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AT31T

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

(Rewritten by Carol Jean Blakely)

Teacher's Lessons

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LESSON ONE

JESUS' USE OF PARABLES

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:1-30, 34-43

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 13:3-23, 34-35

MEMORY VERSE: "...Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (Matthew 13:16).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Jesus used parables to help people understand the truth he taught.

TEACHING AIM: To help students understand why Jesus used parables. To help them know how to understand the meaning of parables.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Large paper and marker to make chart of things to remember when studying parables. (to be used each week)

PREPARING TO TEACH

This quarter, we will study the stories Jesus used when teaching. These stories are called parables. We will see how he used parables to help people understand what he wanted to teach them. We will also learn how these parables can help us.

In the first verses of Matthew 13, we read that Jesus went out of the house and sat down beside the sea. As usual, a crowd gathered around him. This crowd may be the largest he ever taught. Jesus got into a boat and sat there, facing the crowd. The people stood on the beach and listened. Jesus taught them by using a parable.

The Parable: Read Matthew 13:3-9.

Jesus told a simple story about the way a farmer in Palestine sowed his wheat in a field. To save time, the farmer did not select only the best area of his field, but he scattered the seed here and there as he walked along.

Some of the seeds fell along the path. Birds flew down and ate them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where there was not much soil. These sprouted quickly. But because they had no roots, they died when the sun became hot. Other seeds fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked them out. But some seeds fell on good soil and produced a good harvest. The people knew that a farmer takes a risk when he plants. Some seed will be lost. But he will get a harvest if some seed falls in the good ground. Then it will produce fruit.

The Meaning: Read Matthew 13:18-23.

Jesus' parable was about when people hear the Word of God. Some will not accept it or understand it at all. Others will accept for a short time, but fall away when trouble or persecution comes. Others will love the world more than God. They will soon forget about their decision to follow him. Some will believe and will be faithful until the end. They will bear fruit by bring others to God.

Question and Answer: Read Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35.

It was usual for Jewish rabbis to teach by using parables. It was common among the Jews. But it seems that Jesus, up to now, had not used them when he taught. The disciples wondered why he had begun to use this method of teaching.

In verses 11-17, Jesus gave a good reason for using parables. Since the disciples of Jesus spent a lot of time with him, they were able to understand his teaching. All the people did not have this opportunity. So Jesus used parables, a simple way of teaching, to help them understand. He hoped it would help them accept the message he had for them. He hoped they would decide to believe what he said and follow him. Parables teach truth and help people understand more quickly than many other methods. Simple, ordinary, common things of life are familiar, so people are interested in them. This is true today, as well.

From this time, much of Jesus' teaching was done by parables. Jesus' parables used people and their situations as examples. They told about the farmer sowing and harvesting his crops. The people heard about servants doing their duties and children playing in the marketplace. They visualized men fishing in the sea, people attending a marriage feast, shepherds tending sheep. All of these situations were familiar to the people who heard Jesus' stories. The parables of Jesus show that he noticed the people around him. His stories show his concern for the everyday things in our lives; losing something and searching for it; a son leaving home; a man losing his job; a stranger helping a man in need; a farmer and his problems with weeds. By using stories, Jesus was able to help the people understand themselves. As they heard about the problems of others, they could see themselves. Jesus used parables to help people understand God's love for all people. Through these stories, they could hear the truth of what Jesus said.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Say: "Long ago, our ancestors used stories to teach the young people about life. They used them to teach how they should act in the tribe and in the world. Stories were usually told by an older person in the village. The children looked forward to these story times. They often learned without realizing that they were learning. Hearing about animals and other people of other times helped them understand their lives better." Read the introduction from the pupil's book.

Say: "Today we will see how Jesus used stories to help people understand important truths about God." Tell students to open their Bibles to Matthew 13.

Say: "This chapter tells how Jesus left a house and sat beside the sea. When a large crowd of people came, he climbed into a boat and taught them from the boat. He taught using a simple illustration from everyday life, called a parable. This parable was about a farmer sowing his wheat in a field." Tell the story of the seed using the background material and verses 3-8.

Read verse 9. Say: "Parables were stories which got people's attention. Some who heard them did not look for the meaning. They just listened to the story without really understanding what it meant. But the disciples wanted to know more and asked for an explanation." Read Matthew 13:10. Say: "Jesus would have been glad to discuss his parable with anyone. But only the disciples asked about the meaning."

Have a student read Matthew 13:11-17.

Say: "Jesus knew that very few of the people who listened to him really wanted to understand. Most of them wanted to see his miracles and receive what he had to give them. But few were willing to really follow him. Jesus pointed out that his disciples were ones who really did want to know Jesus. The truth of the parables would be clear to them. Most of the people would not understand."

Read verses 14-15 again. Say: "Jesus wanted the people described in verse 15 to understand his message. He used parables to help them. He tried to give the people as much truth as he thought they could understand. But understanding is an individual matter. Some people want to understand and receive the truth. Some people resist and do not want to understand spiritual truth."

Explain the meaning of this parable, using verses 18-23 and your background material.

Say: "The average farmer does not become discouraged by his failures, but he keeps on looking forward to the harvest. Those who believe in God's power, can expect a 'harvest' when they share the gospel with others. This parable teaches that not all people will accept Jesus as Saviour. But some will and those will be faithful as God wants them to be."

Conclusion

Say: "In this unit of lessons, we will be studying some of Jesus' parables. There are several things we need to remember while we study them: (Write each main point on a large piece of paper. Read the statement in brackets to your students, but do not write this. It is just explanation.)

1. Pay attention to the setting of the parable. (It will help us understand the meaning. It will help us see what the story does not say.)
2. Most parables teach one main truth. (Try to find the main truth of the parable. All other truths we see in the parable relate to the main truth.)
3. Do not try to make every detail have meaning. (The main truth is the important thing to look for in a parable. An example used in one parable does not always represent the same thing in another parable.)
4. Parables help us see life and God.
5. Parables help us see ourselves.
6. Ask God to help you understand the parable. (The disciples asked for understanding. We need to do the same.) Say: "These will be the things we will need to remember as we try to understand the parables we will study over the next few weeks. We will leave this chart here to remind us each week of these things."

Read Matthew 13:34-35. Lead your class in prayer. Pray that the parables you study in the weeks ahead will help them grow. Ask for courage for members to share with others what they learn about Christ and his love from the parables you will study.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Think about some people you know who are like the seed in the parable.

1. Someone who would not listen or accept the truth at all.
2. Someone who seemed happy to accept Christ and followed him for a while. But when problems came, they turned away from God.
3. Someone who followed for a time. Later they put other things before God. Perhaps friends or family kept them from following. Perhaps they thought material possessions were more important than serving God.
4. Someone who believed and followed. They studied to know more about God. They told their friends and family about God. They showed their love for God by helping others. They were faithful servants.

Can you use what you learned from this parable to help or encourage one of these people? Ask God to show you the way and give you an opportunity to share with them. Pray for them everyday this week.

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Psalms 78:1-8

Monday: Matthew 13:24-30

Tuesday: Matthew 13:36-43

Wednesday: Matthew 13:47-52

Thursday: Matthew 13:53-58

Friday: John 13:3-15

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON TWO

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE?

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 9:14-17; 13:31-33, 51-52; Mark 4:26-29

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 9:14-17; 13:31-33, 51-52; Mark 4:26-29

MEMORY VERSE: "Fear not, little flock, for it your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

CENTRAL TRUTH: The kingdom of God is God's rule in the lives of men.

TEACHING AIM: To help each person to understand the kingdom of God.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Chalk and chalk board. A piece of old clothing which needs to be mended. A second piece of new cloth.

GETTING READY TO TEACH

A Misunderstanding: Read Matthew 9:14-15.

One night, Jesus ate with a group of tax collectors and sinners in Matthew's house. The Pharisees criticized Jesus for this and for eating when they and John's disciples were fasting and praying. John's disciples asked him, "...Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

Jesus explained their action by comparing it to a wedding feast. When the bridegroom is present, a guest does not fast. For his disciples, Jesus was the bridegroom. He knew he would be with them for only a short time. When he died, his disciples could fast. Now there was no reason to fast. Jesus brought the good news of God's love. This was reason to rejoice!

Changes will come: Read Matthew 9:16-17.

In verse 16, Jesus talked about how difficult it would be for them to accept his teachings about God. It was like sewing a piece of cloth which had not been shrunk on an old garment. It must be done carefully to prevent a bad tear. Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders would have to be willing to make great changes in their thinking. These religious people thought they knew what God planned for Israel -- a powerful earthly kingdom! They thought they knew what the Messiah would be like--a conquering King! Jesus and the kingdom he taught about were very different from what they expected. He illustrated the same idea in verse 17. Jesus brought a new interpretation of God's relationship to man. Jewish ceremony and religion would change when they understood fully the good news of God's grace.

Unexpected Growth: Read Matthew 13:31-33, 51-52.

The mustard seed was small, but, in the fertile soil of Galilee, it grew as large as a tree. It often grew 10 to 12 feet tall. Even the birds came to sit in its branches. Jesus compared this seed to God's kingdom. It may seem small, but in the end, God's rule and power will reach all the earth.

In verse 33, the kingdom of heaven is compared to yeast or leaven. When a little leaven is put into some dough it soon gets into every part. God's rule

affects every part of life. Every person is affected by God's authority and power, whether he accepts him as Lord or not.

The disciples were told to use good judgement as they applied his teachings. (verses 51-52) Jesus did not come to destroy all Jewish customs and traditions. He came to complete God's plan by joining old and new. His followers would have to see what was good in their old understanding of God. They would have change what needed to be changed.

Growing Quietly: Read Mark 4:26-29.

Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a seed. The seed represents the beginning of the kingdom. Naturally, the seed sprouts and grows when it is planted. The kingdom of God also grows. It grows in stages like a plant. Jesus is the sower who plants the seed. God is the harvester. His kingdom grows quietly in the lives of people. The season for God's harvest will come. So the kingdom of God is like the farmer's harvest.

The kingdom of God is God's rule. As the farmer cannot make the seed grow when it is planted, man cannot control the growth of God's kingdom. Man's part is to accept the rule of God or refuse it.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Say: "Our study of Lesson One taught us that Jesus used parables when he taught. He taught in parables to help all people understand what he was teaching. One of the most difficult things Jesus tried to explain was the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Today we will study several of the parables Jesus used to describe the kingdom of God.

"For the Jew, the kingdom of God meant the kingly rule of God. It meant God's power over man and the created world. In the Old Testament, we often see God described as the King. He wanted to be the only King of Israel. But when the Jews asked for an earthly king, like other nations, God gave them one. They believed their kings had closer relationships with God than the ordinary person did. Through them, God was the true ruler of their nation. For many Jews, the coming of the kingdom of God meant Israel's rising as a nation of power in the world."

Ask: "Before we join a group, we want to know about it. Let us list the questions we would want answered before we decide whether or not to join." (Write answers on the chalk board. Include: What is its purpose? Who is in it? What would I be required to do? What benefits would I receive?) "These questions will help us understand the nature of the kingdom of God."

Have a class member to read Matthew 9:14-15.

Ask: "What is fasting? What did it mean to a Jewish person?" (Fasting is going without food from dawn to sundown. It showed devotion to God, repentance for sin, sorrow after death.)

Ask: "What did a wedding feast mean to a Jewish person? Why did Jesus use this example?" (It was a time of rejoicing. During a wedding feast, a person does not fast. As long as Jesus was with his disciples, there was no reason to fast. Later, after Jesus, the bridegroom, was gone, they would mourn and fast.)

Let someone read Matthew 9:16-17.

Show your class the cloth you brought which needs mending. Show them the new piece of cloth which you can use to patch it. Explain: "No one sews a piece of new, unshrunk cloth on to an old shirt or dress. When it is washed, the new cloth will shrink and the torn place will be even worse." Show them how this would happen if you sewed this new cloth into the old, worn cloth. Say: "And for a person to put new wine into old wine containers was foolish. Wine expands as it ferments. If the old wineskins could not stretch, they would burst and the wine would be spilled."

"Jesus used these pictures to show the new relationship between God and man. The kingdom of God which Jesus taught cannot be just a patch on the old Jewish beliefs. The 'old wineskins' of the Jewish ceremonies were not suitable containers for the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ."

Let someone read Matthew 13:31-33.

