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2026: The Story of Jesus



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Cross Walk

From His first “Follow Me” to Simon and Andrew on the banks of the sea of Galilee (Mark 1:16-18), the cornerstone of Jesus’ kingdom ministry was laid. His directive echoes across time to us today. Will we follow Jesus? Will we be His disciples? And what does that actually mean?

For those first disciples, the way of the Master meant more than just His teaching and example, as essential as those steps were. “Follow Me” raises the question “Where is He going?” Long before Jesus was nailed to the tree, He told His disciples that the cross was His destination (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). We are no more agreeable to this journey’s end than they were. If “Follow Me” means we’re heading to the cross, do we really want to go?

And yet, the cross is not only the destination but the journey itself. The way of the Master is the way of the cross. It is what “Follow Me” means, as Jesus taught all of them: “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (8:34; cf. 10:21). Paul links faith in Christ to the cross too. Faith is being crucified with Him (Galatians 2:20; 6:14). And that changes everything!

How astonishing that the cross, the instrument for the once-and-for-all sacrifice of God’s Son, is also the implement of discipleship, of what it means to follow. We not only kneel at the cross but also carry it. These two dimensions of the cross are noted when Jesus said He “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Only Jesus ransoms, but He calls us all to sacrificially serve as He did.

Though we may try, we cannot follow Jesus without taking up our cross. And the cross is simply submission to God and service to others. It means “Not My will but Thine be done” and loving the least of these. The cross is dying to ourselves and living to Him. And as His disciples, we are called to make more disciples, so we say, “Take up your cross and follow Jesus.” Proclaim it. Live it.

— Jason Overman



Moving from admirers to
followers of Jesus.

by **Moises Capetillo**

There is a difference between being around Jesus and following Him.

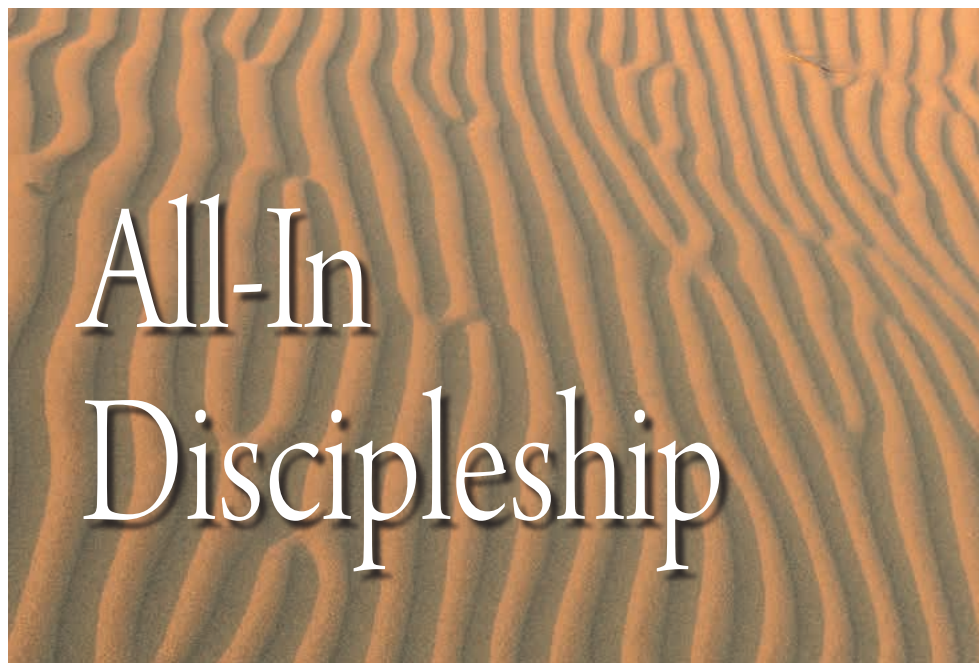
Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is surrounded by crowds. People come from everywhere — to hear Him teach, to witness miracles, to experience something extraordinary. They listen, they watch, they marvel.

But not all of them follow. Some are curious. Some are impressed. Some are hopeful. Some need healing. Some are skeptical. The crowds are large and impressive, but only a few become disciples. And Jesus knows the difference.

