope Christ’s teaching in today’s Scripture passage will help you along the way. Pray for God’s will to be done in your life.

# A Biblical Worldview

## Read Ephesians 2:1–10

*We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.—Ephesians 2:10*

A kindergarten teacher was trying to understand how she could teach her young students from a biblical worldview. At her Christian school, she spent time telling her students about their intrinsic value as God's creation. That weekend, one of her boys unexpectedly used his mother's smartphone to post a video to Facebook. With his toothless grin and wide smile, he boldly proclaimed to the world, "Who am I? I am God's masterpiece!"

A "masterpiece" is a priceless creation. The word, often used to describe valuable works of art, itself implies that this "piece" is formed by an expert, a "master" craftsman. In Ephesians, Paul describes who we are. He begins by saying we are "dead" in our sinfulness (v. 2). Controlled by the "ways of this world," we did not follow God but lived in disobedience (v. 3). The turning point comes in verse 4 with the word "but." Everything changes because of God's "great love for us" (v. 4). The result? We are made

alive, and saved by His grace (v. 5). This grace ensures our future and changes who we are. It is not a result of our work; God's produces this change (v. 8).

We, sinners, have the awesome privilege to be described as His "masterpiece" (NLT). Some Bible versions use "workmanship" (NASB) or "handiwork" (NIV). That word can be translated from the Greek as "His work of art." Do you believe that about yourself? Perhaps you need to refresh your worldview. As God's creation, you have implicit value. This is just one part of the biblical worldview that will help us interpret the world around us. Even wide grinned, toothless 5-year-olds can understand this foundational truth and celebrate the incredible gift of being God's unique work of art.

▶ Do you think of yourself as a masterpiece? As God's special creation, you are created and saved to do His work. This identity, this worldview, should change how we think, act, and live.

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### Pray with Us

Today we invite you to praise the Lord as your Creator, Savior, and Teacher. Thank Him that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made," created to do good works for the Kingdom.

# Listening as Obedience

## Read Malachi 2

*“If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you.” —Malachi 2:2*

At times I can be “listening” to someone and suddenly realize that I haven’t heard a word that has been said in the last five minutes. My not listening has nothing to do with the topic at hand or my hearing ability. It has everything to do with one thing: selfishness. I allowed my busy mind to wander away from what I should have been focusing on in that moment. I gave priority to my thoughts over the other person’s thoughts. Whether it’s during a personal conversation, a business meeting, or even listening to a sermon, can you relate?

The prophet Malachi served God by delivering a message of judgment to the people of Judah. They had turned away from worshiping the Lord and toward worshiping foreign gods. Even the priests, the religious leaders, were not listening to God. In Malachi 2:1 we see God’s graciousness in His willingness to give the priests a “warning.” Verse 2 begins with a

stern warning, “If you will not listen . . .” If they disobeyed and continued to close their ears, God’s wrath and judgment would fall upon everyone.

This problem was not really a new one for God’s people. For example, the priests of Judah had practiced not listening well to God’s instructions by bringing Him polluted offerings (1:7–8). In Malachi 2, God clearly and purposely instructs the priests (His servant leaders) to listen well to His instructions and give the proper honor to His name. Why? He tells them in verse 7 that their lips should “preserve knowledge” because they are God’s messengers. Oh, if they would only listen and obey!

▶ When I don’t listen well it reflects my selfish focus. Although I might be quiet and appear to be listening, I know that my mind is wandering. As we seek to share Jesus with others, we should learn to be careful listeners. Whom will you listen to today?

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### Pray with Us

Today’s Scripture shows the importance of listening to the voice of the Lord and honoring His name with our lives. Let’s pray we’ll discern God’s voice above all the others competing for our attention.

# Listening Well

## Read Philippians 2

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.—Philippians 2:3*

When our two children, Jaclyn and John, were preschoolers, I often had to gently turn their little faces toward me and say, “Listen to Mommy. Let me see your eyes and your listening ears.” Of course, their minds could be elsewhere, but the starting point of teaching them to listen well was to get their attention and have them focus on me, their mother, and my words of instruction.

