

TIMELESS
TEACHINGS

STUDIES IN THE PARABLES
OF CHRIST

Leader's Guide

by

Rachel Delaney

and

E. Ruth Lorah

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest privileges that God's children have is that of studying and teaching His Word. Therefore preparation for teaching should involve more than just reading the lesson. The teacher needs first to prepare her heart to receive God's truth and apply it to her life. This preparation must begin with prayer. As you approach each lesson, ask the Lord to teach it to you, to give you a sensitivity to His truth and to the needs of those whom you teach. Pray for each person in your circle or Bible study group by name asking the Lord to open her heart and mind to His Word.

Then begin your study by reading the Scripture portion several times. Take note of the context of the parable; what was happening? Who was involved? What prompted Jesus to tell the story? How does the parable speak to you personally? Does it make you think of any special person in your group?

Now read the chapter in the study book. Using this Leader's Guide, work through the questions. If your group has more than ten members, consider dividing into smaller groups to work on the questions. Divide the questions between the small groups and allow time for them to report on anything that had particular significance to them.

Most of these chapters contain more material than it is possible to cover in a usual session. Therefore it is very important that you plan ahead of time what you want to emphasize.

Go through the chapter and mark those portions on which you want to spend time. This will depend upon the background and interests of your group.

Be creative in finding ways to make these familiar stories come alive in your teaching. You will be well rewarded for the extra time that it may take as you see the interest and growth in the members of the group. We must never teach God's Word merely as an intellectual exercise, but we must pray expecting God to use His Word to change our lives and the lives of those we teach.

May God bless you in His glad service.

Georgia Settle
Editor

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1

DEVELOPING A SENSITIVITY TO THE TEACHING OF GOD'S WORD

THE SOWER, THE SEED, AND THE SOILS

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Sower comparing God's Word to seed sown and the human heart to soil.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that a believing heart is one that receives the Word and allows it to alter attitudes and behavior.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION by helping members of the group determine how their lives have changed because of their response to the gospel.

PREPARATION: An important part of your preparation is praying for yourself and each person in your circle or study group. Pray that the Lord will prepare hearts to receive and respond to His Word. Pray that the Holy Spirit will make each person in the group sensitive to the needs of those around her.

Since this parable deals with seeds and planting, you might use colorful seed packets for name tags. Glue a small strip of paper to the packet to write the name on. Use two of each kind of seed or flower and at prayer time have each member find the person with a matching tag. Allow about two minutes for them to exchange prayer requests and pray together. Encourage them to remember the request and pray for each other until the next meeting.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS: Along with the answers you will find additional information and suggestions. Each leader will need to carefully consider the needs and interests of her group as she determines how much time to spend on this extra material.

DEFINITION: *sow*— 1. To scatter or plant seed for growing. 2. To plant seed in or on. 3. To spread or scatter.

1. (a) What familiar occupation did Jesus use in this parable? (b) Who is the sower in this parable? (c) What method did the farmer use to sow the seed?

Answer: Jesus based this parable on (a) farming with the (b) farmer being the sower who (c) scattered or broadcast the seed on the soil. It was customary to use one of two methods to sow seed. The first was to attach a bag with small holes to an animal. As the animal walked the seed would be dispersed.

The second option was for the farmer to attach a leather bag to his waist and as he walked across the fields he would draw seed from the bag and scatter it by hand.

2. (a) How many different types of soil were mentioned? (b) What was the condition of each soil and how did it affect the seed which was planted?

Answer: (a) Jesus spoke of four types of soil. Three of these were unproductive while the fourth type was productive. (b) The first type mentioned was a *way side* or path. Farmers avoided plowing these paths as they were used to divide the fields. This soil became very hard from the travel of men and animals. The birds devoured the seed which fell on the hard soil.

The second type of soil was in *rocky places* which were covered with a thin layer of soil. Though the seed could germinate the roots could not penetrate deeply enough to find moisture. The seed which fell on the rocky places came up, but so did the sun. The sun scorched the plants before they could take root in the shallow soil. Having no depth of root to draw sustenance, the plants withered away.

The third type of unproductive soil mentioned was neither hard nor shallow. It was suitable for sustaining growth, but it was already *occupied by thorns*. The thorns choked the growth of the plants so that they could not mature and bear fruit.

The fourth type was *good soil* which received the seed and provided an environment suitable for the seed to take root, sprout, and eventually yield a harvest.

3. What admonition did Jesus give in verse 9?

Answer: Jesus said, "He who has ears, let him hear." This was a caution and a warning to His listeners. In other words, give attention to God's Word; read it, study it, meditate upon it; and pray for guidance in applying it. The secret of a fruitful life must begin with a hearing ear. We should take a lesson from the attitude of Samuel when he said, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10).

4. (a) What does the seed represent and who does the sower represent? (b) Who do the birds represent? (c) What method does Satan use to interfere with the growth of the seed? What philosophies or other things in today's world cause people to harden their hearts against the Word of God?

Answer: (a) The seed represents the truths of Scripture and Jesus is the sower. The sowers in today's world are those who teach and illuminate the Word of God. The hardened path is representative of the ones who hear the Word of God, but refuse to allow it to make an impression because their hearts have not been prepared. (b) The birds represent the evil one. (c) Just as the birds snatched up the seed from the hardened path, Satan uses every evil influence and distraction to snatch spiritual truths from the hearts and blind the minds of unbelievers before the Word has an opportunity to germinate. (d) People open their minds to philosophical ideas: mysticism, hedonism, materialism, relativism, and other concoctions of man's mind. Eventually they become hardened and cynical.

5. (a) What do the rocky places represent? (b) What contributed to the rejection of the Word of God? (c) What are some examples of present day situations which have this effect?

Answer: (a) The rocky places picture the one whose heart hears the Word, receives it, and embraces it because it strikes a responsive cord within him. This reception of the Word, however, is superficial because beneath the surface his unconverted heart is as hard as a rock. This condition does not permit the message to send down deep roots; so the initial joy and apparent growth are deceiving. (b) The sun that scorched the young plants corresponds to tribulation or persecution arising because of God's message. This offends and causes persons to stumble. This is why Jesus urged people to count the cost before declaring their discipleship (Luke 14:25-33). Christianity often attracts unstable souls who will emotionally seize upon the message for selfish reasons but will abandon their new found interest when they experience the hardships of discipleship, which actually strengthen and nourish the true believer.

(c) People who adhere to the concept of modern day humanism are not willing to accept the authority of God's Word. If they were to adjust their living habits to comply with the standards of God they would have to give up many of their selfish values. Many are not willing to do this.

6. (a) What do the thorns represent? (b) How do the thorns which Jesus mentioned affect our Christian witness? (c) How can we overcome the thorns and weeds, which represent things that hinder our growth?

Answer: (a) The patches of thorns represent the hearts of persons who are initially receptive to God's message, but eventually allow it to be choked off by mundane concerns. Jesus specifically mentions two thorns which choke out God's truth: the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. (b) These concerns often develop more rapidly than spiritual interest and soon overshadow the truths of God's Word. Anxiety over earthly matters detracts the mind from Christ. It also deprives one of the time and attention necessary for developing the Christ-centered faith which trusts God for all earthly concerns.

Unlike the soil which was hard and shallow, this soil was soft and deep enough to sustain growth, but it was already occupied by other plants. The competition for air, light, moisture, and nutrients was too keen for the new plants and so they were smothered. So it is with the hearts of some men. They allow the concerns of a busy life to absorb all of their energies and time so that they deprive themselves of the eternal life sustaining ingredients which are found only in God's Word.

The person who occupies his mind with acquiring wealth and at the same time neglects the spiritual riches of God is deceiving himself (Luke 12:16-21). This is deception in its fullest form, for no amount of wealth can provide true satisfaction and contentment. Only those who put their hope and trust in God will experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who gives true joy and inner peace which allows us to take hold of the life which is eternal. (c) By turning earthly matters over to God one can free up time to spend on heavenly matters—prayer, Bible study, fellowship (Matt. 6:33-34).

7. (a) Who does the good soil represent? (b) Why was the seed that fell on good soil able to produce desirable results? (c) What is the spiritual fruit that is evidenced in the life of the believer who hears the Word, accepts it, retains it, and applies it to daily living situations?

Answer: (a) The good soil represents the one whose life is receptive to God's Word and obedient to His will. This is the person who truly believes in the person of Jesus Christ and His atoning work. (b) The Word of God falls upon hearts that are noble and good—that is, prepared by the Holy Spirit. The soil of their hearts is fertile, soft, deep, and free from other concerns; therefore they hear the Word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. The seed will germinate and produce abundantly—although not equally. The amount of fruit may vary considerably, but wherever the soil is good, there is some fruit. The parable reiterates the previously stated truth: "Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them" (Matt. 7:20). (c) "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

MINISTRY IDEA: Suggest to the women that they write a note of thanks to someone who has planted seeds of God's Word in their life. Perhaps the one who led them to the Lord, or the pastor, or a Sunday school teacher. Perhaps someone would like to write a note to the pastor for the group.

CHOOSING GOD'S VALUES AND SETTING CHRISTIAN PRIORITIES

THE RICH FOOL

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Rich Fool—emphasizing that material possessions cannot bring true satisfaction.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that material blessings are from God and should be used to further His kingdom.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of the parable by teaching that life's main priorities should be set on things which have eternal value.

