

Adult Teaching Resources

September 1, 2019



Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

On the Road with Jesus

Luke 14:1-14 (RCL 1, 7-14) – “A Way to the Top”

Choices That Matter

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 – “Make the Right Choice!”

Jeremiah 4:11-28 (RCL 11-12, 22-28) – “Delay and You’ll Pay”

Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 (RCL 8:18-9:1) – “Go on and Grieve”

Jeremiah 32:1-15 (RCL 32:1-3a, 6-15) – “Never Give Up”

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A Way to the Top

Luke 14:1-14 (RCL 1, 7-14)

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

“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Sometimes you think you know where a conversation or story will go and you go through the motions of listening and trying to pay attention. Other times, though, you begin a conversation and it takes a dramatic turn. Or, you’re in the middle of a story and something totally unexpected happens that makes the story even better.

Today, we spend more time with Jesus, and our passage begins like any other passage or story we have of Jesus. But, all of a sudden, Jesus takes us in a different direction, and we learn the true way to get to the top.

Opening

After everyone arrives, have your large group form smaller groups of 3-4. Once everyone is in a group, have each person share at least one story from their life when they attended a banquet or dinner party where each person had an assigned seat at the table.

What was the occasion?

How did it feel to have your name at the table?

Where did you sit at the table in relation to the host/hostess/person of honor?

Did you feel any type of hierarchy with the way names/seats were distributed at the table?
If so, where did you fit in that hierarchy?

Then, as time allows, ask for individuals to share when they have had to place people at a table for a banquet or dinner party.

Who did you seat where? What was your criteria for that seating arrangement?

Where did you place yourself?

Did you move anyone after everyone arrived? What was the reason for that shift?

Give all the smaller groupings time to share, then move on to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

Where was Jesus going? (to the house of a leader of the Pharisees)

What was he going to do at the house? (eat a meal on the Sabbath)

Who stood before Jesus at the house? (a man with dropsy)

What did Jesus ask the lawyers and Pharisees? (“Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath or not?”)

How did they respond? (with silence)

What did Jesus do? (healed the man and sent him on his way)

What did Jesus do when he noticed how the guests chose places of honor? (told them a parable)

When invited to a banquet, where should you sit? (at the lowest place at the table)

What might the host do when he sees you in the lowest place? (come to you and invite you to move up higher; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you.)

Who should be invited to a luncheon? (the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind)

Why should they be invited? (because they cannot repay you, and you will be blessed at the resurrection of the righteous.)

Making Connections

When does Sabbath begin for you in the week? How do you observe Sabbath? What are the things you avoid doing during Sabbath? How strictly do you follow your own Sabbath expectations?

Who are the religious authorities in your life? How much control do they have over what is right and what is wrong? How much authority do you give them?

What situations can you think of that would cancel out any rules or societal expectations we might hold sacred? (For instance, Jesus healing someone on the Sabbath.) Why do we set aside our rules and expectations?

What is your definition of humble, or humility? What is your definition of exalted? Which would you rather experience? Why?

When have you been the guest of honor at a dinner party or banquet? Where did you sit? How were you treated? How did that experience affect you?

When have you been a “regular person” at a dinner party or banquet? Where did you sit? How were you treated? How did that experience affect you?

When have you been the host or hostess at a dinner party or banquet? Where did you sit? How were you treated? How did that experience affect you?

Making Connections *continued*

Have you ever followed the biblical instruction and taken the lowest seat at a dinner party or banquet? What was the occasion? Where did you sit? Were you moved by the host or hostess to a higher seat? How did that make you feel?

When you put together a list for a get-together in your home, what is your motivation for including the people you include? Do you ever hope to be invited in return to one of your guest's parties?

So What?

Ask your smaller groups to get back together for a final discussion on this passage.

Our Lesson Writer explains Jesus' parable in this way,

"we must understand that Jesus was not just teaching a different way to get eternal rewards. The point is that we don't do these things to get rewarded. We do these things because that is what the righteous do. That is what people who understand and who follow Jesus' ethics do. They love other people as they love themselves, and they show it by unselfishly helping others. This story is not about getting to the top: it's about being like Jesus."

Ask each group to discuss these questions:

How can a humble person be exalted in today's society? What do we give up? What do we gain?

What are some tangible ways we can unselfishly help others?

What must we do more of to be like Jesus?

Give each group time to talk among themselves, then open the floor for larger group discussion.

The Challenge

This week, humble yourself and place yourself at the lowest seat everyday. Pay attention to the opportunities to do it, and pay attention to how others react to your actions. Most importantly, pay attention to how intentional humility affects you.

Prayer

Loving God, you call us to be humble, yet we live in a world that often looks down on those with humility. Help us to be strong in our actions so that we might live more like Jesus every day. 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 text begins with 14:1, then skips to vv. 7-14. The reasoning is probably because the story of Jesus’ healing of the man with dropsy and his following response to critics are very similar to a healing and controversy story in last week’s text.

