

**It's A New Year Life-Sharing Lesson 1—What Am I Giving? Proverbs 3:9-10
Luke 18:18-30 Matthew 6:24**

4. HONOR THE LORD AND DO NOT WITHHOLD ONE'S OFFERING (3:9-10)

[3:9-10](#). In Israel, honoring **the LORD with... the firstfruits of all one's crops** was a way of expressing gratitude to Him for His provisions ([Deut. 26:1-3, 9-11](#)). It was a way of acknowledging God and His help ([Prov. 3:6](#)). In return, God then (cf. [v. 4](#)) promised to fill the **barns** (with grain) and the **vats... with new wine** (*trôs* "freshly squeezed grape juice"). *In general* it is true that godliness results in gain, that piety brings prosperity (cf. [v. 2](#); [Deut. 28:1-14](#); [Matt. 6:33](#)). But this kind of generalization, common in Proverbs, does not disallow God from making exceptions. Otherwise God is invested in, rather than honored. [Proverbs 3:10](#) is well balanced by [verses 11-12](#), as Derek Kidner appropriately observes (*The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 64).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

JESUS SPEAKS TO THE RICH YOUNG MAN / [18:18-30](#) / [175](#)

A ruler stopped Jesus with a perfectly legitimate question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus told the man what he needed to hear instead of what he wanted to hear. The young man wanted to have another possession in his expansive collection—eternal life. He wanted to have the kingdom of God, but as it turned out, he wasn't ready.

This episode with the rich young man differs greatly with Jesus' blessing of children in the previous section. The children are an example of innocent faith and trust. The rich young man thought he could gain eternal life by what he did, only to find that he could not have it.

[18:18](#) A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"^{NIV} In [Matthew 19:22](#), this person is called a "young man" ([Mark 10:22](#) says he had great wealth), so he apparently was a relatively wealthy young man of prominent social standing (hence, he is called a *ruler*). He addressed Jesus as *good teacher* (not the more common "rabbi") and eagerly asked a question about what he should *do to inherit eternal life*. He viewed eternal life as something that a person could achieve or earn through certain works or good deeds, and he wanted to make sure that he did everything necessary.

LIFE APPLICATION

BUSINESS SENSE

This young "ruler" had business sense. Getting rich was no problem, but he knew that someday he was going to die. What's the use of money if you can't keep it?

Sometimes people come to Jesus for life insurance—they would rather not lose everything at death. But Jesus' call is one step deeper, beyond possessions to the real self.

Are you God's child, whatever you own? Are you Jesus' disciple, whatever the cost? Becoming a Christian means happily surrendering the best of earth for the brightest of heaven. Have you placed your possessions and wealth fully under God's control?

18:19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "Only God is truly good."^{NLT}

Instead of answering the young man's question, Jesus first took issue with the way the man addressed him as "good teacher" ([18:18](#)). This may have been no more than a flippant attempt at flattery, but Jesus forced the young man to think about it. Because *only God is truly good*, the young man had made a statement about Jesus that he probably did not even realize. By asking this question, Jesus was saying, "Do you really know the one to whom you are talking?" Jesus did not deny his deity but instead confirmed it by these words. The young man was correct in calling Jesus good, for he was good and also God.

18:20-21 "But as for your question, you know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.'" The man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was a child."^{NLT} Regarding the young man's question about what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus at first pointed him back to the *commandments* (meaning the Ten Commandments). Jesus listed only five of them—those dealing with human relationships. He did not list any of the first four commandments that deal with a person's relationship to God. All of the ones listed could be easily identified—the man probably could honestly say that he had not committed adultery or murder, had not stolen or lied, and had honored his parents. To keep the letter of these laws would be relatively easy for a wealthy young Jewish man. So he responded that he had *obeyed* all those commandments since childhood, yet he still felt strongly that something was lacking in his life. So he asked if there were more he should do. The point is that even *if* a person could keep all these commandments perfectly, which this man claimed to have done, there would *still* be a *lack* of assurance of salvation, for this man needed such assurance. Keeping the commandments perfectly cannot save anyone. Jesus would reveal to this man what he lacked.

18:22-23 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have

treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich.^{NRSV} The young man saying that he had kept all the commandments led Jesus to focus on the man's relationship to his material possessions (alluding to the last commandment not to covet) and on his relationship to God (the first four commandments that Jesus had not mentioned). Jesus perceived an area of weakness—his wealth—and so gently told the young man that it was the money itself that was standing in the way of his reaching eternal life. So Jesus told him to *sell* everything he owned, give away his money *to the poor*, and then *follow* him. This challenge exposed the barrier that would keep this young man out of the kingdom: his love of money. Money represented the young man's pride of accomplishment and self-effort. Ironically, his attitude made him unable to keep the first commandment, one that Jesus did not quote: "You shall have no other gods before me" ([Exodus 20:3](#)). The young man did not love God with his whole heart as he had presumed. In reality, his many possessions were his god. If he could not give these up, he would be violating the first and greatest commandment.

The task of selling every possession would not, of itself, give the man eternal life. But such radical obedience would be the first step. The emphasis was not so much on "selling" as on "following." Jesus' words to this rich young man were a test of his faith and his willingness to obey. The man thought he needed to *do* more; Jesus explained that there was plenty more he could do but not in order to obtain eternal life. Instead, he needed an attitude adjustment toward his wealth; only then could he submit humbly to the lordship of Christ. By putting his *treasure in heaven* and following Jesus along the road of selflessness and service to others, the man could be assured of his eternal destiny. But the young man *became sad* when he heard this. He wanted to do good deeds and stay rich. He did not expect such an answer from Jesus, so he realized that what Jesus said he needed to do was exactly what he could not do. Jesus asked him to become a disciple, to follow him. Tragically, the man refused.

Jesus does not ask all believers to sell everything they have. He does ask each person, however, to get rid of anything that has become more important than God. If your basis for security has shifted from God to what you own, you may need to get rid of those possessions.

LIFE APPLICATION

UNTIL JESUS IS ALL

Jesus told the young man to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. For true disciples, wealth can be dangerous. Money and possessions can make people

- care more about money than about their role in God's kingdom.
- worry more about comfort than about their neighbor's needs.

- shop more for possessions to make them happy; search less for answers to life's big questions.
- anchor happiness in their accomplishments, not in God's Word.
- cling more to the tangibly immediate, less to the promised future.

To have the treasure in heaven that Jesus promises requires letting go of attachment to earthbound riches. How easy it is to rationalize away Jesus' teaching. If Jesus visited present-day churches, many believers would be told the same truth. Yet Jesus requires even more. It is not enough to be indifferent to money or be willing to give it up. Jesus demands that his followers actively give to the poor.

18:24-25 Jesus watched him go and then said to his disciples, "How hard it is for rich people to get into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"^{NLT}

Offered discipleship, the young man chose to return to his possessions. Jesus sadly pointed out to his disciples that it is *hard* for rich people to get into God's kingdom. This was contrary to conventional wisdom. Most Jews believed that wealth was a sign of God's blessing on people. Here Jesus explained that riches can often prove to be a stumbling block. Rich people often don't feel the deep spiritual hunger needed to seek out and find God. They can use their money to buy possessions, trips, and helpers so that they don't perceive any needs in their lives. With all their advantages and influence, the rich often find it difficult to have the attitude of humility, submission, and service required by Jesus. Because money represents power and success, the rich often miss out on the fact that power and success on earth cannot provide eternal salvation. Even if they use their money to help good causes, they can still miss out on God's kingdom.

Jesus used a well-known Jewish proverb to describe the difficulty faced by the rich; he said that *it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God*. Some commentators have suggested that the "needle" may refer to a certain gate in the wall of Jerusalem, a gate that was too low for camels to get through without removing everything from their backs. The Greek word, however, refers to a needle used with thread. Furthermore, the Needle's Eye Gate didn't exist in Jesus' day. It was put in later when the city was rebuilt after its destruction by the Romans. Jesus' image, therefore, was for hyperbolic effect. The camel, the largest animal in Palestine, could get through the eye of a sewing needle easier than a rich person could get into God's kingdom. These are indeed sobering words for those whose money and possessions are extremely important to them. Those very things cannot give eternal life and may, in fact, cause a person to miss eternal life just as they caused this young man to miss being with Jesus.