PREPARATION: Prepare enough 3 x 5 cards for the group by marking each two cards with a matching color, number or design. As the group arrives, give each lady a card and ask her to write her name and a prayer request on it. Either at the beginning or end of the study, have each one find the person with a matching card. Allow three to five minutes for them to exchange cards and pray together. Encourage them to continue praying for each other until the next meeting.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 12:13-21

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS: Each leader should consider the extra material given in these answers and determine how much time to spend on this in the group.

1. (a) In what predicament did the rich fool find himself? (b) Who was responsible for this good fortune? (c) Was this abundant crop a new experience for him?

Answer: (a) The rich man in the parable experienced an abundance of crops and unprecedented success. So much that he did not know what to do with them. (b) The Lord who is responsible for all good gifts was responsible for his good fortune. (c) Evidently this was not a new experience for he was described as being a rich man. He did not become rich because of the abundant harvest, instead, the harvest added to his riches. His barns were already filled to capacity. He did not need them to sustain himself, or his household.

2. (a) How many times does the rich fool use the personal pronouns "I" and "my" in verses 17-19? (b). Who was the center of his thoughts?

Answer: (a) In a few short sentences the man used eleven personal pronouns. "I" is used six times. "My" is used five times, plus the personal pronoun "you" is used one time to refer to himself. (b) Obviously his thoughts were only of himself and his own comfort. He was carrying on a conversation with himself.

This dialogue reflects his self image and presuppositions. He consulted no one, least of all God, for an answer to his situation. He was possessed by his possessions with no regard for anyone but himself. He forgot that he was not the owner, but only the possessor and the steward of his good fortune. All he had belonged to God.

3. (a) What decision did he have to make concerning his situation? (b) What was his plan? (c) Who would benefit from it?

Answer: (a) He had to decide what to do with the abundance. (b) He planned to tear down the existing barns and build larger ones. (c) He alone would benefit. By storing the provisions he was showing that his chief concern was for himself, his own comfort, and enjoyment. He was revealing that his primary goal in life was to satisfy himself by using the wealth that he had accumulated.

4. (a) What is your response to the man's decision to build bigger barns and store his crops? (b) Is it wrong to plan and save for the future?

Answer: (a) This question calls for a personal response. (b) "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" (Prov. 16:9). It was not the possessions, or the acquisition of the possessions, which Christ was condemning. It was the rich man's attitude toward these possessions which Christ found to be distasteful. The fact that this man had such a rich harvest only proved that God had been kind and gracious to him. Material possessions cannot be used as a measuring stick for personal worth, nor can poverty mean that a person is unworthy. The man's behavior indicates that he had no knowledge of the fact that the material blessings of life are provided by God. This man was exhibiting his pride in himself by neglecting to consider what God would have him do.

A spiritually-minded person would have considered how he or she might use these gifts to help others and glorify God; would praise God for his good fortune; would share his wealth with the less fortunate, or would perhaps invest the wealth and use the income for worthy purposes. Jesus teaches that we should use our wealth for things with eternal value which cannot be stolen or destroyed (Matt. 6:20). The parable does not imply that material things are wrong in themselves, but only when they become the focus and goal of one's life.

5. How did God respond to the man's decision?

Answer: God responded by calling the rich man a name, by passing judgment upon him, and by asking a question (v.20).

1) He called him a "fool." According to Scripture, a fool is a man who leaves God out of any consideration: "The fool says in his heart, there is no God" (Psa. 14:1a).

2) He made a statement: "This very night your life will be demanded of you." What a startling thing to hear! Herein lies the tragedy of the parable. It points out the unpredictability of death. When the time came for him to die, his possessions could do nothing for him. They could not speak for him, nor could they influence his destination. This fact illustrates the deceitfulness of riches.

3) He asked a question: "Who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" It is not possible to take material possessions with you into your final destination. Those things which have been accomplished for the glory of the Lord may gain you a reward, but will remain behind for the Lord to use for His glory. Material possessions will be left for someone else to either enjoy or misuse. We can determine from this parable that covetousness is a kind of psychopathic behavior which causes fools to lose sight of God.

6. (a) What was God's desire for this man's life? (b) What does it mean to be "rich toward God?"

Answer: (a) God wanted him to be rich in things of the Lord (v.21). (b) Being rich toward God means to be in fellowship with Him through study, prayer and as a part of His church. It is through Bible study and prayer that we learn of the attributes of God. The more we learn of Him, the greater our desire will be to serve Him. Service to Him means to be actively engaged in those things which promote His kingdom. Being rich toward God requires that we strive to be obedient to His commands as they are revealed in Scripture. Richness toward God begins in a relationship with Him.

7. What happened to this man's fortune?

Answer: When the man died all his possessions were left behind.

8. If material things are designed for this life and not for the life to come, why do you think the rich fool viewed them as he did?

Answer: Perhaps this question could lead to a discussion of our attitudes toward possessions. Could it be that the man was completely ignoring God and the part He played in the acquisition of these gifts? He reflected a prideful attitude by taking credit for amassing a fortune. He was thinking only of himself and the pleasure he would get from his riches.

9. Even though material possessions are temporary, how can they be used to acquire eternal riches?

Answer: Material possessions may be used to assist others in a way which will bring honor to God. We must look upon all blessings as gifts from God and use them in ways that will advance His kingdom. We should receive these gifts with the attitude of humility toward God, the Giver of all good gifts. We should realize that all opportunities are given for a purpose. It may be that prosperity is sometimes a greater test of character than poverty. This proved to be so for the rich farmer.

10. How is it possible for a Christian to measure success?

Answer: The world defines a successful person as one that succeeds in obtaining what he (or she) desires or intends. The rich man succeeded in building new barns, but could we say that he was successful? A Christian can only know and feel success from the perspective of a personal relationship with his heavenly Father. If one is continually growing in his or her spiritual development through faith and trust in the Lord, then we can say that person is achieving success. By seeking God's righteousness, the most important of all things, our success will exist for an eternity. God's Word tells us that we will all live for an eternity, but we must decide how, where, and with whom. If we have the assurance that God will take us unto Himself when our lives are required by Him, then, yes, we can measure success from this perspective.

11. (a) Is our spiritual wealth inherited or earned? (b) How can we invest our material inheritance for the future?

Answer: (a) Our spiritual wealth is a free gift from God and cannot be earned. "Free," it is; "cheap," it is not! Jesus Christ paid the purchase price for our salvation through His atoning work. Because of His sacrifice for us we are obligated through our commitment, behavior, and attitudes to extend to others Christlike concern and care with the hope that they, too, might experience the joy and peace which is ours in Christ. (b) Material blessings can be a help, or a hindrance, to one's spiritual growth. If we view them as gifts from the hand of God and use them to honor His name, they can serve as an eternal investment. If we see them as the product of our own ingenuity and efforts, as did the rich farmer, and use them for the sole purpose of our enjoyment and pleasure, they can hinder our spiritual maturity. Material possessions can keep us from entering into a meaningful relationship with God if they influence us to neglect our dependence on Him. An accumulation of things will not contribute to a godly character, unless they are used for the good of others and the glory of God.

MINISTRY IDEA: Suggest that each woman walk through her house and look through her closets with this question in mind, "Lord, what have you given me that you would have me give to others as an investment in your kingdom?" Perhaps the answer will not be found in *things* but in *time*.

3

LABORING EARNESTLY IN THE LIGHT OF CHRIST'S RETURN

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Talents showing that all believers are endowed with spiritual gifts.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that God expects believers to use their spiritual gifts to promote His kingdom.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of the parable by exhorting members of the group to know their spiritual gifts and use them to influence others in their Christian lives.

PREPARATION: Ask the pastor if there are special things he would like the women to pray about. Add other requests such as missionaries the church supports, church officers, youth groups, etc. Write these requests on 3 x 5 cards to give out at the meeting.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25:14-30

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS:

- 1. (a) Who does the man in verse 14 represent? (b) Who do the servants represent? (c) Where was the man going? (d) What kind of relationship existed between the man and his servants?**

Answer: (a) In the parable the master represents Jesus Christ. (b) The servants represent believers. (c) The man was going on a long journey. (d) The man had enough faith in his servants to entrust them with his wealth.

- 2. What do the talents represent?**

Answer: The talents represent spiritual gifts of believers.

- 3. How did the master determine the amount to be left with each servant?**

Answer: Each servant was given responsibility according to his ability.

- 4. Do you think the master felt at peace as he journeyed on his way believing his possessions would be cared for?**

Answer: There is no definite answer to this question. You might ask the group how they would feel about going on a long trip and leaving a friend to care for their house.

5. How did the first two servants respond to their responsibility of taking care of their master's money?

Answer: The first two servants immediately responded by getting busy and doubling the money entrusted to them.

6. How did the man who had been given one talent react to the situation?

Answer: The third servant dug a hole and buried the money in the ground.

7. (a) How long was the master away? (b) What did he do when he returned?

Answer: (a) The master was gone a long time. (b) When he returned he called the servants to account for how they had handled the money entrusted to them.

8. What did the first and second servants have to report?

Answer: The two servants reported that each had doubled the amount.