Ask: "How is the kingdom of heaven like a mustard seed? What does this say to us as members of that kingdom?" (The tiny mustard seed grows to become a large tree. The kingdom of God began as one man -- Jesus. It grew as people followed and believed in him. We are part of that growth.)

Ask: "How is the kingdom like leaven or yeast? How does it work in the world? (A small amount of yeast is enough for many loaves of bread. The kingdom of God spreads like that.)

Have someone read Mark 4:26-29. Read the section called "Growing Quietly" from the background comments. Then say: "Just as the farmer cannot make the seed grow when it is planted, man cannot control the growth of God's kingdom. There are rules of nature about the growth of a seed: first the blade shows, then the ear, then full corn. The kingdom of God is a process of growth and there are stages of development."

Read Matthew 13:51-52. Say: "Jesus knew some of the things in the Jewish traditions were against the Old Testament teachings of God and the teachings of Jesus. Jesus told his disciples to be like a householder who has both old and new treasures. Some parts of the Jewish faith were valuable and should be kept. But some would have to be changed and discarded."

Conclusion

Look at the list of questions on the board and think about the kingdom of God. Answer them from the parables studied. (Purpose: to let God's rule grow in our lives; Who: all who believe and accept his rule; Requirements: obedience, change, sharing good news; Benefits: joy and eternal life)

Say: "We have learned that the kingdom of God is the personal rule of God in the lives of believers. It gives man a personal relationship with God. As we grow in trust and obedience to God, his kingdom grows in our lives. The more we submit to his control of our lives, the greater the joy. This joy makes us want to share the good news of his kingdom."

Ask: "Are there some things in our society today that show God does not rule in the lives of men?" Discuss this with your class. "What can we as Christians do about this?" (let God rule in our lives, not follow customs and practices which would not please God, share what we know about God's kingdom and love)

Let your class think about and discuss these questions: "Does the way we practice our Christian faith in our church show God's rule? Does he rule in your life and worship?"

Close in prayer asking God to rule in our lives so we can experience his kingdom and the joy it brings.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

More about the kingdom...

1. How did Jesus describe his coming? Read Mark 1:14. (as the coming of the kingdom of God)
2. Why did Jesus come? Read Luke 4:43. (to preach and explain God's kingdom)
3. Where is the kingdom? Read Luke 17:20-21. (within us)
4. Who can see the kingdom? Read John 3:3,5. (those who are born again)
5. When did the disciples fully realize this? Read Acts 1:3. (after the resurrection)
6. What do the words, the kingdom of God, mean in Acts 8:12 and Acts 28:23? (They mean salvation through Jesus.)

SCRIPTURES TO STUDY THIS WEEK

Sunday: Luke 8:1, 16:16

Monday: Mark 2: 18-22

Tuesday: Luke 5:33-39; 18:12 Wednesday: Mark 4:30-32

Thursday: Luke 13:18-19

Friday: Matthew 17:20

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON THREE

THE MOST VALUABLE POSSESSION

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13:44-50; Luke 14:15-24

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 13:44-46; Luke 14:15-24

MEMORY VERSE: "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

CENTRAL TRUTH: When a person joins the kingdom of God, he changes. What is important to him and what he does will be based on God's standards.

TEACHING AIM: To lead each person to look at what is important in his life and to decide to put God first in his life.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Paper and pencils for each student. Chalk and chalk board

GETTING READY TO TEACH

Buried Treasure: Read Matthew 13:44.

There were no banks in Jesus' day. People often protected their valuables by burying them in the ground. Sometimes the person who had hidden the treasure would die and the wealth would be forgotten. One day someone working in the field, perhaps just a farm laborer, would find it. Seeing its value, he would try to get enough money to buy the field. He would sell everything he possessed, so he could become owner of the land and the treasure. In this story, the man was not searching for treasure, but he found it. Sometimes people find God when they are not looking for him.

Jesus taught that the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God) is like a treasure. It is so valuable that a person should be prepared to give everything to have it. We cannot buy the kingdom of heaven like this man bought the field. We can get it only by trusting in Jesus and accepting his plan for our salvation.

The Pearl: Read Matthew 13:45-46.

This parable tells of a pearl merchant who knew the value of pearls. He spent his life looking for a pearl which was bigger and better than any he had. When he found it, he sold everything he had to buy it.

The pearl was not found by accident, but after a long careful search. People who sincerely seek God with an open heart and open mind will find him. These people are willing to give everything they have to have a relationship with God. The kingdom of heaven, found through Jesus, is worth more than all other possessions.

The Great Supper: Luke 14:16-24.

Jesus told of a wealthy man who planned a great feast. He invited many guests, and they accepted his invitation. But when the host sent his servant to say the feast was ready, they made excuses not to come.

The first man said he had bought a new field and had to go see it. Do you think a man would buy property without looking at it? It might be worthless. Someone might have tricked him into buying property that did not exist. This does not sound like his real reason to miss the feast.

Another man said he had bought a team of oxen and needed to examine them. Would anyone buy oxen without testing them first? They could be too old or too sick to work. Perhaps they would not pull together. This man, too, did not have a good reason to miss the banquet.

Another man said he had married a wife. The wife would have been welcomed at the banquet. He had no reason to miss the feast.

When the servant reported that the invited guests were not coming, the master told him to go invite other guests. The banquet had already been prepared. The food was ready. The servant was told to bring in the poor, the lame and the blind.

The people came quickly. They wanted to come. They did not make excuses. This was a great occasion for them. There were still extra places at the feast, and the Master wanted all the places to be filled. The poor had received the first invitation - then the outcasts were invited.

In this parable, Jesus told the people that God was offering the best he could. He had prepared a wonderful life for all who would come to him. God, by giving his Son, has invited us to accept his salvation, but we often make excuses not to come, just like the men in the parable. If we refuse to come and accept God's gifts, others will take our place.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Say: "In lesson two we heard about the kingdom of God. We saw how it is like a seed growing. What did Jesus mean by 'the kingdom of God'?" Let students answer. (The rule of God in our lives.) Say: "Today we will answer the question, 'What is the greatest possession I can have?'"

"In two parables, Jesus explained how important the kingdom of God was to a person." Read Matthew 13:44. Say: "The story of the hidden treasure tells about a man who, by accident, stumbled upon a treasure in a field. He quickly sold all he had and purchased the field so the treasure could be his." Read Matthew 13:45-46. Say: "In this parable, a collector of pearls searched a long time for the great pearl. When he found it, he sold all he had, including his other pearls, in order to buy the pearl of great value."

Say: "These parables compare our attitude toward earthly treasure and toward the kingdom of God. Which is the greater treasure, earthly treasure or heavenly treasure?" (Heavenly treasure is greater because it is eternal.) "We should be more willing to seek God's kingdom than wealth and treasure of this world. We should want God to rule our lives more than anything else. We should be willing to give up everything in order to have God. He is much more important than earthly treasure. Jesus said the kingdom of God is a priceless possession. We must be able to recognize the true value of the kingdom of God in our lives. His rule should be seen by those around us."

Ask: "What are you willing to give to have the rule of God in your life?" Give each student a piece of paper and a pencil. Tell them to write one thing they

have given up for God. Tell them to share what they wrote with the person sitting next to them.

Have someone read Luke 14:16-17.

Say: "A man planned a great banquet and invited many people. Later, at the time of the feast, a servant was sent to tell the guests to come. In the parable, the feast represented God's gift of salvation."

Read verse 18 a. Then let three students read the excuses given in verses 18b-20. Discuss their reasons for not coming. Decide if these excuses were real reasons not to come. (Use your background material.) Say: "These people were rejecting the best and putting other things before God and his kingdom." Ask: "What are some of the reasons people give today for not accepting the gift of salvation?" Let class members discuss this.

Say: "Most of the people who reject God today are not terrible sinners. They are just too busy with the everyday affairs of life to think seriously about God. Do we sometimes give excuses for not being able to serve God through the church?" Let students discuss this freely.

Have someone read Luke 14:21-24.

Say: "The host became angry. The guests insulted him. In middle-Eastern countries, to turn down an invitation was a serious thing. But the host did not plead with the guest who had refused to come. He simply found others to take their places."

Ask: "Why did these outsiders accept while the invited guests refused?" Let class members discuss this. (Perhaps the outsiders knew their need. They were lonely, hungry and thirsty. They were not welcome anywhere else for who would invite people like this to a feast?)

Say: "The Lord welcomed people nobody else wanted. They believed the message, come, and discovered they were welcome. This is the invitation for all people today: 'Come and receive my gift of salvation.'"

Read verse 24 again.

Say: "It is dangerous to refuse God's invitation for salvation. We may not get a second chance and this can change our lives for eternity." Read Isaiah 55:6.

Say: "The feast represents salvation. God prepared the feast. He sent his prophets to invite his chosen people, the Jews. They said they would come. But when God sent his Son, Jesus, to tell them to come, his chosen people would not come. Then God invited any person who wanted to come. All of us are invited to find the joy of salvation. There is always room for more to come. Nothing is more important, because nothing else is eternal."

Conclusion

Read the story which is in the Introduction of the pupil's book. Invite students to bow their heads and think about their relationship to God and his kingdom. Say: "You have been invited to the feast God has prepared. Have you given him your answer? He invites each of us to receive his salvation. What is your answer?"

Continue: "Some of us have said yes to God. We have come to the feast. We have received his salvation. But we are not showing that we put God first in our lives. We have time for the things we feel are really important. We make time, like the men in the parable, for business and family affairs. But sometimes we do not think much about our spiritual life. Will you decide today to show others that you think God is the most precious possession you have? Will you tell someone about it this week?"

Close in prayer.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

What is your most valuable treasure? Can it be stolen? Read Matthew 6:19-21. Where would be a safe place to put our treasure? (in heaven) If we put it there, what kind of treasure must it be? (an eternal, spiritual treasure)

Read Mark 8:35. What must we give up to have this treasure? (our lives)

Read John 12:24-26. How far must we be willing to follow Jesus in order to get this treasure? (to death, if necessary)

Read Philippians 3:8 How much did Paul lose to gain Christ? (everything)

How much are you willing to give up to gain Christ? Are you willing to make him your most valuable treasure? It will cost your life to do so. Will you give it?

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Matthew 16:21-23

Monday: Matthew 16:24-28

Tuesday: Luke 14:1-6

Wednesday: Luke 14:15-24

Thursday: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Friday: 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON FOUR

GOD'S SEEKING LOVE

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 15

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 15:11-24

MEMORY VERSE: "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

CENTRAL TRUTH: God loves all people. Christians should also love others and try to lead lost people to Christ.

TEACHING AIM: To help students understand and accept their responsibility to love and help people who do not know Jesus as Saviour.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: None

PREPARING TO TEACH

Running Away: Read Luke 15:11-24

This parable tells of a man who had two sons. The younger son asked his father for his inheritance. Usually a father's property was divided after his death, but the younger son could get his share before the father's death, according to Jewish law. He would receive one third. The elder son would receive two thirds when his father died. As soon as he received his share the younger son left home. He wanted to get as far away from home as possible. He wanted a life of excitement. He spent his money foolishly. His new "friends" left him after his money was gone. He was all alone in the world. The happiness his freedom and money brought did not last long.

Trouble

At this time, the country where he lived had a famine; but, if a person had a lot of money, he could get food. The young man's money was all gone. He was a foreigner in the land. He had no family there to help him. He faced greater hardships than the citizens of the country.

Since he had no money and was hungry, he looked for work. The only work he could find was taking care of pigs. For a Jew, this was a very bad job. Pigs were unclean. Touching them made him unfit to worship God. In addition, his job working with the pigs did not pay him enough to buy the food he needed. He was so hungry, he began to eat some of the pigs' food.

Looking at Himself

The young man began to think about his father's house. His servants had plenty to eat. (verse 17) He decided to return home. He thought about what he would say to his father. He realized that he had sinned against his father. He had also sinned against God by following his own desires. He admitted his guilt. He took all the blame. He did not try to blame someone else. He was willing to become one of his father's hired servants. He felt this was all he deserved after hurting his father the way he had.

Forgiveness

Verse 20 tells us that he went to his father. He did not just think about it. He acted. He went back home. His father saw him coming at a distance. He ran to his son and embraced him.

