

Commentary

4:17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.^{NIV} Believers are to be maturing in their faith and using their gifts to benefit the church ([4:11-16](#)); therefore, they have a privilege as well as a responsibility. Paul could not stress too much the significant responsibility given to believers as they live in a sinful world. So, he wrote, *I tell you . . . and insist*. The words "in the Lord" provide the basis for the authority of what Paul was about to write.

The believers in Ephesus *must no longer live as the Gentiles do*. Many of the believers to whom Paul was writing were Gentiles by racial background. Because Paul was writing to many Gentiles, why did he say not to live "as the Gentiles do"? Paul was stressing that the Ephesian believers must abandon what had been their former way of life, not living any longer as the other Gentiles around them who were pagans, not Christians (see [1 Corinthians 12:2](#)). How did the Gentiles live? *In the futility of their thinking*, referring to the natural tendency of human beings to employ intellectual pride, rationalizations, and excuses ([Romans 1:21](#)). Their thinking was "futile" because their lives were being wasted on worthless objects (idols), untrue teachings, and immoral behavior. The results of this futile way of thinking are described in the following verses.

4:18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.^{NIV} This describes the unfortunate state of the unbelievers surrounding this core of believers in the church. The believers could no longer live as they previously did, for their prior lifestyle had been completely opposite of what they were presently experiencing. The unbelievers *are darkened in their understanding*, while the believers have found the light of Christ and are given his wisdom. The unbelievers are *separated from the life of God*, while the believers have been made one with him through Christ. The unbelievers are in *ignorance*, while the believers have access to the full knowledge of the truth. The unbelievers have refused to believe after *hardening . . . their hearts*, while the believers have welcomed Christ into their hearts. A fully hardened person is unable to respond to God (see [Exodus 11:10](#); [Mark 8:17-18](#); [Romans 11:8](#); [Hebrews 3:7-8](#)).

LIFE APPLICATION

TURN ON THE LIGHTS

Having described mature believers in [4:13-16](#), Paul followed with a brief description of nonbelievers. The first characteristics are "futility of their thinking" and "darkened

in their understanding." They have "darkened minds." Have you ever tried to share your faith in Christ with nonbelieving friends, even very intelligent ones, and they have looked at you as though you were from Mars? Your friends aren't stupid; they have darkened, unregenerate minds. Of course, you should continue to give them a reasoned defense of your faith if they're interested, but the struggle is not really a matter of explanation. It's more a need for "illumination"—for God to "turn the lights on." Continue to be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you ([1 Peter 3:15](#)), but even more urgently, pray that God will lift the darkness.

The next characteristic of nonbelievers is that they have "hardened hearts." The problem is not only intellectual; it is *willful*, too. That's why it's almost impossible to argue someone into the kingdom of heaven. People don't often reject Christ on intellectual grounds; they reject him (or ignore him) because they don't want to surrender their wills to his. If you are presenting Christ and you receive an objection to every statement or truth claim, step back and ask: Is this really an intellectual problem? Or is it just that this person does not want to submit to Christ? If it's truly intellectual, try to answer the objection. If it's more willful, recognize that and deal with it on the heart level. Pray that God will turn on the lights and illumine the darkened, hardened heart.

[4:19](#) Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.^{NIV} These unbelievers have *lost all sensitivity*, or have no feeling about their degenerate condition. Such people are beyond feeling either shame for their evil or hope for anything better concerning their condition before God.

The logical next step for people who have lost all conscience is that they *have given themselves over to sensuality* (lewd behavior, lowest morals possible), *indulge in every kind of impurity* (they work toward moral decadence as if it were their occupation), and *lust for more* (also translated "greediness," extreme selfishness without regard for others).

While these terms seem strong, we must understand the culture that surrounded the believers in and around Ephesus. The temple to the goddess Artemis (the Roman name was Diana) stood in Ephesus. (See the Introduction under "[Audience](#)" for more on this temple.) Artemis was the goddess of fertility in women, animals, and nature. On occasion, human sacrifices were given to Artemis. She was believed to be a moon goddess who helped women in childbirth. She is portrayed as the many-breasted earth mother. Her temple had a hierarchy of religious personnel, including eunuch priests, young virgins, and prostitute priestesses. One month every year was devoted to ceremonies honoring Artemis. A carnival atmosphere that included concerts, feasts, athletic games, and plays created opportunities for immorality, drunkenness, and sensuality. To the Jews, worship at the temple of Artemis was extremely corrupt. Christians, as well, were not to take part in its practices.

LIFE APPLICATION

IN THE DARK

How had these Gentiles gone wrong? Their hearts and minds were rebellious against God. After darkened minds and darkened hearts comes . . . *darkened behavior*. Of course, what else would unregenerate hearts and minds generate? Like our own world, the Roman culture that formed the backdrop to Paul's writings had accomplished much and yet was in a moral free fall. Sexual immorality was rampant, including homosexuality; graft in political offices was the norm; violence and cruelty were commonplace; the arts featured lewdness and suggested sexual excess. And into the face of this howling moral wasteland, Paul wrote,

Darkened minds + darkened hearts = darkened behavior

Sin has a narcotic effect on persons and cultures. It feels good and is fun for a while, but then it begins to break us down and deaden us to what is good, right, and true. As you deal with moral and ethical darkness, remember that that kind of behavior is merely consistent with darkened, deadened hearts and minds. Lovingly shine the light of God's love and truth on those behaviors, and pray for God to bring about change. Start with yourself. Don't let the culture define your moral standards. Help to keep the church a citadel of proper moral conduct. Make your family a place where you teach and uphold high moral standards.

4:20 **But that isn't what you were taught when you learned about Christ.**^{NLT} In great contrast to the unbelieving Gentiles (referred to as "they" in the previous verses) stands the word "you" in this verse. The Ephesian believers had been *taught* and had *learned about Christ* from Paul himself as well as from other teachers. To know Christ is the greatest knowledge that anyone can have.

That knowledge is the truth; that knowledge opposes what the evil world teaches and applauds. Therefore, what the Ephesians and the other believers were taught should make all the difference in their lifestyles.

"To know" is not a mere exercise of the head. Nothing is "known" until it has also passed over into obedience.

J. A. Motyer

LIFE APPLICATION

NEW AND IMPROVED

In direct contrast to the preceding description of the unregenerate person, Paul next

described the new life of the believer. He wrote of:

- our *new minds*: "But that isn't what you were taught when you learned about Christ. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught . . . to be renewed in the spirit of your minds."
- our *new hearts*: "[You were taught] to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires."
- our *new behavior*: "Clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

From darkened minds, hearts, and behavior, to new ones—this is the stark contrast from the old self to the new. Does your life reflect this contrast, the marks of the new life of the believer? Are there evidences of it in your thinking, desires, will, and behavior?

4:21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.^{NIV} The phrase translated *heard of him* is literally "heard him," referring to the individual's hearing the call to salvation and responding. This only happened because they had been *taught in him* by those who shared the gospel *in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus*. Jesus is the truth ([John 14:6](#)). Paul rarely used the name "Jesus" and generally did so when referring to the death and resurrection of the man Jesus. Here it may not indicate any theological distinction but may merely be a stylistic change. This is the truth that the Ephesians heard and believed. This is the truth that brings salvation.

4:22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.^{NIV} While unbelievers live in darkness and sensuality, believers *were taught* in Christ a whole new manner of living, which must leave behind the *former way of life*. Paul explained that believers must decisively *put off* the *old self*. The "old self" (literally, "old man," also translated "old nature") describes each person before he or she comes to know Christ. The person was enslaved to sin, bound to the world, and without hope. Those who have accepted Christ are still susceptible to temptations and the evils of the sinful nature. Paul does not distinguish between two parts or two natures within a person. The old self describes those areas of rebellion against God. We must forsake this former lifestyle. Like old clothes, we must shed our identification with our sinful past and live as new people. To "put off" that old self will take conscious, daily decisions to remove anything that supports or feeds the old self's desires.

The person's old self *is being corrupted by its deceitful desires* (which Paul described in [4:17-19](#) above). The verb form "is being corrupted" reveals a continuous process that ends in complete degeneration and death. Like a cancer, the evil nature of the old self spreads and destroys. Christ came to offer each person a new self ([4:23-24](#)), but he or she must desire Christ's help to "put off" the old self. As a person takes off an old, dirty garment in exchange for something clean and new, so the believer can take off the old, filthy "self" and exchange it for

the clean and pure "self" provided by Christ. The verb "put off" is in the aorist tense, so it describes a definite act.

This "putting off" is a once-and-for-all decision when we decide to accept Christ's gift of salvation ([2:8-10](#)). Although this putting off of the old takes place at conversion, we must drive out the remaining parts of it day by day. See also [Romans 6:6](#); [Colossians 3:5-10](#); and [James 1:21](#).

Repentance is primarily a change of moral purpose, a sudden and often violent reversal of the soul's direction.

A. W. Tozer

[4:23-24](#) And to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.^{NRSV}

We cannot "put off" without also "putting on." Believers must "put off the old self" ([4:22](#)), but then they should follow with two specific actions: (1) *to be renewed in the spirit of your minds*, and (2) *to clothe yourselves with the new self*.