Listening well requires turning our attention off ourselves and onto others. We all have trouble at times focusing our attention where God wants it to focus. In a world with ever-increasing distractions, listening well is key for all who desire to lead others in serving Christ. Listening involves removing the focus from ourselves, and valuing others as Jesus did (v. 3). Philippians 2:3–5 describes Jesus as a model of humility. First, we see that He listened to the will of His Father (vv. 5–7). Notice how this humble position changes both His relationship to God and to others. Listening and following Jesus’ example means we

count others as more significant than ourselves (v. 3) and enables us to look out for the interests of others (v. 4). Listening well may mean silencing our phones and turning our full attention to those Christ is asking us to serve.

Verse 5 places this listening in context: “In your relationships with one another . . .” *Relationship* is an important word. Living in true relationship requires humble sacrifice. God sacrificed His Son Jesus for us. Can we sacrifice our own thoughts and opinions at times simply by listening well? But verse 14 takes listening a step further. We are to listen well and resist grumbling or arguing. Following Jesus, we are to exalt God and not ourselves (v. 9).

► We all need our heavenly Father’s gentle prodding through Scripture to turn our focus on Him rather than our smart calendars, to-do lists, or even our desire to be heard. Consider how well you listen to others and how your listening well represents Christ’s love through you.

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### Pray with Us

How do we represent Christ to those around us? Do we walk in love, grace, and humility, preferring others to our agenda? Make these matters your prayer today.

# Promoting Healing

## Read 1 Corinthians 13

*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.  
But the greatest of these is love.—1 Corinthians 13:13*

Caring for elderly parents can provide incredible blessings but also poses significant challenges. As my 81-year-old father lay in a cancer center for two weeks, we shared wonderful and sometimes tearful conversations. During one visit, he gave my brother and I an important request. He asked that we promise to care for our mother, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. We knew that fulfilling our dad's request would require time, money, and energy, but we were determined to love and serve our father and mother in this way.

As Christ followers, we are called to love one another as Jesus loved us. We have seen how He did so in a way that not only addressed people's spiritual needs but also their physical and emotional ones. Showing love in this way may require great sacrifice on our part. First Corinthians 13 describes a way of living and loving that goes contrary to our natural inclination to think primarily of ourselves. Paul goes into detail with a list of what Christlike

love requires: "Love is patient, love is kind" (v. 4), "it is not self-seeking" (v. 5). This love, *agape* in the Greek, is displayed in God's unconditional, sacrificing actions toward us. He gave His one and only Son for our salvation (John 3:16), the ultimate example of healing.

This love, defined for us in 1 Corinthians 13, is sacrificial and, at times, costly. Living out 1 Corinthians 13 may come with a cost—perhaps a significant sacrifice of our time, money, or personal desires—but the healing that can result can literally be the difference between life and death. "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (v. 13).

► As you read 1 Corinthians 13, list the actions and attitudes God uses to describe love. Which of these tend to be more difficult for you in loving someone? Why? Consider studying each action and attitude through a word study. Ask God to reveal to you how He wants you to respond.

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### Pray with Us

As we ponder the attributes of love in 1 Corinthians 13, we thank Jesus that these are also His attributes. He poured out this love on us. We ask for courage to share Christ's love with others.

# Building Community

## Read Matthew 22

*Love your neighbor as yourself. —Matthew 22:39*

Foster parents open their homes and lives to children whose lives have been upended by personal tragedy, and sometimes that opportunity comes about unexpectedly. My husband Michael and I were blessed to foster and later adopt two siblings, Jaclyn and John, who are both now adults. One thing we will always remember from those first days of foster parenting is how our church family stepped in to help with much needed supplies and wisdom.

In Matthew 22, Jesus is approached by the Sadducees, religious teachers, who wanted to test, insult, and deflate Jesus' influence. They approached Him with what they considered to be a series of difficult questions, hoping to reveal Him as a false teacher. First, they attempted to trap Him with a question about taxes (vv. 15–22). Second, they asked about marriage in the afterlife (vv. 23–33). But their final question is the focus of our reading today. One of the group, "an expert in the law" (v. 34), asked: "Teacher, which is the greatest

commandment in the Law?" (v. 36). Although their intent was to dissuade the community of believers by trying to reveal Jesus as not knowing the details of the Law, Jesus' response would challenge their thinking. They were first to "Love the Lord your God" (v. 37) and second, to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 39). Jesus goes further to say that all other teachings "hang" on these two commands (v. 40).