The son began his confession, but his father would not let him finish. The father did not scold him and say, "I told you so." He gave him such a welcome that the son could not doubt his father's love. The son had hoped to be accepted as a servant in his father's house. Instead he was welcomed back into the family. The father gave the son the best of everything. He gave him a robe which was reserved for honored guests, a ring and shoes. He was the guest of honor at a feast celebrating his return. The father was very happy. He said his son "was lost and is found." This must be God's feeling when a lost person comes to him.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Begin by telling this story: "When James finished secondary school, he moved to the city. He found a room where he could stay. He put his luggage in the room, locked it and went out to find some food. He wandered through the market and bought a few things. He heard some noise down the street. He saw a crowd moving toward the sounds. He followed. Soon he was as excited as the people around him. He watched with them as the president drove by. When the crowd broke up, James decided to go home. He suddenly realized that he did not know where his room was! He was lost. He was all alone in a big town. He did not know how to get back home!"

Ask: "Have you ever been lost in a new place?" Let students share their experiences. Ask: "Have you ever been in a place where you did not know anyone? Perhaps they spoke a language you did not know. How did you feel?" Let students share.

Say: "Our lesson today is a parable which tells about someone who felt alone and lost. He turned to those he loved for help. Jesus told this parable to teach about God's love and forgiveness. Remember that a parable is a story of things we know about and understand. It helps us understand things about God."

Have someone read Luke 15:11-12. Explain that a father's wealth was usually divided after the death of the father. However, the younger son could claim his share before his father's death. The younger son would receive one third of his father's wealth.

Read verse 13. Say: "The younger son represents every person who does not know Jesus as Saviour and Lord. He represents every person who thinks only of himself, wants his own way and ignores God."

Have someone read verses 14-16.

Say: "For a Jew, taking care of pigs was as bad a job as he could have. Pigs were unclean animals which Jews were not supposed to touch."

Have someone read verses 17-19. Ask: "Was the boy sincere in admitting his guilt?" Let students discuss. (He was. He took all the blame himself. He knew his sin had caused him to lose his position as a son. He was willing to become one of his father's hired servants.)

Say: "If we are willing to admit our own responsibility for sin, God can help us. We cannot be reconciled to God without confession. We must take full blame for our actions. We must be sorry that we have failed to do as God wants us to

do. This is not always easy. It is easier to blame circumstances or someone else for our actions."

Read verse 20. Say: "The father never stopped looking for his son to return. This teaches us about God's Love. God's love never runs out. He is always ready to receive us if we turn to him. God is always ready to forgive us no matter how badly we sin. He is like the father in this story."

Have someone read verses 21-24. Say: "We can imagine how this father felt. It is hard when our children leave us. We want to guide them and help them with their decisions. When they decide to leave us to live on their own, we may feel sad. We worry about them. We are afraid they will make bad choices. We may think they have rejected us and what we have tried to teach them. This son did just that. He rejected his father's home, authority and love. He lived a sinful life, but his father forgave him."

"The son hoped he would be accepted as a servant in his father's house. But instead of becoming a servant, he was treated as an honored guest. He was welcomed back into the family. God forgave us like this and still loves us. He is ready to receive us even though we have sinned against him. He will accept us no matter how long we have stayed away."

"This father loved his son enough to allow him to leave home. Our heavenly Father does the same with us. God gives us freedom. We may do with our lives what we wish. God risks losing us by letting us make a choice. He does that so we may choose to love him. He would never force a person to love him."

Conclusion

Read the memory verse together. Say: "Although God seeks and saves, we must repent and receive his forgiveness willingly. He provides salvation, but we must accept it."

"This story shows that God is ready to forgive people who understand their sin and turn to him. God is willing to accept anyone, no matter how bad he has been. His love for us never stops."

Lead your students to discuss these questions: "Do we love people who are in trouble as God loves them? Do we love people of different backgrounds or tribes as God loves them? Are we willing to show our love for other people? Are we willing to help them find God and understand his plan for their salvation?" Say: "Although the younger son returned home, he may sin against his father again. If he does and asks for forgiveness, his father will forgive him again. God, our Father, always loves his children. He is always ready to forgive us if we ask for forgiveness. We sometimes fail to act as loving children of God. But God always acts as a loving Father."

Ask: "Remember how lost James felt in the story at the start of our lesson? Perhaps you are feeling lost and far away from God today. Perhaps you have never received Jesus as your Saviour. He is ready to help you today. He can give you salvation and eternal life. Or perhaps you have sinned and are feeling far away from him. He is ready to forgive you if you come to him and tell him about it." Give time for silent prayer as students consider these things. Close in prayer.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

What happens when we confess our sin? Read the Scriptures on the left. Match each verse to the word which tells what happens.

Proverbs 28:13	Forgiveness
1 John 1:9	Acceptance
2 Samuel 12:13	Mercy
Hosea 14:2	Life

How do we know if a person has truly repented? Read the Scriptures on the left. Match each verse to the word which gives the proof of repentance.

Mark 1:5	New Heart
2 Kings 22:19	Change
Mark 14:72	Baptism
Jonah 3:10	Fasting
Ezekiel 18:31	Humility
Joel 2:12	Sorrow, weeping

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Psalms 23

Monday: Luke 15:1-7

Tuesday: Luke 19:1-10

Wednesday: John 10:1-18

Thursday: Luke 15:8-10

Friday: Luke 15:25-32

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON FIVE

THE WAY GOD REWARDS

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 19:23-20:16

VERSE USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 20:1-16

MEMORY VERSE: "So the last will be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16).

CENTRAL TRUTH: God will reward all who serve him with an attitude of love.

TEACHING AIM: To help students look at their reasons for Christian service.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: A newspaper

PREPARING TO TEACH:

Works Needed: Read Matthew 20:1-2.

The disciples knew about the problems of the grape harvest in the vineyard. Grapes ripened quickly. Many workers were needed for the harvest. If the rains came before the harvest, the crop would be ruined. The best place to get workers was from the market place. Skilled people who did not have jobs waited there for someone to hire them for the day.

Early in the morning, the vineyard owner went to the market place to hire workmen. According to the Jewish law the workday began at sunrise and continued until sunset. The householder agreed to pay a group of workers 1 silver coin, called a denarius. This was the usual day's pay for a laborer in that time. The workmen agreed to the price which they were offered.

More Workers Needed: Read Matthew 20:3-5.

The householder saw that he did not have enough workers to harvest his crop of grapes. So he went out again about 9 O'clock (the third hour) to the market place. He saw men who had not gotten work for the day. These men were hoping that someone would give them work. When he hired these men, he made no agreement on their wages. He promised to give them fair pay for their work. They accepted the job and went to work with others. They trusted the householder to act fairly toward them.

He went out again at noon and 3 O'clock (the sixth and the ninth hour) to get more workers for his vineyard. He made the same promise that he made to the second group. They would get "whatever is right." They too, trusted him and went to work in the vineyard.

Still More workers Needed: Read Matthew 20:5-7.

About the eleventh hour (5 o'clock) he went out again. It seems strange that the householder would go to the marketplace to get workers at such a late hour. The workday would be over in an hour. But in this parable that is what the householder did.

The householder asked these last ones why they had been standing around all day with no work. They replied that they wanted to work, but no one had offered them a job. They were told to go to the vineyard and work with the others. No promise was given to them concerning their wage.

Paytime: Read Matthew 20:8-10.

The day came to an end and the owner ordered his paymaster to give wages to the workers. As these men were working on a daily basis, they received their pay at the end of each day. The owner instructed the paymaster to first pay the group which came to work last. He had a reason for doing this. He wanted to see the reaction of the others.

Those who had worked only an hour received a denarius. This was a very generous wage. Jesus does not mention the payment of the workers who were hired at nine, twelve and three O'clock. He wanted to emphasize the difference between the first group and the last group.

When the first group saw how generous the owner was, they began to think that they would receive more. Surely they would receive a denarius for each hour like the last group had received. The first group received the amount they had agreed to work for - one denarius. They were shocked even though they had to work for one denarius.

Grumbling: Read Matthew 20:11-16.

The first group accused the owner of being unjust. His payment was not fair. How could he give the last group the same amount? They had worked only an hour. The first group worked all day in the hot sun. This was not right. They hoped the owner would change his mind and pay them more.

The owner told them they had agreed to work for one denarius for the whole day. He had paid them what they had agreed. He chose to be generous with the last group. He had the right to do this if he wanted to. He was the owner. It seemed unfair to the men who had worked all day. The workers complained, "We have worked all day. Our backs are hurting from stooping for hours gathering your grapes. The mid-day sun was scorching hot. This last group came in the cool of the afternoon - how can you do this to us?" Yet, they lost nothing because of this man's generosity to the others.

Jesus was trying to show his disciples the kind of workers God needed for his kingdom. In this parable, we see the motives of the workmen. The first group was only interested in their pay. God wanted men who wanted to work regardless of the pay they received.

This truth of this parable is found in Matthew 19:30. A person who has his eye set on the reward needs to question his faith. Our relationship to God cannot be motivated by the thought of reward. In the kingdom of God, we do not ask the question, what am I going to get out of it?

TEACHING THE LESSON

Hold a newspaper in front of you and say, (as if reading from it): "Help wanted - workers for God's vineyard."

Qualifications - Unemployed and willing to be hired. No experience necessary, but attitude and spirit important.

Terms - Hours may vary. Pay will be whatever is right and fair.

Benefits - Promotions and changes in job may come at any time the employer chooses to give them."

Ask: "How many of you would take a job without knowing wages, hours, benefits or even what you would do?"

Say: "The Pharisees in the day of Jesus tried to please God through righteous deeds. In this way they would earn salvation. They did good for the reward that it would bring them."

Say: "Today, reward often comes to those who work hardest. The one who does the best job gets the promotion. Some people do dishonest things to get the top place to be rewarded by men. 'Getting ahead' is all that matters."

Say: "Sometimes, we think like this about Christian service. We ask, if I follow Christ, what am I going to get out of it? What is in it for me? This parable points out clearly that the person who always keeps his eye on reward ruins his relationship with the kingdom of God."

In your own words tell the story found in the background material. You can follow the plan used there. Read the verses and then summarize each section. Read aloud the section entitled "Grumbling."

Discuss the complaints of the workers in the first group.

Emphasize:

(1) They received the amount they had voluntarily agreed to work for; (2) The employer had the right to do as he chose with his own money; and (3) They should be ashamed for complaining about the good fortune of others."

Say: "Many times Jesus spoke about rewards. The type of reward he spoke about was not public approval or promotion. It was not even a special spiritual reward. The reward of his kingdom is eternal life. This reward comes by the grace of God. This lesson emphasizes the greatness of God's love and his generosity in offering salvation. His rewards are not based on earning them. They are given because of his grace."

Ask: "What is our motive in the service of God? Do we serve him only for the reward we will get? God wants servants who serve him out of love. The first group of workers should have been happy that the farmer was generous. Instead, they thought their own reward was too small." Conclusion

Say: "We can learn several lessons from this parable.

(1) God offers all an opportunity to serve him. There is always work to do.

(2) We should not worry about other workers, their work or reward. God will deal justly with all who faithfully serve him.

(3) God never stops seeking laborers. Salvation is offered to a young person with many years to serve God. It is also for the person in his 50's or 60's who may not have much time to serve him.

(4) God judges our service by his standards. Some have a full day (or full long life) to serve. Others have but an hour (a few years).

(5) Our attitude in service is important."

Say: "You may have learned to work for the good things you want. In God's kingdom, we work, not in order to receive a reward, but because we love God. That is our motive. If we work with that attitude, our reward will be great. God is loving and just."

Say: "One reason that Christians do not share the gospel the way we should is the way many of us work for God. Not many church members give to their Christian service the same time and effort they use in their jobs. They do not care about being on time and being prepared for service. We may say, 'Yes, but I am paid for my work!' We need to ask our selves, 'What is my motive for Christian service? Do I give to God only that which is left over? Or do I give him my best because I love him so much?'"

Read again the "Help wanted" at the beginning of the Teaching Plan.

Ask: "Are you willing to work?" Close in prayer.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Are you willing to serve the Lord just because you love him? He promises that if we serve him faithfully, he will reward us. What kind of reward will he give? Read these verses to find out.