The verb "to clothe" (like the verb "to put off" in [4:22](#)) refers to a once-and-for-all action. When believers put off the old self and clothe themselves with the new self, they don't keep on changing back into old clothes once in a while. The old clothes have been thrown away. While we are still on this earth, we will struggle with our old way of life. Paul understood this struggle clearly (see [Romans 7:14-25](#)). In explaining these concepts, some people have wrongly given the idea that there are two selves or two equal-but-opposite poles in our life (old and new) warring against each other. This is not how the New Testament used these words. Christ sees his people as redeemed. The other verb, "to be renewed," describes a continuous activity. The "self" has been exchanged, but the process of renewal, of becoming like Christ, is a continual daily process. Transformation begins in the mind and results in renewed behavior.

How are believers "to be renewed in the spirit of [their] minds"? They must:

- be involved in activities that renew their minds ([Philippians 4:8-9](#));
- desire to pattern themselves after God, not the world ([Romans 12:2](#));
- study and apply God's Word so that it changes their behavior from within ([2 Timothy 3:15-16](#)).

As just noted, the tense of the verb indicates a daily act. The "spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit controlling the believers' minds, or it may refer to the spiritual side of each person's mind-set, which is where renewal must begin ([Romans 12:2](#); [Colossians 3:10](#)). Most likely, the meaning may be a combination of both, for the human spirit can only be renewed by the divine Spirit. (See also [2 Corinthians 5:17](#); [Galatians 6:15](#); [Colossians 3:10](#); [Titus 3:5](#).)

This *new self* with which believers are *to clothe* themselves is a new creation, *created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*. This new self

However holy or Christlike a Christian may become, he is still in the condition of "being changed."

John R. W. Stott

(literally, "new man") is the new relationship we have with Christ that gives us a new orientation to life. The new self is *according to the likeness of God* with the characteristics of *true righteousness and holiness*. We have a right relationship with God that results in right behavior, creates an aversion to sin, and prompts us to devote ourselves to his service. These qualities are "true," meaning they cannot be faked. This is totally opposite of the old way of living characterized by sin and corruption. Finally, the new self refers not to a split in one's personality; instead, it pictures the new direction, attitude, and mind-set away from self and toward God and his will.

4:25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.^{NRSV} The general character of the new self will lead to specific ways of acting. Because believers in the church exhibit "true righteousness and holiness" ([4:24](#)), they must put away *falsehood*. This may refer to various forms of falsehood—anything that pertains to the old lifestyle and is not part of Christ's truth. Like putting off the old self and replacing it with the new self, so believers put off falsehood and put on the willingness to *speak the truth*. This is a quote from [Zechariah 8:16](#). This reference in the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament) says speak the truth "to" (pros), while Paul said speak the truth "with" (meta). The change in focus lies in the following clause: *for we are members of one another*. Paul stressed our mutual responsibility. Because we are members of one another in Christ's body, our words and actions must not be destructive to the body. Lying to each other disrupts unity by creating conflicts and destroying trust. It tears down relationships and leads to open warfare in a church. Truthfulness, however, opens the door to understanding. To maintain unity, the believers must be completely truthful with one another.

4:26-27 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.^{NIV} Another characteristic of the old self that has to be put off is bad temper, or a lifestyle characterized by anger. The words "in your anger do not sin" are quoted from [Psalm 4:4](#). The Bible doesn't tell us that we shouldn't feel angry, but it points out that it is important to handle our anger properly. We must not indulge our angry feelings or let them lead to pride, hatred, or self-righteousness. Jesus Christ became angry at the merchants in the temple, but this was righteous anger and did not lead him to sin. Believers must follow Jesus' example. We ought to reserve our anger for when we see God dishonored or people wronged. If we get angry, we must do so without sinning. To do this, we should deal with our anger before the sun goes down. According to Deuteronomy, sunset was the time by which wrongs against God and against others should be made right ([Deuteronomy 24:13, 15](#)). Anger that is allowed to smolder and burn over time can eventually burst into flame and *give the devil a foothold*, causing people to sin as they become bitter and resentful. We should resist the devil ([James 4:7](#)). Satan can use our anger against one another to destroy our unity and our love. It is so much better to deal with the situation immediately; perhaps the previous admonition to lovingly speak the truth can solve the problem.

LIFE APPLICATION

DON'T GET BURNED!

If vented thoughtlessly, anger can hurt others and destroy relationships. If kept inside, it can cause us to become bitter and destroy us from within. Paul tells us to deal with our anger immediately in a way that builds relationships rather than destroys them. If we nurse our anger, we will give Satan an opportunity to divide us. Anger must be dealt with as quickly as possible. Used correctly, anger can motivate us to right a wrong, redress a grievance, correct an injustice. Used improperly, it can burn us and everyone else around us. Are you angry with someone right now? What can you do to resolve your differences? Don't let the day end before you begin working on mending your relationship.

4:28 **If you are a thief, stop stealing. Begin using your hands for honest work, and then give generously to others in need.**^{NLT} In most cases, a reference to stealing or to *a thief* in the New Testament concerns a bandit or a person who engages in stealing as a livelihood. Paul explained that such a person who became a believer had to "put off" that old lifestyle and make a change, turning to *honest work* in order to make a living. Stealing and idleness go together; thus, Paul's charge was not only to stop stealing but also to begin honest work. In addition, slaves were often prone to stealing from the households they served; many slaves became Christians, and Paul may have been speaking to them. All believers should work hard, do their part in the community, hold their own, and not expect anyone else to support them.

Even then, the Christian's goal for his or her labor differs from the world's. We work not to enrich ourselves, but so that we can *give generously to others in need*. Giving is at the heart of Christianity. We hold lightly to our possessions because we have our treasure in heaven ([Matthew 6:19-21](#); [Romans 12:13](#); [2 Corinthians 8-9](#)).

4:29 **Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**^{NIV} Believers must also be careful about what they say. As part of Christ's body, filled with his righteousness and holiness, they must *not let any unwholesome talk come out* of their mouths. "Unwholesome" means corrupt, insipid, worthless (such as gossip and slander), and it includes foul talk (such as coarse language). Such speech is worthless, spreads worthlessness, and leads hearers to think about worthless matters. Not only should our speech be kept clean and truthful, but we should also speak *only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs*. We must be sensitive to the situation and the needs of anyone with whom we converse, and we must be wise in choosing our words, for even good words, unless used appropriately, can be destructive instead of useful. We should not speak vaguely in words that could fit a thousand

different occasions. Rather, our words should be genuine and specifically suited to the present person, time, and place. Our speech should edify, not tear down. Unless we help the other person, our words will be meaningless. What we say can *benefit those who listen*. God can work through our words to help others and bring his grace to them.

LIFE APPLICATION

CROSS WORDS

Words count. The words we say to one another can be a powerful force for good, for building each other up. Conversely, they can be just as powerfully destructive, tearing us down. Think back to when you were young: What kinds of words do you remember the significant adults in your life using toward you? Were they positive, encouraging words that built you up and made you feel valuable and worthwhile? Or did you hear more terms like "loser," "worthless," "stupid"? The memories either bring smiles or cause pain. Your words have the same effect on those around you, especially on children and young people. Take a mental inventory of your speech. Do your words build up or tear down? With God's help, commit to being the kind of person whose words encourage and edify others.

4:30 **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**^{NKJV} That the Spirit can be saddened or grieved points to the personality of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person who can be saddened by the way we live. Paul has already explained that the Holy Spirit's power within gives new life to believers. While we continue to battle with our sinful nature, we should be living for Christ each day.

To refuse to do so, to constantly give in to lying, anger, stealing, and foul talk is to *grieve the Holy Spirit of God*. "Grieving" is different from "stifling" the Holy Spirit ([1 Thessalonians 5:19](#)), which has to do with stifling prophecy. Paul's reference

How would you like to live with somebody who was everlastingly grieving your heart by his conduct?
G. Campbell Morgan

to the Holy Spirit brings to mind [Isaiah 63:10](#) and reminds believers that the Holy Spirit binds them together in the body. When believers quarrel and hurt one another, they distress the Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit controls and guides speech, praise, prophecy, and tongues, we offend him when we use them improperly. (See also [Acts 7:51](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:8](#).)

Paul reminded the readers that the Holy Spirit within them gives both a privilege and a responsibility. Their responsibility is to not disappoint him by the way they live; their privilege is their promised future, for through the presence of the Spirit, they *were sealed for the day of redemption*. The seal of the Holy Spirit upon a believer marks that believer as God's property

until the day he or she is completely redeemed. It connotes the protected status of the believer. (For more on this sealing, see commentary on [1:13-14](#).)

LIFE APPLICATION

THE HURT

Paul gives us a surprising reason for choosing the right over the wrong: so that we don't grieve the Holy Spirit—not just so that we don't hurt one another, but also so that we do not sadden God the Spirit. What a powerful incentive to do what is right and avoid what is evil! What a privilege and responsibility to know that our actions have that kind of effect on God. How do your words, thoughts, and behavior impact him?

[4:31](#) Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.^{NIV} The sins listed in this verse picture the former way of life, the old self ([4:22](#)). None of these attitudes and activities have any place in the believers' Holy Spirit-filled life; indeed, they foster dissension today and are the opposite of how believers should be characterized (see [4:32](#)). In their lives and in their churches, the believers must *get rid of*:

- *Bitterness*—a spirit that refuses reconciliation.
- *Rage*—outbursts of anger or quick temper for selfish reasons. This could mean continual and uncontrolled behavior.
- *Anger*—a continuous attitude of hatred that remains bottled up within. This could refer to what is under the surface, while "rage" refers to what bursts out. Anger would destroy harmony and unity among believers.
- *Brawling*—loud self-assertions of angry people determined to make their grievances known.
- *Slander*—destroying another person's good reputation by lying, gossiping, spreading rumors, etc. Malice often manifests itself through slander. This defamation of character destroys human relationships.
- *Malice*—doing evil despite the good that has been received. This word is a general term referring to an evil force that destroys relationships, and it can mean anything from trouble to wickedness. It is a deliberate attempt to harm another person. Thus, *every form of malice* must be destroyed.