LIFE APPLICATION

RICHES

Jesus taught that it was nearly impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Because money represents power, authority, and success, often it is difficult for wealthy people to realize their need and their powerlessness to save themselves. The rich in talent or intelligence suffer the same difficulty. Unless God reaches into their lives, they will not come to him. Jesus surprised some of his hearers by offering salvation to the poor; he may surprise some people today by offering it to the rich. It is difficult for a self-sufficient person to realize his or her need and come to Jesus, but what is impossible with people is possible with God. If God has blessed you with wealth, make sure you give to the poor as Jesus taught. Then your testimony may be the best way to reach others who are wealthy.

18:26-27 Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."^{NRSV} Because the Jewish people saw riches as a sign of God's special blessing, they were astounded when Jesus said that riches actually worked against people finding God. So they asked, "Then who can be saved?"

Jesus answered that *what is impossible for mortals is possible for God*. People cannot save themselves, no matter how much power, authority, or influence they buy. Salvation comes from God alone. Both rich and poor can be saved, and human impossibilities are divine possibilities. The rich will need to loosely hold their riches, remembering that every penny comes from God. And they should willingly use what God has given to advance his kingdom. This does not come easily for anyone, rich or poor. Money can be a major stumbling block, but God can change anyone.

18:28-30 Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."^{NIV} Peter and the other disciples had paid a high price—leaving their homes and jobs—to follow Jesus. The Greek word *aphekamen* is in the aorist tense, signifying a once-for-all act. They had done what the rich young man had been unwilling to do. They had abandoned their former lives.

Jesus reminded Peter that following him has its benefits as well as its sacrifices. Any believer who has had to give up something to follow Christ will be paid back in this life as well as in the next. For example, if you must give up a secure job, you will find that

I never made a sacrifice. We ought not to talk of "sacrifice" when we remember the great sacrifice which he made who left his Father's throne on high to give

God

himself for us.

David Livingstone

offers a secure relationship with himself now and forever. If you must give up your family's approval, you will gain the love of the family of God. The disciples had begun to pay the price of following Jesus, and Jesus said they would be rewarded—they would have *eternal life*. This is what the young man had wanted to be sure of—eternal life ([18:18](#)). The answer lies in setting aside your life in order to live wholly for Christ. For the rich young man that meant giving up money as his idol. For each person the sacrifice may be different, though no less difficult. No matter how much or how little you have, no matter how difficult the sacrifice may be, are you willing to do whatever it takes to have eternal life? Are you willing to listen to God and obey him in all areas of life? You can never outgive God. When you obey and follow, you will receive rewards without measure—that's his promise.

Believers are saved by God through Christ's faithful work in dying on the cross. Believers receive mercy and forgiveness by accepting God's kindness through trusting in him. But the Bible teaches that all people will be held accountable for their lives. For believers, there will be rewards for service. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ has been given authority to judge all the earth ([Romans 14:9-11](#); [Philippians 2:9-11](#)). There is a future final judgment when Christ returns, and everyone's life will be reviewed and evaluated. While believers' destiny is secure, Jesus will look at how they handled gifts, opportunities, and responsibilities in order to determine their heavenly rewards. The greatest reward will be eternal life. Beyond that, believers do not know all that Christ has in mind for his people. (See also [19:24-27](#); [22:28-30](#).)

LIFE APPLICATION

NO LOSS SO GREAT

Jesus promised much to his followers. Nothing you lose threatens the love, joy, and peace God promises to all his children.

- Not your home. Tornadoes may flatten it.
- Not your job. Stingy bosses may cancel it.
- Not your spouse. Cancer may snatch him or her away.
- Not your friends. They may shun "religious types."

Your life's losses will add up as years go by, but God's presence in you and promise to you is all the greater a share of your heart's real treasure. No loss is so great that God does not fill the void.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

6:19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal."^{NKJV} Jesus' followers do not concern themselves with amassing possessions and wealth; they refuse to *lay up . . . treasures on earth*. Those treasures by their very nature cannot be secure, and death would cause a person to lose them. Such treasures can be eaten away by moths or *rust* (the Greek word *brosis* can refer to anything that "eats away"), and they can be stolen by *thieves*.

Jesus did not condemn saving money for the future or having certain "treasures" in your home that you value. But he condemned the attitude toward money and possessions that makes these things more important than eternal values.

6:20-21 "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."^{NKJV} How does a person *lay up . . . treasures in heaven*? Laying or storing up treasures in heaven includes, but is not limited to, tithing our money. It is also accomplished through bringing others to Christ and all acts of obedience to God. That "treasure" is the eternal value of whatever we accomplish on earth. Acts of obedience to God, laid up in heaven, are not susceptible to decay, destruction, or theft. Nothing can affect or change them; they are eternal.

The final sentence points out the significance of Jesus' words. Wherever our focus lies, whatever occupies our thoughts and our time—that is our "treasure." Jesus warned that people's hearts tend to be wrapped around their treasures, and few treasure God as they ought. In this startling challenge we again face the tension between actions and words in following Christ. Words become cheap when we tell ourselves we can act one way and believe another. Jesus exposed those who claim to value eternity while living as if there were nothing beyond this world.

Our *heart* will be with our *treasure*. The "heart" refers to the mind, emotions, and will. What we treasure most controls us, whether we admit it or not. (This is not limited to financial treasure. Some people treasure their house, car, or children almost to the point of idolatry.) For example, if we lay up treasures on earth in the form of money, our "heart" will be with our money. If our focus is our money, then we will do all we can to make more and more, and we will never have enough. We feel great when our stocks are up; we might feel despair if the stock market declines. We may become stingy, unwilling to give a cent of our amassed fortune, for then we would have one cent less. In short, we forget whose money it really is, the good purposes for which he gave it to us, and the fact that it will not last.

Jesus contrasted heavenly values with earthly values when he explained that our first loyalty should be to those things that do not fade, cannot be stolen or used up, and never wear out. We should not be fascinated with our possessions, lest *they* possess *us*. This means that we may have to cut back if our possessions become too important to us. Jesus calls for a decision that allows us to live contentedly with whatever we have because we have chosen what is eternal and lasting.

LIFE APPLICATION

FINANCIAL PLANNING

Do you have a will? a living trust? a diversified portfolio? a broker you can call?

Christians might ask, "Why all the fuss over financial security, given Jesus' warning here?" But Jesus was not teaching people to be sloppy and careless about money. We need solid financial plans to be good stewards of the earthly resources that God has entrusted to us.

Jesus was also saying that money is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Money ought never to be any Christian's goal. Financial plans should not drive our lives. Believers should focus on God's purposes, God's goals, and God's plan.

Everyone needs money. Every Christian ought to share money. Financial planning is a sign of careful management. But hopes and dreams that rise to heaven are the only ones worth living for.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

**It's A New Year Life-Sharing Lesson 1—What Am I Giving? Proverbs 3:9-10
Luke 18:8-30 Matthew 6:24**

1. Why do you think the Lord gives us a new year?

I think the Lord wants us to realize there is always the potential for starting over. Things come and go in cycles. We need not think that things will always be the same. A new year is a way of reminding us of having hope with unlimited possibilities.

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, if the Lord had discussed your giving with you at the end of December, how happy would you have been with the discussion?

I think I would be at an eight even though I did more than tithe. I'm amazed at how much more I give when we are in a campaign than when we are not. Yet at the same time it seems as though I have less money available to me when a campaign for ministry is not going on. The more I give, the more money seems to come my way.

3. Why do you think people give to the Lord's work?

I think a lot of people give out of appreciation for what God has done for them and how God has blessed them. Some people give because they feel very strongly about the mission or the vision of the church they are a part of. Some people give out of a sense of obligation, that they ought to give something after all they do share in some of the benefits from the church. Some people give because they think they have to give something to make it to heaven. Some people give to make others think they are generous.