Recently, I was part of a large gathering where a speaker was sharing something powerful and engaging. The room was full, and you could feel the energy. People were attentive, nodding, even taking notes. When the sermon ended, the speaker invited those present to take a next step — to commit, to engage, to move from simply hearing to actually doing something with what had just been shared.

Most people stayed in their seats. Some gathered their things. A few stepped forward. Only a select few stayed after the prayer to ask follow-up questions of the speaker.

Everyone had heard the message, but only a handful responded to it. As I watched that moment unfold, I couldn't help but think about the crowds that



followed Jesus, and I realized that the same dynamic exists today.

At one point in John 6, after Jesus' powerful and challenging teaching about eating His flesh and drinking His blood (vv. 41-65), many who have been following Jesus make a decision: "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more" (v. 66). The same crowd that has seen miracles and received provision (vv. 1-14) now walk away.

What has changed? The message has become costly.

Admiration stays to be fed and enjoy miracles. However, it struggles with surrender. When Jesus' teaching demands more than curiosity — when it requires commitment — the crowd thins. It did then, it still does today.

Reordering priorities

In Luke 14, great multitudes are traveling with Jesus (v. 25). By every outward measure, this

is a success. The movement is growing. The audience is expanding. If ever there were a moment to simplify the message, this is it.

But Jesus does something unexpected. He turns to the crowd and says, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (v. 26).

These are not comfortable words. When Jesus speaks about "hating" father, mother, and even one's own life, He is not promoting hostility. He is establishing priority.

To follow Christ means that every other loyalty must take second place. Discipleship is not something we add to our lives. It is something that reshapes our thoughts, our actions, our whole being.

Jesus is not asking to be included. He is calling us to be surrendered.



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Cost of discipleship

Jesus continues, “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (v. 27).

In the first century, the cross was not symbolic; it was final. To carry a cross meant walking toward surrender, toward loss of control, toward denying self.

This is where admiration often stops. Admiration is comfortable; discipleship is costly. Admiration listens; discipleship obeys. Admiration stays in the crowd; discipleship steps out of it. Admiration hears the call; discipleship answers it. Admiration is drawn to the miracle; discipleship commits to the Master. Admiration asks, “What can I receive?” Discipleship asks, “What must I relinquish?”

Jesus makes this distinction clear elsewhere: “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (6:46). The difference between the crowd and the disciple is not proximity but obedience. One of the most

sobering realities in the Gospels is that people can be near Jesus and still not follow Him.

The rich young ruler proves this. He comes sincerely, asks the right question, and walks away when the cost clearly becomes too much to bear (Mark 10:17-22).

The crowds cheer Jesus one moment and abandon Him the next, proving that being close to Jesus is not the same as surrendering to Him.

Jesus gives two brief yet profound illustrations of this point: a builder constructing a tower and a king preparing for war (Luke 14:28-32). Both emphasize the same principle: *Consider the cost before you commit.*

No builder begins without evaluating resources. No king goes to battle without assessing the risk. And yet, many approach discipleship without reflection. Jesus is not discouraging followers; He is inviting serious ones. He concludes, “Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (v. 33).

This is the dividing line. To follow Jesus means releasing control not only of possessions but of priorities, plans, identity, and direction.

Because admiration costs little. Discipleship costs everything.

Standing invitation

If we are honest, it is easy to remain in the crowd. We can listen regularly. Agree intellectually. Participate outwardly — and still avoid the deeper question: Am I truly following Jesus? Following Jesus shows up in obedience — in decisions that align with His Word, in surrender that reshapes our priorities, in quiet faithfulness when no one is watching.

Jesus never asked for admiration. He asked for disciples.

The crowd will always exist — observing, listening, reacting. But the invitation is not to remain in the crowd. It is to step out of it. To count the cost. To carry the cross. To follow.

Counting the cost is not meant to push us away but to make us aware. Because Jesus wants followers who understand what they are stepping into — not just in moments of inspiration but in a lifetime of surrender.

Jesus is not looking for fans. He is calling followers. And while discipleship costs everything . . . it leads to everything that truly matters. **BA**

Moises Capetillo

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Escaping the Comparison Trap

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by **Amanda Fullington**

In John 21, when Peter gets distracted with comparison and wonders about another disciple's path and purpose, Jesus gently redirects Peter's gaze — from comparison to calling. Jesus answers with a simple question, then an invitation: "What is that to you? You follow Me" (v. 22).