[4:32](#) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.^{NKJV} The previous way of life must be put off ([4:31](#)) and the new life put on. Believers ought to *be kind to one another*. Kindness means acting charitably and benevolently toward others, as God has done toward us. Kindness takes the initiative in

responding generously to others' needs. The Psalms and writings of the prophets say much about God's kindness. Because believers have received kindness, we ought to act with kindness toward others.

The word for *tenderhearted* is also translated "compassionate." Compassion is genuine sensitivity and heartfelt sympathy for the needs of others. Compassion characterizes God.

Believers must also be constantly *forgiving one another*. In what way? *Even as God in Christ forgave you*. Though Christ has bridged the gap between us and God so that we are forgiven once and for all, we only experience God's forgiveness in personal, practical ways as we learn to forgive others from day to day. None of us has experienced as great a wrong against ourselves as that which we have all done to God ([Matthew 18:33](#)). God had to give up his only Son to forgive us; we have nothing to give up but our selfish natures and our unwillingness to forgive those who have wronged us. Christ taught this law of forgiveness ([Matthew 6:14-15](#); [18:35](#); [Mark 11:25](#)). We also see it in the Lord's Prayer—"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" ([Matthew 6:12](#) NKJV). God does not forgive us *because* we forgive others, but solely because of his great mercy. As we come to understand his mercy, however, we will want to be like him. Having received forgiveness, we will pass it on to others. Those who are unwilling to forgive have not patterned their lives after Christ, who was willing to forgive even those who crucified him ([Luke 23:34](#)).

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

1. What do you think it means to help somebody grow spiritually in the Lord?

I think it means to help a person change their way of thinking to conform it more to the mind and purposes of Christ. If we only change our behavior, without changing our thinking, we won't see the necessity for the change in behavior. We will slowly return to what we use to do. Our goal is to move forward.

Ephesians 4:17-18 (NIV)

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

2. What do you think it means to have a darkened understanding?

A darkened understanding is to look at the world or situation as though God does not exist. We think God is not involved and will not hold us accountable for the choices we make.

3. What's the process for hardening a heart, and how does a hardened heart keep us from growing.

One of the ways to harden our hearts is to say yes to sin, and no to the convicting power of God. It is clear what the word of God says, or that God has spoken to us, but we refuse to yield to God's Will. We find in Hebrews Hebrews 3:12-15 (NIV)

¹² See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. ¹⁵ As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

A hardened heart keeps us from being changing even when it is in our best interest to do so. We find ourselves rejecting the Spirit's influence in our lives.

¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. ²⁰ You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:19-24

4. We are told to put off our old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. How does the old self, deceive us and keep us from accepting others.

The old self causes us to only accept those who we think can offer us something to help us move ahead in life. We may think our special treatment of some is not necessarily a rejection of others, but it is. James dealt with this problem of favoring the rich over the poor. James 2:1-4 (NIV) ¹ My brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

5. What are the standards by which we measure others, which come to us from the world and not from Christ?

We measure people by their wealth, their education, their attractiveness, their nationality, their race, their sex and how much they look and act like us. In the Back To Church video, how many of us assumed that the guy with the earrings and the tattoos all over the place was the Christian who needed to share his faith with the plain clothes "normal looking" guy.

6. What are the things that influence our minds, and in return influence our walk in Christ?

We are influenced by culture around us through the programs we watch, the music we listen to, the books or magazines we read, the time we spend on social media, the shows we listen to, and the people we talk to. We are influenced by the people we hang with and the teachings from others. We are influenced by those we love and desire to have a relationship with. We are influenced by the teachers and preachers we listen to and by whether or not we actually study or read the bible. Staying away from the bible influences our walk in Christ just as getting into it does.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Ephesians 4:25-28

7. How do we practice falsehood in our walk with each other in the church? How important is honesty in our relationships with each other?

We practice falsehood by pretending we are walking deeper with God than we really are. We practice falsehood by pretending we are living up to our responsibilities as members, when we in fact know that we are not. We practice falsehood by being two faced in our relationships with others. What we say all depends on who we are with at the time. Falsehood is usually exposed and it leads to hurt and distrust. Honesty makes it possible for there to be genuine sharing and acceptance of other people. People are turned off when people are acting religious and fake. Honesty allows us to deal with the mistakes we make. It also allows us to come to our aid and help us out in our times of need.

8. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would others rate you on your ability to hold on to a grudge? What causes us to hold onto grudges?

It's funny how with the exception of one person, I could easily have chosen a 3 or 4 meaning I let go of things very easily. But if this one person is a stumbling block, then I guess it means I really am an 8 or so in God's eyes. We hold on to grudges to justify our own actions in a situation. We'd rather blame the other person, than to look at the darkness in our own hearts or the role we may have played in the situation.

9. How do grudges keep us from helping others to grow in Christ?

1) Grudges can cause us to think the person we are holding the grudge against are outside of the grace of God and therefore not worth our attention. 2) Grudges can give us a false sense of superiority over others, which they pick upon and make them not open to what we are saying. 3) Grudges stop our own growth process in Christ, and we cannot lead others further along than we have gone ourselves.

10. Do you think its stealing from the church, when you receive the benefits of the church, but do not give to the church even when you are able to do so, but make choices to spend your money on other things.

There is a principle in the bible that basically says that we should do our part or we ought not to get the benefits that others get. We find in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (NIV) ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." There is a welfare mentality in the church, that somehow we are owed benefits even if we do not do our part to make sure the benefits are there for everyone to enjoy.

²⁹ *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful*

*for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
Ephesians 4:29*

11. Some Christians think nothing of cursing or using profanity. Do you think there are situations to justify using cursing/profanity for a believer? Why or why not?

A Christian is always being watched by the world. People in the world expect Christians to be held to a higher standard with their language. We can ask God to help us make our point verbally, without being a stumbling block to others.

12. What are some other forms of unwholesome talk that we are willing to tolerate more easily than cursing? How do we help each other grow with this problem?

Unfortunately we tolerate gossiping and slandering far too readily. We make a game of putting down others with jokes that can be humiliating. These are forms of unwholesome talk as well. We also tolerate and even participate at times in putting down others with our words, calling people stupid, worthless, no-good and the like. The goal of our words should be to build others up.

³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ³¹ *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Ephesians 4:30-31*

13. What do you think it means for us to grieve the Holy Spirit?

I think when we have broken relationships with each other through our actions, it grieves the Holy Spirit in the same way that a broken relationship between siblings can grieve the heart of a mother or father. The whole purpose in us becoming one is so that the world will know that God sent Jesus into the world. When we are at odds with each other, we cloudy the message that God wants to give to those who do not yet know him.

14. How does verse 31 confirm that we are a constant work in progress in our walk with the Lord?

The verse is written to believers and it says “get rid of” it did not say “ you have all been set free from”. We are to be working to remove these things out of our lives. Notice they did not disappear just because we got saved. Getting saved is only one step in a life-long process of change.

³² *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32*

15. Are you willing to make a pledge to practice vs 32. Each time you come to New Life At Calvary? What are some practical things you can do to make the verse a reality?

Yes. I am going to strive to forgive youth who misbehave in church and deal with them after the service is over as if their behavior did not happen rather than allowing a grudge to develop.

Life-Sharing Lesson 2 40 Days Of Community—Serving Together Acts 6:1-7 | Thessalonians 5:12-15

Commentary Material

Acts 6:1-7

SEVEN MEN CHOSEN TO SERVE / [6:1-7](#)

From arrests at the hands of the Jews to the attempted deception within the congregation, the early days of the church seemed difficult. Yet the growth was phenomenal! [Chapter 6](#) returns to an internal problem—some apparent discrepancies in the distribution of goods to the needy widows in the congregation. The result: complaints from those who thought they were being discriminated against and a rising tide of anger. It was a potential disaster. But the Spirit-filled apostles wisely solved the young church's problem.

The rapid growth of the church meant more people. More people meant more programs and larger ministries. More programs meant administrative and logistical problems that threatened to consume all the apostles' time. Rather than neglect the spiritual disciplines of prayer and teaching, the apostles called and commissioned a group of men to attend to the pressing needs of the body. Finding qualified people who can and will help share the load of work is a mark of a healthy congregation.

[6:1](#) But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.^{NLT} The number of believers in Jerusalem made it necessary to organize the sharing of resources. People were being overlooked, and some were complaining. The believers *who spoke Hebrew* were the native Jewish Christians, "locals" who spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language. The believers *who spoke Greek* were the Grecian Jews from other lands who had been converted at Pentecost. They could not speak Aramaic, the native tongue of the Jews living in Israel. They were probably at least bilingual, speaking their native tongue and Greek but not Aramaic. There had developed a class distinction between the two groups, similar to racism. Though all were Christians, their backgrounds and outlooks were different.