9. Was the master pleased with their accomplishments?

Answer: The master commended these servants. God's people will be commended and rewarded when they faithfully exercise good stewardship.

10. How were they rewarded?

Answer: The master gave these servants a promotion and an invitation. They were both given positions with higher honor and more responsibility. Both were invited to share in their master's happiness. They were extended the privilege of greater service and responsibility which for the believer represents a life of joy and service in God's presence (Rev. 7:15).

11. (a) How did the third man open the conversation when he came to report what he had done? (b) Was the accusation justifiable? Why or why not?

Answer: (a) The third servant defended himself by explaining why he had not invested the money. (b) The servant blamed the master for his own lack of productivity. These words of accusation show that he had no love for the master and was unappreciative of what the master had done for him. Words spoken about a person very often reveal the true feelings of the person speaking.

12. (a) What reason did he give for burying the money instead of multiplying it? (b) Do you think he had sufficient cause to be afraid of his master, or was he just making an excuse which he thought would be acceptable? (c) Do you think he expected to be rewarded for keeping the money safe and returning it in its entirety?

Answer: (a) The servant blamed his failure on his fear of the master. Parts (b) & (c) of this question call for personal opinions.

13. (a) How did the master turn the servant's plea against him? (b) What alternative did the master suggest?

Answer: (a) The master used the servant's own words to indict him for not acting according to his convictions. (b) He could have put the money in the bank to gain interest.

14. Do you think the servant meant to contradict himself?

Answer: He may have thought that by placing the blame on the master he could make his actions excusable.

15. (a) What did the master do with this servant's money? (b) How might this principle be applied concerning spiritual gifts in the lives of believers?

Answer: (a) The master ordered that the talent be taken from him and given to the one who had ten talents. (b) As we faithfully perform small tasks for the glory of God, we are given greater opportunities to serve Him. A lack of faithfulness results in reduced opportunity.

16. What sentence did the master pronounce upon the slothful servant?

Answer: He was banished into darkness and suffering (Matt. 25:30).

MINISTRY IDEA: Perhaps this would be a good time for the group to discuss something they could work on together to show their love for Christ in the church or the community. Ask the women to discuss needs that your group is equipped to meet. Ideas from other groups include: giving a birthday party at a nursing home or retirement home for all those having birthdays that month; making layettes for a crisis pregnancy ministry, such as Bethany Christian Services; giving a dinner for international students on a local campus; offering classes in conversational English for international women in your community.

REALIZING THE GREAT DEBT OF LOVE WE OWE OUR LORD

PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Two Debtors showing that all sin is debt and must be paid.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that God accepted Christ's atoning work as payment in full for believers' debts.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of the parable by teaching that we should extend God's love to others as an expression of our gratitude to Him.

PREPARATION: Prepare cards to pair prayer partners. Pray for the needs of which you are aware in the lives of the women in your group. Pray for each one to have an open heart for God's Word.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:36-50

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think Simon, the Pharisee, invited Jesus to dinner?

Answer: Scripture does not state a reason for Simon's invitation, but his identity as a Pharisee suggests possible reasons: (a) Could he have been an admirer and/or sympathizer since not all Pharisees were Christ's enemies? (b) Was his intent to engage Jesus in a conversation which would discredit Jesus' teaching? (c) Was he exercising political and social amenities in order to impress others?

2. What does Scripture tell us about the character of the unnamed woman who entered Simon's home?

Answer: The woman was identified as a sinner.

3. What motivated this woman to come to the Pharisee's home?

Answer: She came because she learned that Jesus would be present.

4. What did she bring with her?

Answer: She brought an alabaster jar of perfume. This is a very expensive substance which is used for embalming a body or the anointing of a king. It was customary to use olive oil for anointing under these circumstances. This woman brought expensive perfume in an alabaster container to anoint the feet of Jesus.

5. How did she react to the presence of Jesus?

Answer: As the woman wept she wet Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped His feet with her hair, kissed His feet, and poured perfume on them.

6. Although no spoken words by this woman were recorded, what do you think her demonstrative actions revealed about her heart attitude toward Jesus?

Answer: Discussion of this question might be encouraged by asking the group what they would have thought if they had been present in Simon's courtyard. It is possible that the woman had come to the realization that she was without hope and needed forgiveness for her sinful life; that she had become aware of her lost estate and was seeking relief from her life of sin and degradation. She was affected to the intense degree that she was willing to offer her heartfelt thanks in public to the One who was able to forgive her of her sins. By doing this she was acknowledging that Jesus was the Messiah and she had come to seek His forgiveness.

7. (a) What were Simon's thoughts as he watched this display of devotion? (b) What did his thoughts reveal about his knowledge of this woman?

Answer: (a) Simon thought: "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39b). (b) A conflict must have arisen in the mind of Simon. He knew of her reputation as did the other people of the town. If Jesus was the Messiah, as He claimed to be, He would also know of her reputation (Deut. 18:15-18). Simon observed that Jesus was not offended by this woman's show of devotion which according to their tradition would defile a person, especially a prophet (Lev. 5:3). Simon could not reconcile these two things in his mind.

8. What aspect of Jesus' nature was evidenced when He responded to Simon's unvoiced criticism?

Answer: Jesus' answer was evidence of His divine nature. By focusing His prophetic power of discernment upon Simon, He was displaying His Omnipotence.

9. (a) How did Jesus introduce His remarks? (b) What words in Simon's reply revealed that he had still not accepted Jesus as the Messiah?

Answer: (a) Jesus called Simon by name and then informed him that He had something to tell him. (b) Simon referred to Him as teacher. In his heart he was saying, "if he were a prophet," this indicates that Simon did not recognize Jesus as being anything other than an exemplary human being.

10. What situation did Jesus use to illustrate the concept of forgiveness?

Answer: Jesus used a commercial setting to portray the indebtedness of two men to the same moneylender.

11. What did the two debtors have in common?

Answer: Both men owed a debt which they could not repay.

12. How did the moneylender respond to the needs of the two debtors?

Answer: The moneylender canceled both debts.

13. What question did Jesus ask Simon?

Answer: Jesus asked Simon, "Which of them will love him more?"

14. Was the generosity of the creditor an easy concept for Simon to understand? Why or why not?

Answer: It was probably not easy for Simon to understand the moneylender's generosity. This was contrary to the nature of moneylenders. This was also a difficult concept for a Pharisee to accept because their's was a religion of merit through good works.

15. (a) Were the words of Jesus intended as a commendation for the woman, or a reprimand to Simon for neglecting common courtesies when entertaining guests? (b) What was the deeper meaning that Jesus' words conveyed?

Answer: (a) Jesus' words offered both a commendation to the woman and a reprimand to Simon. Christ used the illustration to point out that the woman's behavior toward Him was a demonstration of her faith in His person. By comparison, it also revealed to Simon that his failure to show Christ the usual courtesies due a guest resulted from his lack of faith in the person of Christ. (b) Christ accepted what the woman offered because it sprang from her faith. The central truth is that the one who can demonstrate the genuineness of faith by the fruits of repentance is the one who receives forgiveness. The illustration also makes the point that our love toward God is directly related to our experience of forgiveness. By worshipping Him we are showing our gratitude to the Lord for His saving grace.

16. What did Simon learn about this woman who had acknowledged, through her behavior, her commitment of faith to the Messiah?

Answer: Notice when Jesus addressed Simon He spoke of the woman's spiritual condition in the past tense. This signifies that her rebirth had occurred previously and her many sins had already been forgiven. According to the Gospel harmonies, the event which preceded this dinner was Christ's invitation to sinners (Matt. 11:28-30). She could have been in the crowd and heard these gracious words, "Come unto me," and as a result have responded to the invitation, committed her heart to Him, trusted Him, and experienced forgiveness. When addressing the woman Christ spoke in the present tense indicating that her sins are forgiven. This can be explained by the use of the Greek tense of the verb which means, "They have been forgiven, they are forgiven, and they stand forgiven."

17. (a) What was the response of the guests who witnessed the teaching of this parable? (b) Does their lack of discernment indicate spiritual blindness?

Answer: (a) The other guests talked among themselves trying to identify what kind of a person would have the ability and power to perform such an act. (b) The question they asked of each other indicated that they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, knew nothing of His Divine power, and had no faith in His person, ability, or power.

18. (a) To what did Jesus attribute the woman's salvation? (b) What did she receive because of her faith in Him?

Answer: (a) The woman's salvation was a result of her faith in Jesus Christ. It is important to note that the object of her faith was Jesus Christ. Faith by itself could not save her, but faith in Jesus Christ alone surely did. (b) She went out a new person. She received a new peace in her soul. God's grace accompanied by her faith had lead her into a new peace which creates a spiritual atmosphere for those who believe in Christ (Rom. 5:1).

STUDY SUGGESTION: Using a concordance, make a study of different passages dealing with forgiveness. What does the Bible teach regarding forgiveness of sin? How can we know that our sins are forgiven? On what basis does God forgive sins?

AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT
REFLECTS ONE'S NEED OF REPENTANCE

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Unmerciful Servant emphasizing that forgiveness should be a constant on-going attitude in the heart of the believer.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that forgiveness involves complete and total dismissal from the minds of believers of sin committed against them.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of the truth that as Christ has forgiven us we must be forgiving toward others.