2 Timothy 2:12 (We will reign with him.)

Revelation 22:12 (He will repay us fairly for what we have done.) Luke 6:35 (a great reward, if we work out of love for God)

2 Corinthians 9:6 (equal to our service, equal to the amount given)

God will reward his faithful servants. You can be sure of that!

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Matthew 19:23-26

Monday: Matthew 19:27-30

Tuesday: Luke 12:22-31

Wednesday: Galatians 3:2-9

Thursday: Romans 9:14-18

Friday: Psalms 104:1-9

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON SIX

PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 11:5-13; Luke 18:1-8

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 11:5-13, Luke 18:1-8

MEMORY VERSE: "For every one who ask receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Luke 11:10).

CENTRAL TRUTH: In his wisdom, God responds to persistent prayer.

TEACHING AIM: To encourage members to be more consistent in praying.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Chalk board and chalk

PREPARING TO TEACH

Jesus prayed as regularly as he ate. When he had a need, he knew how to pray because he prayed all the time. He prayed in public and in private. He sometimes prayed for long periods by himself. He urged his disciples to follow his example in praying.

To pray as Jesus prayed is necessary for us today also. We are faced with many problems. When life is difficult, we are tempted to give up. But we must be strong to help those around us. We must pray as Jesus did in order to live and love as Jesus did. Today's parables teach us about prayer. The Neighbor's Request: Luke 11:5-8.

A man had an unexpected guest who arrived at midnight. It was a terrible time for a guest to arrive. It seems as though no one knew he was coming. Unfortunately, the host had no food in his house. He had to find some bread and show hospitality to his guest.

He went to his neighbor to ask for bread -- at midnight! His neighbor refused to come to the door. The house was dark. To find the bread, he would have to light a lamp. He would wake the whole family.

The neighbor continued to knock. He made such a noise that the man was afraid he would wake the children and the whole neighborhood. Finally he got up and gave the loaves of bread, but not out of friendship. He did it because the man was a pest. The man kept asking and got what he wanted.

Is Jesus telling us that God will answer prayer if keep praying until he is tired of us? Certainly not! He is not teaching about how God answers. He is teaching us how to ask.

God Gives Good Gifts: Luke 11:9-13.

After this parable, Jesus told his disciples to ask, seek, knock. He meant that those who persist in prayer will receive an answer.

In verse 11-13, Jesus taught the "how much more" principle. He compared asking a father and asking God. If a son asks his father for a loaf of bread, will he give him a stone? Will he give a stinging scorpion instead of an egg? No father would be so cruel. A father does what is good for his children. "How

much more" will God give the Holy Spirit, his greatest gift, to those who ask him.

The Unjust Judge: Read Luke 18:1-8.

Jesus told another parable about persistence in prayer. A widow had been cheated. She pleaded with an unjust judge to help her. He did not fear God, so his decisions were not determined by Jewish law. He did not care what people thought of him. The only way he would do what people wanted was through bribes. But the widow had no money for a bribe. Again and again she went back to the judge with the same plea for justice. She went so often, she became a nuisance. At first, he would have nothing to do with the case. But finally, he had to do something so he could get some rest. The unjust judge helped the widow to get rid of her.

Jesus did not teach that God will not help us until we annoy him. Rather, we must have the faith to keep on praying. Verses 7-8 show plainly that God will help us. But in verse 8b, Jesus questions our faith. God will answer prayer, but do we believe this? Do we keep on praying? The widow believed that the unjust judge would answer, so she kept on asking. We must believe that our just God will answer, and keep on praying.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Write on the board: Where, when, how, with whom. Ask the class, "Do you pray?" Let students respond to this and the following questions. Where do you pray? At home? In other places?

When do you pray? On Sunday? Every day? In time of need? In the morning? At night? At other times?

How do you pray? With a loud voice? Soft voice? In your mind only? On your knees? With long prayers? With repetitions? With whom do you pray? Alone? With Family? Friends? Other Christians?"

Discuss these questions: "Is prayer important in your life? Have your prayers been answered? Have you ever prayed many years for the same thing? Did you get tired of praying? Did you get discouraged and stop?"

Say: "Jesus teaches us about praying in the two parables we will study today."

In your own words, tell the story found in Luke 11:5-8.

Ask: "Was Jesus teaching that if we bother God enough, he will answer us just to get rid of us?" Let students respond. (No. His emphasis was on continuing to ask and not giving up.)

Have a student read Luke 11:9-10.

Say: "These verses by themselves seem to promise that all our prayers will be answered as we want them to if we just keep on asking. Is that what Jesus meant?" Let students respond. (No. Again he emphasized keeping on even when it seems like no answer is coming.)

Read verses 11-13. Say: "In these verses Jesus explains the meaning of the parable. Jesus showed us 'how much more' God will do for us than the neighbor

did for his friend. If a father does what is good for his children, then 'how much more' will God give us what is good for us."

Ask: "What will God give us, according to verse 13?" (the Holy Spirit) Say: "This shows that Jesus was talking about spiritual blessing -- not just bread for an unexpected guest."

Say: "Another parable about prayer is found in Luke 18:2-5." Have someone read these verses. In your own words re-tell the story.

Ask: "Was Jesus teaching that if we bother God enough, he will answer us just to get rid of us?" Read Luke 18:1 to find the answer.

Say: "Some of Jesus' parables teach us how things are alike. We learned that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It is like the treasure in a field and like the pearl of great cost. Some parables showed a contrast or how something is different from something else. That is what the parables in today's lesson do. The first shows a neighbor who shares his bread because the friend kept bothering him. Jesus shows how God gives us what we need because he loves us.

"The second shows an unjust judge who helps the poor woman to get rid of her. Jesus contrasts him with God who helps us because he loves us. Jesus used the 'how much more' principle. A neighbor or unjust judge will help a person when he keeps on asking. "How much more" God will answer those who continually pray to him!"

Say: "There are some things these parables do not teach:

- (1) That God is asleep and does not want to get up and help his children.
- (2) That God will listen to our prayers even if our attitude is wrong.
- (3) That whatever we pray for, we will get." (See Luke 11:13.)

Say: "We may ask, 'Why should we keep on praying? God already knows what our needs are.' We do not know all about how our prayers relate to a great, all-powerful God. Often we do not receive what we ask because we ask with the wrong motives. But other times we think we ask with the right motives. It seems we still do not get what we ask. When we pray we should seek the Lord -- not seek something from him. Prayer should help us know the will of God and ask for it. God wants us to keep asking as the man and woman in the parables did."

Conclusion

Ask: "As you look at your village, nation or the world, are you ever discouraged? What are some reasons?" (sickness, drought and hunger, war, sin, corruption) Say: "The widow had every reason to be discouraged. To others her situation looked hopeless. But she refused to give up."

Ask: "Have you known anyone like this? Perhaps you know a woman whose husband is an alcoholic. Perhaps you know a family which has a son in prison or a daughter who lives a sinful life. Yet they continue to trust in God and ask for his help. They continue to love and care for their family." Let class members share from their experiences of knowing people like this.

Remind the class, "Everything we are and everything we do for God depends on prayer. Even our good works are useless without prayer. I wonder if it would make a difference in our personal lives if we really prayed? Would it change our homes, our churches and our world? Christians need to really learn how to pray. When they learn how, they should do it. "

Say: "One of the joys of the Christian life is to pray for others. We see God helping people for whom we have prayed. They may not know that we prayed, but God knows, and we know. He lets us share in the blessing."

Say: "Jesus had the power to perform miracles, yet he needed to pray. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, yet he prayed. He lived a sinless life and was always obedient to his Father's will, but he had to pray. If Jesus who was God in human form had to pray, how much more do you and I need to pray?" Close in prayer.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

What should we pray for? Read Luke 11:9-13.

From these verses, we see that we should ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Read these verses to see how the Holy Spirit helps us live the Christian life.

John 14:26 (He will teach us and remind us of what God says.)

John 15:26 (give counsel and give witness about Jesus)

John 16:8 (convince us that we are sinners)

Romans 8:26 (helps us and pray for us when we do not know how to pray)

1 Peter 3:18 (make us alive)

If we pray sincerely for the Holy Spirit, God will bless us greatly.

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Ephesians 1:15-23

Monday: Mark 1:35, Matthew 14:23

Tuesday: Matthew 19:13; 26:36

Wednesday: Matthew 5:44; 6:5-6

Thursday: Matthew 26:41, Mark 11:24

Friday: John 14:13-14; 17:1

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON SEVEN

HUMILITY BEFORE GOD

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 14:7-11; 18:9-14

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 14:7-11; 18:9-14

MEMORY VERSE: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

CENTRAL TRUTH: We must not think we are better than other people. We must not think we have no need for God's mercy.

TEACHING AIM: To help each student understand his relationship to God and people.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Let two students help you by acting out the parable in Luke 18:10-13. One will read what the Pharisee said. He will act proud. The other will read what the tax collector said. He will act humble.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Some people think they are better than others because of their tribe. Others think they are better because they have much money. Some look down on others for the kind of work they do or their level of education. Jesus taught that we should not think we are better than others. We should not be proud before God but come before him humbly. We should not boast of how good we are. This is an important lesson for us today.

The Best Seat: Read Luke 14:7-11.

An important Pharisee had invited guests to his house. We do not know who the guests were, but there were many. Some of them were trying to get places of honor at the table. They wanted to sit near the host. That way everyone would know they were important, too.

Jesus told the guests how to behave at a wedding feast. The host would seat his guests according to their position in life. Some guests would want to take the best seats for themselves. They would think they were very important. If a more honored guest came, they would be asked to move. They would be very embarrassed. Everyone would know they thought they were worthy of a place of honor. Jesus taught this group that humility is best. A man should not consider himself important. If others think he is, that is all right. But a man who thinks he is very important, might not seem important to others. Jesus taught us to consider others more important than we are.

Jesus taught that when you come to a feast, you should not look for the best place. Instead, stand outside, or take a seat on the ground. Perhaps your host will pass by and see you seated on the ground. He may call you into the house, possibly to the best chair. Instead of being embarrassed when another is given your place, you will be honored. Thus, the man who seeks honor for himself is embarrassed in the end. The man who does not seek honor is honored by others.

Pride and Humility: Read Luke 18:9-14.

Jesus taught that we should come before God with humility. This shows that we understand how great God is. In this parable, two men came to the temple to pray. One man was a very proud Pharisee. Not all Pharisees were proud men, but many of them thought they were better than others.

When the Pharisee began to speak, he did not pray at all! Instead of praising God, he "...prayed ...with himself..." (verse 11). He listed the bad things that others did. He was proud that he did not sin like other men did. His pride was dangerous. He believed he was better than other people. He despised those who did the things he listed. He felt like he was as good as God!

First the Pharisee told God the bad things he did not do. Then he told God how often he fasted and how much money he gave. He wanted God to know how good he was. We may be tempted to have this attitude. We may tell our neighbors how good we are. We may tell how often we go to church, or how we help people. We may think we are good in God's eyes because of the good things we do. We may praise ourselves and be proud.

Now let us look at the other man in Jesus' parable. This man's prayer was a cry for mercy. He was not proud. In fact, he felt he was unfit to pray to God. He had come to the temple to pray but he would not stand up close. He stood a long way off. He would not follow the custom of lifting up his eyes. He called himself a sinner. He knew he was not good enough in God's sight. He asked only for the mercy of God. He showed humility.

Jesus tells us plainly that the humble man was right. He went away from his prayer in a right relationship with God. The proud man did not.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Point out to the class the title of the lesson: Humility Before God. Ask: "What is humility? (The humble person does not think he is better than others.) Say: "Today's lesson will show examples of humility and of pride. Seeing pride will help us understand more clearly what humility is."

Ask: "When you are planning a celebration, how do you decide which guest will be honored more than others? Who will have the best seat? Who gets the first portion of food?" Let students give local customs.

Explain that Jesus went to a feast. People who thought they were most important took the best seats. They tried to get seats near the host.

Have a student read Luke 14:7-11.

Have some class members act out this story. Let one person be the host. Place him at the front of the room. Leave the two chairs next to the host empty. Have four students to stand. Tell all the others to sit anywhere they want around the room. Choose two of the four standing to be the "honored guests." Have two to be "those who think they are important." The two who think they are important should come proudly through the door and sit down in the two seats. The "honored guests" come into the room and sit on the ground (or in leftover chairs). The host stands and brings these two "honored guests" take their proper seats.