The Greek-speaking Christians *complained that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food*. There were many more widows than usual since many of the widows who came from other Greek-speaking countries had returned to Jerusalem to live out their years and be buried with their ancestors. Their money may have run out, and they needed help. Widows in general needed help since property was passed on from father to son, and the son was responsible to care for the mother. She had no wealth of her own. (It should be noted that early in church

history, "widows" became a recognized group worthy of help from the church—see [9:41](#); [1 Timothy 5:3-16](#).) This "discrimination" against the Greek-speaking believers was more likely caused by the language and class barrier.

The early church took seriously the meeting of both the physical needs (distributing food and supplies) and the spiritual needs (teaching the Word) of the body of believers.

LIFE APPLICATION

NO PERFECT CHURCH

When we read the descriptions of the early church—the miracles, the sharing and generosity, the fellowship—we may wish we could have been a part of this "perfect" church. In reality, the early church had problems just as we do today. No church has ever been or will ever be perfect until Christ returns. All churches have problems. If your church's shortcomings distress you, ask yourself: "Would a perfect church allow me to be a member?" Then do what you can to make your church better. A church does not have to be perfect to be a powerful and effective witness for Christ.

6:2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables."^{NIV} Out of the conflict there arose a meeting. The *Twelve* (referring to the apostles) *gathered all the disciples* (referring to the rest of the believers) *together* and made a statement. They noted that it would *not be right* for them to *neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables*. From both physical energy and time restraints, it would be impossible for them to do both. The Greek here translated "wait on tables" is literally "to serve tables" (diakonein trapezais), which could refer to the tables used for serving food or maybe even for passing out funds to those in need. The reason was not that the apostles thought that they were "above" waiting on tables; rather, they knew that they had been called to preach and teach the Word of God, and that had to be their priority.

Good character is more to be praised than outstanding talent. Most talents are, to some extent, a gift. Good character, by contrast, is not given to us. We have to build it piece by piece—by thought, choice, courage, and determination.

John Luther

6:3-4 "Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word."^{NRSV} To correct the situation, the apostles said that the believers should choose respected Greek-speaking men and put them in charge of the food distribution program. Five requirements were clearly spelled out: the candidates had to be (1) *men* (andras—a specific Greek term for men); (2) believers (*from among yourselves*); (3) possessing good reputations (*good standing*), known as men of integrity; (4) solid spiritually (*full of the Spirit*); (5) full of *wisdom*—demonstrating their ability to apply God's truth appropriately to life situations. *Seven* was the typical number of men used to handle public business in a Jewish town, the official council.

LIFE APPLICATION

MATCHING GIFTS WITH NEEDS

As the early church increased in size, so did its needs. One great need was to organize the distribution of food to the poor. Since the apostles were called to focus on preaching and praying ([6:4](#)), they chose others to administer the food program. A prominent New Testament teaching is that each person has a vital part to play in the life of the church (see [1 Corinthians 12](#)). If you are in a position of leadership and find yourself overwhelmed with responsibilities, prayerfully determine what your priorities should be, and then find others to respond to the other legitimate needs. If you are not in leadership, realize that you have gifts that can be used by God in various areas of the church's ministry. Serve him with these gifts.

"Fullness" of the Spirit means a Spirit-following lifestyle. To be "full of the Spirit" was not an elitist position; instead, it indicated a mature, healthy Christian life. These people had demonstrated that the Spirit was working in them.

The person who was full of wisdom (sophias) would have demonstrated the ability to get to the best ends by the best means; that is, someone who had common sense. People who carry heavy responsibilities and work closely with others should have these qualities. We must look for spiritually mature and wise men and women to lead our churches.

The apostles kept their priorities straight. They were successful in part because they realized that both tasks were important: the task of meeting the physical needs of the church body and the task of meeting the spiritual and educational needs of the body. They had to ask themselves the basic question: since we can only do *some* things,

which of these many good things to do are the most important and the most appropriate for us? For the apostles, the answer was clearly praying and teaching the Word, as they had been commissioned to do.

LIFE APPLICATION

EVERY MEMBER A MINISTER

The apostles' priorities were correct. The ministry of the Word should never be neglected because of administrative burdens. Pastors should not try, or be expected to try, to do everything. Instead, full-time ministers are called to "equip God's people to . . . build up the church" ([Ephesians 4:12](#) NLT). That's the New Testament model: in every church each and every member is a minister! By getting believers involved in this way, churches are able to utilize and enjoy the gifts that have been given to each person, thus multiplying their impact.

[6:5](#) This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.^{NIV} The *whole group* (meaning all the believers) was *pleased* with the solution, so seven men were chosen, though how this was done was not recorded. *Stephen* and *Philip* were likely placed first because they are the only two whose ministries will be explained later in Acts ([chapters 7–8](#)). All seven of these names are Greek, which means that the men were probably Hellenistic Jews. This would lay a good foundation for the future spread of the gospel to the Greek world. Nothing more is known about *Procorus*, *Nicanor*, *Timon*, *Parmenas*, or *Nicolas*.

LIFE APPLICATION

CHOOSING THE BEST

When it came time for the church to assemble a team of servants, note what happened. First, they did not select just any candidates. They picked the godliest men they could find! Second, these highly qualified men did not grumble at the thought of serving food to the elderly! Rather they served gladly. Is this how things work in your church? Are ministry slots filled with "the best person" or with "just a warm body"? How about those unglamorous but necessary positions of service? Do members rush to fill them, or do they run

from them? For a church to be effective, it needs an army of godly servants who are willing to do whatever is asked of them. Are you such a person?

6:6 They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.^{NRSV} Spiritual leadership is serious business and must not be taken lightly by the church or its leaders. In the early church, those chosen to serve would be ordained or commissioned (set apart by prayer and laying on of hands) by the apostles. Laying hands on someone, an ancient Jewish practice, was a way to set a person apart for special service (see [Numbers 27:23](#); [Deuteronomy 34:9](#)).

Were these men the church's first deacons? Some say these were not deacons, deacon-predecessors, or even elder-predecessors but rather temporary, nonofficial positions created to meet the need at hand. They are never called "deacons" but rather "the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food" ([21:8](#) NLT). The word "serve" (diakonein) in [6:2](#) is used elsewhere in Acts to describe acts of service, not to signify an office of deacon (see [1:17](#), [25](#); [11:29](#); [12:25](#); [19:22](#); [20:24](#); [21:19](#)). There is no denying, however, that the seven men performed the function of deacons as the office would later be defined.

That the apostles *laid their hands on them* was a common gesture used in the commissioning of individuals to a task or office. It was also a granting of some sort of authority (see [8:17-19](#); [13:3](#); [19:6](#); [1 Timothy 4:14](#); [5:22](#); [Hebrews 6:2](#)). The apostles were hereby identifying themselves with the seven men and granting them a portion of their authority, at least for the task at hand.

LIFE APPLICATION

EFFECTIVE LIFE MANAGEMENT

Here are the ABCs of management from the apostles:

Assess your problem *accurately* ([6:1-2](#))—Are you attacking the right problem?

Budget your time *strategically* ([6:2](#), [4](#))—Are your priorities right?

Choose your leaders *wisely* ([6:3](#))—Are you choosing and following biblically qualified leaders?

Distribute your load *widely* ([6:3](#), [5-6](#))—Are you delegating the load? Are you doing your part?

5:12 Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and warn you against all that is wrong.^{NLT} The *brothers and sisters* in the church needed to show *honor* to those in leadership in order for everything to function smoothly. The word "honor" is also translated "respect." These *leaders in the Lord's work* probably were the elders, who held positions of leadership and responsibility. Elders were church officers providing supervision, protection, discipline, instruction, and direction for the other believers. "Elder" simply means "older." Both Greeks and Jews gave positions of great honor to wise older men, and the Christian church continued this pattern of leadership. Elders carried great responsibility, and they were expected to be good examples. These men worked hard among the believers and deserved to be honored. Paul expressed a similar thought in his letter to Timothy: "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" ([1 Timothy 5:17](#) NIV).

The leadership structure in local churches began very early, for as Paul planted a church and then moved on, he needed to leave behind an organized group of believers (see [Acts 11:30](#); [14:23](#); [1 Timothy 4:14](#); [Titus 1:5](#); [James 5:14](#); [1 Peter 5:1](#)). Paul could not stay in each church, but he knew that these new churches needed strong spiritual leadership. Leaders were chosen to teach sound doctrine, help believers mature spiritually, and equip believers to live for Jesus Christ despite opposition. [Acts 14:23](#) describes Paul and Barnabas's return to some of the churches that they had planted. Part of the reason that Paul and Barnabas risked their lives to return to these cities was to organize the churches' leadership, helping believers get organized with spiritual leaders who could help them grow. The churches needed Spirit-led leaders, both laypersons and pastors.

Timothy may have also reported back to Paul some concern regarding a lack of respect by the Christians for their leaders. Perhaps the leaders had been warning *against all that [was] wrong* and in so doing been the target of criticism. It may have been that the leaders' warnings were not being heeded or that at times the leaders had been a bit overbearing in their dealings with sin in the congregation. The injunction to "live in peace" in [5:13](#) (NIV) includes all believers, even their leaders. If the leaders had not exercised their authority delicately enough, they may have been met with resistance. They needed to learn how to lead gently and with the heart of a servant. Even so, Paul explained that these men had been put in positions of responsibility for a reason; thus, believers should respect and heed their words.