PREPARATION: Mark prayer requests cards in sets of three with matching numbers, colors or designs. Set aside time in the meeting for women to pray with those who have matching cards. Pray for the members of the group by name. This time commitment prepares your heart to be sensitive to these women as you teach.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:21-35

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What question did Peter ask which caused Jesus to relate this parable?

Answer: Peter asked, "How many times must I forgive my brother (Matt. 18:21)?"

2. (a) How many times did Jesus tell Peter that he was required to forgive his brother? (b) Do you think Jesus meant specifically 490 times, or an unlimited number?

Answer: (a) Jesus told Peter to forgive his brother seventy-seven times. Because of the ambiguity in the Greek text, the words "seventy-seven" are interpreted differently in various translations. The King James Version interprets it to mean seventy times seven (490), while the New International Version interprets it to mean seventy-seven. (b) Jesus is saying that we should forgive an unlimited number of times.

3. In teaching about forgiveness of sins, to whom does Jesus liken the kingdom of heaven?

Answer: Jesus told a story about a certain king and his subjects to illustrate truths about the kingdom of heaven.

4. What did the king want to do with the servants?

Answer: The king called his servants to settle their accounts.

5. What was the amount owed by the first servant?

Answer: The first servant owed the king ten thousand talents.

6. (a) What did the king require as payment for the debt? (b) Since the servant was unable to make restitution for his debt, what did he request of the king? (c) How did the king respond to his plea?

Answer: (a) The king ordered the entire family to be sold in slavery to pay the debt. (b) The servant begged for more time. Since he had nothing to pay with, yet promised to pay all, it is possible that he was trying to bluff his way out of a hopeless situation. (c) The king took pity on him and canceled the debt.

7. (a) Who is the next character introduced into the parable? (b) What actions did the servant who had been forgiven display toward the servant who owed him money? (c) How did he respond to the servant's plea for patience?

Answer: (a) A fellow servant who was in debt to the first servant. (b) The servant who was forgiven by the king physically and verbally abused the man who was in debt to him. (c) He refused to forgive his fellow servant the debt and had him thrown into prison until the debt was paid.

8. (a) Who took notice of the cruel actions inflicted upon the second servant? (b) How did they feel about the heartless treatment which the forgiven servant extended to the one who owed him?

Answer: (a) Other servants saw what happened. (b) They were distressed and reported to the king. These servants brought their report to the king, not out of a desire to get their companion in trouble, but to redress a blatant wrong. The report was thorough and accurate.

9. (a) How did the king feel when he learned of the ungrateful attitude of the servant whom he had forgiven? (b) How did the king reprimand the servant for his calloused behavior toward the one who only requested what he himself had already been granted?

Answer: (a) The king was angry when he heard what happened. (b) He turned the unforgiving servant over to the jailer until he paid back all he had owed.

10. What lesson should we learn from this parable?

Answer: Jesus' answer in verse 35 reemphasized the importance of believers forgiving one another in the family of God.

6

HONORING GOD BY HEEDING HIS WARNING

PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Fig Tree showing that repentance is a prerequisite for salvation.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that every believer should become a productive citizen of God's kingdom.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of this truth by considering practical ways that believers can enhance that part of God's vineyard in which they have been placed.

PREPARATION: Read Isaiah 5:1-7. This Scripture contains an Old Testament parable that illustrates the relationship between God and Israel. This relationship provides a setting for the fig tree parable.

Fruit would be a good theme for this meeting. You might make fruit shaped name tag/prayer cards (or put fruit stickers on 3 x 5 cards); make two with an apple, two with bananas, etc. Ask each member to write her name and prayer request on the card, then find the woman with matching fruit. Give them a few minutes to exchange requests and pray together.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 13:1-9

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS: These answers also contain some suggestions for application. Each leader will need to decide how much of this material to include. If there are more than ten in your group you might divide them in two groups and let each group work on six questions. Assign a leader for each group and give her a copy of these answers. Allow ten minutes for this segment of the study. Ask each group to report on one question that was of particular interest to them.

1. **Who was the owner of the fig tree?**

Answer: God is the Creator, Owner, and Sustainer of all things. Since the man owns the fig tree, he represents God in the parable (Psa. 50:10-12).

2. **Who does the fig tree represent?**

Answer: The fig tree represents God's people. He places His own people in various places throughout His creation for the purpose of bringing glory and honor to His name. Believers are those who have been born from above, who have received a new nature, and who have been adopted into the family of God.

3. Where did the owner plant the tree?

Answer: The owner planted the tree in his vineyard. This would seem to be the choice spot for a tree since the land was prepared and cultivated for this purpose. He did not plant it in the wilds of the land to be overrun by insects and other growth, nor by the wayside where it could be trampled and destroyed by invading animals. He planted it in a favorable place under the supervision of a skillful caretaker. So, we can say that it was chosen, planted, nourished, and protected. Such is the privilege of every believer—John 15:16; Psalm 1:3.

4. (a) What did the owner expect from the tree? (b) On whom should the blame be placed for the failure of the tree to grow?

Answer: (a) He expected it to produce fruit. God has given us the privilege of knowing Him, He has planted us among others who do not know Him, and it is perfectly reasonable that He should expect us to be productive. God had favored the nation of Israel by transplanting them from the barrenness of Egypt into the fertile land of Canaan. He did this with His wisdom, protection, and power. It was natural that He should expect them to live lives of productivity and fruitfulness. He has delivered us from lives of darkness and sin. He has chosen to place us in His vineyard where we are cared for, protected, nourished and guided by His loving hand. His purpose for us is not to serve as ornaments in His creation. We have not received such a high calling merely to be fed and coddled, but to bear fruit for the One who has chosen, called, and placed us in His vineyard. (b) The blame for its failure to produce fruit is placed on the tree. No one else can be blamed. The tree itself refused to rise up to its high privilege (Phil. 2:12; Heb. 2:3).

5. How did the owner react when he found that his expectations were not fulfilled?

Answer: The owner reacted to the tree's failure with disappointment, grief, and anger.

6. Who was the caretaker of the vineyard?

Answer: The caretaker represents Jesus. He interceded for the fruitless tree just as Jesus made intercession with the Father for mankind: for sinners, Isaiah 53:12; for weak believers, Luke 22:32; for enemies, Luke 23:34; for sending of the Comforter, John 14:16; for the church, John 17:9; our acceptance with the Father depends upon His intercession, Romans 8:34; His intercession is effectual and everlasting, Hebrews 7:25. For three years God in Christ sought fruit in Israel and found none. Yet the compassionate Savior interceded, crying "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34).

7. How often did the owner come to check on the tree? What did he find?

Answer: The owner came to check on the tree every year for three years. We do not know how many visits he made each year. He was unable to find fruit on the tree. There was no evidence of any results from the attention which the caretaker bestowed upon the tree.

8. What did the owner say should happen to the tree and for what reasons?

Answer: The owner declared that the tree should be cut down and destroyed. It was using nutrients from the soil which could be used to support other plant growth. Cutting it down would be an easy way of getting rid of it. It had sufficient time for trial, but had shown no sign of improvement. It had been useless from the time of its planting. It had been taking up space which might have been used to a better advantage. If left to its own devices it could have been a bad influence on other trees.

Fruit bearing constitutes our only reason for being allowed to continue in the Lord's vineyard. Opportunities which are neglected will soon deteriorate and become lost. The grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and to live soberly and righteously in this present world. Lip service, without accompanying action, will not save us (I Cor.9:24-27). The inconsistencies of professing Christians could influence and affect other Christians and cause the destruction of much fruit—as the biting frost of nature harms the tender bud.

9. How did the caretaker react to the owner's decision?

Answer: The caretaker interceded on behalf of the unproductive tree. Even though the tree was not fulfilling its intended purpose, the caretaker was not willing to allow it to be destroyed. Neither is our Lord willing to allow us to be destroyed because of our unwillingness to live obedient lives. His love is lasting, however, it is not everlasting to those who continually refuse to heed His Word (Rom.11:20).

10. What did the caretaker plan to do for the tree?

Answer: The caretaker planned to work with the soil around the tree and fertilize it in order to encourage productivity. We should view the trials and testings of our lives as necessary diggings that make us more productive and fruitful in our spiritual lives (Jas. 1:2-4). God may need to dig and break up the soil around a life in order to enrich and fertilize that life with His Word before spiritual growth and healthy fruit can be produced. These interruptions and afflictions should serve as solemn warnings.

11. What would the caretaker's final recommendation be if the situation could not be rectified?

Answer: If after the caretaker's efforts the tree did not bear fruit, it would be cut down. The fact that judgment did not fall on the nation of Israel at that time, but was postponed until A.D. 70, suggests that the caretaker's petition was granted. The period leading up to that judgment provided Israel an opportunity to prove themselves a fruitful nation. The fact that judgment did fall shows that no fruit of righteousness was produced by the nation of Israel. Believers are joined by faith to Christ. They are "grafted" to Him and thereby grow in and through Him. From Him they receive power to lead productive lives (Rom.7:4; John 15:1-5).