Ask: "How would the two asked to move to lower seats feel?" Let students respond. "How would the true 'honored guests' feel?"

Point out how embarrassed those who thought they were important would feel. The host has asked them to leave the seats of honor. Point out how honored the true "honored guests" were to be moved to these seats.

Say: "It hurts our pride to be told that we are not as great as we thought we were. How could we avoid being embarrassed like that?" (Take the seat of no honor unless invited to the honored place.)

Read verse 11. Say: "This applies to all of life. In everything we do, we must not think we are better than others. If others give us honor, it is all right, but seeking honor brings embarrassment." Read Proverbs 25:6-7.

Let the two students you asked to help you play the parts of the two men praying. Remind the one playing the Pharisee to stand in a very proud manner as he reads the words of the Pharisee's prayer. Remind the man playing the tax collector to keep his head down and show that he is ashamed to come before God.

Discuss these questions with your students: "What is the difference between the two? Which one is really praying? Does one think he is better than the other? Why does he think he is so good? Is he really as good as he thinks he is? What do you think God thinks of him?"

Conclusion

Say: "Jesus said plainly that the humble man succeeded in his prayer. The tax collector's prayer was acceptable to God. The Pharisee's prayer was not.

"If we thank God for our goodness, we show that we are satisfied with ourselves. We are not coming to God in humility. We do not think he needs to change us at all. This is not prayer at all. We are showing that we think we are better than people who do these things we do not do. Humility is always pleasing to God. Our boasts and pride in our own goodness are not."

Remind the class that this teaching applies to all of life. Read verse 14 again. Say: "If we think we are great, we will fall. If we can humble ourselves, then God will make us great."

Say: "We need to ask ourselves, 'Am I like the Pharisee? Am I proud? Do I try to show how good I am by pointing out the sins of others? Do I ask for God's mercy and forgiveness as the tax collector did?'"

Say: "Greatness in the kingdom of God is not the same as the world's standard of greatness. It is not based on our own goodness or position. In order to be great, we must humble ourselves. We must admit our need for God. To be great, we must be a servant. To be first, we must put others first and be willing to be last. Then God can bless us and make us great."

Close in prayer. Ask God to help us see ourselves clearly. Are we proud? Do we think we are better than others? Ask him to remove our pride so we can be good witnesses.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

The Pharisees thought they knew and kept all God's laws. They thought Jesus' teaching were new. Read the following verses from the Old Testament. You will see that God has always loved humility and hated pride.

Proverbs 16:19: It is better to be poor and humble than (rich) and (proud).

Proverbs 22:4: The reward of humility is (riches) and (honor) and (life).

Proverbs 29:23: Pride will bring a man (low); the humble will get (honor).

Isaiah 57:15: God wants to live with those who are (humble) and (contrite). He will revive the (heart) and (spirit) of those who are (humble).

Psalms 10:2: The proud who hurt the poor will be (caught in their own trap).

Proverbs 11:2: Pride brings (disgrace); humility brings (wisdom).

Proverbs 16:18: Pride goes before (destruction) and (falling).

Proverbs 21:4: A proud heart is (sin).

From the beginning, God wanted man to come humbly before him. He knew that if we depended upon our own goodness, we would fall. We should ask God to help us see our need for his mercy. Then he can give us honor and blessings.

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Matthew 23:1-12

Monday: Mark 12:38-44

Tuesday: Mark 14:32-44

Wednesday: Acts 20:17-24

Thursday: 1 John 1:1-10

Friday: Luke 22:24-30

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON EIGHT

KNOWING AND DOING GOD'S WILL

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:21-29; 21:23-32

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 7:21-27; 21:28-32

MEMORY VERSE: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

CENTRAL TRUTH: A Christian seeks to know and do God's will.

TEACHING AIM: To help students learn to recognize and do God's will.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Chalk and chalk board

PREPARING TO TEACH

Knowing God's will cannot be separated from doing God's will. For how can we do God's will if we do not know it? And what is knowing it if we do not do it? A soldier may hear his captain's orders, but he must obey if he wants to be a soldier. A child cannot be obedient to his father by just listening to him. He must do as his father says. Knowing the will of God is worth nothing, if we do not do his will.

Hearing and Obeying: Read Matthew 7:21-23.

Jesus warned that entering the kingdom of heaven is not just saying certain things. Ceremony and words are not enough. The one who will enter the kingdom is the one who does God's will. He stops wanting wealth, power, honor and other things that men want. He starts wanting what God wants.

Many people think that doing God's will means doing certain good deeds. At the judgement day, people will stand before Jesus. They will remind him of the good works they have done. But doing "good" things does not mean that we are doing God's will. Doing his will is becoming what he wants us to become. We must allow him to change us inside so we want the things he wants.

The Two Builders: Read Matthew 7:24-27.

Jesus told a parable about two builders. The foolish builder did not lay a foundation. He set his house directly on the ground. When the rains came that year, the ground filled with water. The water soaked into the walls of the house. The base of the walls became soft. When the wind blew, the house fell down. The walls crumbled and the roof fell in.

The other builder was wise. He chose a place where could set his house on stone. When the rain came, his house did not fall. The water in the ground could not reach his walls and soften them. Even though the wind blew, his house stood.

Jesus was not teaching us how to build good houses. He was teaching us how to build a good life. Our lives must have a solid foundation. His teachings are the stones which make a good foundation. A wise man will live by the teachings of Jesus. A foolish man will hear those same teachings and ignore them.

Look again at the example of the house builders. Without doubt the foolish man knew the rain would come. Without doubt he could see the same stone the wise man saw. But he did not use it. Why not? He was foolish. He was like the man who will not use Jesus' teachings as the foundation of his life. He knows that sorrow and trouble are coming in life. Even so, he casts aside the teachings of Jesus. His life falls apart because he is foolish.

The Two Sons: Read Matthew 21:28-32.

Jesus told this parable to the Pharisees in the temple. They doubted his authority. They refused to believe he was from God.

Jesus asked these men to judge the actions of two sons. The sons were grown, but they lived at home with their father. They made their living from the same farm, but the father was in charge.

One day, he ordered his sons to work in the vineyard. The older son did not show his father proper respect. He answered him rudely and refused to do what his father asked. The younger son was more polite to his father. He called him 'sir' and agreed to go to the vineyard.

God hears these same answers from people today. Some give him no respect. They refuse to follow his commandments. Others speak properly to God. They agree that everything he commands is right and good.

But Jesus' story did not end there. He went on to tell what actually happened. The younger son, who had politely agreed to go to work, did not go. The older son who had rudely refused to go, changed his mind. He did what his father asked.

Now Jesus asked the Pharisees to judge which of the sons obeyed his father. Immediately they said it was the older. Jesus agreed with them. The younger son seemed more obedient. But his actions showed he was not.

Jesus compared the Pharisees to the younger son. They said the right words, but did not repent of their sins. This was what God really wanted them to do. Sinners, like tax collectors and prostitutes, repented when they heard Jesus teach. This pleased God. The sinners would enter the kingdom of God because they repented. The Pharisees would not because they refused to repent.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Read Matthew 7:21-23. Ask: "Do these verses surprise you? Can a person call on God and not be heard? Can we do good work and not be rewarded?" Let your students discuss this. Then ask: "What does verse 21 say? What kind of man will go to heaven?" (The one who does the will of God.) Say: "From these verses, we can see that saying the right thing is not enough. Doing good deeds is not enough. To do the will of God we must become what he wants us to be. We must be changed inside. So what is the will of God? How can we know it? Today's lesson teaches how to know and do the will of God."

Have someone read Matthew 7:24-27. Ask how many in the class have seen a house fall down because the foundation was weakened by water. What kind of foundation did it have? Say: "Both houses in Jesus' story looked alike. They may have been built carefully out of similar materials. The difference was hidden. At first, only the builders knew about it. One had a foundation of stone and the other of sand."

Ask: "What is Jesus teachings us? Was he telling us how to build a good house?" (No. He was teaching us how to build a good life.) Say: "A man may put a lot of good things into his life. He can go to church, sing and even pray. He can still fail if he did not begin correctly. Jesus said man must begin by doing the things he taught." Ask: "In building a life what is the stone for the foundation?" (Jesus and his teachings.) Ask: "What kind of man would throw away the good foundation and use a weak one?" (Only a foolish man would refuse to use a good foundation.) Ask: "What kind of man would throw away the teachings of Jesus?" (a foolish man)

Say: "Now let us look at another parable about doing God's will." Read Matthew 28:23. Explain that Jesus was in the temple talking with the Pharisees when he told a story of two sons.

Have a student read Matthew 28:27-30. Let the class judge which son did the father's will. When they have answered, ask them why they chose as they did.

Read Matthew 28:31-32 to see the Pharisees' reaction. Ask: "Did Jesus agree with the Pharisees' judgement of the story?" (Yes.)

Emphasize that what you say and what you do are two different things. Say: "It did not help the vineyard for the younger son to agree to work there. He did not go, so his words were meaningless. No help came from them. They were empty. Help came only when the older son went to work there. The vineyard could only be helped by actual work."

Conclusion

Ask: "What does this mean to us today?" Let students apply this parable to their lives.

Explain: "The Pharisees were the very religious people of that day. In some ways, they were like we are. They were the ones who were always going to church. Would Jesus think we are like they were? Do we speak well but do nothing? We say we agree that the Bible is good and we should obey it. We go to church. We sing praises to God. We pray. The Pharisees did all these things too. But Jesus taught that all this means nothing by itself. We must do what God wants us to do. Jesus said the sinner who repents and seeks God's will will please him. He is more obedient than one who speaks well in church, but does what he likes." Ask: "Is God helped by our words or by our actions?" Let students respond. Ask: "Is he helped by our actions if our attitude is wrong?" (Read Matthew 7:21-23 again.) Say: "Our words and actions are nothing if we remain unchanged inside. The obedient person is the one who tries to know God's will and do it."

Ask: "How can we know God's will?" (List the following ways on the board. Briefly discuss each one.) 1) Prayer, 2) God's written Word, the Bible, 3) Advice of Christian friends, 4) Worshipping God, 5) Reading Christian books or tracts."

Say: "God wants us to know and do his will. If we listen to him he will help us know his will. He will help us want to do his will, too.

"Remember that God sees our hearts. He knows if our faith is more than words. He knows our attitude when we do 'good works.' We cannot hide from God. But we

can depend on him. He will change us and make us like Jesus." Close in prayer. Ask God to help us know and do his will this week.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Match each result of disobedience with the verse which describes it

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|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. We will give up our salvation | Ephesians 5:6 |
| 2. We will be punished by God | 1 Samuel 12:15 |
| 3. God's anger will be on us | 2 Thessalonians 1:8 |
| 4. God will be against us | Hebrews 2:2-3 |

Match each blessing which comes from obedience with the verse which describes it.

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|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. We will be part of God's family | Deuteronomy 5:29 |
| 2. All will go well with us | John 14:23 |
| 3. We will be blessed in what we do | Matthew 12:50 |
| 4. God will live within us | James 1:25 |

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Deuteronomy 26:16-19

Monday: Joshua 1:8; 1 Samuel 15:22-23

Tuesday: Psalms 143:5-10

Wednesday: Matthew 26:36-42

Thursday: Romans 6:11-14

Friday: James 4:13-17

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON NINE

WHAT IS TRUE WEALTH?

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:19-34; Luke 12:13-21

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 12:13-21; Matthew 6:19-21

MEMORY VERSE: "...Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matthew 6:33).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Our attitude toward money and possessions changes when we become Christians.

TEACHING AIM: To help students see how the use of money and things is related to their discipleship.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Several pieces of local currency.

PREPARING TO TEACH

What is true wealth? Is it a regular salary? Is it clothes, a watch, a radio and a bicycle? Is it owning a house and having a second house to rent? Is it being able to buy a car or travel to many places? Is this true wealth? If a person has these things, does he really have something of value? His house may burn. His car may be wrecked. Travel may be stopped by bridges which are destroyed or by mechanical problems in airplanes. Today we will think about what kind of wealth which does not fade away? We will find the answer in the teachings of Jesus.

A Man's Wish: Read Luke 12:13-15.

We do not know much about the man who asked Jesus for help. He was very concerned about his inheritance. He interrupted Jesus while he was teaching a crowd of people. Was he in the right? We have no way of knowing. He thought Jesus would help him because the Jewish rabbis did judge problems like this. But Jesus' authority was different. He had not come into the world to deal with problems of inheritance. For Jesus, this question gave him an opportunity to teach something very important.