In saying this, Jesus reminds us that our obedience is deeply personal. True success lies in our individual obedience to what He has instructed us to do, no matter what it looks like to the world or to others or how it compares to another believer's journey.

In fact, that should not be a concern of ours at all. Jesus' question — "What is that to you?" — cuts straight through our tendency to compare. It reminds us that a relationship with Him is unique to each person. We are not called to analyze someone else's path, measure our obedience against theirs, or even wonder how our walk might be perceived by others. Those questions only distract us from the simple, steady call on our own lives.

When we release the burden of comparison, we discover a surprising freedom: to love without calculating, to obey without looking sideways, and to trust that the same Lord who calls us will not only guide us but also walk out our journey *with* us. Our task is not to keep pace with others but to keep our eyes on Jesus, walking forward in daily faithfulness, letting Him lead us one step at a time.

It's easy to look at others, as Peter did, and fall into the trap of comparing our path with someone else's. Or even get caught up in how others may judge or misunderstand us. But Jesus calls us to simply focus on Him and follow.

Lately, the words Mary speaks in John 2:5 have been a steady and grounding reminder to me: "Whatever He says to you, do it." That's all. Mary does not explain *how* it will work or *why* it makes sense. She doesn't project the outcome or soften the command. She simply points the servants to Jesus and steps back. Her words strip obedience down to its most vulnerable form: listening and responding. No comparison, no second-guessing, no concern over appearances. Just focus on Jesus, then prompt obedience.

There is something freeing in that kind of faith. We often want clarity before obedience, reassurance before action, or confirmation that others are doing the same thing. Mary offers none of that. She reminds us that our responsibility is not to predict the result but to simply respond to the voice of Christ.

When we live this way, obedience becomes less about control and more about wonder and surrender. We stop striving to manage outcomes. Instead, as we see God at work, blessing our submission, we discover that there is no greater adventure in this life than simply following Christ — quietly, faithfully, one foot in front of the other. The results will be far more than we could ever ask or think.

"Whatever He says to you, do it." Not more than that. Not less. Just that. **BA**

Amanda Fullington writes from Branson, MO.





How Much Is Too Much?

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by Jewell Johnson

A young couple commits to large monthly payments to own a luxury car.

A family maxes out their credit card to take a costly vacation.

A woman leaves more than two hundred pairs of shoes in her closet when she passes away.

We can easily convince ourselves we will be happier if we own more things. But how much is too much? The Bible recognizes our need for food, clothing, and shelter. It also gives us principles by which we can assess our relationship to what we own.

Possessed by possessions. Houses and lands — the things we own — demand attention, but if they possess us, we have too much. Our preoccupation with our possessions, money, and jobs can desensitize us to what is really important. In the parable of the sower and seed, the seed falling among thorns is choked out by life's cares (Matthew 13:22).

Jesus told the parable of a farmer who built bigger storage barns for his crops (Luke 12:18-21). Absorbed in gathering and storing the abundant harvest, he didn't factor God into his life — only getting more. He was not rich toward God.

When the things we own and care for consume most of our time and energy, God's face becomes veiled. Our possessions control us.

Forgetting our Source. We have too much if we forget our true Source. James notes that God is the source of our possessions: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights . . ." (1:17). We cannot provide for ourselves; we depend on God for life's

provisions. When we pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11), we acknowledge the Lord as our source.

Ignoring the poor. God is concerned about the hungry child, the homeless family, the frail, aged person. If we ignore them, we have too much. In the Old Testament, God commanded the harvesters to leave the corners of the fields for the poor (Leviticus 19:9, 10). Paul encouraged the church in Corinth to send an offering to the needy Christians in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-3).

One purpose of earning wages is so we may help the poor. Paul writes, "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28). The poor are so important to God that He pronounces a blessing on those who help them: "Blessed are those who have regard for the weak; the LORD delivers them in times of trouble" (Psalm 41:1). Sharing our resources to help those in need is not a suggestion but a command that followers of Christ take seriously.