4. Rewrite the verse below in today's language and instead of using a farmer, use a city worker with a job.

Proverbs 3:9-10 (NIV) ⁹ Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Show how much you put God first with everything that you receive. Give a tithe to the Lord out of your gross pay and not from the net. God will see to it that you have more than enough to cover your bills. You will receive money you did not expect. There will be money in your checking account even after your bills are paid. You will be amazed at what you can afford.

5. What is the difference between a tithe and an offering?

A tithe is giving one tenth of what you received. A tithe is 10% of the amount no matter how large or small the amount. A tithe from a \$100 is \$10, a tithe from \$10 is \$1, and a tithe from \$1 is ten cents. An offering is something you give to the Lord above a tithe. It is your way of saying I want to go above and beyond in my giving to the Lord. An offering can be of any amount or of any percentage.

Luke 18:18-30 (NIV)

¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone.

²⁰ You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" ²¹ "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. ²⁴

Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!

²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." ²⁸ Peter said to him, "We have left all we

had to follow you!" ²⁹ "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God

³⁰ will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

6. How can you tell the ruler was looking for a new start in life?

The ruler came to Jesus, asking Jesus what changes he needed to make in order to receive eternal life. The ruler did not come with a theoretical discussion in mind. He came with the intent of making a change in his life to fill a void that he was obviously experiencing. Even with all his wealth and status, he did not have the assurance of eternal life as he died.

7. Why do you think Jesus told the man to give away all he had instead of just a tithe and offering?

Jesus knows what keeps each of us from surrendering our lives to him. From the way the man had been keeping the commandments, he was probably already tithing and giving offerings. His problem was not giving 10%. His problem was that he trusted the other 90% more than he trusted God. His faith for his life was not in the Lord, but in what he could do with his money. He did not realize that his money actually had seized control of his heart. We don't like to admit it, but our desire for a certain life-style seizes control of us and we put it ahead of our desire to do things for the Lord.

8. Do you think it would have made a difference if Jesus had said give it away to your family and friends?

I'm not sure. It may have in that he could have expected to receive some of it back if he knew the people he was giving it to. Surely, they could have possibly helped him out if he got in a jam. If it were me, it would be harder trying to figure out who to give it to and how much to give each if I had to distribute it between family and friends. I would also feel awkward around them if I have them my wealth, and then had to possibly turn around and asks them for help at times.

9. If you received a million dollars tomorrow, how much could God ask you to give away and you be fully satisfied with it?

I really don't know. I guess it would depend on where God asked me to give it to. I'd like to say God could keep 90% and let me have 10%. But then if I had nothing one day, why would I have to have \$100,000 the next day in order to be content. If God

kept 95%, wouldn't \$50,000 be a blessing in my life especially if I did nothing to earn it. If God kept 99%, why am I angry with \$10,000. I doubt if I would be alone in this struggle. Fortunately, most of us will never have to face this situation.

10. Do you believe that Jesus was telling the truth when he said you get treasure in heaven by giving away today? Why or why not.

I believe Jesus was telling the truth. Jesus taught us to live as though this life is only temporary. What we do in this life affects us after we die. If we are rewarded on earth for things we do on earth, then we should not expect a second reward for the same act. Our money is an indication of where our hearts truly are.

Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV) ¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

11. The amount of money we make has very little to do with how we give. Why is giving always an indication of what is happening in our hearts?

Most of us think that if we made just a little more money, we would be able to give more. That's one of the great lies of Satan. If we make a little more money, we simply find a way to spend a little more money. Until we agree to say no to things we want, but don't need, we will continue to be in a debt trap. Having more money does not make us more generous. Even the rich have to be commanded in the Scriptures to become generous.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NIV) ¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Matthew 6:24 (NIV)

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

12. In reference to the verse above, how do we know when money is becoming a master in our lives? What are some of the signs?

We know money has the wrong place in our lives when we convince ourselves we will never be able to tithe. We know money is becoming a master when we start to give in to materialism and start purchasing items we do not need or purchasing more than what we need of some items. If we are way in debt with consumer items, money is our master. Another sign is if we are hurriedly saving for a rainy day, while neglecting our responsibility in the kingdom of God today. When we are working two and three jobs to get more money just to have it, while neglecting our spiritual lives by not being engaged in worship or with other believers, it is a sign that money has become our master.

13. If God wants us all to be blessed, then how come we cannot serve God and money?

Money has a very tricky way of deceiving us. None of us start out to love money. We fall in love with a lifestyle that requires a certain amount of money. We believe we are entitled to that lifestyle and make compromises to maintain it. Being blessed by God is falsely equated with having things from God. We stop serving God in order to get the things or lifestyle we want. The shift is a subtle one, but it works its way in all of our hearts if we are not diligently working against it. Just because we can afford an item does not mean that we should purchase it, or even purchase it for ourselves. We should check in with God to see where should the money go. Otherwise, the advertisers may convince us on what to do with the money. Every now and then we should spend money on others who can't pay us back, just to show our freedom from the grip of money.

14. Will you complete your pledge sheet this week or have you already done it?

Yes I will.

15. Give a little extra above your pledge on a regular basis to Above and Beyond and see if the Lord does not bless you with extra income throughout the year.

I will accept the challenge.

It's A New Year—Life-Sharing Lesson 2 Where Will You Serve?
2 Kings 3:11-12, Ephesians 4:11-13, Ephesians 2:8-10 , Matthew 20:1-16

[3:9-12](#). **Edom** at this time was under Judah's authority and joined the alliance. After marching through Judah down the southwestern coast of the Dead Sea, around the southern end, and into Edom, **the army** ran out of **water**. Joram's expression of dismay ([v. 10](#)) indicates that he considered **the LORD** responsible for their predicament. As on an earlier occasion ([1 Kings 22:7](#)) **Jehoshaphat** suggested they find a **prophet of the LORD** who could obtain instructions for them. One of Joram's officers volunteered that **Elisha** was nearby. Probably the Lord had directed him there to be ready for this mission; it is unlikely that he was traveling with the army. Pouring **water on the hands** of another for washing was a servant's work; Elisha had been Elijah's minister (cf. [1 Kings 19:21](#)). Evidently the officer thought Joram did not know Elisha, which may have been the case. Whether Joram knew of Elisha or not, **Jehoshaphat** did. Humbling themselves before the prophet, the three kings paid him a visit.

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[4:11](#) **The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.**^{NRSV} This expands on the thought begun in [4:7-8](#) regarding the gifts Christ gave. In this context, these gifts are actually people who have been called to special functions. Not all people have all the gifts, for Paul was clear to explain that *some* would be gifted in one area and *some* in another. The list given here is by no means complete (for other types of gifts, see [Romans 12](#); [1 Corinthians 12](#)). According to the Greek, all the people listed are direct objects of "gave," indicating that God gave these people to the church as gifts. The offices listed here focus mainly on those who proclaim the gospel and teach the truth.

First listed are the *apostles* and *prophets*, about whom we have already read. They are the foundation for Christ's temple (see [2:20](#) and [3:6](#) and commentary there). "Apostles" included the eleven men Jesus called (without Judas), plus others who are called apostles—such as Paul himself ([Romans 1:1](#)), Matthias ([Acts 1:26](#)), Barnabas ([Acts 14:14](#)), Jesus' brother James ([Galatians 1:19](#)), Silas ([1 Thessalonians 2:6](#)), Andronicus and Junias ([Romans 16:7](#)). It seems that the qualifications for being an apostle were to have seen the risen Christ, to have been sent out by him to preach the gospel, and to be working on behalf of the kingdom, building its foundation (as noted in

[2:20](#)). Paul also notes "signs, wonders, and miracles" as marks of a true apostle ([2 Corinthians 12:12](#)).

God also gave *prophets* to the church. These people, also laborers on the church's "foundation" ([2:20](#)), had special gifts in ministering God's messages to his people. At times they would foretell the future ([Acts 11:28](#); [21:9](#), [11](#)), but more often their job was to exhort, encourage, and strengthen God's people ([Acts 15:32](#); [1 Corinthians 14:29](#)). God spoke through prophets—inspiring them with specific messages for particular times and places.