This teaching is important to us, because we, too, are concerned over property. We are concerned about having enough food and other things for our family's needs. We want to have a nice house. We may worry that our money may have to be used for treating an illness. We may think we will be richer if we keep all our money for ourselves instead of giving God his part. We are like the man who interrupted Jesus' teachings to talk about his inheritance.

In verse 15, Jesus warned us not to be greedy. We are sometimes tempted to want more and more things. If we get something we want, we are tempted to want another which is bigger and better. Jesus warns us that we must not think property makes a good life. Life is more than the things we own. If a man owns a lot of property, he is not guaranteed happiness. He is not even guaranteed that he will live at all.

The Rich Fool: Read Luke 12:16-21.

After giving this warning, Jesus emphasized his teaching with a parable. Verses 16-20 tell of a rich farmer, who had many barns. One year his land produced more food than ever before. This made a great problem for the man. He did not have enough space to store his crops.

This same problem occurs today. We may think that riches bring happiness. But if we get property the property itself brings problems. How shall we protect it from thieves? If we have cattle, we must protect them at night. If we have money, we must protect it from thieves, or even from rats who can eat paper. If we have corn, we must protect it from rain, rats and insects. Riches of any kind bring problems.

The man in the story decided he would pull down his barns and build bigger ones. He did not think of sharing his extra food with others. He considered only himself. He had had good luck on his farm. He did not want to waste what he received. So he planned to save it for himself. Then he could rest a while and not have to work hard. By our thinking, he was a wise man, Jesus called him a fool.

Jesus called him a fool because he forgot about the real things of life. He was only the outside part of life. He forgot that man is also spirit. He thought only of the needs of the body. The man himself thought he was wise. He thought for sure that he would live a long life in comfort. But the end of the story shows that Jesus was right. That very night he died. He had spent his life seeking the wealth of the world. He had not sought wealth in heaven. He thought he had something of great value, but suddenly his life was ended. His wealth of the world cannot bring happiness or life.

What is true wealth? In verse 21, Jesus applied this story to us. He showed that the man who stores up riches for himself does not have true wealth. Only those who are "rich toward God" are really wealthy.

Riches in Heaven: Read Matthew 6:19-21.

This passage is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Here, Jesus stated plainly what true wealth is. True wealth is that which lasts forever.

Most people today still think that if they can save up enough money, they will have no problems. In verse 19, Jesus names three problems connected with the riches of the world. Moths eat clothing that is stored away. Rust destroys metal objects, such as jewelry and tools. Thieves will carry off anything they can find. The first parable showed that death can also make treasure on earth lose its value.

What is true wealth? Jesus says that which we lay up in heaven is the true treasure. If your treasure is in heaven there is no way you can lose it. There are no moths, no rust or thieves. There is no death.

In verse 21 Jesus said that the things you value will shape your life. If you think earthly treasure is best, then you will need to protect your treasure. Your life will be self-centered and full of problems. You will not know the peace of God in your heart. If you value heavenly things, you will please God. You will gain your "wealth" by being kind, loving, forgiving to others. If heavenly treasure is the most important, then you will have no fear of losing anything at all. Your wealth cannot be taken from you.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Show the class some money. Ask and discuss these questions: "How much money does it take to make a man wealthy? Can money alone make him wealthy? Can a person ever have 'enough'? What size house must a man have to be wealthy? How many cows a man must have? What can happen to a house? To money? To cows?" Read the title of the lesson to your class. Say: "Today we will learn that true wealth cannot be lost."

Have someone read Luke 12:13-15. Say: "The man who brought the request to Jesus was seeking earthly treasure. When did he ask this question? (while Jesus was teaching) Are we sometimes like that? Do we stop listening to the preacher to figure out how to buy something we want?"

Ask: "Did Jesus do what the man asked of him?" (No.) "What did he do instead?" (He used his question as an opportunity to teach about greed.)

Say: "The story of the rich farmer emphasizes the warning of verse 15. Let someone read Luke 12:16-19. Let someone in the class tell what the farmer did. Ask another what the farmer thought. Ask: "How was his wealth useful to him?" (He would have plenty. He could rest.) "How was it a problem?" (He did not have enough storage space.)

Read verse 20. Ask: "Now was it useful to him? Can we keep any of our wealth after death?" Read verse 21. Ask: "How can we be 'rich toward God?'" (share with others, help spread the gospel, value spiritual things)

Have someone read Matthew 6:19-21. Say: "Most people in Jesus' day had few possessions. Whatever they did own, they guarded very carefully. They may have possessed clothes, some jewelry, some tools and some money. They had a desire for things just as we do today.

"But Jesus pointed out that if we treasure fabrics and clothes, we face the danger of moths and rats. If we value cars, jewelry, or tools, rust can destroy our treasure. Those who hide their houses can be robbed by thieves. Then there is always the threat of death. When we die none of these things matter at all. They are of no use to us."

Ask: "What might Jesus talk about as our treasures today?" (houses, cars, savings accounts, land, education, family) "What might happen to them? Can they be taken from us?" Let students discuss this.

Ask: "According to verse 20, what kind of treasure should we have?" (treasure in heaven) "Why?" (no moths, rust or thieves)

Say: "Matthew does not say what these treasures in heaven are or how they may be obtained. What do you think they are?" Let students discuss this fully. (Possible answers: service, helping, showing love and kindness, trying to be like Jesus, using time and money for God, etc.)

Say: "Paul says that if we belong to Christ, we should set our minds on things of heaven. He speaks of truth, love, mercy, goodness, kindness, peace, joy, justice. These things are eternal. They make us truly wealthy. The rich fool's mind was on his barns, grain and goods. He had nothing eternal. So when he died, he was very poor."

Conclusion

Read verse 21. Say: "Whatever one chooses as his highest goal in life becomes his treasure. What is your treasure? Can bad health, thieves or fire take it away? If so, then you have the wrong treasure. Can everything you value be seen or held in your hand? If the answer is yes, your heart's treasure is earthly. It will pass away. But if spiritual things are important to you, your treasure is heavenly and eternal."

Ask: "What is true wealth? It is wealth that cannot be lost. It is treasure laid up in heaven. We gain this true wealth by showing love to our fellow man." Lead the class in a prayer that our hearts might be right and that we might have the proper view of material possessions.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

God promises true wealth to those who want to enter his kingdom. What are some of the things we will get by obeying him?

Proverbs 10:22 (blessings)

Ephesians 1:18 (hope)

Ephesians 3:8 (grace to share with others the riches of Christ)

James 2:5 (faith and inheritance of the kingdom)

1 Timothy 6:19 (life which is real life)

1 Timothy 6:6 (godliness and contentment)

Ecclesiastes 2:26 (wisdom, knowledge and happiness)

Each of these things is valuable. Many people try to find them in material possessions and worldly wealth. God says we will never find them there. We will only find them when we seek him. God alone can give these riches. Will you ask him for them?

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Mark 10:17-22

Monday: Mark 10:23-31

Tuesday: Luke 16:19-31

Wednesday: 1 Timothy 6:6-11

Thursday: Ecclesiastes 11:18-19

Friday: Philippians 4:8

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON TEN

LIVING BY THE LAW OF LOVE

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-37

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 10:25-37

MEMORY VERSE: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (Roman 13:8).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Christians must love as Jesus loves.

TEACHING AIM: To encourage students to find ways to help and show love to their neighbors this week.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: People to play parts in dramatizing the story. Map of Judea and Samaria.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Questions and Answers: Read Luke 10:25-29.

A lawyer stood up while Jesus taught. He wanted to test Jesus. Perhaps he was trying to get evidence against him. He was an expert in the law. He knew what the law said about eternal life. Even so, he asked Jesus how he might inherit it.

Jesus said to him, "You are asking a question for which you already know the answer. You are an expert in the law. How do you read what is written in the law?"

The lawyer answered without hesitation. He combined the command to love God and the command to love one's neighbor. The first command, given in Deuteronomy 6:5, was familiar to all the Jews. They quoted it daily. The second command, from Leviticus 19:18, was not so well known.

Jesus agreed with his answer. The lawyer was proud of himself. But Jesus knew his problem. He knew there is a great difference between knowing what is right and doing it. Jesus saw the lawyer had trouble practicing what he believed. He told him to do this and he would live. By saying this, Jesus showed him that he must do more than just know what to do. He must genuinely love God with his whole personality. He must really love his neighbor as himself.

The lawyer was embarrassed in front of the others present. He knew Jesus was accusing him of failing to keep the law. He asked Jesus another question in order to justify himself. He wanted more explanation about loving his neighbor. He wanted Jesus to define 'neighbor' for him. Just who was his neighbor? Who was worthy of his love and who was not? Jesus told a parable to answer the question.

The Good Neighbor: Read Luke 10:30-37.

The road between Jerusalem and Jericho was a dangerous one for travellers. It passed through hills which had numerous caves. This road became a place where thieves robbed travellers.

Jesus' story was about a traveller on this road. We do not know much about the traveller. He was probably a Jew but the story does not say for sure. He was just a traveller. He was robbed, beaten and left for dead.

In verse 31-32, we see that a priest and a Levite passed by without helping him. They saw him, but they did not stop. These men represented the religious leaders of that day. Why did they fail to help the man that lay wounded by the roadside? Were they in a great hurry? Did they not care about the man? Were they afraid for their lives? We have no answer to these questions. We just know they did not stop to help the man in need.

Then Jesus surprised his listeners. He chose a Samaritan as an example of a good neighbor. Samaritans were of mixed blood, part Jewish, part Gentile. They worshipped differently and were bitter enemies of the Jews. In fact, the Jews called the Samaritans 'dogs.' They would not even pass through their country. Jews felt Samaritans were inferior to them.

The Samaritan was not in too great a hurry to help the wounded man. He was not too afraid of thieves who might rob him. He chose to stop and help the man. He had compassion on him. The man needed help and the Samaritan was willing to help him.

He bound the man's wounds and put him on his donkey. He took him to an inn and cared for him. He put the man's needs above his own.

He had to continue his trip the next day. He promised to repay any more money that was used on his return trip.

Instead, after telling this story, Jesus asked the lawyer, "Which was the neighbor?" The lawyer saw he was caught in his own trap. He knew the Samaritan proved himself to be a neighbor. Notice that the lawyer replied, "He that showed mercy on him." He was unwilling to say the word, Samaritan. Did Jesus' teaching help him change his ideas about loving his neighbor? It does not seem so.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Say: "Jesus taught that being a follower of his was more than just obeying rules. It was more than just knowing what the law said. Jesus taught that "his way" involves our whole lives. It includes our relationships with everyone, even those who are different from us. If we give ourselves to Jesus, we can be like him and love as he loved."

Have a student read Luke 10:25-26. Ask: "What must we do to inherit eternal life?" Let students discuss this. Read Luke 10:27 for the lawyer's answer. Emphasize the meaning of these verses. Discuss how we show our love for God. Be sure to mention obedience and faith in Jesus.

Ask: "Did Jesus agree with him?" (Yes.)

Read Luke 10:28. Ask: "Does knowing what we should do give us eternal life?" (No. We must do it.) "Do you think this lawyer was obeying these laws?" (Read verse 29. He tried to justify himself, so probably not.) "What was the lawyer's question?" (Who is my neighbor?) "What did this question show Jesus?" (that the lawyer was not willing to love everyone. He wanted to know who he had to love according to the law.) "What was Jesus' answer?" (the story which follows, in verse 30-35)

Choose students to act the parts of the traveller, robbers, priest, Levite, inn-keeper and the Samaritan. Some can play more than one part, if necessary. Read Luke 10:30-35 slowly. Let students act out the story. (Encourage them to do this even if they are shy. It will help them remember the lesson better.) After they have acted out the story, discuss these questions. Use your background material to help you. "Was the traveller a Jew?" (We do not know, but he probably was.) "Why did the priest and Levite pass by?" (They might have been in a hurry or afraid of thieves. They might have just not cared about him. We do not know for sure.) "Who were the Samaritans?" (people of mixed race and religion, who lived north of Jerusalem, south of Galilee) Show students Samaria on the map in your Bible. Explain how Jews would not pass through Samaria when they travelled.) Say: "The Jews hated the Samaritans because of their religion and race. What did the Samaritan do when he saw the wounded man?" (Review verses 33-35.) "Why did he do this?" (He was loving and kind.) "Who please God, the priests and Levites who knew the law or the Samaritan who obeyed the law? (the Samaritan)

Read verse 36. Say: "Jesus wanted the lawyer to answer his own question, 'Who is my neighbor?' How did he answer?" (Read verse 37.) "Why did he not say 'The Samaritan?'" Let students discuss this. Then say: "Perhaps he was angry that Jesus had revealed his true feelings. He did not love his neighbor as he should. He had to answer, but he did not want to agree that a Samaritan could be better than a priest or Levite." Read again verse 37b. Ask: "How do we please God and gain eternal life?" (We must obey. Jesus said we must go and do.)