LIFE APPLICATION

STRONG SUPPORT

Paul instructed the church to honor its leaders. Faithful church leaders should be supported and appreciated. Too often they are targets for criticism because the congregation has unrealistic expectations. How do you treat your church leaders? Do you enjoy finding fault, or do you show your appreciation? Do they receive enough financial support to allow them to live without worry and to provide for the needs of their families? Jesus and Paul emphasized the importance of supporting those who lead and teach us.

How can you show respect to and hold in the "highest regard" your pastor and other church leaders? Express your appreciation, tell them how you have been helped by their leadership and teaching, and thank them for their ministry in your life. If you say nothing, how will they know where you stand? Remember, they need and deserve your support and love.

5:13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.^{NIV} In addition to honoring their leaders ([5:12](#)), believers are also to *hold them in the highest regard in love*. "The highest regard" conveys a superlative forcefulness that left Paul's readers with no doubt about his meaning. Leaders are not to be ignored or argued with; they are to be held in highest esteem—not with fear but with love. These leaders are to be respected and loved, not just because of their position of responsibility, but also *because of their work*. When believers respect their leaders and join them in their work for God's kingdom, the church will grow. Of course, it also helps if leaders do not have to spend all their time dealing with internal conflicts; hence, Paul reminded believers to *live in peace with each other*. The command to "live in peace" includes the leaders as well. All are to work together to build the kingdom and to serve one another. The best way for this "peace" to occur is for all believers to serve with their God-given gifts, to let others use *their* gifts, and then to respect and love one another for what God is doing through them.

5:14 Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.^{NLT} While the leaders have special responsibility to guide the church, believers (*brothers and sisters*) are not exempt from their responsibility to care for one another. Paul singled out three groups in this church and "urged" believers to look after or deal with them—but in different ways.

First, they were to *warn those who [were] lazy*. The word "warn" is also in [5:12](#) and means to firmly admonish, particularly in the areas of sin. They were to warn lazy, idle believers. The word translated "lazy" is used only in the letters to the Thessalonians (see also [2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 11](#)) and seems to have been a particular concern for this church. The Greek word translated "lazy" (*ataktous*) was used for soldiers who would not stay in the ranks. These people had set themselves outside the prescribed pattern for the church—everyone else was working and serving, but they would not.

[Second Thessalonians 3:11](#) calls these people "busybodies" (NIV). The problem with idle people is that because they are not busy enough with valuable activities, they usually stir up trouble of one kind or another. These people need to be warned to get back in among the believers and use their God-given gifts in service for the kingdom.

Second, they were to *encourage those who [were] timid*. The word "encourage" is also used in [2:12](#), where Paul described his ministry among the Thessalonians. The Greek word translated "encourage" (paraklesis) means to come alongside with helpful instruction and insight. The lazy need to be warned, but the "timid" need to be encouraged. The "timid" are the fearful people who lack confidence—perhaps in themselves or even in their faith. They have become discouraged or worried, possibly by persecution or by the deaths of their fellow believers ([4:13](#)). These people need loving instruction from their fellow believers to calm their fears and to build their confidence.

Third, they were to *take tender care of those who [were] weak*. The word translated "take tender care" is antechesthe (also translated simply as "help") and means to hold on to these people, wrap arms around them, and cling to them. This is the kind of help suggested for the spiritually "weak," those weak in faith, those in need (such as financial need), or those who might be struggling with the sins associated with paganism that Paul wrote about in [4:3-8](#). These might be struggling, needy, or immature Christians who need the arms of strong fellow believers to guide them, give them support, and let them know they are not alone. See also [Romans 5:6](#); [14:1](#); [1 Corinthians 8:9](#).

Paul's advice is simply to use the right medicine. For example:

- It would not work to "take tender care" of a "lazy" person; that person would not appreciate it and would remain unchanged.
- It would not work to "warn" a "timid" person; that person is of fragile self-esteem anyway, and a warning would only scare him or her away.
- It would not work to "encourage" a truly "weak" person to press on to greater things; that would show callousness to the person's real need. The one trying to encourage may be doing so because it takes far less effort and involvement than taking "tender care" of that person as Paul prescribed.

Finally, being *patient with everyone* is the glue that holds relationships together. In any group where a variety of people come together, godly patience will be required of everyone. Believers cannot write off the lazy, timid, or weak even if they do require a lot of time and energy. On the contrary, great patience must be exercised. The word for "patient" (makrothymia) is also translated "long-suffering." This is an attribute of God (see [Exodus 34:6](#); [Psalm 103:8](#)), a fruit of the Holy Spirit in believers ([Galatians 5:22](#)), and a characteristic of love ([1 Corinthians 13:4](#)). God is patient with people, and so

Christians should be. In addition, God has given his Spirit to help his people be patient with one another.

LIFE APPLICATION

THE RIGHT MEDICINE

Don't loaf around with the idle; warn them. Don't yell at the timid and weak; encourage and help them. At times it's difficult to distinguish between idleness and timidity. Two people may be doing nothing—one out of laziness and the other out of shyness or fear of doing something wrong. The key to ministry is sensitivity: sensing the condition of each person and offering the appropriate remedy for each situation. You can't effectively help until you know the problem. You can't apply the medicine until you know what is causing the pain.

5:15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.^{NIV} To a church under persecution, the command against retaliation is especially poignant. *Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong.* Personal revenge and retaliation are clearly forbidden to those who call themselves followers of Christ. Jesus said, "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" ([Matthew 5:39, 44](#) NIV). To many Jews of Jesus' day, these statements were offensive. Any Messiah who would turn the other cheek was not the military leader they wanted to lead a revolt against Rome. Because they were under Roman oppression, they wanted retaliation against their hated enemies. Instead, Jesus suggested a new, radical response to injustice. Instead of demanding rights, give them up freely! According to Jesus, it is more important to give justice and mercy than to receive it.

To the Romans, Paul had written:

- *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* ([Romans 12:17-21](#) NIV)

In addition, there would be times when relationships between believers would be strained. They would also need to remember that they should never pay back "wrong for wrong" but should *always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else*—including those in the church and those outside, even their enemies. That believers should "always try" indicates a life-style of kindness that should permeate all their dealings with others.

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

**Life-Sharing Lesson 2 40 Days Of Community—Serving Together Acts 6:1-7 |
Thessalonians 5:12-15**

1. When was the last time you had to make an accommodation in order to serve someone else?

Yesterday, I changed my schedule to assist True Vine Missionary Baptist Church in training them on the things left at the church.

2. What is usually involved when you make an accommodation? What accommodation have you made at New Life At Calvary?

When you make an accommodation, change on your part is necessary and an acceptance of a new reality may also be required. Something you feel you have been entitled to may have to be given up for another good. I have made a change in my travel plans to and from the church. I know longer can simply go back and pick something up at the house. I have to plan my day better. I also am trusting others more to supervise some of the ministries without my involvement.

Acts 6:1-7 (NIV)

¹ *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.*

² *So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

⁵ *This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

3. How do you think this unequal treatment in this merger between the Grecian Jews and the Hebraic Jews had come to be?

I think with the church growing as rapidly as it was, nobody anticipated this problem was going to occur. There was also a communication problem with the language of some speaking Hebrew and some speaking Greek, so that not everyone understood exactly how things were supposed to be distributed. There also appears to have been a lack of organization as to how things were to be done. It's possible the Hebrew Jews had already been doing a widow's food program, so those ladies knew more about how the program worked than did the Hellenistic or Greek speaking Jews did. It does not appear that there was intentional discrimination taking place as some of those complaining were indicating.

4. What was the goal of the ministry that was taking place in verse 1?

The goal of the ministry was to feed widows who were in need of food.

5. What and who was needed in order to accomplish the ministry?

The ministry needed an organizational structure because it had grown much larger than it had been before. It needed volunteers to carry out the job of actually distributing the food. It needed leaders who were going to organize the volunteers to make sure the ministry could be effectively carried out. It needed people who were filled with the Spirit to make sure God was glorified throughout the ministry.

6. Why did the apostles not jump into taking care of the distribution situation themselves?

The apostles were already busy with preaching and teaching the word of God to the people. The church had grown to 5,000 by the 4th chapter of Acts. A lot of these people needed to learn about Jesus. The apostles wanted to continue to see the church grow through their preaching and teaching. Although this ministry to the widows was important, it was even more important for the apostles to keep winning people to the Lord, because others could handle the ministry to the widows.

It's interesting to note that, since the complaint was coming from the Greek Speaking community. The seven people chosen over the ministry were all Greek Speaking people. The words choose seven men is specifically seven Greek Speaking men.

7. What main image does the bible use to describe believers that indicate we are to work together in meeting the needs of others?

We are called the body of Christ. In the body, every part in some way assists the other parts. Every part of the body is just that, a part of the body. No part can live isolated from the rest of the body for very long. When a part is missing, the rest of the body has to make accommodations or there will be a weaker body than before. If I lose my foot, the rest of the body is affected in what it can and cannot do, even those parts that are not directly attached to it.

8. Do you think it was necessary to choose people of full of the Spirit and wisdom just to serve widows food? Why or why not?

Yes this is a ministry where attitudes make all the difference in the world. In our coming to serve the community, the attitude in which we do it is just as important as what we are doing. If we are not full of the Spirit and we are dealing with people, we will not display the love of Jesus to them. We will not even see the people in the way Jesus sees them. This is not just a poor person I am serving, this is a person for whom Christ died and who belongs inside the body of Christ to be my brother or sister.

9. What happens when we see what we do in the church as simply a task to be filled on our part instead of as ministry that is building the cause of Christ? Should we install people publicly into different ministries in the church, rather than simply letting them join a ministry?