The *evangelists* were the traveling ministers, similar to the missionaries of today. They went to non-Christian people and proclaimed the gospel to them, often being the first to start a church in a particular area ([Acts 21:8](#); [2 Timothy 4:5](#)).

Next, God gave *pastors and teachers*. These two gifts are likely the same. While the apostles, prophets, and evangelists had a universal sphere of function (the church as a whole), the pastors and teachers probably served in the local churches. Like shepherds, they tended God's "flock," handling the day-to-day affairs of their congregation—administering, counseling, guiding, feeding.

LIFE APPLICATION

WHO'S YOUR MINISTER?

How many ministers are there in your church? One? Three? If it's a big church—eight or ten? Before you answer that question, read [Ephesians 4:11-12](#) carefully. Here Paul shows that God gives pastors and teachers to his church not to *be* the ministers of the church but to *equip* the ministers. Who then are the ministers? All Christians are to be ministers, so you are one of them. The role of pastors and teachers is to train and equip the "saints" (all believers) to be able to serve in whatever ways that God has called them. So if your church has one hundred members and only one minister, there's a big problem. We are all called to be ministers. What is your ministry? How are you being equipped for it? In what ways are you using that training and your gift(s) for the building up of the body?

See Also:

[Chart: Spiritual Gifts](#)

[4:12](#) To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.^{NRSV} These specially gifted people ([4:11](#)) were given to the church for one ultimate goal: *to equip the saints*. The word for "equip" means to make right, like the

setting of a broken bone, or to bring to completion by training or restoring. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers furnish and equip the believers to do the work of the ministry, which results in the *building up the body of Christ*. The church builds itself in the faith as the members care for one another, show love, and generally manifest the other gifts God gives (as mentioned in [Romans 12](#) and [1 Corinthians 12](#)). Yet the church also builds itself as it reaches out to its surrounding community with the love of Christ, drawing others into the fold. God has given his church an enormous responsibility—to make disciples in every nation ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)). This involves preaching, teaching, healing, nurturing, giving, administering, building, and many other tasks. Fulfilling this command solo would be impossible. But God calls us as members of his body. No one should be a bystander, an observer. Everyone must do *the work of ministry*. Some of us can do one task; some can do another. Together we can obey God more fully than any of us could alone. We tend to overestimate what we can do by ourselves and underestimate what we can do as a group. But as the body of Christ, we can accomplish more together than we could dream possible working by ourselves. Working together, the church can express the fullness of Christ.

4:13 **Until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.** ^{NLT} The word "until" indicates that the process described in [4:12](#) must continue until a certain end is achieved—when all believers *come to* (arrive at, attain) unity (see [Philippians 3:11](#)). While unity of the Spirit must be maintained ([4:3](#)), *unity in our faith* must be attained. The "unity of faith" means a unity of belief in Christ himself, and this belief relates intrinsically to our knowledge of him. The goal includes making a united effort to live out and proclaim this faith.

Unity in our *knowledge* refers to fuller and more complete experiential knowledge. Every believer must have a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul here called him *God's Son*, showing that this knowledge includes an appropriate understanding of the new relationship with the Father that has been provided by the Son ([Romans 8:10-17](#)).

This unified body of believers is called to *be mature and full grown, measuring up to the full stature of Christ*. The focus is on "we" in this verse—every believer as part of the entire body. This metaphor means that the church, as Christ's body, must match the Head in growth and maturity. This does not speak of perfection (impossible in this life) but of growth—such as children growing into adults, which ties into the following advice regarding this growth. (See [Luke 2:52](#), where Jesus grew "in stature.")

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Ephesians.

2:8 **For by grace you have been saved through faith.** ^{NKJV} Elaborating on the statement in [2:5](#), this verse repeats that it is *by grace* that anyone is *saved*. Salvation includes being made alive, raised, and seated with Christ as described in [2:5-6](#), and

that occurs only because of God's kindness toward undeserving people. "Grace" refers to the multifaceted gift that God makes available to us despite our unworthiness. Not only does God mercifully withhold the judgment and punishment that we so clearly deserve, he grants instead the almost unbelievable gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. God's grace requires faith because the moral and legal case against us leads to an inevitable verdict—guilty. "Grace" means the forgiveness of our sins. It cannot be earned by works or by any goodness in us. It is free and undeserved favor on us by Christ's faithful act of redemption.

Our salvation comes from God's grace alone. "Through faith" could refer to: (1) God's faithfulness to his promises, (2) Christ's faithfulness in his obedience to God by dying on the cross, or (3) people's faith in accepting salvation. In light of Paul's references to the Ephesians' faith in [1:1](#) and [15](#), he most likely meant "faith" to refer to people's faith (#3 above). The way people obtain salvation is through faith—simple acceptance of God's gift of salvation (see also [Romans 3:22, 25](#); [Galatians 2:16](#)).

And that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.^{NKJV} Lest anyone should think that "faith" is a necessary work that people must perform in order to receive salvation, Paul added this phrase. It is unclear whether *that* refers back to "saved," "faith," or to the previous section. It is most likely that Paul is referring back to his entire explanation of salvation in [2:4-8](#), thus including "saved" and "faith" in his one word "that." Thus, "faith" is also a gift. In any case, Paul is firm that absolutely nothing is of our own doing (*not of yourselves*)—not salvation, not grace, not even the faith exercised to receive salvation—

everything *is the gift of God*. Salvation does not come from our self-reliance or individualism but from God's initiative. It is a gift to be thankfully accepted (see [Romans 3:24-28](#); [1 Corinthians 1:29-31](#); [Galatians 2:16](#)).

The only thing that a man can contribute to his redemption is the sin from which he needs to be redeemed.

William Temple

[2:9](#) Not of works, lest anyone should boast.^{NKJV} Salvation is "not of yourselves" ([2:8](#)), and it is *not of works*. In other words, people can do nothing to earn salvation, and a person's faith itself also is not to be considered a "work" or grounds that *anyone should boast*.

People find it difficult to accept something so free, so willingly given, so available to anyone. We want to feel as though we *did* something, that we somehow earned our salvation by our merit. That was how the Judaizers (false teachers who said Christians had to obey all the Jewish laws) regarded their laws and why they tried to impose them on the Gentiles—there had to be a certain amount of law keeping and goodness on people's part in order for them to receive salvation. But Paul's words are unmistakable—if salvation is by God's grace and is accepted through faith, then it is "not of works." If salvation could be earned by good works, then people would, by

nature, "boast" about their good works, compare the goodness of their works to others' good works, and do good only to boast about it. Then, what would be "good enough" for salvation?

But no one could ever be good enough to please a holy God. He casts aside all human effort and pride by offering salvation for free to all people by simple acceptance. People are given salvation on the grounds of God's grace alone.

If there is to be in our celestial garment but one stitch of our own making we are all of us lost.

C. H. Spurgeon

See Also:

[Chart: Not of Works but of Grace](#)

[2:10](#) For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.^{NIV} But wait, there's more. *We are God's workmanship* (work of art, masterpiece, new creation). Salvation is something only God can do—it is his powerful, creative work in us. People are re-created into new people, and those new people form a new creation—the church.

The verb "created" is used only of God—for only God can truly create. As he created the universe from nothing, so he creates new, alive, spiritual beings from the old, dead, sinful creatures we were—"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#) NRSV). Then God forms believers into a unified body, his church (see [2:15](#); [4:24](#); [Colossians 3:10](#)). *In Christ Jesus* emphasizes the source of this creation, as in [2:6-7](#)—Christ has provided salvation.

LIFE APPLICATION

GOD'S MASTERPIECES

Why would God do it? Why would he sacrifice his only Son for sinners like us? [Ephesians 2:10](#) gives one reason: so that we could be living, breathing pictures of his grace and mercy. Not only does he change us radically into new creatures, he also wants to use us as display cases for his artistry. According to this verse, believers are his workmanship, his masterpieces. That would be an arrogant claim to make about ourselves if God hadn't already said it. This statement also carries some significant implications about how we ought to see ourselves and how we ought to treat one another. God's masterpieces should not lower or degrade themselves with sinful attitudes, words, or behaviors. Nor should we devalue his other works of art:

our brothers and sisters in Christ. Treat fellow Christians as God's masterpieces.