Conclusion

Say: "Christ said that I must love my neighbor as myself. On the surface this might seem very simple to do. But if you look at it carefully, it is not simple."

Ask: "What do you want in this life?" Let students answer. Say: "If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we want our neighbor to have the same things we want for ourselves. It means that we must treat him as we ourselves want to be treated. Is that easy to do?" (No.)

Say: "But we must remember, when we are a neighbor to others, we are serving Christ. On the day of judgement, Jesus will say, "...Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Matthew 25:34-36). They will be surprised and ask Christ when they did this. His reply will be, 'When you did this to any of my children, you did it to me.'"

Say: "Christ commands us to love those who do not love us. We are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. How can we do this?" Let students discuss, then say, "Christ will help us obey his commands. He has given us the Holy Spirit to lead us in our words and actions. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can be a neighbor to all."

Say: "In this parable, Christ has presented a big challenge to us. How may I be a neighbor to all, even to those who do not like me? How may I show love even to those who say I am their enemy? What about those of another tribe, those of another race of color?" Let the students discuss ways in which they can put

this command into practice. Help them decide on something they can do this week to show God's love to others. Pray for strength to carry out this plan.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

How are we to love? Read John 15:12. (as Jesus loved us)

Why do we love? Read 1 John 4:19. (because he first loved us)

If we say we love God, who else must we love? Read 1 John 4:20-21. (We must love our fellow man.)

How do we obey all of God's law? Read Romans 13:8. (love our neighbor)

Why is this so? Read Romans 13:10. (Love does no wrong to a neighbor)

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Monday: Leviticus 19:9-18; 32-37

Tuesday: Mark 12:28-34

Wednesday: Matthew 5:38-48

Thursday: 1 John 3:11-18

Friday: 1 John 4:7-21

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON ELEVEN

FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:9-15; 18:21-35

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 18:21-35

MEMORY VERSE: "...Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

CENTRAL TRUTH: God forgives us, so we should forgive others.

TEACHING AIM: To help students understand forgiveness and the need to forgive.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Chalk board and chalk

PREPARING TO TEACH

Peter's Question: Read Matthew 18:21-22.

Jewish law said you must forgive a person three times. After that, you did not have to forgive again. You could then punish the person for his action against you. Peter was willing to go a little further than the Jewish rule. Maybe he was thinking that Jesus would praise him for his generosity. Compared to the old law, maybe it was generous, but it was not generous in the eyes of Jesus. Jesus taught that one sign of being part of God's kingdom is being willing to forgive. The law said an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Jesus brought new teachings which had love as its center.

Jesus did not tell Peter to count the number of times a person sinned against him. In ancient times there was no limit to hatred and vengeance. So Jesus meant that among his followers, mercy and forgiveness should have no limitations. If you are asked to forgive, you must forgive.

The Forgiving King: Read Matthew 18:23-27.

To help them understand the principle of forgiveness, Jesus told the parable of a servant. In this story, the king was checking the accounts of his servants. He found that one servant had borrowed and used ten thousand talents. This servant had a very large debt, larger than he could ever repay!

The law in this case was clear. He could not pay his debt so he would be sold as a slave. His wife and children would be sold as well. All his possessions would become the property of the king. This would pay part of his huge debt.

The servant begged for mercy from the king. He asked for more time to repay the debt. The king knew he would never be able to repay this big debt. More time would not help. Mercy in a case like this was unheard of in that day. They strictly followed the law.

This king, however, did more than give him more time. He forgave him of all his debts! The king's kindness should have touched the debtor deeply. He should have realized how blessed he was. His life was given back to him through the king's mercy.

The Unforgiving Servant: Read Matthew 18:28-31.

This servant who had just received mercy met a man who owed him a small amount of money. It was a very small amount compared with his debt to the king. He knew the law. It was his right to hold the man by the throat and demand payment.

The man begged for mercy just as he had done. He asked for time to repay his debt. This debt was small enough that the man could have repaid it. The first man could not have repaid the king in a lifetime. The first man refused to give his debtor time to repay his debt. He was sent to prison until he could pay. It was very hard for a man to repay a debt while in prison. Why could the first man not have said, "I forgive your debt?" He did not understand the meaning of mercy, even though it had been shown to him. When people heard what he had done, they went to the king. They told him what the man had done to his debtor.

Punishment: Read Matthew 18:32-35.

The king was disturbed by the attitude of the man who would not forgive the small debt. He called the man before him. He reminded him that he has shown forgiveness and mercy. He should have followed his example. The king was angry with him because he did not do this.

The king's mercy turned to anger. The servant was put in prison. Because his debt was so great, he would die in prison. He would not be able to repay it.

Jesus showed how the parable applies to the kingdom of God. As the king forgave, so God forgives our sins. We receive complete pardon from him through Jesus Christ.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Say: "Nothing is more important in our relationship to people than a forgiving spirit. Recently in a Bible School there was a quarrel between two men. Each man tried to get the other students to agree with him against the other. This problem was dividing the school and hurting the Lord's work. Finally, they realized they could not go on like that. The men met with others for many hours to solve the problem. The problem was solved when each man saw his own wrong. Then he was willing to ask the other for forgiveness. Now, since there is harmony between the two men, there is peace in the school."

Ask: "what does forgiveness mean?" Let the students answer. Say: "You hear people say, 'I will forgive, but I will never forget,' or 'I will forgive, but I will not speak to that person again.' Is that real forgiveness?" Let the students discuss this. Then say: "Those who say such things do not understand the meaning of forgiveness that comes from God. When God forgives, he forgets completely. He never remembers it again. Forgiveness is not just an act of doing something. It is an attitude which comes from the heart. If the heart is full of sin, we cannot be forgiving as we should be. If Jesus has made our heart clean and pure, we can forgive." Ask: "Shall we go on and on forgiving or is there a limit?" Choose a student to read Matthew 18:21-22. Say: "Peter thought he was generous when he suggested seven times. The law said you must forgive three times. So Peter suggested four times more than was required by their religion. Jesus mentions the number seven times seventy which is 490 times. Would you keep a record of a person's sins up to 490 times?" (No. This meant there was no limit on forgiveness.) Say: "God continues to forgive us daily for our sins against him. He has promised to continue as long as we need forgiveness. His forgiveness to many of us is more than 490 times!"

Have someone read Matthew 18.23-34. Then in your own words, tell the story of the king and servant. Use your background material to help you. Emphasize the large debt owed to the king and the small debt owed to the servant.

Ask: "What is the meaning of "mercy?" (kindness and forgiveness when it is not deserved) Discuss the mercy of the king in the parable. Compare him to God. Emphasize the mercy of God.

Share how God has shown mercy to you. Let others give their testimonies of God's mercy to them.

Conclusion

Say: "Forgiveness is not a part of the nature of man. A forgiving spirit comes from God. Knowing God's love and his forgiveness helps us to forgive others." Ask: "Could the servant ever hope to pay the huge debt mentioned in the story?" (No. It was too much money.) Say: "By our sinning we have become debtors to God. This debt is so huge that we cannot repay it. It is impossible to undo what we have done. All we can do is ask God to forgive us. He does forgive us in his mercy."

Ask: "Does God's forgiveness depend on our doing something?" (Read verse 35. He forgives only as we forgive others.) Say: "If we have an unforgiving spirit toward our fellow men, God will not give forgive us. He is willing to forgive only as we forgive others."

Read the story in the Introduction of the pupil's book. Ask: "What happens in our lives and relationships if we refuse to forgive?" Let students discuss this. (They may mention: unhappy homes, spouses deserting the family, children running away, physical harm done to each other, churches, villages and nations being divided.)

Ask your students: "Can you think of times when bad things happened because people were not willing to forgive each other?"

Let students discuss these questions: "What would have been the results if they had forgiven? Will God forgive us if we are not willing to forgive others? What did Jesus say in verse 35 about the unforgiving man?"

Say: "Without a forgiving spirit, we cannot pray and expect results. We cannot ask God to forgive us unless we are willing to forgive others. This is an important lesson for us today. Our own forgiveness depends on our forgiving others. We must have a forgiving spirit if we want to show others the way to Jesus. They will see his mercy in us. They will be drawn to Jesus."

Pray with your class that God will give them a forgiving spirit. If they have not forgiven someone, encourage them to go immediately and do it.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Jesus taught that we should forgive others as we have been forgiven.

When should we forgive? (Mark 11:25) (whenever you are praying)

Why should we forgive? (Ephesians 4:32) (because God has forgiven me)

How should we forgive? (Colossians 3:13) (as the Lord has forgiven me)

How often should we forgive? (Luke 17:4) (every time we are asked to)

"...Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Psalms 85:1-7

Monday: Psalms 32

Tuesday: Acts 13:26-33; 38-39

Wednesday: Mark 2:5-12

Thursday: Ephesians 4:22-32

Friday: Matthew 6:12-15

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON TWELVE

PREPARING FOR HIS COMING

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25:1-13; Mark 13:28-37

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 25:1-13

MEMORY VERSE: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Christians should work to serve God today so we will be ready when Jesus returns.

TEACHING AIM: To help students realize that God is working in their lives to prepare us for the return of Jesus.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Chalk and chalk board

PREPARING TO TEACH

Waiting for the bridegroom: Read Matthew 25:1-5.

In Jesus' day, before marrying, a couple became engaged. A year later, the bridegroom set the date for the marriage feast. After the feast, he and his bride would be legally married. On that night, the bridegroom led a procession through town to the home of the bride. He then brought her to the feast at his house. Only those who were in the procession were allowed to come in for the feast. Each person had to carry a lamp to light the way.

Village maidens waited near the bridegroom's home. They had come with their lamps, and were waiting for the bridegroom to return with his bride. According to the custom, no one knew what hour he would come. His coming was always a surprise. They had to be ready, watching for him.

There were two kinds of maidens waiting. Some were called "foolish" and others "wise." The "foolish" maidens did not think about the bridegroom being late. They did bring an extra supply of oil for their lamps. They did not have what they needed. They did not realize it until it was too late. The other maidens were called "wise" because they were prepared. They knew the bridegroom might be late. When getting ready, they brought along some extra oil. A wise person will always try to be prepared for any situation which might arise.

In those days, the bridegroom chose when he wanted to start the wedding feast. While they waited, the maidens grew tired and went to sleep. While sleeping, the lamps continued to burn and used up all the oil.

The Bridegroom is Coming: Read Matthew 25:6-10.

At midnight, a cry was heard. Finally the time had come to go to the house for the wedding feast. The bridegroom was coming with his bride. It was the hour they had been looking forward to for many days.

The maidens trimmed their wicks. The five foolish girls noticed that the oil in their lamps was almost gone. Their lamps were about to go out. They knew that without light, they could not walk in the streets. They would miss the wedding

feast. They had been waiting for this hour for weeks. Now, they would miss the feast because of their own foolishness.

The foolish maidens saw that the wise maidens had extra oil. They asked them to share their oil with them. The five wise maidens refused to share their extra oil with the foolish girls. Sharing the oil would mean they might not have enough oil to complete the procession. Then they would miss the event they had prepared for so carefully. The wise maidens suggested that the foolish girls go buy more oil for themselves. They left to do this.

While the foolish ones went to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Those who were ready went to the groom's house for the wedding feast. When everyone was inside, the door was shut. No one else was allowed in. Those who were late could not attend the feast.

The Door Was Shut: Read Matthew 25:11-13.

