

Adult Teaching Resources

July 7, 2019



Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

On the Road with Jesus

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 – “A Mission Trip to Remember”

Luke 10:25-37 – “A Wonder on the Road”

Luke 10:38-42 – “A Better Way to Go”

Luke 11:1-13 – “A Good Way to Pray”

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A Mission Trip to Remember

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“He said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’” Luke 10:2

As people of faith, we feel the pull to do many important tasks in the name of God. We serve. We teach. We share. We listen. We sing. We do a lot. But, when it comes to naming the most important task, we typically say our most important task is telling others about Jesus.

Today, our passage is about the seventy who went out with that important task—to declare the kingdom of God.

Opening

After everyone arrives, ask your group to form smaller groups of 3-4. Once everyone is ready, share the words from Steven Covey, The success guru Stephen Covey made popular the mantra: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”

Write the mantra on the board for all to see, and then have each group answer this question:

“What is the main thing?” for these different areas of life...

What is the main thing for family?

What is the main thing for church?

What is the main thing for community?

What is the main thing for self?

Give each group time to talk about the main thing, then open the floor for a larger group conversation before moving to the Bible. How are the “main things” similar? How are they different? Is there any way to determine which main thing is more important or more significant than the others?

Reading the Bible

How many did the Lord appoint? (seventy)

Where did he send them? (to every town and place where he himself intended to go)

How many laborers are there for the plentiful harvest? (the laborers are few)

How is the Lord sending them out? (like lambs into the midst of wolves)

What are they to carry and how are they to interact on the road? (4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.)

What are they to do when they find a welcoming town? (8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”)

What are they to do when they find an unwelcoming town? (go out into its streets and say, 11 ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’)

With what town are unwelcoming towns compared to? (Sodom)

Which two cities are called out in “Woe?” (Chorazin and Bethsaida)

Who is spared or rejected? (“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”)

What did the seventy joyfully proclaim upon their return? (“Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!”)

How did Jesus respond to them? (“I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”)

Making Connections

Share a time when you were sent out to share the good news of God’s kingdom. How old were you? Who sent you out? What was your message? How did you deliver it? How was it received?

Our passage contains the verse, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few,” (10:2). What does that verse mean to you? What responsibility, if any, do you feel after reading this verse?

Our Lesson Writer asks a powerful question about Jesus evaluating your church’s ministry. How do you answer the question – “If Jesus were to show up and evaluate your church’s ministry, how well would the congregation score on pursuing the main thing?”

If you were sent out in pairs to spread the good news, who would you choose (dead or alive, but can’t choose Jesus) to go with you? Why would you choose that person?

Making Connections *continued*

What type of preparation do you think is necessary for those going out into the world to share the good news? Do you think your church does a good job preparing those to go out? Why do you say that?

When has your message of the good news been rejected? Share that story. What did you learn from that experience?

Our Lesson Writer says, “We have a responsibility is to proclaim the good news in love, but we cannot make someone else’s decision for them. Our task is to love other people as Christ loved us and to share the good news with sensitivity and grace. Whether others accept us as persons or accept our message or accept our ministry is their responsibility.” Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why?

What difference for God have you made with your words, your actions, and/or your service?

So What?

Ask everyone to get back in their small groups of 3-4. Share these words from our Lesson Writer, “We may wonder if what we do for God really makes any difference; if our mundane ministry is worth the trouble. If we can take a clue from the return of the 70, it could make more difference than we will ever know. When his followers returned from their mission, excited that “even the demons submit to us,” Jesus said “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning” (vv. 17-18). They made a difference, and no power of evil could stop them. (See “The Hardest Question” online for more thoughts on vv. 19-20).

We may go to meetings and fill out reports and do the ordinary work that’s part of the everyday reality of the church. We suffer through the summer when attendance is low and people are tired and maybe we wish we were on vacation, too. We donate to the local food pantry (again) and visit the shut-ins (again) and expend huge efforts on Vacation Bible School (again). But while we may wonder if it’s all worth the effort, perhaps Jesus still responds to our faithfulness with ‘I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning.’”