That we are God's "workmanship" may be intended as a contrast leading into *good works*. God's "work" of salvation and new creation overturns our "sinful works" and makes doing "good works" possible. People become Christians through God's undeserved favor (his grace), not as the result of any efforts, abilities, intelligent choices, personal characteristics, or acts of service. Out of gratitude for this free gift, however, believers will seek "to do good works"—to help and serve others with kindness, love, and gentleness. While no action or work we do can help us obtain salvation, God's intention is that our salvation will result in acts of service. We are saved not merely for our own benefit but to serve Christ and build up the church ([4:12](#)). This solves the so-called conflict between faith and works. Works do not produce salvation but are the evidence of salvation (see [James 1:22](#); [2:14-26](#)).

The Greek word translated "do" (*peripateo*) means "to walk about in." We move ahead in this life of grace doing the good works *which God prepared in advance for us to do*. The new life that God gives cannot help but express itself in good works. This does not necessarily mean that God has set up all the specific good works each person will do—although there would be no point arguing against the possibility of our omniscient God doing just that. Just as God planned salvation in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world, so he planned that believers should do good to others (see [1 Timothy 6:18](#); [Titus 2:7](#); [1 Peter 2:12](#)).

CHRIST IS THE WAY TO PEACE / [2:11-22](#)

Before Christ's coming, Gentiles and Jews kept apart from one another. Jews considered Gentiles beyond God's saving power and therefore without hope. Gentiles resented Jewish claims of their position of superiority based on their heritage. Christ revealed the total sinfulness of both Jews and Gentiles, and then he offered his salvation to both. Only Christ breaks down the walls of prejudice, reconciles all believers to God, and unifies us in one body.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Ephesians.

JESUS TELLS THE PARABLE OF THE WORKERS PAID EQUALLY / [20:1-16](#) / [176](#)

[20:1-2](#) "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard."^{NRSV} This parable further explains Jesus' words in [19:30](#) (indicated by the repetition of that verse in [20:16](#)). It explains the "first and last" saying by focusing on the landowner's generosity (God's gracious love) in welcoming everyone into his field.

Jesus further clarified the membership rules of the kingdom of heaven—entrance is by God's grace alone. In this parable, God is the *landowner*, believers are the *laborers*, and the *vineyard* is the *kingdom of heaven*. This parable speaks especially to those who feel superior because of heritage or favored position, to those who feel superior because they have spent so much time with Christ, and to new believers so as to reassure them of God's grace.

The landowner went out *early in the morning* to find some laborers. The workday went from sunup to sundown, so this "early morning" hour was about six o'clock. These laborers agreed to work *for the usual daily wage* (usually a denarius). Bosses and managers should not overlook the fact that laborers had a fair role in the negotiation of wages at the beginning of this story. Owners do not hire workers on a "take it or leave it" basis here. They talk, and as the day's work begins, both sides are pleased with the terms.

Fair bargaining today means that Christian managers talk with labor at a table where both sides recognize mutual interests, needs, and expectations. When the talk is done, both sides should say, "Good deal, let's get to work."

[20:3-4](#) "When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went."^{NRSV} The landowner *went out about nine o'clock* and hired more workers who were *standing idle in the marketplace*. (Some versions say "the third hour." The day was divided from sunrise to sunset into twelve hours, so the third hour would be about nine o'clock in the morning; the eleventh hour, mentioned in [20:6](#), would be five o'clock in the afternoon.) Why the landowner went out and continued hiring people is not explained and is not essential to the point of Jesus' parable. Evidently the landowner needed workers. The marketplace was the public square of the city where most of the business was done. Unemployed laborers could stay there waiting for an opportunity to work. If there was a lot of work to do, they might work right up until sunset, but never beyond, for there would be no light in the fields. So each successive group of laborers worked for less time than the group hired previously. The landowner promised to pay this second group of laborers *whatever is right*—which they probably considered would be the appropriate fraction of the denarius that matched the amount of time they worked.

LIFE APPLICATION

WORKLESS

How quickly the workers forgot their condition when the landowner found them! None of the "shifts" were found looking for work. Instead, they were standing idle in the marketplace. The landowner approached them with an opportunity. He called; they answered. The original condition of the workers

strengthens the point Jesus made. He gave the invitation to people who were doing nothing.

Apart from God's gracious call, life has no ultimate purpose. Before we become servants of Christ, our lives account for little more than standing around in the marketplace. The world passes by, and we're going nowhere. But God finds us idle and offers us work. His love makes contact and gives purpose and direction. Tell someone today about the difference God made in your life when he gave you purpose, direction, and a destination.

20:5-7 "When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.'"^{NRSV} The landowner went out and hired three more groups of workers: some at noon, some at three o'clock, and some at five o'clock. Whether these people were *idle* (which is a later addition) truly because no one had hired them or because they were lazy is an unknown detail and is not important for Jesus' meaning in this parable. If people didn't work, they would likely go hungry. So the landowner hired these people as well. They were willing to work, even for that last hour which they thought would not earn them much money at all.

20:8-10 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'"^{NIV} At *evening* (referring to sunset), the workers were called to collect the day's wages, which was required by Jewish law so that the poor would not go hungry (see [Leviticus 19:13](#); [Deuteronomy 24:14-15](#)). The landowner purposely asked that the last ones hired get paid first. This is not a normal reaction; it would have surprised the workers and it surely surprised Jesus' listeners. So "**when those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.**"^{NRSV} When those who worked less time received a full day's wage, the laborers who had worked throughout the day expected to get paid *more* than that, even though the *daily wage* was what they had agreed upon when they were hired (20:2). Certainly those listening to the parable expected the same thing, although all would wonder at the astuteness of a businessman who would pay a full day's wage to laborers who had worked only an hour.

LIFE APPLICATION

RIGHTS

The workers grumbled, and we can identify with them. They have a strong point. It's a commonplace principle: more work, more pay; less work, less pay. It nears the status of a right that a worker may fairly claim—the right to a wage commensurate with the market value of one's work. Jesus' point, however, is that in God's kingdom, grace supersedes rights.

Grace rewards generously, according to the goodwill of the giver. Rights claim what's fair. Grace mixes workers together, young and old, bright and slow, veteran and novice, breaking down social distinctions. Rights tend to keep people in their "rightful" slot. Grace means the kingdom includes many joyful surprises.

If God's rewards were based on rights, we'd all worry about collecting "Brownie points"—the focus would be on *me* and *my* work. Because God rewards on the basis of grace, we can keep our focus on Jesus and faithful service to him. Be confident of God's good and generous judgment.

[20:11-12](#) "When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'"^{NIV} Everyone who had been hired during the day received the same—the daily wage. The laborers who had worked all day in the hot sun received what they had agreed upon. *They began to grumble against the landowner*, not because he hadn't kept his bargain with them, but because he had been generous to everyone else. They thought it wasn't fair that those who had worked *only one hour* received the same amount of pay as (were made equal to) those who had *borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day*.

LIFE APPLICATION

THE DIGNITY OF PARTICIPATION

The loving father allows his child to push against the mower handle while Dad makes it move. Alone, the child could not budge the machine. Alone, the father would finish the work much sooner. But this father has a greater purpose than simply mowing grass. He also desires to help his child grow. The landowner in Jesus' parable had more than grapes to harvest. He also wanted to practice generosity. He went looking for harvesters.

Grace cannot be rightly defined as God doing it all for us. That would simply display divine power. Rather, God's grace evokes wonder and growth in us as we recognize that he does it all *with us!* Our participation is never essential, but

it is real! God doesn't need us. Working in and through us slows the divine plan to a snail's pace. But therein lies God's grace! Submitting to Christ's lordship requires that we admit that we can't do it by ourselves. Nor can we claim that the final results are due to our efforts. But we have participated. In fact, the deeper our commitment to working with the Father, the greater our awareness of how much God does. Ask God to multiply your efforts to serve him.