Parallel sections—Luke 13:10-14:35 is marked by an interesting sequence of stories in 13:10-35 that are followed by a group of very similar stories in the same sequence in 14:1-35. The story of the bent-over woman in 13:10-17 is echoed by the account of a man healed from dropsy (also on the Sabbath) in 14:1-6. The healing of the woman is followed by two related parables about the kingdom in 13:18-21, and the healing of the man is followed by two parables about the kingdom in 14:7-14. The following verses in each chapter, 13:22-30 and 14:15-24, are concerned with who will enter the kingdom of God. Finally, Jesus’ approaching suffering in Jerusalem in 13:31-35 is paralleled by the question of followers taking up their cross to follow Jesus in 14:25-35.

Pharisees—The Pharisees weren’t as “high and mighty” as we sometimes think. They tended to be lower- or middle-class Jews who belonged to a fraternal society dedicated to following the written and oral law as closely as possible. Pharisees were sometimes portrayed as self-righteous, but they weren’t typically among the elite – unlike the wealthier Sadducees. Although Jesus sometimes criticized both Pharisees and Sadducees, they were also at odds with each other. While the Sadducees accepted only the Torah as authoritative, the Pharisees also accepted the prophets and the oral law.

Why the silence?—When Jesus asked the scribes and Pharisees whether it was lawful to heal someone on the sabbath, they remained silent. An oral law among the rabbis taught that one should only practice healing if someone’s life was in immediate danger. They would have known that: Why do you think they had no response?

Empty cups?—Joan C. Webb once published a book called *Meditations for Christians Who Try to Be Perfect* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993). It’s a good book for ambitious Christians. Here’s a thought from the book:

Years ago, after I asked God to fill my cup, it seemed, instead, that he ate my lunch. As I saw my dreams fade away, I worked harder to hold on and eventually burned out. I wondered where God was and why he let it happen.

Now as I reflect back, I wonder if he could not fill my cup because I already had it full with my personal agenda. I wanted to accomplish great things for God, but I had my own ideas. Perhaps he was waiting for me to empty the unusable contents so he could pour in his plan.

Digging Deeper *continued*

When we admit our need and ask God for help, it is like emptying our life cups. Emptiness, though uncomfortable, is a necessary prerequisite to filling.

Our overflowing cups yield anxiety. God's portion produces security (p. 83).

Fit for the kingdom—Jane Yolen tells a wonderful story related to this theme. It's called "Once a Good Man," from *The Hundredth Dove and Other Tales* [New York: Schocken Books, 1977], pp. 53-57).

The story concerns a certain man with whom God was pleased, and God offered to grant him anything his heart desired. The man's only wish was to see both heaven and hell with his own eyes. An angel took the man to hell, where he saw broad green pastures and picnic tables loaded with delicious food that smelled wonderful. People sat all around the table, but they were all thin and hungry. The people were strapped to their chairs. Their arms were free, but there were steel bands around them that prevented them from bending their elbows. The people could see the food and smell it, but there was no way they could pick it up and bring it to their mouths.

The good man was amazed at this. The angel then took him to heaven, and he was even more astonished to see a very similar scene. The same broad, green pastures. The same long picnic tables laden down with ham and chicken and barbeque. The same delicious smells. People were sitting around these tables, too, and the man was surprised to see that they were also strapped to their chairs, and they had steel bands around their arms. Yet, these people were well-fed, smiling, and joyful. And that is because, while they could not feed themselves, they did not hesitate to reach out and feed their neighbors, who fed them in return. It is not the reward of heaven that is most important, but being the kind of person who fits in there.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Who fell in the well?

In v. 5 of today's text, Jesus asked "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" That's the NRSV translation, also followed by NET and NAS95. The NIV11 has the more gender-neutral "child" in place of "son," but the King James Version has "an ass or an ox."

Who fell in the well (or pit)?

This is one of those cases where ancient manuscripts disagree, and translators must rely on the work of text-critics to determine the most likely original text.

Here, the word "son" (*huios*) appears in some of the earliest known manuscripts, including the parchments P^{45, 75}, the fourth century *Vaticanus* (B), and the fifth century *Washingtonianus* (W).

The word "donkey" in place of "son" appears in the 4th century *Sinaiticus* text () and some eighth century texts. It's likely that a copyist sought to harmonize this verse with 13:15, where Jesus used a donkey and an ox as an illustration. Deuteronomy 22:4 also speaks to helping a neighbor if his donkey or ox has fallen, and Isaiah 32:20 likewise pairs donkeys and oxen.

The Western text D, often copied, has "sheep" in place of "son."

One principle of textual criticism is that the more difficult reading is likely to be the most original: it's more likely that a later scribe would smooth out a difficult text than that he would make a clear text more difficult.

The combination of "son" and "ox" seems less natural: it is the more difficult reading. The witnesses to it are also older. Thus, though "donkey and ox" may sound right, the better reading is probably "son." It was the son, not the donkey or a sheep, who might have been in danger of joining the ox in falling down a well.