Discontentment. Why does a father uproot his family frequently as he searches for just the right job? Why does a woman buy clothes she doesn't need? Often feelings of discontentment are the culprit — another sign that we have too much.

The Word of God instructs us, "Be content with what you have" (Hebrews 13:5). And "If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that" (1 Timothy 6:8). These verses are a plea for a simpler lifestyle. If we are not satisfied with food, clothes, and shelter — the basics — we may need to

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Big lessons from
small leftovers.

by R. Herbert

All four Gospels feature Jesus' miraculous feedings of great crowds: the four thousand in Matthew (15:32-39) and Mark (8:1-9) and the five thousand in Matthew (14:13-21), Mark (6:32-44), Luke (9:12-17), and John (6:1-14). All the accounts make it clear that after these meals, the disciples picked up large quantities of leftover crumbs, or small bits of bread and fish. The feeding of the five thousand in northern Galilee resulted in twelve baskets of leftovers, often seen as symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. The feeding of the four thousand in, or on the borders of, the Gentile region of Decapolis (see Mark 7:31) resulted in seven baskets of leftovers. This is often seen as symbolic of the seven people-groups of the Gentile area (Deuteronomy 7:1).

But the Gospel of John adds a key fact regarding these leftovers:

Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, *that nothing may be lost*" (6:11, 12, ESV; emphasis added).

Deeper meaning

In reading the story of this miracle, we tend to notice only the fact that after the feeding of the multitude, the disciples took up far more food than they started with. But notice that Christ's instructions to gather up the remaining pieces of bread

included the careful instruction “so that nothing may be lost” or, as we might say today, “Don’t lose any!” Clearly, there was no shortage of leftover food, so the command not to lose any of the crumbs had to have another reason.

To understand that reason, we must look closely at the Gospel of John. In the sixth chapter, John records the feeding of the five thousand as one of the key signs of Jesus’ messiahship and adds a great deal of context that is lacking in the other Gospels. After the feeding, John’s narrative proceeds with Jesus moving from the area, but what happens next is clearly connected. Once Jesus arrives at His destination, He begins to teach the people a lesson based on what they have seen a little while earlier.

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. . . . All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. . . . And this is the will of him who sent me, *that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me*, but raise it up on the last day” (vv. 35, 37-39, ESV; emphasis added).

The disciples had doubtless not forgotten the feeding of the five thousand — or the work of picking up twelve baskets of leftover bits of food. So there is no doubt that they understood the connection between the miracle and the lesson Jesus taught, even if they did not comprehend its full significance at that time. Jesus was stressing to His listeners that the miracle was not only a sign of His messianic identity

(v. 14) but also a living lesson revealing His and the Father’s intent in working with His human family (v. 39).

Bread of Heaven

While Jesus could have just verbally stressed, “Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18:14), John shows how important the point apparently was — enough so that Jesus drove it home by means of a miracle. We may know intellectually that our Father does not desire that anyone be lost, but in our times of failure or discouragement, we should remember the extent to which Christ made that point for us to see clearly.



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In many Bible translations, John 6:30 is rendered, “What sign will You give us?” This would be a strange question from the people after they just witnessed the feeding of the five thousand. But the Greek verb is not the future tense but in the present tense (“What is the sign You are giving us?”). The crowd

was not asking for another sign but for an explanation of the one they had just seen (see KJV, ESV, NASB, etc.).

Quite rightly, the crowd interpreted Jesus’ feeding of the multitude in that wilderness area as a replication of the manna from heaven given in Moses’ time: “Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’” (v. 31). By implication, if Jesus was like Moses, He must be the prophet that Moses had predicted to be like him (Deuteronomy 18:15). That was why the crowds desired to make Jesus their leader like Moses at that time (John 6:14, 15).