If we do not see what we're doing as essential, we will be tempted to do it only when we feel like it or when its convenient. We will not put our all into it, and rather than

seeing it as a form of worship, it will be nothing more than a task to be completed. We won't even mind when we don't show up to do it.

It may be that if we publicly installed people, it would lift the ministry up to a higher level in their eyes. There may be more of a sense of accountability associated with it. What if we did take one Sunday a month to ask people to come forward and install them into ministries just as we installed elders and deacons? That could be a positive thing to do.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 (NIV)

¹² Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

10. Teamwork involves dealing with people. We see that there are different kinds of people in the church that we must deal with in the passage above. What do you think Paul means when he tells us to warn those who are idle in the church?

The word idle is also translated as lazy. These are the people in the church, who are not volunteering to do anything while others are working. In 2 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul calls these people "busybodies" (NIV). The problem with idle people is that because they are not busy enough with valuable activities, they usually stir up trouble of one kind or another. These people need to be warned to get back in among the believers and use their God-given gifts in service for the kingdom.

11. Why are people idle in the church? Is every member in the church, called to be active in a ministry in the church? Why or why not.

People are idle in the church either because they do not know they are to have a ministry in the church or they choose not to have a ministry in the church. They want to have the benefits of the church without making an investment of themselves. Every member is to have an active ministry in the church, because every member is a part of

the body. Every part of the body is to do something in assisting the health and growth of the body.

13. How are we to accommodate those who are timid in the church?

The Greek word translated "encourage" (paraklesis) means to come alongside with helpful instruction and insight. The lazy or idle need to be warned, but the "timid" need to be encouraged. The "timid" are the fearful people who lack confidence—perhaps in themselves or even in their faith. They have become discouraged or worried, possibly by persecution or by the deaths of their fellow believers ([4:13](#)). These people need loving instruction from their fellow believers to calm their fears and to build their confidence.

14. What comes to your mind when you hear help the weak?

I think of people who don't quite have it together at the moment. Third, they were to take tender care of those who [were] weak. The word translated "take tender care" is antechesthe (also translated simply as "help") and means to hold on to these people, wrap arms around them, and cling to them. This is the kind of help suggested for the spiritually "weak," those weak in faith, those in need (such as financial need), or those who might be struggling with the sins associated with paganism that Paul wrote about in [4:3-8](#). These might be struggling, needy, or immature Christians who need the arms of strong fellow believers to guide them, give them support, and let them know they are not alone

Paul's advice is simply to use the right medicine. For example:

- It would not work to "take tender care" of a "lazy" person; that person would not appreciate it and would remain unchanged.*
- It would not work to "warn" a "timid" person; that person is of fragile self-esteem anyway, and a warning would only scare him or her away.*
- It would not work to "encourage" a truly "weak" person to press on to greater things; that would show callousness to the person's real need. The one trying to encourage may be doing so because it takes far less effort and involvement than taking "tender care" of that person as Paul prescribed.*

15. How do you make the distinction between being patient with everyone, but not being patient with everyone's sin?

We love the person, but we do not give our stamp of approval to their behavior. We accept people where they are as God sends them to us in that we don't demand a change before we choose to love.

16. What are subtle ways in which we pay back wrong for wrong in the church that hurts the ministry of Christ.

We stop using our gifts and talents in the church or we stop financially supporting the ministry. We also become critics of the ministries of the church or the people in the church.

Life-Sharing Lesson 3 40 Days Of Community “Living A Generous Life”

Matthew 6:24 Luke 19: 1-8 | Timothy 4:16-18

Commentary

Matthew 6:24

6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."^{NRSV} Continuing the theme of his disciples having undivided loyalty, Jesus explained that *no one can serve* (that is, be a slave of, belong to) *two masters*. A slave could belong to two partners but not to two separate individuals because his or her loyalty would be divided. While slaves have their earthly master chosen for them, from a spiritual standpoint all people must choose whom they will serve. They can choose to serve themselves—to pursue *wealth* and selfish pleasures—or they can choose to serve *God*. The word translated "wealth" is also translated "mammon," referring to possessions as well. Either we store our treasures with God ([6:20-21](#)), we focus our "eyes" on him ([6:22-23](#)), and we serve him alone—or else we do not serve him at all. There can be no part-time loyalty. Jesus wants total devotion.

LIFE APPLICATION

WHO'S YOUR MASTER?

Jesus says we can have only one master. We live in a materialistic society where many people serve money. They spend all their lives collecting and storing it, only to die and leave it behind. Their desire for money and what it can buy far outweighs their commitment to God and spiritual matters. Even Christians spend a great deal of time trying to create heaven on earth.

Whatever you store up, you will spend much of your time and energy thinking about. Don't fall into the materialistic trap, because "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" ([1 Timothy 6:10](#)). Does Christ or money occupy more of your thoughts, time, and efforts? Ask yourself, "Have I taken Christ or financial security as my master?"

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

Luke 19:1-8

JESUS BRINGS SALVATION TO ZACCHAEUS'S HOME / [19:1-10](#) / [180](#)

In Jericho, Jesus invited himself to the home of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector. Many in the town would have considered him the "chief sinner," for tax collectors were despised for their association with Rome. Because their salary was gleaned from the additional money they collected from others, many tax collectors were tempted to charge more.

Apparently Zacchaeus was one of these corrupt tax collectors. Although he was despised and hated, he became an impressive example of a rich man coming to salvation. The rich ruler, who was satisfied with his own religiosity and did not want to give up what he owned, could not be saved (see [18:23-27](#)). He depended on his own accomplishments and possessions, instead of God. The young man's attitude made it impossible for him to enter the kingdom of God. But with Zacchaeus, Jesus accomplished the impossible. He sought out a wealthy sinner and called him to repentance and salvation. In fact, Jesus' earthly mission was "to seek and to save what was lost" ([19:10](#) NIV). Imitate Zacchaeus's attitude: be eager to listen to Jesus and willing to repent and turn from your sin.

[19:1-2](#) Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.^{NIV} After healing a blind man outside the city ([18:35-43](#)), *Jesus entered Jericho* (see also [18:35-36](#)). Again the scene shifts, this time to a man named Zacchaeus who was the *chief tax collector* and, thus, *was wealthy*. To finance their great world empire, the Romans levied heavy taxes on all nations under their control. The Jews opposed these taxes because they supported a secular government and its pagan gods, but they were still forced to pay. Some of their own countrymen became tax collectors, lured by the wealth such a position promised. Luke has presented stories of several tax collectors and their dealings with Jesus (see [3:12](#); [5:27-30](#); [7:29](#); [15:1](#); plus a parable in [18:10-13](#)). As the "chief" tax collector, Zacchaeus was apparently in charge over others. Matthew had been a tax collector, but Zacchaeus was chief of his region. Matthew had been well off; Zacchaeus was very wealthy.

[19:3-4](#) He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowds. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree beside the road, so he could watch from there.^{NLT} Zacchaeus, like the rest of the people in Jericho, was curious to see this man whose healings and teachings had been astounding people all over the country. Moments earlier, a blind man sitting on the side of the road had been healed ([18:42-43](#)). The news had spread, and Zacchaeus wanted to *get a look at Jesus*. The text reveals another detail about this wealthy tax collector; he was *short*—so short, in fact, that he could not see over the people in the crowd. Zacchaeus would not be put off. He ran on down the road and *climbed a sycamore tree*. The sycamore tree was easy to climb, like an oak tree with wide lateral branches.

LIFE APPLICATION

LOVE FOR ALL

Tax collectors were among the most unpopular people in Israel. Jews by birth, they chose to work for Rome and were considered traitors. Besides, it was common knowledge that tax collectors were making themselves rich by gouging their fellow Jews. No wonder the people muttered when Jesus went home with the head tax collector Zacchaeus, a man who was good at being bad. Despite the fact that Zacchaeus was a cheater and a turncoat, Jesus loved him; in response, the little tax collector was converted. In every society, certain groups of people are considered outcasts because of their political views, immoral behavior, or lifestyle. Don't give in to social pressure to avoid these people. Jesus loves them, and they need to hear his Good News.

[19:5-7](#) When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! For I must be a guest in your home today." Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy.^{NLT} Up in the tree, Zacchaeus watched the approaching crowd. He wanted to see Jesus, and apparently Jesus wanted to see him. Many places in Luke reveal Jesus having knowledge of people's inner thoughts and needs (see [5:22](#); [6:8](#); [7:39-40](#); [8:46](#); [9:47](#)). As always, every act of Jesus was part of a divine plan—he said, "*I must go to your home.*" Jesus knew Zacchaeus's heart, and he took the initiative, calling Zacchaeus *by name* and inviting himself over. Far from being embarrassed or put out, Zacchaeus climbed down *quickly* and took Jesus home *in great excitement and joy*.

But why Zacchaeus? In fact, many in the crowd were unhappy with Jesus' choice of hosts: **But the crowds were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.**^{NLT} The religious leaders often complained about the ones to whom Jesus ministered (see [15:2](#)). Luke recorded Jesus' words: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" ([5:32](#) NIV). Zacchaeus must have been a pretty bad character, for the crowd reacted with great displeasure that Jesus would have chosen him out of everyone. No one else in the crowd could have known that Jesus' visit would change this tax collector's life.

LIFE APPLICATION

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

Jesus took the first step in reaching out to Zacchaeus. He cut through the exclusivity of the Jews and approached this outsider. Often the first step in making a friend is the most difficult one. Take the initiative.