[20:13-15](#) "But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.'"^{NRSV} While the laborers did not address the landowner with any respectful title, the landowner responded to *one of them* as *friend*. He pointed out that he had not done wrong by these laborers who had worked hard all day; he had paid them the agreed amount. Besides, he added, "**Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?**"^{NIV} Obviously, the landowner could pay whatever he chose as long as he cheated no one—it was his own money. So what was the real problem? The early workers were envious that the landowner had been generous with everyone else.

In this parable, Jesus pointed out that salvation is not earned, but given freely only because of God's great generosity, which goes far beyond our human ideas of what is fair. The message of the parable is that God's loving mercy accepts the lowest member of society on an equal footing with the elite. This parable may have been addressed in the presence of the religious leaders who "grumbled" because Jesus chose the "lowly" disciples and spent time with those considered unclean and sinful ([Luke 15:1-2](#)). Those who come to God—regardless of social strata, age, material wealth, or heritage, and no matter when in life they come—will all be accepted by him on an equal footing. All will receive their inheritance in the kingdom of heaven—no one will get less than what they expect, and some may receive more. Such generosity, such grace, ought to cause all believers great joy—no one should be in the corner grumbling.

LIFE APPLICATION

REVERSED ORDER

Jesus repeated a principle that is recorded in [19:30](#). There he used it to respond to the disciples' amazement that wealth was not a gauge of acceptance with God. Here he said, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last" as the moral of the parable of the workers ([20:1-15](#)). Clearly, Christ rejects the widely accepted notion: "first come, first served." Why? Here are three possible reasons:

1. *God isn't impressed by our achievements.* The workers did no more than they

were asked to do. The landowner gave them work they did not merit and fulfilled his promise. Those who worked all day were not cheated. Those who worked an hour had no reason to brag. The idea that God "owes" us something is wrong. Instead of complaining, we should be grateful that God seldom gives us what we deserve.

2. *God rejects our comparisons.* To understand our sinfulness, we should examine our tendency toward discontent and ungratefulness. Like children, we demand equal treatment when we think that we have received less than others. Yet we are rarely concerned for others when we're ahead of them. Like the landowner, however, God holds us to our agreement. God keeps his promises. Comparing ourselves to others will not help our defense when we stand before God.

3. *God's rewards are his domain.* The landowner held the right to be generous to whomever he desired. If we are not astonished at God's grace toward us, we will miss it completely.

Are there areas of ungratefulness in your life? Use this list to remind yourself of what God has done for you.

20:16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."^{NIV} The reversal noted in these words (and in [19:30](#)) points out the differences between this life and life in the kingdom. Many people we don't expect to see in the kingdom will be there. The criminal who repented as he was dying ([Luke 23:40-43](#)) will be there, along with people who have believed and served God for many years. The Jews were promised the kingdom first, but the Gentile believers will share the kingdom along with them. God offers his kingdom to all kinds of people everywhere. God's grace accepts the world's outcasts. No one has a claim to God's generosity; it is by his grace alone. No one has a claim to position in the kingdom; God will make the appointments—the *last* and *first* cannot be earned, bought, or bargained for (see [20:20-23](#)).

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

**It's A New Year—Life-Sharing Lesson 2 Where Will You Serve?
2 Kings 3:11-12, Ephesians 4:11-13, Ephesians 2:8-10 , Matthew 20:1-16**

1. Why did God create you with the gifts and talents that you have?

God had a place for me to fit within the kingdom of God that could be used to further God's purposes in building the kingdom. God gave me what I needed to do what God called me to do.

2. What ability has God given to you that you now using for God's glory?

God has given me a skill to utilize technology to help keep the church current in trends going on in the society. I take technology and multiply the outreach of our ministry in ways that I myself cannot see.

2 Kings 3:11-12 (NIV)

¹¹ But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there no prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD through him?" An officer of the king of Israel answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah."

¹² Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the LORD is with him." So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

3. What was the ability Elisha used that caused him to be noticed by the officer? Why is God able to use people who are willing to do very humble task?

Elisha washed the hands of Elijah. The officer saw a connection between the two prophets in this act of servanthood. He must have assumed that Elisha was becoming an apprentice of Elijah. People who are willing to do very humble tasks for others have often dealt with their issue of pride. Elisha had come from a wealthy family, but he gave it all up to be a servant of Elijah. Elisha had 12 pair of oxen when he was called by Elijah. Very few people had even one pair of oxen. (See 1 King 19:17-19). The kingdom God is often more visible in our humble acts, than it is during our mighty displays. How we behave when we lose something we should have won, may say more to others than having won in the first place.

4. Why do most people in the church want the pastors or paid staff to be responsible for doing the work of the ministry?

People will give all kinds of excuses 1) They're paid to do it, 2) I'm not qualified, 3) I don't have the time or 4) I don't want to do it wrong. Unfortunately, they simply do not want to be equip to do it because it takes time and it forces you to be accountable to others who observe you.

5. According to the verse below, what is the real job of pastors and teachers?

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The real job is to equip or to prepare people to actually minister in the name of Jesus. Every Christian is to be involved in some aspect of ministry. Pastors and teachers are to help them discover what that calling is, and how to minister within that calling. Some people are called to be coaches. Pastors and teachers are to help them understand, how does a coach minister in a coach's setting. Too often people will abandon areas they are gifted in to become pastors, when they could be much more effective right where they are.

6. According to the verses below, why did God save us?

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV) ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God called us to do some works that God had in mind from the beginning. No Christian is to simply come to church and observe. One comes to church to be empowered for the good works that God wants them to do. Unfortunately the good works may be in areas that we would rather overlook because they don't seem spiritual enough. Good works may be as simple as loving the people in your family to taking an interest in someone at a nursing home who does not have any visitors.

7. Can you serve God faithfully without getting angry because others did not do their part in a ministry function? Why or why not?

It's not always easy, but I have come to accept that not everyone serves at the same level of commitment. People's motives for serving differ greatly, and as a consequence, the quality of the job they do also differ.

Matthew 20:1-16 (NIV)

¹ "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard.

² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³

"About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' ⁵ So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing.

⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' ⁷

"'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' ⁸ "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

⁹ "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.

¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

¹³ "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?

¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

8. Would you have felt cheated if you had of been one of the first servants to show up for work? Why or Why not?

In all honesty, if I had not known this story was in the bible, I would have felt cheated. I would have thought, the landowner knew in the beginning that he was getting more work out of me than he should have by offering to pay me a denarius. I would have also assumed that he had negotiated the same deal with the later workers. I'm not so sure if in the beginning he had told me, I'll pay you

what is fair would have been acceptable to be as it was to the later workers. I would have wanted to know “what is fair” meant before I worked a whole day.

9. Why do you think the landowner handled this situation in the way that he did?

The landowner wanted to be a blessing to all those that he could. He knew that all the people needed to work that day in order to have food to eat that night. He also gave the ones who worked all day, the opportunity to confront him directly if they felt he had cheated them. If they had been paid first, and left, only to find out later, the others had received the same amount, they may have been even more angry and refused to work the next day.

10. When have you been envious of the generosity of God at work in the lives of other people? What do you think was the root cause of your feelings?

When I have seen some churches just grow by leaps and bounds while at the same time we seem to be growing at a snail's pace, I have become envious of the generosity of God. I want to say, “God haven't you seen all the hard work we have been doing as a church.” The root cause of my feelings are envy, jealousy, and unfair comparison.

11. Why is it important to value whatever talent that God has given to us?

God gave what God gave to us for a reason. We are going to be most effective and happiest when we are within God's plan for our lives. If I compare my talent to those whose talent is weaker in that area, I can become filled with pride. If I compare it to someone who is stronger in that area, I can become filled with envy or jealousy from continuously making the comparison. If I value what I have, I do not put undo pressure on myself to obtain results I may never achieve. Learning contentment with the talent I have, probably makes it easier for others to live with me.