But Jesus turned the crowd’s

attention from Moses to God: “It is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven” (v. 32). Jesus also emphasized another lesson: “Do not work for food that spoils” (v. 27). Instead, He told

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A Ministry of Service



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Choosing to shun
the spotlight.
by **Caroline S. Cooper**

Many years ago, I attended my first Christian women's conference at a local concert venue. We worshipped, listened to presentations by popular women speakers, and enjoyed fellowship with other Christian women. As I drove home from the event, I reflected on my growing writing and speaking ministry. *I could do this, I told myself. I could be a Christian speaker. I would love to teach thousands of people about God.*

That dream did not come to pass. My once-upon-a-time desire for popularity and prestige was not part of God's plan. Even now, grandiose questions can enter my mind: *Why won't God open the door for me to have a national spotlight and a world-wide ministry? Shouldn't I be doing more with the gifts God has given me?*

I have learned to acknowledge these thoughts, set them aside, and turn my mind back to Jesus. He set the example of how to serve in love and humility.

When we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love others as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31), we will be content to humbly minister to others in the unique way God has called us. This can be a handful of hurting people or a stadium

filled with worshippers. God has given me joy and fulfillment in the work I am doing for Him. I don't need a spotlight or a global stage. I simply need Jesus.

Desire for humility

Mark reveals in his Gospel that Jesus' disciples were not immune to this desire for greatness.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory" (10:35-37).

In Matthew's version of this event, or possibly on a separate

occasion, the mother of James and John asked Jesus to place her sons in these positions of power (20:20, 21).

Jesus' response revealed a radically different mindset from that of the world. In both Gospel accounts, Jesus first informed James and John that, although they wanted to follow in His footsteps, they were not ready to do so. He then told the disciples, "Whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:44, 45).

In Jesus' kingdom, then, the desire must be for humility, not greatness.

Humble Servant

Jesus did not expect His disciples to do anything He was not willing to do Himself. When He performed His first public ministry at the wedding in Cana, Jesus did so at His mother's request. After she explained the situation to Him, He responded by saying His time had not come.

But Jesus agreed to His mother's request, revealing His servant heart. Six large stone jars, or waterpots, were filled to the brim with water. Jesus miraculously transformed the water into wine, but He did so in secret, without calling attention to His actions. Only the servants knew what had happened.

Although Jesus told those He healed early in His ministry to keep His identity secret, word began to spread about His power. His growing popularity drew the attention of the religious leaders. Matthew writes, "Then the Pharisees went out

and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him. But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all" (Matthew 12:14, 15).

Even as threats against Him began to escalate, Jesus healed them *all*. He did not turn anyone away. He did not stop healing when His feet got tired or His tummy growled with hunger. He responded to people's needs as a humble servant, showing them unconditional love and kindness.

Ultimate act of service

Throughout His ministry, Jesus did many great things, but not for attention. At His last Passover

meal the day before His arrest, Jesus gathered with His disciples behind closed doors. Then the Lord of the universe knelt before each of these men and washed their feet. He once again took the role of a servant by performing this dirty, messy, smelly job for those He had called to follow Him.

Washing feet was an example He expected them to follow.

He told them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, a *servant is not greater than his master*; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:16, 17, emphasis added). Later in the evening, Jesus re-emphasized this important teaching (15:20).

Our call to serve

I am grateful that God taught me the true meaning of service. Yes, I still have prideful thoughts and lofty goals for my life, but I've learned God's plan will always be better than I can imagine.

Humility is essential for living

“In Jesus' kingdom, the desire must be for humility, not greatness.”

as a servant. Jesus, the greatest servant of all, has called us to serve. As His followers, let us strive to be like Him. **BA**

Caroline S. Cooper
writes from
Harrisonville, MO.



Pray and Do Not Lose Heart!



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We cannot succeed by
working alone.

by **Dr. David R. Downey**

While we serve God, our challenges are real. Our obstacles are great. Our success is assured!

But we are going to need some help. We cannot do this alone. If God is, in fact, going to be glorified by what we do in service to Him, wouldn't it make sense that He must be involved in our efforts?

This reminds me of a little boy who was trying to lift a large rock unsuccessfully. His father stood nearby and asked, "Are you using all the strength you have?"

The frustrated boy replied, "Yes!"

His dad said, "No, you are not. You haven't asked me to help you."

How often do we find ourselves working in God's field without attention to His supernatural power? No wonder we get discouraged!

Jesus tells a famous parable in Luke 18 about a widow and a judge to show "that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" when asking for His help.

Working without assistance (vv. 2, 3)

Here you have two conditions for failure when trying to accomplish things for God.