After buying more oil, the foolish maidens, hurried to the home of the bridegroom. They saw the door closed and begged the bridegroom to let them in. He was the only who could open the door. They asked for mercy and explained why they were late. But the customs of the day were clear. Once the door was shut, it could not be opened again. They were not allowed in, because they had not been prepared.

The bridegroom assumed the role of judge in this verse. He denied knowing the maidens. He refused to listen to their pleas. There was no reason for special favors to be given to them. They had plenty of warning that this hour was coming. They were told to be ready for it. They knew that his coming would be sudden and they must be ready. They simply were not ready when he came. They had to suffer the results of their foolishness.

Jesus warns us to be like the five wise maidens. We are to watch and be ready for this coming. He will come unexpectedly, like the bridegroom came. To not know the time is no excuse not to be ready. We can be caught as they were when he comes. We can be shut out of heaven if we are unprepared.

We are told to watch. We are also told to do faithfully the things Jesus has given us to do. We are to serve him until he comes again.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Ask students to tell of some events in their lives for which they have had to prepare. (suggestions: taking tests, applying for a job, planning a wedding or a trip or even preparing a meal)

Say: "Today we will study a parable which teaches that we must be prepared for Jesus' return. We can see how important it is to be prepared in everyday life. The student knows he must prepare for the examination if he expects to succeed. When we apply for a job, we must be prepared to do that job. If you have been involved in a wedding, you know how much you have to prepare for this event. Some of you may have to prepare for guests in your home. From these events we can see that it is necessary to be prepared."

With the help of the background material, explain the wedding customs of Jesus' day.

Say: "Jesus warns us that he will be coming back. We do not know when. He says we must be ready for his coming. There have been many people who have said they

knew the day of his return. They have all been wrong. No one knows the day of the hour. We do know that he is coming again. Jesus taught that we must be prepared for this event."

Read Matthew 25:1-13. Review the story of the maidens using the background material. You might want to read from the background material.

Say: "After studying the parable of ten maidens, we see what happened to those who were not prepared. The door was shut, and they did not enter. Jesus says that if we are not prepared when he comes again, we shall not enter his kingdom either. The first way to prepare is to accept him as our Lord and Saviour." Write on the board: Accept Jesus as Saviour. Say: "After this, we should be busy doing the will of the Father." Write on the board: Do God's Will.

Ask: "How can we know God's will for us?" (through Bible study, prayer, advice and counsel of other Christians, by seeing needs around us)

Ask: "Would any of you like to share what you have discovered that God wants you to do?" Let students respond. Share what you have discovered in your own life.

Say: "Another thing we notice from this parable is that we cannot prepare for someone else. Our salvation is only good for our lives. Those who do not have this faith cannot borrow from us. We see this in the example of the five foolish maidens. They could not borrow the oil from the five wise ones. Each person must prepare for himself." Write on the board: Each Person must prepare himself.

Say: "We see many in our own families who are like the foolish maidens. They just go on from day to day without preparing for the Lord's return. This is hard for us to bear, but each person is accountable for his own deeds and life. We can help them by telling them about God's plan for their lives."

"This parable teaches that not all will be allowed in. All are not saved. All are not prepared for judgement. We can warn them about the future. We all face judgement. It may be when he returns to earth or it may be when we die. Either way, all must be ready." Discuss this if you have someone in your class who is not a Christian. Stress that nothing is more important than being ready to face Jesus. Read Matthew 25:13. Ask: "What does this verse teach us? (to be ready at all times) "Do you know any foolish people, like the foolish maidens in this story? Our job is to share the good news of Jesus with them." Write on the board: Share Jesus with the lost.

Say: "Christ has promised us that he will return. We do not know the hour or the day. If we have given our lives to him, we are ready. He will invite us into his kingdom. We will enter through the door which is Jesus himself. If we are not prepared, the door will be shut without us. We shall never have an opportunity again to make a decision for Christ."

Say: "Think about a lost friend or family member. Will you pray every day for that person? Ask the Lord to help you speak to him about being ready for judgement. Obey the Lord when he tells you to share your testimony. You can do nothing more important for them."

Close with prayer. Ask God to help students to be soul-winners.

NOTE: Ask a student to be ready to re-tell the parable in Matthew 25:14-30 for the next lesson.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

The return of Jesus is an important subject in the Bible. It is an important day for Christians. It will be an important day in history when it happens. Read the Scriptures on the left. Match them to the statement on the right. You may use one statement more than once.

Acts 1:11	the time of Jesus' return
Matthew 24:36	his return foretold
1 Thessalonians 5:23	the purpose of his return
Hebrews 9:28	the time is near
James 5:8	what we are to do until then
Philippians 3:20-21	
Matthew 16:27	

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Mark 13:28-37

Monday: Psalms 15

Tuesday: Isaiah 41:2-6

Wednesday: Luke 3:7-17

Thursday: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Friday: Matthew 24:36-44

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

LESSON THIRTEEN

USING ALL FOR THE MASTER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25:14-30

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 25:14-30

MEMORY VERSE: "Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Corinthians 4:2).

CENTRAL TRUTH: God has freely given salvation and spiritual gifts. Christians are responsible to God as they use what he has given them.

TEACHING AIM: To help students use responsibly the gifts God has given.

HELPS FOR THE TEACHER: Student to summarize Scripture passage. Chalk and chalk board.

PREPARING TO TEACH

The greatest thing God gives us is the gift of salvation, but that is not all he gives us. He gives us gifts and abilities, too. We are to use them to serve him. We are accountable to God for the gifts he gives us.

Dividing the Talents: Read Matthew 25:14-15.

Before departing on a trip, a wealthy man gave his servants money. He expected them to invest it for him. They were to use it to make more money. During his absence the servants were to prove their faithfulness. He expected them to work and make some profit for him.

The master gave according to each servant's ability. One was given five talents and another was given two talents. The last servant was given one talent. A talent was worth more than 15 years wages of a laborer. Each was given just what he could work with.

Using the Talents: Read Matthew 25:16-18.

Immediately after the master left, the first two servants went to work. They invested the money and doubled the original amount. The third servant was completely different from the other two. He did not work while the master was gone. Was he afraid? Was he too lazy to work and make a profit for his master? Maybe he felt his own business was more important than the master's. Whatever the reason, he just hid the master's money in the ground. He did not use it to increase his master's money.

The Rich Man Returns: Read Matthew 25:19-25.

The master was gone a long time. When he returned, he called the servants before him. He wanted to know what they had done with the money he had given to them. This is how it will be when Christ comes again. All will have to stand and give an account to God. How have we used the gifts that God has given to each of us?

The first servant was very happy to report to his master. With the five talents he had gained five more talents. The master was pleased and praised him for his faithfulness. He said: "You have been faithful over a little, I will set

you over much." Because he had been faithful, his lord gave him even more responsibility than before. The master was pleased with the work of this servant. The servant was happy because he pleased the master.

The second servant came before the master. He made the same report as the first. He, too, had doubled the money his master gave him. The master was just as pleased with him as he was with the first servant. He, too, was given more responsibility because of his faithfulness.

The third servant came before the master, He reminded the master that he was a hard, shrewd, money-making man. Because of this, he was afraid he might lose the money if he invested it. So he just hid the money safely away. He may have expected praise for his careful action and honesty. At least he had not lost any money!

The Danger of Doing Nothing: Read Matthew 25:26-30.

The master was angry with the third servant. He had expected him to work and increase the original amount. He called him "wicked and lazy." He had been too lazy to even take the money to the bank. There, at least, he could have gotten interest on it.

Many people feel that if they do not do bad things, they will be right. Here we see one who did nothing bad, but on the day of judgement, he was condemned by his master. He had not used what he had been given. His money was taken from him and was given to the one who had the most. He had failed to use his talent, so he lost it. The worthless servant was sent out of his master's house. (verse 30)

This parable shows how it will be on the day of final judgement. Those who have been faithful servants shall enter into the joys of heaven. Those who have been unfaithful shall be "cast into outer darkness." They shall be eternally separated from God.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Ask: "What is the most wonderful gift you have ever received?" Let students answer. Discuss gifts and how they get lost, broken or worn out. Ask: "What gift have you received which will never wear out? (salvation and our spiritual gifts) Say: "Today we will see what God expects us to do with these gifts.

"Jesus told many parables about the kingdom of heaven. In each of them, there is a warning. In this parable, the warning concerns the gifts which God gives to us. He says if we use these gifts for his glory, then we will find happiness. If we do not, we become unfaithful servants. Then all will be taken away from us, and we will be very unhappy."

Let the student you chose tell the story recorded in Matthew 25:14-30. Then have someone read these verses.

Say: "We see that the master knew his servants. He knew what kind of work they did. Some could do more than others. He gave them work to match their abilities." Discuss the third servant. Ask: "Why did he hide the money?" Let students discuss. Say: "Perhaps he was afraid he would lose the whole amount. It represented more than 15 years wages for the common working man. Who would repay if he lost it? But he had ability! The master would not have given him the

money if he could not work with it. There was something that he could do, but he was unwilling to do it.

Say: "We can see several things from this parable. First, life is a gift from God." Write on the board: Life is a gift from God. Say: "All we are belongs to God. He created us. We owe everything to God -- our lives, our abilities and our material possessions. We can misuse our abilities and waste our possessions, but we are still responsible to God. We are his stewards and servants. In fact, we are just like the servants in the parable. We will have to give an account of our stewardship someday."

"The second thing we can see from this parable is that we should be faithful stewards." Write on the board: We should be faithful stewards. Say: "Our memory verse today was written by Paul." Read it together. Ask: "How can we be trustworthy?" (Use fully what God has given us. Share our gifts with others.) Say: "We do not have to be wealthy before we can give. We do not need to have superior knowledge before we can be a witness. We just must use what he has given to us as well as we can."

Say: "Some Christians have many special talents. When we compare our gifts we become discouraged. We might feel that our talents are too small to be important to Jesus, but who gave you your abilities?" (God) "We should use our abilities for him. In God's service, no talent is too small. Every ability is important because he gave it."

Say: "The third thing we see in this parable is that the Lord has not given us all equal gifts." Write on the board: Each is given different gifts. Say: "This does not mean that God loves some more than others. No, he loves us all equally. The master was happy with both faithful servants. He rewarded them both and gave both of them greater responsibilities." Ask: "Do you think all believers have been given at least one gift from God?" Let students discuss. Say: "We know for sure that all have been given salvation. If they have accepted that gift, they can share it with others."

Say: "The fourth thing we can see in this story is that faithfulness requires risk." Write on the board: Faithfulness requires risk. Say: "Some of us are like the last servant in the story. We want to take our Christianity and hide it in a hole somewhere. We are afraid of the risk. From this parable, we can see that if we do this, we cannot find real joy in life. Joy comes from being faithful and using our gifts for the Lord."

Say: "Lastly we see that we are required to use our gifts for God. What is the result of failing to do this?" (Read verses 29-30.) Write on the board: Unfaithfulness leads to damnation.

Say: "A few people have great ability. Most of us are more like the second servant. We have a few gifts and abilities. God does not expect more of us than we can do. But most of us don't use the skills we have."

Ask: "What are some of the temptations that come to persons who have a lot of ability?" (pride, feeling of superiority, using the ability in business but not in church) "What are some temptations that come to persons who have little ability?" (thinking they are not important, so doing nothing) Ask again: "Have any of you ever said, 'I just don't have any talents?' Is this true?" Let students discuss. Say: "Some of us have talents which we have not yet discovered. God knows our abilities. He is generous. He has given everyone some abilities."

Ask: "What are some abilities we might have to use for God? (preaching, teaching, singing, showing love, giving encouragement, witnessing, praying) "Do you know what your abilities are? Are you using them for God?" Let your students share.

Say: "We must either use the talents we have been given, or we will lose them. What did God do with the unused talent of the third servant?" (See verse 28.) Remind students of the danger of "doing nothing," as shown in verses 29-30. Close in prayer asking God to help all to use gifts and abilities he has given them.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Read 1 Peter 4:10-11. Answer the following questions.

- Who has received a gift? (each one)
- How should it be used? (for one another as good stewards of God's grace)
- How should we speak? (as unto God)
- How should we serve? (by the strength of God)
- Why should we serve? (so God may be glorified through Jesus Christ)

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Luke 19:12-26

Monday: Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-16

Tuesday: Hebrews 11:17-22

Wednesday: Hebrews 11:23-28

Thursday: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Friday: Hebrews 3:1-6

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.