If we follow Jesus' commands, we will not only love Him but also love others. Love becomes the foundation for the church's work in the local community and beyond. In response to the question, *Which is the greatest commandment?*, Jesus focused on love.

► Imagine a young couple who become instant foster parents and no one is there to help. Many people face unexpected situations without a supportive and loving community. How can you demonstrate Christ's love to someone in need today?

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### Pray with Us

Again, God's love is the focus of our study today. Our prayer is that we'll keep the two greatest commandments in the forefront of our words and actions.

# Helping Others

Read Matthew 25:31–46

*Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. —Matthew 25:40*

As a teacher, I have been given the opportunity to work with students of various needs. I have had the blessing of helping students with dyslexia (a reading disorder) move into becoming competent readers of God's Word. And some of these students are now teachers themselves making a difference in children's lives. My life has been enriched by helping these students.

In Matthew 25 Jesus explains the importance of helping others. He says that at the Final Judgment people will be separated into two categories: the sheep and the goats. The sheep not only know Him but have followed His example. They have served others by genuinely helping meet people's needs through providing food, clothing, shelter, and time. Jesus tells us these helping actions were done without knowing of any reward, and these selfless actions are considered the same as serving Christ Himself.

The goats, however, did just the opposite. They never took time to help, even though the opportunity

was presented to them time and time again. Matthew 25:43 states, "I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." Helping others, especially those who are clearly in need, reflects our Savior's love. Helping should never be about getting a reward and is certainly should not be seen as our "entrance ticket" to heaven. Rather, our desire to help others should flow from our desire to serve and imitate Christ.

Matthew 25:46 warns that there is a different outcome for those who do not know God and those who know Him and are willing to help others: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

► What about you? Is helping your natural habit? Even if you don't have a natural inclination to help, it can become a part of who you are when you desire to be more like Jesus. How will you respond today when God presents your opportunity to help?

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## Pray with Us

Today's devotional reminds us that helping the poor, the hungry, and the prisoner is the same as doing it to Christ Himself. May we honor the Lord with our deeds of compassion!

# The Learning Gap

Read John 21:15–19

“Yes Lord,” he said,  
“you know that I love you.”—John 21:15

A test is designed to assess learning over a given period of time. What has the student learned, and, specifically, is there a “gap” in learning? A gap means that key pieces of knowledge and understanding are missing. Until that gap is filled, progress is not likely. Sometimes, the gap can only be filled through continual reteaching.

In John 21:15–19, Christ’s repeated questioning reveals Peter’s learning gap and challenges him to put away pride and walk in sacrificing love. Before he denied Jesus three times Peter claimed to love Jesus *more* than the other disciples loved Jesus (vv. 15, 16). Now, during this resurrection appearance to the disciples, Jesus used the word *agapas*, asking Peter the question, “Do you love me?” *Agapas* refers to an all-giving and unselfish love that focuses on someone else’s benefit. It is interesting to note that Peter answered Jesus using the word *philio*, a friendly and mutual affection between two people.

It is also important to note that Christ never asked Peter to apologize

for his denial. He doesn’t throw Peter’s failure in his face. Instead He asks a third time, “Do you love me?” Peter’s response reveals his continued focus on himself yet his growing understanding of Christ’s omniscient power. Jesus revealed that Peter would, eventually, come to an even greater understanding of what it means to walk in love. He attempted to fill Peter’s “learning gap” through a two-word command. No matter what happens in life, Peter should do one thing: “Follow me” (v. 19). Follow God and lead others to God out of an all-giving and unselfish love that is based on God’s own love for him (and for us). Christ never reprimanded Peter for his need to continue to learn. As our Master Teacher, Christ continued His life-giving lessons.

► Think about your spiritual growth in recent months. What is your learning gap—an area you realize you need to grow in? Read God’s Word, and ask Him to help you fill this gap and follow Him more closely.

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## Pray with Us

How would you answer Christ’s question in today’s reading: “Do you love me” (John 11:16)? Ask the Lord to show you how to walk closer to Him and love Him more.

# The Power of Repetition

Read Mark 10:32–45

*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.—Mark 10:45*

Do you ever need to be told something more than once before you truly get it? Or maybe you repeat something to yourself in order to truly remember it? As a Master Teacher, Jesus knew the power of repetition to help His followers learn. And no matter how frustrating their lack of understanding might have been, He did not lose patience.