12. Why is it important to try new ministries in the kingdom of God?

New ministries allow for the possibility of helping others to discover gifts and talents they did not know they had. It is very easy for us to develop a one way of

thinking mode and still think we are on the cutting edge of following the Spirit. We need to think outside of the box more often so that we can see new ways of presenting the gospel. Some new ministries will succeed and some will fail. But either way, we learn something about ourselves and our walk with the Lord.

13. What's a new ministry that you could try at New Life At Calvary in 2014?

I want to try new ways at being a more effective communicator.

**It's A New Year—Life-Sharing Lesson 3 What At You Becoming?
Matthew 16:24-26 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 (NIV)**

[5:16-17](#) So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.^{NIV} At one time, Paul had evaluated Jesus *from a worldly point of view*—in Greek, literally, "after the flesh," meaning "according to human standards." As an educated Jew, Paul was looking forward to the Messiah. But the Jews of his time were looking for a political Messiah, a powerful person who would free them from Roman rule. Instead, Jesus had died, even suffering the Romans' most cruel punishment: crucifixion. Because [Deuteronomy 21:23](#) says "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" ^{NIV}, the Jews considered dying on a cross a sign of God's disapproval. According to human standards, Jesus was an insignificant man who died like a criminal—not a person who deserved worship.

Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road radically changed his thinking ([Acts 9:1-15](#)). All of his learning and all of his training under the teachers of the law and the respected Gamaliel had not led him to the truth. The wisdom of the world had not pointed him to the Savior of the world (see [1 Corinthians 2:1-16](#) for Paul's explanation of why God circumvented human wisdom in his plan of salvation).

Only this personal encounter with Jesus convinced Paul that he needed to reevaluate his own life in light of what Jesus had accomplished on the cross. Jesus had given up his life for others—not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles (see [Acts 10:34-44](#) for Peter's discovery of this). As a Pharisee, Paul had strictly followed Jewish law and its traditions, which limited contact with unbelieving Gentiles (see [Acts 10:12-16](#), [28-29](#) for Peter's reaction to entering a Gentiles' house). In light of Christ's work, however, Paul abandoned those scruples and began calling Gentiles to faith in Jesus Christ ([Romans 11:13](#); [15:16](#)). He regarded everyone—both Jew and Gentile—as completely unworthy sinners before God ([Romans 3:9](#)). Anyone who acknowledged this fact, repented, and believed in Jesus as their Lord and Savior would enter the Christian community, whether Jew or Gentile ([Ephesians 3:6](#)). Paul no longer was looking on the outward appearances—whether a person was from a certain ethnic or racial origin. Instead, he evaluated people through Christ's perspective.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!^{NLT} Christians are brand-new people. The Holy Spirit gives them new life, and they are not the same anymore. Christians are not reformed, rehabilitated, or reeducated—they are recreated (*a new creation*), living in vital union with Christ ([Colossians 2:6-7](#)). At conversion, believers are not merely turning over a new leaf; they are beginning a new life under a new Master.

In addition to recreating individual Christians, Jesus is incorporating them into an entirely new order. This new creation that Christ has begun constructing through his work on the cross includes the community of faith and all of creation (see [Romans 8:20-21](#); [Ephesians 1:9-10](#)). This recreation of all the earth was something the prophet Isaiah had predicted (see [Isaiah 65:17](#)). An important aspect of this completely new creation is how people are reconciled to their Creator and even to other people. The distinction between Jew and Gentile is abolished. In its place is the new creation (see [Galatians 6:15](#)). *Everything old has passed away*. The old order of sin and death has gone; the selfish, sinful human nature has been dealt a death blow (see [Galatians 5:16-21](#), [24](#)). Old ways of thinking, old distinctions, have been abolished for those who are *in Christ*. In its place, the new has come. To draw attention to the coming of this new order, Paul announced it with the word "see."

LIFE APPLICATION

NEW LIFE

Paul proclaimed a whole new creation in Christ. Too often this verse has been individualized so that the main point is blurred. Many preach, "If anyone is in Christ, *that person* is a new creation." While this is true, Paul is saying much more. Not only are believers changed from within (mysterious new creations in Christ), but a whole new order of creative energy began with Christ. There is a new covenant, a new perspective, a new body, a new church. All of creation is being renewed.

So sit up. Take notice. The old, worn-out ways are being replaced with *new*. This is not a superficial change that will be quickly superseded by another novelty. This is an entirely *new* order of all creation under Christ's authority. It requires a new way of looking at all people and all of creation. Does your life reflect this new perspective?

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Corinthians.

[16:24](#) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."^{NKJV} These words applied to the disciples and to all who would *come after* Jesus—that is, become a disciple and enter his fellowship. Recognizing and confessing belief in Jesus as the Messiah is only the beginning of discipleship. Jesus invites every person to follow, but those who desire to follow him must have three attitudes: (1) a willingness to *deny* themselves, (2) a willingness to *take up* the cross, and (3) a willingness to *follow*.

To deny oneself means to surrender immediate material gratification in order to discover and secure one's true self and God's interests. It is a willingness to let go of selfish desires and earthly security. This attitude turns self-centeredness to God-centeredness. "Self" is no longer in charge; God is. Too often this has been interpreted to mean that we should have no self-esteem. Some discipleship or "deeper life" strategies have advocated stripping ourselves of all dignity or anything that contributes to a sense of self-worth. Jesus' view of denial was immediate and practical. It had to do with the disciples' careers—their future.

To take up the cross was a vivid illustration of the humility and submission that Jesus was asking of his followers. When Jesus used this example of his followers taking up their crosses to follow him, the disciples got the picture. Death on a cross was a form of execution used by Rome for what they considered dangerous criminals. A prisoner carried his own cross to the place of execution, signifying submission to Rome's power. Following Jesus, therefore, meant identifying with Jesus and his followers, facing social and political oppression and ostracism, and no turning back. For some, taking up the cross might indeed mean death. But Jesus' words meant that his followers had to be prepared to obey God's Word and to follow his will no matter what the consequences. We must count the cost and be prepared to pay it. Soon after this, Jesus would take up his own cross. Jesus was speaking prophetically here as well. To *follow* Christ is also a moment-by-moment decision, requiring compassion and service. Following Jesus doesn't mean walking behind him, but taking the same road of sacrifice and service that he took.

LIFE APPLICATION

LOYALTY

Jesus asked for something unique and rare when he suggested that his disciples be loyal to him.

What receives our loyalty today? Sports teams . . . as long as they're winning. Career . . . as long as we're advancing. Marriage . . . as long as one's spouse remains attractive. Basically, the self alone seems to deserve the loyalty of the self. It's each person looking out for number one.

In Christian faith, however, Jesus must be number one, and we must give him our loyalty. Stick with him despite the swift current you're swimming through. Never think that switching loyalties will reckon to your personal advantage. Remain loyal to Jesus and follow him all the way to heaven.

16:25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."^{NKJV} The Christian life is a paradox: To attempt to save your life means only to *lose* it. The Greek word for "life" is *psuche*, referring to the soul, the

part of the person that includes the personality with all its dreams, hopes, and goals. A person who "saves" his or her life in order to satisfy desires and goals apart from God ultimately "loses" life. Not only does that person not receive the eternal life offered only to those who believe and accept Christ as Savior, but he or she loses the fullness of life promised to those who believe.

By contrast, those who willingly "lose" their lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel (that is, God's kingdom) actually "save" their lives. To lose one's life for Christ refers to a person refusing to renounce Christ, even if the punishment were death. To lose one's life for the gospel implies that the person would be on trial for preaching and circulating the Christian message.

To be willing to put personal desires and life itself into God's hands means to understand that nothing that we can gain on our own in our earthly lives can compare to what we gain with Christ. Jesus wants us to choose to follow him rather than to lead a life of sin and self-satisfaction. He wants us to stop trying to control our own destiny and to let him direct us. This makes good sense because, as the Creator, Christ knows better than we do what real life is about. He asks for submission, not self-hatred; he asks us only to lose our self-centered determination to be in charge.