12. Were the owner and the caretaker in agreement as to the final recommendation?

Answer: The owner and caretaker agreed upon the outcome. Those who refuse to believe and hinder others from believing will not always be permitted in His vineyard. This parable contains solemn and searching lessons for every Christian. Our presence in the vineyard proves His claim that He has a right to expect fruit from our lives (John 10:30).

MINISTRY IDEA: The application objective for this lesson spoke of considering ways that women can enhance the area of God's vineyard where He has placed them. This is sometimes expressed on country crafts as: "Bloom where you are planted." Have the group discuss things that make them feel welcome at church and ways they might make others feel welcome. They might also discuss things they might do to make the church building and/or grounds more conducive to welcome and worship. If actual projects are suggested, appoint a committee to investigate, get approval and enlist help from the group.

NOURISHING FAITH IN GOD
REQUIRES PERSISTENT PRAYER

FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT

PERSISTENT WIDOW

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLES of the Needy Neighbor and the Persistent Widow to show the importance of persisting in prayer.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that persistence in prayer brings results.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of this lesson by praying to God with confidence and persistence.

PREPARATION: Ask the pastor if there are special prayer needs for which the group might pray. Prepare cards with these requests and others of concern to the women. In the meeting, ask the women to add concerns for which they have prayed for a long time. As someone mentions such a request, ask for a volunteer to share that prayer burden with her by praying about it daily.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 11:1-13; Luke 18:1-8

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS: These answers give more help and insight than the average group will have time to cover. Each leader will need to be sensitive to the time and consider how much of this material to use. Spend time on those points that meet the needs and interests of your particular group.

VOCABULARY: *IMPORTUNATE* (adj.) Urgently or stubbornly persistent in demand. Synonym: insistent, persistent, shameless.

1. What kind of person would you feel free to call upon at midnight?

Answer: The need and the urgency of the crisis would determine whom we might feel free to call. This is true from a human perspective, but as Christians we can take comfort in knowing that our heavenly Father is unchangeable and always available.

2. Was the neighbor's request reasonable? Could the request have been postponed until morning?

Answer: According to the law of hospitality in the Eastern culture one would not hesitate to knock on the door of a friend regardless of the hour (Matt. 5:42). The need was immediate. His guest had arrived and to have no food for a visitor was an insufferable reproach to an Oriental.

3. How did the friend respond?

Answer: The friend refused to get up because his family had retired for the night.

4. Did his refusal discourage the caller?

Answer: The determined borrower knocked on the door with shameless persistence.

5. What reason, or reasons, did the friend give for his unwillingness to fulfill the request?

Answer: The family had retired for the night. His answer was not based on lack of generosity. It was because he did not want to be inconvenienced. From a human point of view this is understandable. This unwillingness, however, does not apply to God who is always ready to listen and answer our prayers. He created us for Himself and gave us the gift of prayer so that we might talk with Him and He with us. He does not answer our prayers simply to get rid of us, but He answers our prayers because He is anxious to give us good gifts (Luke 11:13).

6. How did the caller respond?

Answer: The text implies that the caller refused to take "no" for an answer. He persisted until the need was met. The man was not ashamed to continue his appeal until he was given the bread. The persistent friend seemed brazen and bold, but since his plea was for another, not for himself, he remained steadfast. A good measure of validity for a prayer request is "Will it enable us to serve another person for the glory or our Lord?" Many of our prayers need to be personal, but even when we ask prayers for ourselves we should do so for God's glory and others' good.

7. What, then, was the reason for the friend's positive response?

Answer: He was not willing to do this for a friend. It appears that he responded in order to get rid of the caller.

8. Why does God respond to our persistent prayers?

Answer: God is more willing to give than we are to receive. He never sleeps and therefore is never disturbed when we approach Him (Psa. 121:4). His desire for our intensity in prayer is indicated by the exhortation to ask, seek, and knock. God does not answer our prayers to get rid of us. He answers our prayers because He is anxious to give us good things (Luke 11:13).

9. How much did the friend give to the caller once he decided to honor the request?

Answer: The friend gave as much as was needed.

10. To what spiritual truth did Jesus relate this parable (vs. 9–10)?

Answer: God's response to us is based on our relationship to Christ and on His perfect will for our lives. Healthy prayer flows from our confidence in His response as our faith develops and draws us closer to God (Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:22–25; John 14:12–14).

11. Do you think Jesus is speaking about material needs, spiritual needs or both (Luke 11:2–4)?

Answer: Christ is concerned about all the needs of our lives—both physical and spiritual.

12. Can you think of an earnest prayer request which, according to your opinion, has been ignored, delayed or answered in another way? Were you satisfied with the answer?

Answer: If we do not receive what we pray for, it is not because God grudgingly refuses to give it, but because He has some better thing for us. There is no such thing as unanswered prayer. The answer given may not be the answer we desired or expected; but even when He refuses to grant our request, He answers according to the love and wisdom of a divine and sovereign God.

13. What two relationships does Jesus contrast in order to point out God's willingness to grant our prayer petitions?

Answer: Jesus contrasts the behavior of a human father to that of the heavenly Father. Jesus states that

the best gift that the Father gives to His children is the Holy Spirit. This is the Father's special gift to man (John 15:26). He indwells all Christian believers (John 14:16–17; Rom. 8:9; I Cor. 6:19; Eph. 1:13–14). Since we know that God gives such a wonderful gift, we can be confident our need will be met as we persevere in prayer (Rom. 8:26–27).

14. (a) Are there any similarities between the sleeping friend and the unjust judge? (b) Are there any differences?

Answer: (a) Neither wanted to be inconvenienced, but both granted the request. (b) The sleeping friend refused because he did not want to disturb his household. The unjust judge had no feelings of consideration for God or man. He complied with her request because he was tired of being bothered.

15. Do you see any similarities in the behavior of the importunate widow and the friend in need?

Answer: They were both persistent in their asking. They both went to someone who was capable of granting their requests.

16. How were their requests different?

Answer: The friend in need was asking for food for a friend. The widow was asking for protection for herself.

17. What truths about our heavenly Father do we learn from these two parables?

Answer: There are no prayers of believers so insignificant as to be ignored by God; nor, are any of their petitions so unimportant that they will go unnoticed (James 1:4–5). If urgent continuous asking prevailed with a mere human, how much more must prayer prevail with God, Who cares for us with a divine love and delights in satisfying our needs (Deut. 4:7).

MINISTRY IDEA: A number of women's groups sponsor a morning of prayer annually in their church. They set aside one morning, invite any in the church who are interested, and prepare detailed prayer lists. The time begins with prayers of praise, then a time of silent prayers of repentance. The third section is for intercession which may be divided into praying for the world (countries in crisis, missionaries' needs—list names and specific needs); the United States (government officials, critical issues, etc.); your state and city (officials and specific community needs); the PCA (General Assembly leaders, church planters, evangelism, etc.); your church (pastors, officers, teachers, musicians, youth leaders—list names).

Have a different person open each section with an appropriate Scripture reading and lead the group through the prayer list for that section as they pray silently (or aloud if anyone desires to; however, if many pray aloud it will be difficult to complete the list). Music may be interspersed throughout the time.

ENJOYING CONTENTMENT AND
PEACE THROUGH HIS GUIDANCE

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Good Shepherd showing our need of Christ as the Shepherd of our lives.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that God cares for the people of the world.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of the parable by examining the role of Christ as the Good Shepherd and the blessings this affords to those who believe in Him.

PREPARATION: Prayerfully read Psalm 23. Pray for each member of the circle or study group by name. Pray especially about the way you will present question 15.

SCRIPTURE: John 10:1-18

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How does Jesus refer to Himself in verses 7 and 9?

Answer: Jesus referred to Himself as the gate, (NIV), or the door, (KJ).

2. What points was Jesus emphasizing in verses 1 and 7?

Answer: As the door is the only access to the sheepfold it is only through Jesus that we have access to the Father. A door admits and excludes; it can keep in all those who are welcome and it can prevent all others from entering. Jesus contrasts Himself with others—the thieves and the robbers. He probably had in mind the Jewish religious leaders who opposed His ministry and tried to prevent people from following Him.

3. How does Jesus refer to Himself in verses 11 and 14?

Answer: Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd.

4. Was the concept of Jesus as the Good Shepherd new to these religious leaders?

Answer: The concept of the Messiah as the Good Shepherd was very familiar to Jewish leaders.

5. What relationship exists between the shepherd and the sheep as recorded in John 10:3-4?

Answer: The shepherd has a personal and intimate relationship with his sheep. The shepherd knows

their proper names and seeks their individual good. It is not enough for sheep to be safe and at rest in the fold. They need to be led to fresh healthy pastures and still waters.

6. How does Jesus represent this relationship?

Answer: Jesus said that He knows His sheep and they know Him. He knows their names, their nature, and their needs. The Lord judges the heart. He discerns the hidden spirits of men. The sheep know the shepherd because He has manifested Himself to them (1 John 5:20; 2 Tim. 1:12). Human followers of the divine Good Shepherd are able to give Him their complete trust and devotion knowing beyond a doubt that they will not be forsaken when trouble arises. There are examples in Scripture of people responding to Jesus when He calls them by name; Matthew, Matthew 9:9; Zacchaeus, Luke 19:5; Philip, John 1:43; Lazarus, John 11:43; Mary Magdalene, John 20:16.