Like His closest followers, we too can be slow to understand. Christ's patience while repeating the same message to His followers was truly extraordinary. Jesus spoke of His death and resurrection over and over again in the Gospel of Mark, and still the disciples didn't seem to understand what was coming. In Mark 10, He had been answering questions from the Pharisees and teaching the people. When they left for Jerusalem, Mark records that "again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him" (v. 32).

Clearly this was not the first time Jesus had tried to prepare them for the difficult days ahead. He could

not be clearer than He was in verses 33–34, delivering detailed information on the next days, followed by His resurrection. Still, there seems to be a lack of understanding, and James and John immediately switched subjects to discuss which of them would be most powerful in the kingdom (v. 37). Jesus emphasized that they are not to pursue a power position but to follow His own example which would be marked by humility and suffering.

Four times in Mark 10 the author repeats the setting of Christ's teaching as being "along the way" or "along a road." Christ used every situation, setting, and opportunity to repeat His message. Why? He wanted His listeners to hear, to understand, and to believe.

► What is Jesus' attitude toward His listeners? In what ways does He demonstrate patience while sharing Truth? In what ways might God be calling you to show patience to those in your life who will not or cannot understand His truth?

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## Pray with Us

Servanthood is an important theme in today's Scripture. "The Son of Man did not come to be served" (Mark 10:45). Lord Jesus, help us become true servants, worthy of your name!

# Practice Foresight

## Read Luke 24

*Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.— Luke 24:44*

Have you ever looked back at a situation and thought, *I sure wish I'd known then what I know now*. If we're honest, we often have the opportunity to make informed decisions, we just don't always practice foresight. A good teacher shows students how to predict (at least for the most part) what will happen based on what we do know.

Jesus lived each day with a clear knowledge and awareness of what was to come—including His death and resurrection. His foresight had a purpose, obedience to the Father, and salvation for those who would repent of sin and turn toward God. In Luke 24 we see the power of God displayed through the resurrected Messiah. Angels told the women the good news: Jesus had risen from the dead! Peter saw the empty tomb, and Jesus spent time with two disciples, even though they did not immediately recognize Him. Finally, Jesus appeared to His gathered disciples, convincing them that He was not a ghost.

But in Luke 24:44 Christ reminds His followers that all of these things had been foretold. For them, as people who knew and had studied the Law, none of this should have come as a surprise. Likewise, when we know and serve God, we must realize He is faithful to His Word. We are not led blindly. The Bible tells us our future, giving specific and practical instructions on how we should live as faithful followers in today's world.

We have the opportunity to practice foresight each day by reading God's Word and living obediently. Verse 45 tells us how Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Nothing is keeping you from having the same blessing.

► Today, read His Word, believe His Word, and obediently live His Word! As readers of God's Word, we are able to live with foresight, certain of what is to come. When you place your head on your pillow tonight, no matter what happens, you can say, "Lord, today I lived for and honored you."

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## Pray with Us

During your time with God ask Him for guidance in your study of His Word and help in going deeper into its truth. Let God's Word transform your life.

# Facing Disappointment

Read Matthew 26:14–56

*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.—Matthew 26:41*

Many years ago I attended a student’s sweet sixteen party at a luxurious hotel banquet hall. It was a beautiful event. However, on Monday this same young woman walked into my classroom in tears. She explained that when she got home that evening her parents told her they were divorcing. She felt betrayed by this sad ending to her birthday. The good news is that this precious teen did not turn against God. Supported by mentors, she was able to move forward and today is a grown godly woman with three teenage children.

Life’s disappointments produce a sense of sadness resulting from our unfulfilled expectations. One moment we are celebrating life, and the next moment we feel knocked across the face by unexpected disappointments. In Matthew 26 Jesus faced a situation that caused great disappointment. Remember, He was fully God, but He was also human and could experience emotional pain. Nevertheless, He accepted what happened as part of God’s plan. Not only did His

disciple Judas plot to betray Him (vv. 14–16), but he also led the capture of Jesus, with a “large crowd armed with swords and clubs” (v. 47). Then Judas sealed the betrayal with a pre-arranged signal: a kiss (v. 48). Oh how hurtful that must have been for Jesus, to be betrayed by one within His closest circle.