- | Avoid prejudgments based on appearance or social status.
 - | Learn something about the other person before you approach.
 - | Let your overture be open and your demeanor engaging. Don't demand friendship; offer it.
 - | Spend time. Listen attentively and share something personal.
-

19:8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."^{NIV} Some grumbled, but Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was ready for a change in his life. After Jesus took the initiative with him, Zacchaeus took the initiative to follow wherever the path of obedience to Jesus might lead.

The rich young ruler had come asking and had gone away empty, unable to give up his money and possessions ([18:18-23](#)). Zacchaeus, however, was able to give away his wealth in order to follow Jesus. This is the heart attitude that Jesus was looking for. Perceiving it in Zacchaeus, he quickly brought this man the Good News.

It was to save sinners that Christ Jesus came into the world. He did not come to help them to save themselves, nor to induce them to save themselves, nor even to enable them to save themselves. He came to save them.

William Hendriksen

Zacchaeus himself lost no time, for immediately (the verb is in the present tense) he said he would *give half* of all that he owned to the poor. The words "if I have cheated anybody" imply that he surely had—most tax collectors did cheat others, so a wealthy tax collector most certainly did. So eager was Zacchaeus to rid himself of the shackles of wealth that he said he would *pay back four times the amount* of the overage that he had charged people. The Old Testament law for restitution required returning the amount plus one-fifth (see [Leviticus 5:16](#); [Numbers 5:7](#)). Zacchaeus went far beyond the law's requirements in righting the wrongs he had done. His attitude was correct, and his actions showed his inner desire to obey. Zacchaeus was setting his priorities right, and he would be ready for the kingdom.

LIFE APPLICATION

FAITH AND ACTION

Judging from the crowd's reaction to him, Zacchaeus must have been a very crooked tax collector. But after he met Jesus, he realized that his life needed straightening out. By giving to the poor and making restitution—with generous interest—to those he had cheated, Zacchaeus demonstrated inward change by outward action. It is not enough to follow Jesus in your head or heart alone. You must show your faith by changed behavior. Has your faith resulted in action? What changes do you need to make?

[19:9-10](#) Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."^{NIV} This tax collector was perceived as a traitor by his people, so they would not have considered him a *son of Abraham*. Yet, by opening his heart to Jesus, he proved himself to be not only a son of Abraham in the sense of a Jew looking for the kingdom but also a son of Abraham in the truest sense of the word because he had *today* experienced *salvation*. Salvation came to Zacchaeus, not because he did good deeds, but because he truly believed in Jesus and set aside anything that might get in the way of obeying him. Whether Zacchaeus continued as a tax collector is unknown. If he did, certainly he would have been the most honest tax collector around, doing just what John the Baptist had recommended to the tax collectors who had come to him to be baptized: "Don't collect any more than you are required to" (see [3:12-13](#) NIV).

When Jesus said Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham and yet was lost, he must have shocked his hearers in at least two ways. They would not have acknowledged that this unpopular tax collector was a fellow son of Abraham, and they would not have thought that sons of Abraham could be lost. A person is not saved by a good heritage or condemned by a bad one; faith is more important than genealogy. To the grumblers, detractors, and self-righteous, to those who thought they were saved simply because they were descendants of Abraham, Jesus explained his mission—*the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*.

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

1 TIMOTHY 6:16-18

[6:17](#) Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches.^{NKJV} After concluding his doxology with a decisive "Amen," Paul returned to the matters at hand. Those most in danger of having an incorrect attitude toward God were the wealthy. In [verses 3-10](#), Paul had instructed those who

did not have wealth, but deeply desired it. Here he focused on those who already possessed wealth. Ephesus was a thriving city, and the Ephesian church probably had at least some prosperous members. Perhaps some of the false teachers had already succeeded in amassing a degree of wealth for themselves.

Paul advised Timothy to deal with any potential problems by teaching that having riches carries great responsibility. The wealthy must not be *haughty* (high-minded or arrogant), as though they deserved their riches. Rather, they must be generous. Even then, they must avoid feeling proud that they had a lot to give. Their perspective on their riches should copy Paul's words in [verse 7](#): "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (NKJV).

The rich were not to indulge in pride over their success nor to place their *trust in uncertain riches*. Pride was inappropriate because it indicated that the rich were basing their lives on what might appear to be valuable and dependable but which was, in fact, terribly uncertain. Clearly, Paul believed that as dangerous as it was to want to be wealthy, actually having riches was at least as risky for a person's well-being (see [Proverbs 23:4-5](#)).

LIFE APPLICATION

PROBLEMS WITH MONEY

The possession and pursuit of money invariably creates certain dangerous difficulties:

- | The desire for wealth is insatiable.
- | The promises of wealth are illusory.
- | The presence of wealth promotes anxiety.
- | The potential of wealth tends to facilitate selfishness.
- | The pursuit of wealth invites immoral suggestions to obtain more.
- | The preoccupation with wealth tends to control a person's life.

When a steward of wealth forgets the source of wealth, a soul lives in grave danger. Does your life demonstrate that you control whatever wealth God

has placed under your authority?

The wealthy must trust not in their wealth **but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.**^{NRSV} The rich must be careful to trust only in the living God for their security. The rich need not be ashamed of their riches; those riches are a gift from God, given to be enjoyed. There must always be a balance between avoiding a stale, ascetic life while at the same time keeping oneself from self-indulgence.

See Also:

[Chart: God's Eternal Audit](#)

[Chart: A Choice of Trust](#)

6:18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share.^{NKJV} The rich are not to consume their riches on selfish pleasures; rather, they must share their bounty with those in need. The general goal to *do good* is broken down into three categories:

(1) As they do good to others they become *rich in good works*, practicing "hands-on" giving to others. People are sometimes more effectively helped by personal involvement than by the giving of material objects or money.

(2) Doing good improves our ability to respond quickly and effectively. Experience can help us become *ready to give* in a wholehearted way.

(3) Becoming *willing to share* will strike a blow against the self-centeredness of our times. We learn to do with less so that more may do with some.

For "share," Paul used a word related to "fellowship" (*koinonikous*, "those willing to share"). We can experience a deep fellowship when believers make their resources available to one another. Being rich in good works may not necessarily benefit our financial statement, but in the long run it will be a far more valuable asset in God's eyes.

6:19 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.^{NIV} Jesus talked about treasure in his Sermon on the Mount: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 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" ([Matthew 6:19-21](#) ^{NKJV}, see also [Luke 12:33](#); [18:22](#)). The rich must make certain to lay up treasures in heaven, investing their riches for eternity. This kind of investment includes tithing and giving offerings in church but is much broader. Any

unselfish giving to meet the needs of others, especially the poor, creates a deposit in eternity. The person without God who selfishly pursues wealth will lay up a treasure of God's wrath ([James 5:1-5](#)).

In so doing, those who give are those who provide a *firm foundation* for the future and experience life as it is meant to be. In contrast to those seeking riches and ending in ruin and destruction ([6:9](#)), these generous rich people find true life, both on earth and in eternity. To again quote Jesus Christ: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" ([John 17:3](#) NKJV). The expression *life that is truly life* also reminds us of Jesus' stated purpose for his ministry: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" ([John 10:10](#) NIV). Because God is the source of all life ([6:13](#)), all those who live his way experience real living!

[6:20](#) Timothy, guard what has been entrusted

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

1 John 3:16-18

[3:16](#) We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.^{NRSV} To understand real love, believers need only to look at their Lord for the example. They can *know love by this, that he laid down his life* for all people. Christ's example shows believers that real love involves self-sacrifice, which, as [3:17-19](#) points out, must result in self-sacrificial actions.

Because he is the example, believers *ought to lay down [their] lives for one another*. They do this by becoming truly concerned about the needs of their Christian brothers and sisters and by unselfishly giving time, effort, prayer, and possessions to supply those needs.

Such an attitude would result in actually dying for a brother or sister if this were ever necessary. Believers' own lives should not be more precious to them than God's own Son was to him.

Tell me how much you know of the sufferings of your fellow men and I will tell you how much you have loved them.

Helmut Thielicke

LIFE APPLICATION

THE EPITOME OF LOVE

Clearly, John's readers were struggling with the topic of love—where to find it and

how to rightly share it with others. (How else can we explain the lengthy sections of this epistle that address the issue?) As the ultimate example of love, John pointed to the cross, where Jesus "laid down his life for us." Then he added that believers should do the same for one another.

What does it mean to lay down your life for a brother or a sister? It means giving up your rights. It means seeking his best, even when it hurts or costs you deeply. It means putting her needs and interests above your own desires. Real love is an action, not a feeling. It produces selfless, sacrificial giving. The greatest act of love is giving oneself for others, serving others with no thought of receiving anything in return. Sometimes it is easier to say that we'll die for others than to truly live for them—that involves putting others' desires first. Jesus taught this same principle of love in [John 15:13](#). In what specific way could you "lay down your life" for a family member or friend today?

[3:17-18](#) How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.^{NRSV} These verses give an example of how believers can lay down their lives for others—to help those in need with their worldly goods. Seldom will believers be called upon to experience martyrdom for another. However, every day they will face needy people whom they ought to be willing to help if they have the resources to do so; most people have more than they need. This parallels James's teaching ([James 2:14-17](#)): Believers should be willing to help a *brother or sister in need*. Believers should respond to God's love for them by loving others, putting others' needs before their ownership of *the world's goods*.