Give each group a piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to list on one column, all the things we do for God that make us wonder if it really makes a difference. For example, our Lesson Writer mentions meetings, food pantry donations, visiting shut-ins, and Vacation Bible School. What other things would you add to that list?

Then, next to each listed item, write down the difference that simple act makes in the lives of those touched and in the kingdom.

After each group has had time to work on their lists, ask the larger group to share some of their revelations.

What ordinary ministry events have far-reaching results?

What affect of everyday actions have on building God’s kingdom?

What is our responsibility to “go out” and share the good news?

The Challenge

This week, commit to doing one ordinary thing from your list that has far-reaching results.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for this time of study and for these fellow travelers to study with. As we live out this coming week, give us the courage to share the good news in ordinary and extraordinary ways. You've given us the responsibility. Help us to step up and do it. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text—The Revised Common Lectionary skips over the middle of the passage, using Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 as the text. This may be because many scholars consider vv. 12-15 to be out of context for a commissioning: Matthew locates the same warnings in a different context (Matt. 11:20-24). Nevertheless, we will take a look at the entire text.

Seventy, or seventy-two?—The manuscript tradition is almost evenly divided between a reading of 70 or 72 as the number of persons that Luke says Jesus sent out. Seventy is the more natural reading, given its apparent symbolism, but for that reason it’s more likely that scribes would have changed the more difficult reading of 72 to 70. It’s harder to explain why anyone would have changed 70 to 72, unless they were harmonizing it to the popular Greek translation – which also lists 72 nations in Genesis 10, while the Hebrew has 70. In Jewish tradition 70 and 72 were virtually interchangeable, so it matters little. Although the number 72 may have claim to be the better reading, we’ll stick with tradition and speak of the 70.

A hodgepodge account?—As previously noted, only Luke includes this story of Jesus sending a larger group of followers on mission. His account, however, includes several quotations taken from different contexts in the other gospels, suggesting that he has developed the story in his own way.

The statement about the harvest being plentiful and the challenge to pray for laborers is also found in Matthew 9:37-38, and the instructions for the journey are very similar to Matthew’s account of Jesus sending the Twelve (Matt. 10:7-16).

Sodom—The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, according to Genesis 19, because of their widespread wickedness as expressed in their refusal to show hospitality to strangers – not, as is often assumed, because of rampant homosexuality. In the story, Abraham’s nephew Lot had invited two angelic messengers in human form to lodge at his home when “the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house” (Gen. 19:4). They wanted Lot to send the strangers out “so that we may know them” (Gen. 19:5). The verb for “to know” can have sexual connotations, so we presume that they wanted to rape the men. Their motives were not because the residents of Sodom were all gay (“to the last man”), but because they held to a mean and hateful culture that followed an age-old practice of shaming strangers by raping them.

Other Old Testament texts that mention Sodom speak of the city’s wickedness, but do not tie it to homosexuality (Deut. 32:32; Isa. 1:9, 3:9, 13:19, 23:14; Jer. 19:18, 50:40; Lam. 4:6). Some even make it clear that their problem was their uncivil rejection of the visitors. Ezekiel prophesied against Jerusalem, comparing it to Sodom as a sister city: “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food,

Digging Deeper *continued*

and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it” (Ezek. 16:49-50).

Chorazin, Capernaum, Bethsaida—These three villages on the north side of the Sea of Galilee were criticized by Jesus for failing to repent despite the mighty works that had been done in them. The location of the first century village of Chorazin (now spelled Korazin) is unknown, though the ruins of a 3rd-4th century village built from black basalt bear that name.

The location of Bethsaida is also uncertain: some have argued that a mound known as et-Tell, the ancient capital of Geshur, later became Bethsaida, but it’s located on a tall hill a mile and a half north of the sea, which seems unlikely for a fishing village. A more recent proposal is el-Araj, which is currently being excavated. Located near the ancient shoreline, it seems a more likely candidate to have been ancient Bethsaida.

Capernaum, located by the sea, has been fully excavated. Though Peter and Andrew were originally from Bethsaida, they moved to the fishing village of Capernaum, just five miles to the west, probably because it was in a different Roman jurisdiction. This saved them having to pay taxes when crossing the border to take their catch to Magdala for processing.