The possibility of losing their lives was very real for the disciples as well as for Jesus. Real discipleship implies real commitment—pledging our whole existence to his service. If we try to save our physical lives from death, pain, or discomfort, we may risk losing our true eternal lives. If we protect ourselves from pain, we begin to die spiritually and emotionally. Our lives turn inward, and we lose our intended purpose. When we give our lives in service to Christ, however, we discover the real purpose of living.

16:26 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"^{NKJV} To reinforce his words in [16:25](#), Jesus asked his listeners a rhetorical question. What good would it be for a person to gain *the whole world* (that is, to have power or financial control over the entire world system of which Satan is the head), but lose his or her soul (that is, to lose eternal life with God)? Every person will die, even those most powerful or most wealthy. If they have not taken care to "save" their lives for eternity with God, then they gain nothing and lose everything.

Jesus had faced this exact temptation in the wilderness: "The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."'" ([4:8-10](#) NIV). Many people spend all their energy seeking pleasure. Jesus said, however, that a world of pleasure centered on possessions, position, or power is ultimately worthless. Whatever a person has on earth is only temporary; it cannot be exchanged for his or her soul. If you work hard at getting what you want, you might eventually have a "pleasurable" life, but in the end you will find it hollow and empty. The answer to the question, then, is that nothing is of enough value that it can be

exchanged for one's soul. Even if a person were to gain the world, that person would lose his or her soul—and the soul counts for eternity. No amount of money, power, or status can buy back a lost soul. Believers must be willing to make the pursuit of God more important than the selfish pursuit of pleasure. If we follow Jesus, we will know what it means to live abundantly now and to have eternal life as well.

LIFE APPLICATION

ETERNITY'S VALUES

When we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life were all we have. In reality, this life is just the introduction to eternity. What we accumulate on earth has no value in purchasing eternal life. Yet how willing we are to sell our eternal values short for earthly security. How foolish to seek worldly comfort and wealth and ignore the issue of our soul's eternal salvation. How important would a lifetime of pleasure seem when compared to an eternity separated from God and all the blessings of life with him? Even the highest social or civic honors cannot earn us entrance into heaven. Evaluate all that happens from an eternal perspective, and you will find your values and decisions changing.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

It's A New Year—Life-Sharing Lesson 3 What At You Becoming? Matthew 16:24-26 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 (NIV)

1. What's one thing you would like to see different about yourself in 2014?

I would like to be a more effective evangelist.

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2. What do you think it means to regard someone from a worldly point of view?

I think it means to base who a person is on what it is they have accomplished, accumulated or achieved, without considering their condition in regards to Christ. I think it can also mean looking at a person on the basis of what the person can do for me, or what I can get out of the person, instead of looking at the person from God's perspective of love for that person.

3. What is the worldly point of view of Jesus?

The worldly view is that Jesus was a good religious teacher. He did his best to teach people to get along with each other by living by the golden rule. His followers could not accept his death, so they made up a lot of stories about him doing miracles and claiming him to be the son of God.

4. What does it mean for a person to be in Christ?

To be in Christ, means to make a conscious decision to leave behind controlling your life and turning over your to Christ, in such a way, that God's will for your life on a daily basis according to the Scriptures becomes your will. You don't stumble into being a Christian. You choose to become one. You make the choice day in and day out. You recognize when you're walking outside Christ, because the Spirit tells you. . Recognizing and confessing belief in Jesus as the Messiah is only the beginning of discipleship. Jesus invites every person to follow, but those who desire to follow him must have three attitudes: (1) a willingness to deny themselves, (2) a willingness to take up the cross, and (3) a willingness to follow.

5. What's the difference between being in Christ and being in Church?

If we define the church as being the body of Christ, then to be in Christ means to be in the church. This is very contrary to the people who believe they can be fully in Christ, but not a part of the body of believers who come together in the gathering of the Church. However, most of the time we define church as being a particular group of people in a particular location such as New Life At Calvary. In that definition, a person does not have to be born again to be in the Church. A person can live a lifestyle totally contrary to the Scriptures and still be in the church as long as the person's behavior is within an acceptable parameter.

Instead of being in the body of Christ, the person is merely in a religious club or association.

6. What is the new creation, Paul is speaking of in this verse?

The new creation is more than simply turning over a new leaf. The new creation is a willingness to be destroyed, and then created into something new that continues to grow and to change. A person becomes something altogether different than what he she once was, and there is a transformation that takes place from the inside out because of the work of the Spirit. Everything about us becomes infected with the Holy Spirit. It's as though we receive our life blood from an entirely different source than we had before. In the new creation, there is a battle that takes place on the inside that did not always take place before as we refuse to give in to the temptations that are around us.

7. If we are a new creation, why do we continue to struggle with sin and temptation?

In the new creation, we are made fully aware of just how sinful we are and that its not just that we have done bad things, we have a nature in which doing bad things is the natural thing to do. The new creation is created by God, but to put the old nature to death is an assignment that we are called to do, to show that we truly love God. God does not make us spiritual robots by giving us the new nature. God gives us the new nature to empower us to resist temptation and to overcome it. We often forget that Jesus had to endure temptation and struggle as we do and Jesus had the very nature of God within Him.

Most believers simply want God to take away all temptation to guarantee that they will not fall. Some will even compromise with sin under the guise of the deception "God would not have given me these desires if God did not expect me to use them. We find in Hebrews 12:1-4 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

8. Why does it seem so much of the old continues to be a part of our lives?

One of the reasons is that we do not always want to make a clean break with our past. We continue to hold on to little gods that control us, instead of fully surrendering everything to Christ. We forget the words of Joshua to the Israelites. Joshua 24:14-15 (NIV) ¹⁴ "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

9. What kind of a strategy does a Christian need to overcome the old nature?

A Christian needs to be realistic about what temptations he or she needs to avoid at all costs and put up certain barriers in his or her life to protect him/herself. There are some places, some people, some programs, some music, some pleasures, some memories and some ideas that need to be avoided at all costs. The second part of the strategy has to include some positive things to become a part of that will replace those negative influences. You must actively seek to allow God to change your routine and your schedule. Get involved in ministry activities. Join a positive team.

10. How can we know when the new has come?

We know the new has come, when our lifestyle becomes different, and there is a change in our attitude about the way we perceive life. This world is no longer seen as our permanent place of living, and we make changes accordingly.

Matthew 16:24-26 (NIV)

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

11. When Jesus says "deny himself" what does he mean?

One's own personal happiness is not the primary goal of a person's life. It means saying no to what you want to do, when you want to do it, with whom you want to do it, if doing it is not in God's plan for your life. To deny oneself means to surrender immediate material gratification in order to discover and secure one's true self and God's interests. It is a willingness to let go of selfish desires and earthly security. This attitude turns self-centeredness to God-centeredness. "Self" is no longer in charge; God is

12. What does it mean to "take up his cross and follow me."?

It means, this thing is not going to be easy. There is going to be an element of pain, suffering, and even death. To take up the cross was a vivid illustration of the humility and submission that Jesus was asking of his followers. When Jesus used this example of his followers taking up their crosses to follow him, the disciples got the picture. Death on a cross was a form of execution used by Rome for what they considered dangerous criminals. A prisoner carried his own cross to the place of execution, signifying submission to Rome's power. Following Jesus, therefore, meant identifying with Jesus and his followers, facing social and political oppression and ostracism, and no turning back. For some, taking up the cross might indeed mean death. But Jesus' words meant that his followers had to be prepared to obey God's Word and to follow his will no matter what the consequences. We must count the cost and be prepared to pay it.

13. How do we go about trying to save our lives for ourselves? Where are you most guilty in your life in this area?

We try to save our lives by holding on to some dreams we have for ourselves, whether those dreams are from God or not. We stop trusting God fully with our future. I am most guilty of this in the area of work.

14. What new thing does God want to work in your life in 2014, that you have been resisting?

Full Trust that God is at work without me seeing it and even without needing me to do it.

15. How often do we have to choose to follow Christ?

Daily