7. How is it possible for Him to claim that He represents both the shepherd and the door?

Answer: As Christ "the door" He provides entrance into the kingdom. As Christ "the shepherd" He preserves and protects His flock as He guides them in their daily Christian walk. A similar idea is expressed in the parable of the narrow gate (Matt. 7:14).

8. (a) Who do you think the thieves and robbers represent in verse 8? (b) If the assumption is correct that Jesus was referring to Pharisees and accusing them of teaching falsely, what effect could this have on the flock? (c) What effect could this have on the owner?

Answer: (a) The thieves and robbers represent the Pharisees or any false teachers. (b) The flock would be misled and their spiritual welfare would be hindered. It is not natural for sheep to respond to the voice of a stranger. Neither should Christians follow the leading of false teachers or leaders. Jesus warns us to beware of teachers who raise doubts in the minds of others turning their thoughts away from Himself (Luke 17:1-3). (c) God's warning to those who teach other doctrines may be found in James 3:1, NIV, 1 Timothy 1:3-4, NIV.

9. Why do you think the Pharisees could not understand the imagery Jesus was using to explain His role as the Good Shepherd?

Answer: The Pharisees were looking for a Messiah who would be an earthly leader and who would allow them to maintain their status in society. Jesus did not satisfy their expectations. His purpose was to do the will of His Father which was to reconcile man to Himself. In order to accomplish this it was necessary that He die for sinners who, as sheep, had gone astray.

10. (a) How does the hireling react when dangers appear? (b) How is it possible for an hireling to desert the flock?

Answer: (a) The hireling quickly abandons the sheep. He runs away leaving the sheep to fend for themselves because he cares more for himself than the sheep. His concern is to seek his own base and selfish ends. (b) He has no personal investment in the flock and is concerned solely in self-preservation. Because he has less at stake he is not willing to take risks in the face of danger.

11. Compare the motives of the thieves (false teachers) and the Good Shepherd.

Answer: False teachers (thieves and robbers) attempt to gain entrance into the kingdom through legalism or learning. They believe that their human wisdom and works are sufficient for admission into the fold. Jesus teaches that there is no other way to the Father except through Himself (John 14:6).

12. Who else is Jesus concerned for besides the Jewish nation?

Answer: The "other sheep" to whom Jesus refers are the Gentiles. It was Christ's teaching that He had come to call those who were His own out of Judaism. Some examples of those who answered His call out of Judaism were the man who was born blind, Mary, Martha and Lazarus, Nathaniel, Nicodemus, the tax collectors, and the disciples. In this parable Christ teaches that there are other folds from which many more sheep would be called. Christ has those who have been given Him by the Father from the folds of the Greeks, Romans, Barbarians, etc.; it was for all of them that He was about to die and whom

He would call. Jesus declares that He must bring them into the fold. Notice that they too will come because they will hear His voice and will enter. These would then form that one great flock, the Church, of which He is the one true Shepherd.

13. Jesus twice claims His willingness to lay down His life for His sheep (vs. 15-17). (a) How did He fulfill this statement? (b) To what is He referring when He promises to take it up again? (c) From Whom does He receive this authority?

Answer: (a) Jesus died on the cross at Calvary to fulfill this statement. By this action He proved that He is the Shepherd who risks His very life for the sheep. Christ laid down His life—not as a victim, because even in death His authority remained. He laid down His life, not only for the good of the sheep, but in their stead. (b) Jesus predicts not only His death but also His victory over death. Because His Father willed it, Jesus laid down His life and took it up again through His resurrection from the grave. (c) He did this by the express order and appointment of the Father.

14. What privileges and freedoms do we enjoy as we come to the kingdom through Jesus Christ?

Answer: The freedom of the Shepherd and the freedom of the sheep are both preserved. Jesus is the Shepherd who provides salvation and also liberates people from the bondage of sin. In addition, He is the shepherd who satisfies his sheep by providing an abundant life. His own sheep find pasture as they follow His leading. The psalmist is certain that God will keep him in his going out and his coming in (Psalm 121:8).

15. Do you feel that this authority, which He received from God, qualifies Him to be the Good Shepherd of your life? Have you entered through the open gate provided by Him? Have you experienced the salvation, the freedom, and the abundance of blessings which He provides for His flock?

Leader, be prayerfully sensitive to the group and encourage the women to do an exercise in introspection in order to answer these questions. If they have any question regarding their salvation, encourage them to talk with you. If you do not feel qualified to deal with this, encourage them to speak to the pastor. Our prayer is that the insight gained through the study of this parable will be helpful.

SUPPLEMENT FOR LEADERS: In this parable Jesus painted word pictures of Himself to illustrate the truths being taught. Jesus used the picture of sheep in a sheepfold to describe His relationship with His followers. He was (and still is) the Shepherd who cares for His flock, knowing them personally and being known by them. He contrasted Himself with others who opposed His ministry and tried to prevent people from following Him. Do you know of any groups today who might be attempting to react to His message as did the "thieves and robbers" of Jesus' day?

The second picture is of Jesus as "the door" through which the sheep enter and leave the fold, finding protection inside at night and pasture outside by day. Jesus portrayed Himself, not as a shepherd to whom a doorkeeper would open but, actually as a door—a door giving access to "life" in all its fullness.

In the third picture Jesus painted Himself again as a shepherd. This time as one who cared for His sheep self-sacrificially. The sheep were His and He was willing to face danger to protect them. He contrasted Himself with the hired shepherd who was not willing to sacrifice anything for the sake of the flock and who immediately ran away when danger was near because he did not have the best interest of the flock in mind. This was not true of Jesus, the Good Shepherd; His self-sacrifice was not just in terms of effort expended or danger faced, but quite literally meant laying down His life for His flock.

And finally, the fourth picture is of a shepherd with some sheep in the sheepfold and others kept elsewhere. This portrait shows Him bringing them together in one united flock. This picture speaks to us of a loving God who embraces all people of the world. His desire is for unity between God and all of mankind under the Lordship of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

9

REJECTING GOD'S INVITATION
HAS SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES

THE GREAT BANQUET

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Banquet noting the reactions of people to God's invitation to be part of His kingdom.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that God is not prejudiced toward any when extending the invitation to come into the kingdom.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of this parable by discouraging favoritism and encouraging compassion towards those with special needs and hurts.

PREPARATION: To tie in with the Banquet Parable, you might use invitation cards or recipe cards for name tags and prayer requests. Have the women find the one with the matching invitation or recipe and share requests and pray together. Remind them to continue praying for each other until the next meeting.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 14:15-24

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What prompted Jesus to speak the parable of the great banquet?

Answer: A guest had said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." Many Jews believed at the beginning of the end times there would be a great banquet hosted by the Messiah. This fellow may have believed that he and his friends would be welcomed into God's kingdom, indeed their legalistic energies were directed toward these goals. Jesus used this opportunity to show that the banquet will include society's outcasts.

2. Do you think this man's purpose in making the statement was: (a) to divert the conversation to something else, or (b) to confirm the truth of Jesus' teaching? Have you ever used the first technique to escape an uncomfortable situation?

Answer: This question calls for a personal response.

3. (a) Who does the "certain man" in verse 16 represent? (b) Who do the "many guests" represent? (c) Who does the "servant" represent and what was his message?

Answer: (a) The "certain man" in the parable represents God. God has through His love and grace provided the feast of His kingdom for all who receive Him. (b) The many bidden are Jews who received the first invitation to the blessings and privileges provided through the sacrifice of God's Son (Deut.18:18-19). (c) God used the Old Testament Prophets and John the Baptist to prepare the Jews for the coming of the Messiah. His message was "Come, for everything is now ready" (Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17; Psa. 32:6; 2 Cor. 6:2; Jer. 25:4).

4. (a) What were the first two excuses given? (b) What contemporary situations would parallel the examining of these men's newly purchased land and oxen?

Answer: (a) The first man used the excuse that he had to inspect real estate. The second man said that he had to try out some newly purchased oxen. Necessary arrangements could have been made ahead of time which would have made it possible for them to attend. (b) Contemporary situations which would parallel these excuses today could be finalizing a sale on a house, farm or other real estate, financial investments, and business interests. Today, as in those times, many are occupied with earthly possessions, but have no time to look at the provisions God has made for their eternal safety and inheritance. Others feel that their occupations, relaxation, and status seeking activities require so much of their time that they tend to delay considering any concerns of the soul. They plan to answer God's invitation when they have nothing else to do. Can the many interesting things to be seen or done in this world compare to the saving glory of the cross?

5. (a) What was the third person's blunt reply to the servant? (b) Was this a valid reason for not attending? Why or why not? (c) Do we ever permit domestic cares and home responsibilities to keep us from participating in activities which would bring honor and glory to God?

Answer: (a) The third person said, "I just got married, so I can't come." (b) This was not a valid reason even if he was appealing to the Old Testament law that instructed a newly married man to remain at home with his wife for a year. This command was designed to exempt the man from business and military duties, not social engagements. (c) This requires a personal response.

6. How did the master react when he heard of the refusals to attend the banquet?

Answer: When he heard the excuses, the master was angry. In some Eastern societies, a rebuff of this kind would be cause for war. He did not resort to that, but he was determined not to have an empty banquet hall, so he broadened the invitation to others.