Jesus appears to have adopted Capernaum as his home (Mark 2:1, Matt. 4:13), and may have stayed with Peter. During the first century, a room in one house was plastered (unlike any of the other basalt houses in the village) and marked with Christian graffiti. An arch was added, allowing for a higher ceiling, and in the fifth century an octagonal church was built over it. A modern Roman Catholic church now sits atop that, perched on legs so that one can see the ancient ruins beneath (see picture above).



Hades, demons, Satan—Jesus’ pronouncement that the people of Capernaum would go to Hades rather than heaven (v. 15) should not be read as a divine endorsement of contemporary notions about heaven and hell. During most of the Old Testament period, it was commonly believed that all who died retired to a shadowy existence in a place the Hebrews called Sheol and the Greeks called Hades. By the first century, ideas associated with Greek mythology, Persian mysticism, and Jewish apocalypticism led to a belief in two locations for the afterlife, with Hades (also known as Gehenna) as a place of punishment.

Likewise, the messengers’ claim that “even the demons submit to us” (v. 17), as we’ve noted before, reflects an ancient worldview that all illness was caused by demons.

Digging Deeper *continued*

When Jesus (or Luke, speaking for Jesus) spoke of Satan falling from heaven like a flash of lightning (v. 18), he was also reflecting a popular understanding of Satan as a supernatural being who, with his demonic minions, encouraged wickedness and acted in opposition to God.

Jesus often spoke in terms familiar with the popular culture of his day, as did the gospel writers. Many modern readers continue to attribute evil to a wicked deity who rivals God and infects the world with demons, but we are not required to regard these as accurate depictions of reality.

Push, or pull?—Like the 70, all of Jesus' followers are called to kingdom living. We proclaim the good news in many ways: through compassionate living, through specific personal ministries, through the spoken word. The kingdom of God is at work in our lives, and our task is to bring the kingdom near to others.

We can turn people away even when we are trying to do what is right. Whenever Christians come across as smug or self-righteous, they will turn people away. The ugly attitude expressed in some “witnessing tracts,” for example, is patently offensive, and I’ve seen “Christian” T-shirts that reek of arrogance. The love of Christ is shown when we are sensitive to others’ needs, when we are compassionate in our actions, when we are humble in our approach. We are not responsible for the decisions that others make, but we *are* responsible for way in which we witness to them . . . for good, or bad.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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What's this about scorpions and snakes?

In verse 19, Luke quotes Jesus as saying “See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.” It is highly unlikely that Jesus intended for his followers to test the waters by finding a viper to step on or a scorpion to play with, like some “snake-handling” Christians who bring rattlesnakes and copperheads into worship or who drink poison in response to the longer (and spurious) ending of Mark 16.

Scholars often suggest that the text may have been intended to reflect Deut. 8:15, where Moses spoke of how God led the Israelites through a land of snakes and scorpions, or Ps. 91:13, which poetically speaks of how the faithful will tread on “the lion and the adder.”

Snakes and scorpions may also have been intended as symbols of the evil influences in general, or the evil spirits the 70 evangelists said had become subject to them. This is suggested by the following verse, where Jesus added “Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (v. 20).

The apocalyptic imagery of the context suggests a background in the late Jewish belief that in the end times, God would defeat Satan and cast him from the heavenly realms. To connect with his audience, Jesus often adopted end-times imagery in his preaching and teaching.

Jesus’ purpose was to assure his followers of divine care, not to suggest that they could not be harmed. In other contexts, he encouraged followers to be faithful even when others slapped them on the cheek or abused them in other ways (Matt. 5:38-41, Luke 6:27-29). Jesus spoke of brothers betraying brothers and children betraying parents as his followers faced persecution (Mark 13:12-13, Matt. 20:21-23). In this very text, the evangelists were sent out “like lambs into the midst of wolves” (Luke 10:3), a clear indication of danger.

Jesus’ point was that Christians could live without fear – not that they could never be harmed on earth, but with confidence that their “names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).