What was Jesus’ response? Notice that He called Judas His “friend” (v. 50). He told those defending Him to put away their swords (v. 52). He asked questions and referred the crowd to Scripture (v. 54). Notice what Jesus did *not* do. He did not wallow in disappointment. We serve a Savior who understands us when we face disappointment because “Jesus understands every weakness of ours” (Heb. 4:15–16).

► Serving God will, at times, bring disappointments. Consider how God wants you to respond. Perhaps He wants you to share His Word or mentor someone facing trials. Ask God to mold you to His image, no matter what today brings.

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## Pray with Us

Our prayer is that the Lord, the great Teacher, will teach us how to turn away from pride, selfishness, and greed and make us ready to serve one another with humility.

# Teaching by Example

Read **John 13:1–17**

*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.—John 13:14*

Corey Nelson is an Arizona high school track coach who his students will tell you “never quits.” While coaching his students on how to sprint, the teacher continues to compete at the Masters level. The teacher’s dedication, both to his students and to the sport, has made a deep impression. One parent commented, “He’s going through the same training, the same problems. They can see he’s not all talk.”

Jesus made a deep impression on His disciples not only because of what He said but also because of what He did. In today’s passage, He showed them what it meant to be a servant leader by humbling Himself and washing their dusty feet. The disciples had gathered for the Passover Festival and their evening meal. Notice that before Jesus teaches by example, the passage explains why He did it. “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so . . . ” (v. 3). Jesus understood the suffering that would come in the

days ahead. He realized who He was and to what He had been called. Even so, He demonstrated sacrificial love for Peter and the others by pouring a basin of water, taking a towel, and washing their dirty feet (vv. 4–5).

This intimate act of humility proved too much for Peter, who objected, “No, you shall never wash my feet” (v. 8). But Jesus wanted to make a point. He explains more fully in verses 12–17. He was indeed their Teacher and Lord, but He was also showing them by His personal example, what it meant to serve with love and humility. Just as He served them in such a dramatic fashion, they were to serve one another in the same way. I’m sure the disciples never forgot that lesson.

► This month has been filled with lessons from the great Teacher. Which ones have pressed most deeply on your own heart? And how can you model your own interactions with others after the example of the greatest Teacher of all?

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## Pray with Us

Coming to the end of the month, thank the Lord for patiently teaching His disciples—and us—His truth. Tell Him what you determined to change in your interactions with others as a result of the great Teacher’s example.

# More Than a Teacher

## Read Revelation 1

*Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.  
I am the Living One.—Revelation 1:17*

Picture Day is an annual tradition in most schools. You might remember the excitement of choosing your favorite outfit, brushing your hair one final time before your official class photo. In each class picture there is a teacher widely smiling, saying, “Here they are my world. My class!”

Jesus Christ is our great Teacher. Imagine for a moment a class photo where Jesus was the teacher. Who are His students from this month’s study? On the top row we see Zacchaeus, head held high, ready to share his wealth. In the middle, we see Nicodemus telling his classmates, “You must be born again.” And there’s Peter at the side of the riser shouting, “I love you, Lord!” Standing in the front row is the Samaritan Woman smiling with thankfulness. The lessons Jesus taught them are part of life’s great lesson plan, designed by God. Why? Because Jesus is *much more* than a Teacher.

Revelation 1 tells us that Jesus is the beginning and end, the First and

Last, the Living One. All things rest on Him. Whether through a parable or an object lesson, or Jesus’ resurrection, it was God’s intent for us to believe in and accept Jesus Christ the Savior. During Jesus’ teaching ministry God revealed His plan for all history, past, present, and future. While being the great Teacher, Jesus was foremost, the incarnate God. There is no greater Teacher for you to learn from and for you to share with others.

If you know Christ as your Savior, then you are in Jesus’ class picture, and God has called you to teach others the good news. “Do not be afraid,” says God. The Alpha and Omega, the Almighty, is with you.

► What does it mean to you, personally, that Jesus is your great Teacher? What lessons have you learned that will make you a better teacher of the gospel? Today, picture yourself in Jesus’ class photo. How would others describe you as a student?

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### Pray with Us

As we conclude our study, we pray we’ll remember the lessons the Lord has taught us this month. Ask Him for courage and determination to go into the world and make disciples.

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