7. To whom did he then extend the invitation?

Answer: The invitation was given to the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame from the streets and alleys of the town—the social outcasts. (Notice that these were the same four categories Jesus had been speaking of before the parable in verse 13.) There was no lack of needy people in that society and the opportunities for serving them were multitudinous. Apart from giving alms, however, the Pharisees would have nothing to do with such people, in fact, they actually despised them (John 9:34). His compassion for the less fortunate should motivate us to extend compassion to those we encounter in like situations.

8. What further orders did the master give the servant?

Answer: Evidently the servant's search through the city did not yield enough guests to fill the banquet hall. The master then instructed him to extend the search where it would not be easy to find people. This was the master's way of conveying the truth that he meant business; his house must be filled.

9. Do you feel that this final command places upon us a responsibility toward those who have never heard the gospel?

Answer: We need only to look at Scripture to affirm our responsibility toward those who do not have the gospel (Mark 13:10; Matt. 24:14; Col. 1:28).

10. (a) What warning is given to those who refused to attend the banquet? (b) What message does this warning convey to those today who refuse to seek after the righteousness of Christ?

Answer: (a) The parable warns that those who reject the invitation will be excluded from the banquet (Heb.2:3). This ending is frightening and could even be considered a final verdict. While the lord wanted his house filled, he would not admit any of those who had been invited first and rejected the offer. The invitation to enter the Lord's kingdom will one day end for all people (Heb. 12:25). Those with the greatest opportunities often reject them because of pride. The Lord's love has not diminished, but He will not force people to accept Him against their will. (b) God is gracious and will receive those who come to Him, but we must not procrastinate. No wonder the prophet warns, "Seek ye the Lord while

He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near" (Isa. 55:6). This life is short and Scripture does not teach that rejecters will have an opportunity to change their minds after it ends. Quite the opposite is true (2 Cor. 6:2).

MINISTRY SUGGESTION: One church has an annual "Highways and Byways Banquet" to reach out to needy persons in the community. A selected committee gets a list of names from the local social services office and from recommendations by church members. They determine how many they can invite from this list. They try to involve the whole church in the program. They enlist volunteers to plan a menu and cook the dinner and young people to help serve. They enlist men to pick up those who do not have transportation and bring them to the dinner and take them home. One couple from the church sits at each table to act as host and hostess. The program consists of special music and a brief message or an inspirational movie.

The idea is to invite those who might otherwise never attend a festive dinner. One church gives a Bible to each family and seeks to visit in their home in the weeks following the dinner to speak to them of Christ. Another church plans this dinner each year at Christmas and provides gifts for each family which they personally deliver to each home.

SERVING GOD AFFORDS NO
SENIORITY RIGHTS OR FIXED WAGES

LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Vineyard in order to examine the reaction of the laborers as they relate to modern day experiences in the Christian life.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that God's generosity extends far beyond our sense of fairness.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of the parable by creating an awareness of our unworthiness when anticipating God's grace.

PREPARATION: Pray for the circle or study group members by name. Prepare cards for sharing prayer requests.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Who or what do the following represent in this parable: (a) Landowner, (b) Workers, (c) Vineyard, (d) Time of day, (e) Market place, (f) Foreman?

Answer: (a) It seems reasonable to assume that the *landowner* represents God who has complete authority and control over that which is His. (b) The *workers* signify the attitudes of believers who are called to serve. Every worker must be careful about his work. Gathering fruit for Christ requires the gentleness of Jesus. (c) The *vineyard* is symbolic of the church in today's world where there is much work to be done. Much patient labor is urgently needed or much fruit will be lost. (d) The *hours* of the day, from morning until evening, are symbolic of the different periods of life. (e) The busy *atmosphere of the market place*, with some standing idle, is a clear picture of today's world. (f) The *foreman* reflects the position of Jesus Christ who has earned the right to solicit workers for the kingdom. Every worker needs to be called by the Master.

2. What agreement did each group of workers have with the landowner?

Answer: The earlier workers agreed upon a contract with the employer. The "penny" or denarius was a silver Roman coin which was worth about seventeen cents. This constituted the standard wage for a day's labor.

Time was counted from sunrise. The men who were hired the third hour (9:00 A.M.), the sixth hour (noon), the ninth hour (3:00 P.M.), and the eleventh hour (5:00 P.M.) were not hired for a specific amount. "And they went their way" (v.5), indicates they trusted the landowner's word for a fare wage and went to work without questioning the amount of pay they would receive. They knew they would be compensated for their labor, but they did not insist on knowing the amount.

3. (a) What question did the landowner ask which showed his concern over their loitering? (b) What reason did they give for their idleness? (c) How did the landowner respond?

Answer: (a) The landowner asked, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" Jesus directed special attention to the last group of workers hired (5:00 P.M.). There is an implied rebuke in the question. The word "idle" means literally not working; but it sometimes conveys the idea of being useless, ineffective, or lazy. (b) They said they were idle because no one hired them. (c) The landowner said, "You also go and work in my vineyard." This last group portrays those who are converted late in life and spend relatively little time in God's vineyard. The point is that they responded to His call and willingly trusted in His promise.

4. How would you feel if you were offered a job opportunity when the job was almost finished?

This question requires a personal answer.

5. Is there an advantage or disadvantage to being called to service by God at any specific age of life? Explain your answer.

Answer: The emphasis in this parable on working for a reward should not be confused with God's way of salvation. Salvation is completely free; no human merit can earn it. The worldwide vineyard of God is in constant need of laborers. Every believer has a role to fulfill in completing God's work. Whether we come to Him early or late in life, He receives us gladly and values our service. Jesus was illustrating the service of the saints. All have been called into the vineyard without respect of merit. All have been assigned a work to do. They choose to do it either in a worthy or unworthy manner. Regardless of their choice each will receive an appropriate reward.

6. (a) How much did each group receive and in what order? (b) Why do you think the ones who were hired first expected to receive more? (c) How did they express their dissatisfaction?

Answer: (a) They all received a whole day's wages and the last who were called were paid first. Payment of wages at the end of each day was the usual practice in Bible times. For the protection of the wage earner, the Law of Moses specified that daily wages were not to be kept until the next morning (Deut.24:14-15). Employers did not always abide by this rule and the prophets had to rebuke the guilty (Jer. 22:13). (b) Those who were hired first expected to receive more because they had worked longer and borne the burden and heat of the day. "Burden" denotes a heavy weight. The "heat of the day" generally refers to the dry scorching heat of that area. (c) In their dissatisfaction they grumbled against the landowner. Are there not many Christians who begrudge sharing God's grace with sinners?

Jesus constructed the parable so that those who were hired last were paid first. This may seem an unorthodox practice, but Jesus had a practical reason in mind. He may have wanted those hired first to observe the amount of pay the others received. In this way He could draw from the story a spiritually symbolic significance in the order He chose. He made the point that "many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." The order of payment, though only a secondary detail, was appropriate to the spiritual lesson He was teaching.

7. (a) Do you feel they had a right to complain? (b) For what reason? (c) How would today's labor unions respond to this situation?

Answer: (a) This question calls for a personal opinion. (b) From the world's point of view one could discern that perhaps the early workers had legitimate grounds for complaints even though they received the amount for which they contracted. The fault lay in the fact that they assumed that they were deserving of more. (c) In today's work place the labor unions would not tolerate an act of this nature. They would intercede for the laborers and cause a work stoppage until their demands were met. Jesus is not teaching about economics in the work place, but rather He is using this parable to illustrate God's grace in giving rewards.

From the scriptural point of view, remembering that this parable represents the kingdom of heaven, we acknowledge that God's grace is right and sufficient for each experience we encounter. We must trust Him to do what is right in all instances of life.

8. (a) How did the landowner respond to their complaints? (b) Why did he claim that he was not being unfair as accused?

Answer: (a) In response to their complaints, the landowner addressed one of them as "friend." The Greek origin of this word means a comrade or companion. Its use here reflects the landowner's true feelings for the workers. Those who had toiled all day were his co-laborers. (b) He rightfully declared that he had not been unjust, for he paid them exactly the amount they had agreed upon.

9. What question did the landowner ask which represented his right to do as he had done?

Answer: The landowner asked, "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?" This rhetorical question requires a positive answer. The money was his to do with as he pleased. God is sovereign, and we must allow for His sovereignty in bestowing rewards. He knows what is right for each of His children, and it is not for us to question His dealings (Rom. 9:20-21). The quality of service is more important than the length of time served. God gives us what He wants to give us and not what we deserve. If God gave us what we deserve, we would have absolutely nothing. By His grace, however, He has given us eternal life (Rom. 5:21; 6:23).

10. Do you feel that graciousness and justice are both represented in this parable? Explain your answer.

Answer: This question calls for a personal answer. But we all need to be reminded that it is important in our relationship with God to know that He does not limit Himself to justice and equality, as the world sees it, when dealing with His own. He exceeds these qualities by showing grace and generosity in larger portions than we are able to comprehend. This principle is demonstrated when the workers who trusted Him to treat them fairly were paid first.