Talk is cheap, so unsubstantiated claims (mere *word or speech*) are worthless. Faith not accompanied by love for others (shown *in truth and action*) is worthless. Anyone can claim to have faith, but if his or her lifestyle remains selfish and worldly, then what good are the words and speeches? True love expressed in action is the fruit of a living faith. If a person claims to be a believer, has possessions to offer, sees a brother or sister in need, and still refuses to help, that person shows a lack of God's love.

LIFE APPLICATION

LOVE IS A VERB

John dismissed the idea that God's love is a mere theoretical concept. He rejected the notion that sentimental words are an adequate expression of love to others. On the contrary, he argued, love must take action! Biblical love is a

verb! It begins with feelings of concern and compassion for those in need and always results in tangible, substantial sacrifice. So easily we rationalize away biblical demands. In most of the world, our Christian brothers and sisters lack proper food, clothing, and jobs to live decent lives. [John 3:16](#) provides the best example of this truth: "God so loved the world that he gave . . ." Consider the people God has placed in your life and ask yourself, "What does an active love require me to do for them today?" Consider people around the world and ask what you can do to help.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – 1, 2, & 3 John.

Life-Sharing Lesson 3 40 Days Of Community “Living A Generous Life”

Matthew 6:24 Luke 19: 1-8 I Timothy 6:17-18

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 outside of your family, how would you rate your level of generosity?

Probably about at about a 8 or 9. I give away things fairly easily.

2. What do you think Jesus actually meant when he said “**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.*

We have to make a choice who or what is going to be first in our lives. A slave cannot be with two different masters at the same time. At some point he or she is going to have to make a choice out of sheer frustration. If the pursuit of money is our goal in life, we will not be able to faithfully serve God. God wants our money subject to his will and plans just as He desires our time, talent and everything else about us. If the pursuit of God is our goal in life, we will have to abandon the pull of money which leads us to materialism and selfishness. Money can keep us from putting our trust in God.

Jesus says we can have only one master. We live in a materialistic society where many people serve money. They spend all their lives collecting and storing it, only to die and leave it behind. Their desire for money and what it can buy far outweighs their commitment to God and spiritual matters. Even Christians spend a great deal of time trying to create heaven on earth. Whatever you store up, you will spend much of your time and energy thinking about.

3. What factors in life contribute to how generous we are to the kingdom?

Generosity has to be thought of in terms of percentages and not actual amounts. It's the percentage we give that makes us generous. Factors that contribute to our generosity are 1) An understanding of the price that God paid so that we can be saved 2) Our commitment level to God 3) Our spiritual gift, 4) Our personality, 5) Our trust level in God, and 6) Our priorities in life. The actual amount of money we have has

very little if anything to do with how generous we are. It only determines the actual amount of what we give, not whether it was given generously or grudgingly.

Luke 19:1-8 (NIV)

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

4. In the passage above in Luke 19:1-8, what made Zacchaeus so generous with his wealth. Do you think you could do what Zaccheus did, if tomorrow you were asked to give away ½ of your possessions to the poor? Why or Why Not?

Zaccheus understood that Jesus was offering him a life that his money could never buy. He also understood that he was benefitting more by giving than by trying to hold on to what he had. It would be a struggle for me to voluntarily start over again with the possessions I have accumulated. I find myself more attached to them than I desire to be. As much as I fight materialism, it keeps creeping back into my life. I pray that I would be able to do it. I also recognize I could lose it all anyways whether I choose to do it or not.

5. Why is it, that often the more we have, the more difficult it becomes to be generous?

Possessions have a way of making us feel as though we were entitled to them because we worked for them. They become ours instead of God's. We also begin to feel as though we cannot do without them. What were once perks, become absolutely necessary for our survival. We think if we give them away, we will be unable to replace them in the future. We become hoarders and claim that we are saving for that rainy day emergency. When in fact all we are doing is holding on to stuff that could be a blessing to others

6. For those of us who do become wealthy (Remember if you make more than \$1500 a year, you are in the top 20 % of the world income) how do you feel about Paul's instructions to the rich in this passage. **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.

Since so many of us want to be wealthy, we should know before we get there what to expect God is going to require of us. If we can't do this before we get wealthy, chances are, we won't be able to do it once we're wealthy. The reality check is that most of us are already in this category of which Paul speaks. If we have a car, any money in the bank, and a steady income each month, we are already very wealthy by this world's standards. We try to set up our lives so that we don't have to depend on God, but can depend on our riches to be there for us in the future. I think people feel better about verse 17 than they do verse 18.

7. What are some of the ways we put our trust in wealth, without realizing that is what we are doing?

When we replace items with new things, but refuse to give away the old things out of fear we might not need the old some day, we are starting to trust in our possessions instead of in God. Those items could be a blessing to someone with a real need today,

but chances are, we are storing them for a time in the future when all we will do with them will be to throw them away. We may start a fanatic retirement savings program, while neglecting our tithes and offerings, not realizing that we may never reach retirement or that someone may steal it away from us. We may base our choice of a career or job on how much money it pays rather than on what God is calling us to do or be. We may hold on to a job or position that is causing us to compromise our beliefs, because we are afraid of what will happen if we don't have that same level of income.

8. Do you think it's possible to command people to be generous and willing to share? Does our money ever really become God's money? How can we tell?

I think you can teach people the principles of being generous but to be generous inside has to come from the heart. I do you think you can command people to share, because sharing simply means giving a portion of what you have to someone else. Sharing does not require a feeling to go along with it. Our money does not really become God's money until we release our control over it, by putting it under someone else's control. Our possessions do not become God's until we are willing to use them for the glory of God in whatever way that we can. It's our car, until we figure a way to use it to further the kingdom of God. It's our house, until we a figure a way to use it to further the kingdom of God with it. Is what we possess being a blessing to others beyond the circle of people in our family. We should be honest with ourselves over what's ours and what belongs to God.

9. Why are people who are generous usually are happier than those who are not?

Generous people tend to have more friends. They have a purpose for life beyond themselves. They are more like God in being a blessing to others. They reap the love and appreciation for others. They are not waiting for someone to come and do for them, because they are active in going to others first.

10. What are some of the signs that you control your money, rather than your money controlling you?

1) You tithe and give offerings. 2) You know how to say no to having the latest this, that, or the other thing. 3) You live a balanced life. 4) You live within your means and below your level of income. 5) You avoid getting into a lot of debt. 6) You have something left over to be a blessing to others. 7) You can wait on buying things. 8) You are willing to make sacrifices for the kingdom of God. 9) You know how to enjoy life and be content with what you have. 10). You spend your money wisely.

11. How do possessions become chains in our lives?

We have to take care of them. Sometimes the upkeep of taking care of them, costs us a lot more than we had anticipated. A person who owned a house that greatly decreased in value during the crisis, may have to pay more in payments, than the house will be worth in the future. It can be impossible to sell without going into a huge hole. We can't change jobs or do ministry, because we need the money to pay for possessions we have accumulated in the past and still owe on them. Possessions can sometimes assist us in hardening our hearts toward meeting the needs of others. If our identity is wrapped in our status, there are certain possessions we must obtain to maintain the image.

1 John 3:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

11. How do you reach a balance between “God wants us to enjoy the good things in this life.” with “if your brother or sister has a need, how can you close your heart to their situation.”

WE need to constantly consider if we're leaning toward becoming more generous or more or a hoarder. It's a battle that will always be with us. We choose what standard of living that we think God wants us to have. Each person has to decide that for him or herself. We are all called to be tithers. A few of us are called to give 50% and some are called to give 90%. Some of us are called at times to give 100%.

We are not called to meet every need that another person has. There are times when people get themselves into jams, and expect others to bail them out. Sometimes we have to let people go through with the consequences of their actions. Some people may come to us as their last resort, when in reality, we are the first ones they have turned to. It's good to know when it's the right time to say no.

God is going to lay different needs upon our hearts to minister to certain people. We need to be willing to say yes when the Lord does it. We also make individual choices on what we will do with what we have extra. We can decide to become more generous in helping those with a need or we can spend the money on something else. Do keep in mind, that not everyone that you help is going to appreciate it.

11. What does it mean for a church to be a generous church? Do you want our church, New Life At Calvary to be known as a generous church? Why or Why not?

It means that we try to help people financially in the midst of emergencies or crisis that come up in life. It means that we try to use our resources and property to be a blessing to others inside and outside the church. It means that we extend hospitality on a regular basis. It means that we shower others with love, rather than trying to do only the minimum required. We have enough for coffee hour without being stingy. We go all out in our service to the community by offering the best that we can do.

12. The easiest way for us to become a generous church is for people to tithe. Why do you think so many of us resist the idea of giving God a dime out of each dollar we earn?

1) We think we have earned our money and that it is ours to do what we please. 2) We are in debt and can't see our way out. 3) We do not know that's what the Word teaches about giving. 4) We are afraid to trust God on the limited income that we have. 5) We just have never committed ourselves to doing it.

13. How may we have to change our lifestyles or mindsets if we are to become more generous? Can generosity be learned or do you have to be born with it?

1) We have to set limits for ourselves and know when enough is enough for us based on the teachings in the Word of God. 2) We have to also recognize how materialism creeps into our lives and be willing to send it back out the door. Generosity can be learned. The more we love God, the more generous we will become, because God is generous. Being truly grateful, makes us generous. Having a cause bigger than ourselves will also make us generous.