11. What question did he ask to expose their selfishness and his generosity?

Answer: The landowner asked, "Are you envious because I am generous?" The sin of envy seems so prevalent in human nature, even Christians are prone to question circumstances of their lives. Too often they accuse God for the unfortunate situations which arise. When we consider the sovereignty of God we realize that it is wrong to question Him. As our relationship with Him becomes more intimate we realize the might of His power and the extent of His love for us and we become aware of our unworthiness. This sense of unworthiness to receive any of His grace will allow us to appreciate the blessings He bestows upon us and be more receptive to those situations which strengthen and mold our characters for Him (Luke 17:10; 1 Cor.2:9).

12. Does our attitude toward the way we serve Christ reflect our spiritual maturity?

Answer: One's attitude toward service does reflect one's spiritual condition. If our minds can grasp the concept of the sovereignty of God, our attitudes will reflect His grace as we look at others through the eyes of that grace. As we utilize this concept of His grace, we see others not as they are, but as they can become through God's grace working in their lives.

TRANSFORMING ONE'S SELF IMAGE
LEADS TO RIGHTEOUS LIVING

PARABLE OF THE WINESKINS AND CLOTH

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Old Garment and the Wineskins to illustrate that a new process is begun in our lives when we accept Jesus as our Savior.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that the unconverted characteristics of our behavior must be put aside.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of the parable by teaching that practicing the righteous behavior of our new nature will improve our self image and enable us to become useful vessels for the Lord.

PREPARATION: Ask the pastor, or contact the church office, for a list of current prayer needs. Put these on cards and give each woman one to pray about during the week. Read Psalm 92:1-5. Plan to allow five minutes in the meeting for women to share items of praise and thanksgiving.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 9:9-17, Luke 5:27-39, Mark 2:13-22

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. To what did Jesus compare His work in His answer to the Pharisees?

Answer: Jesus likened His work to that of a physician by using sickness as a picture of sin. Jesus did not look at these people and see hopeless outcasts or criminals who needed a judge. He saw people who were desperately sick and needed a physician (John 3:17-19). Many pictures of sin are given in the Bible: defilement (Psa. 51:1-2); bondage (Psa. 107:10-14); total corruption (Jer. 17:9). The Pharisees were spiritually sick and they did not know it. They showed their spiritual sickness by outwardly keeping the Law, yet breaking it in their hearts. Christ compared His ministry of salvation to a doctor's healing without implying any further connection between their techniques.

2. What difference had John's disciples noticed between their own practice and the practice of Christ's disciples?

Answer: They noticed that Jesus' disciples did not fast. While Jesus did not command His followers to fast, He did instruct them to do it to God and not for the praise of men (Matt. 6:16-18).

3. After whom were John's disciples patterning their practice of fasting?

Answer: John's disciples followed the fasting example of the Pharisees. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for

making a public display of their fasting (Matt.6:16). David fasted in time of grief (Psa. 35:13). Daniel fasted during times of repentance (Dan.9:3). Jesus fasted as He awaited the ordeal of temptation (Matt.4:2).

4. (a) To whom did Jesus compare Himself in His answer to John's disciples? (b) To whom did He compare His followers?

Answer: (a) Jesus spoke of Himself as a bridegroom. A wedding was a major social event in Jewish society. It was an invitation to feast and rejoice with the bride and groom. Marriage begins with love and leads to joy. When you are "married to Christ" you can experience the joy of sins forgiven, answered prayer, fellowship, and the joy of service. The Christian life is likened to a wedding feast where Christ, the bridegroom, was inviting people to share His joy. Consequently, at that time there should be no mourning. (b) Jesus compared His followers to the invited guests at a wedding.

5. What question did Jesus ask to illustrate His point?

Answer: Jesus asked, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?" To be with the bridegroom was a joyful experience; to be with Jesus is the most joyful experience of life.

6. Was Jesus' question a criticism of John's disciples?

Answer: Jesus was not being critical of John's disciples. Jesus was perfectly conscious of the fact that He came to them with new ideas and with a new conception of the truth. He was well aware of how difficult it is to get a new idea into men's minds.

7. (a) When did He suggest that fasting would be appropriate for His disciples? (b) To what event was Jesus referring?

Answer: (a) Jesus said they could fast after the bridegroom was taken from them. (b) He was giving them a glimpse into His mind as He was considering the way of the cross which awaited Him. This prophetic metaphor contrasts the joy of the days of Christ's ministry with the sorrow that would attend His crucifixion. In essence He had told them of the joy a Christian life would bring. He also wanted them to know that they would soon face experiences which would bring sadness and tears. The joy would never depart from them. They had experienced the joy with Him— would they now be able to endure the suffering?

8. (a) What effect would a new patch have if sewn on an old garment? (b) What truth is Jesus teaching regarding the Levitical law?

Answer: (a) In the process of washing the new patch would shrink and tear away from the old garment rendering it useless. This would lead to destruction of the old garment. (b) Christ was showing that it was impossible to patch the old system of Pharisaism so it could continue to be used. Christ had not come to reform Pharisaism but to introduce an entirely new doctrine. The Pharisees were content with their system and had no desire to change. This parable points out the irreconcilable differences between Christ and Pharisaism.

9. (a) Who, or what, does the new wine represent? (b) Who, or what, do the old wineskins represent? (c) What is the danger of trying to use them together?

Answer: (a) The new wine represents the teachings of Jesus. (b) The old wineskins represent the teachings of the Pharisees. The metaphors of the garment and wineskins point out the incompatibility of new life in Christ and the old rituals of Judaism. The danger would be man's tendency to adhere to the law and neglect the salvation provided by Jesus. (c) It is impossible for man to keep the law perfectly. It is impossible for the law to mediate between God and man. Therefore, the reason for the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is that He alone can present us justified before the throne of God.

STRENGTHENING YOUR CHRISTIAN
WITNESS THROUGH ACTIONS

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

TO TEACH THE PARABLE of the Good Samaritan contrasting two reactions to a neighbor's need.

TO TEACH THE PRINCIPLE that Christians should demonstrate our love for God through our daily relationships with those who need compassion and assistance.

TO ENCOURAGE APPLICATION of this parable by helping the group identify those who need compassion and lead them to show God's love through care and concern.

PREPARATION: Application of this parable involves reaching out to others in need. Be prepared with the names of shut-ins in the church that your group might minister to in a significant way. Be specific in your suggestions. Or, ask each person to think of someone to whom she might minister by prayer, by listening, by helping in a material way, or by just being a friend.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 10:25-37

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What do we know about the lawyer who approached Jesus?

Answer: As an expert in the law, he was testing Jesus (Luke 11:45-46). The man's question concerning eternal life showed that he regarded Jesus as a teacher.

2. How did Jesus respond to his question?

Answer: Christ referred him to the Law; as a lawyer, it was his responsibility to interpret Scripture for others.

3. What does his answer (in verse 27) tell us about the lawyer?

Answer: The lawyer's answer shows that he was well versed in Scripture. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

4. Was the lawyer satisfied with Jesus' answer?

Answer: He was not satisfied with Jesus' answer because he felt a need to justify himself.

5. Why do you think the lawyer pressed Him by asking another question?

Answer: Possibly he wanted Jesus to narrow the concept to personal friends. Because of his legalistic background he may have been fearful that Jesus would include the Gentiles.

6. What happened to the traveler as he journeyed along the road?

Answer: In Jesus story, the traveler was robbed, stripped of his clothing, beaten, and left for dead.

7. (a) Who was the first person to come by and what was his response to the situation? (b) What excuse do you think he would have given if questioned about his actions?

Answer: (a) A Priest passed by on the other side. (b) Perhaps in ceremonial purity he did not want to defile himself by touching a dead body (Num. 19:11). Possibly he was tired, absorbed in his duties, and anxious to get home.

8. The Levite followed soon after. Considering his official responsibility in the church, what should have been his first concern?

Answer: The Levite who passed should have shown concern for the welfare of the injured man (Matt.25:44-45, Jas.4:17).

9. Why do you think Jesus used a Samaritan as an example in this parable?

Answer: A Samaritan, whom the Jews treated as outcasts, was the one whom a needy Jew would least expect to help.

10. How did the Samaritan respond to the situation?

Answer: The Samaritan willingly showed compassion. (See application.)

11. To what extent did the Samaritan minister to the needs of the man who fell into robbers' hands?

Answer: He took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, used oil and wine for medicinal purposes, transported him to the inn, supervised his care, paid for future care, and expressed a willingness to provide even more.

12. What teaching technique did Jesus use to make His point?

Answer: Christ asked a question. This teaching technique challenges the mind to make a decision based on facts presented.

13. Did the lawyer understand the meaning of the parable?

Answer: The lawyer's answer seemed to indicate understanding of the parable.

14. What instructions did Jesus give which would enable him to apply the truth of the parable?

Answer: Jesus told the man to "Go and do likewise." It is not enough to know to do good. Acceptable results are achieved only when *scriptural knowledge is applied to a situation with Christian love* (Jas.1:22, Rom.2:13, Matt.7:21).

NOTE TO THE LEADER: It is just as important for us to apply the teachings of Christ to our lives today as it was for the lawyer in Luke 10. How awful to think that any of us might complete this study as only an intellectual exercise and go away unchanged. You might want to close this study by recalling ways that your group or members of the group have applied one of these principles to a situation with love. (Be careful not to embarrass anyone.) And/or you might ask if anyone in the group has been challenged by this study to apply biblical truth to a situation in their lives.