The "helper." Jesus says a widow was seeking justice from her adversary. The only help she could appeal to was a judge. You know how powerful judges are

today; they were even more so then. They perch high on their benches, and, likely as not, they have beetling brows and imposing eyes. And they have that little hammer. Just like in the TV shows, if you get too feisty, they can whack it on the stand and shock you into submission.

This judge, Jesus carefully noted, did not fear God or respect anyone. He was Al Capone in a black robe. He defied the judgment of God and rejected the opinion of others. That would make him unassailable. Immovable.

This judge represented the widow's only hope for assistance.

That is the state of this adversary: He simply did not care. And the widow in such a state had needed a friend in this judge. As

we like to say, “With friends like this, who needs enemies?”

The position of the supplicant. The second condition for failure was the widow’s position in society. There was no more powerless person in the first century AD than the widow — unless it was the orphan. That is why Scripture talks about them both so much in the same breath using the word *oppression*. Widows and orphans were newly shorn sheep in need of a shepherd.

Here was a woman with no man to stand with her. Can you imagine her position before a judge who had no concern for God or anyone else? Others would likely warn her that her situation was hopeless.

But the widow responded with courage and persistence. She reminds me of a crab I literally ran into at the beach the other day. I was shuffling in the surf when this little bitty crab grabbed my toe in its pincher. I wondered, *Now that it has me, what does it think it is going to do with me?*

In the parable, the widow was like that crab: She held on and would not let go.

In our work for the kingdom, there is a call for courage and tenacity — an opportunity to face our difficulties and show the Lord’s strength. The world would have us defeated, but God would have us win.

This widow had been repeatedly thrown out of the judge’s presence. Just like her, we should never be people who give up in our service to others. We need to be mild, certainly, but maybe a little bit wild at times.

Necessity of prayer (vv. 4-7)

We notice in verse 4 that the judge knew he was a jerk. Some people, while knowing they are wrong and unfair, will still not change in the least. That is not an option for those of us in the church. When we know what to do and do not do it, we are subjected to greater judgment.

Respect the power of prayer.

This judge did not regard people or God, so he and the widow had no common ground. He had authority; she had no pull. He had the options; she had none. Remember this next time you think the challenges you face in ministry are particularly difficult. They cannot be weighed against you much worse than they were against this widow. In essence, Jesus is saying, “If this unjust judge, who has no reason to change, eventually gives the widow what she asks for, how

God has taught me this lesson. Philippians 4 says we are to be anxious for nothing but to pray about everything. For example, let’s say I am worried about an upcoming meeting. My inward discussion goes like this: *Well, let me see. If I say this, what if they say this . . . I hope I remember to touch on . . . I need not appear uninformed . . . etc., etc.*

In such times, God has taught me not to be anxious but to pray. When I am dreading a coming meeting or rehashing a past meeting, then I know God is trying to get my attention. I make the necessary plans, I do my due diligence, but instead of ruminating, I pray. Do you know nine times out of ten, exactly what I ask in prayer is what I get?

Likely you remember the story when Elisha was in Dothan and was unexpectedly surrounded by the enemy (2 Kings 6:11-23).

“In our work for the kingdom, there is a call for courage and tenacity.”

much more will God answer since He cares immensely?”

One of the most unused weapons of our arsenal is prayer. According to Ephesians 6:18, each piece of our spiritual armor is to be put on with prayer. We are to pray always.

Ben-hadad besieged the city by night. When the servant of the prophet saw the army round about the city the following morning, he exclaimed, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?”

Elisha answered, “Do not fear,

for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

I love that! Ben-hadad had a huge army, and they were there to get Elisha. Nevertheless, there were more with Elisha than with the army camped outside.

Likewise, there are more with us than are with the adversaries we face. We have the host of heaven with us when we serve!

Persist in prayer. Luke 18:5 tells us the judge was aware that this woman would *not quit*. Something in her eye told him that if he kept throwing her out, she would keep coming back. Some have titled this parable “The Importunate Widow,” as she asked insistently and repeatedly.

We need to be persistent with God, but impertinence will not work. That’s a different word. We always approach God with reverence.

In his autobiography, William Allen White related the story of a boyhood playmate, Temple Friend, who was kidnapped by the Indians when he was quite young. Providentially, Temple’s grandfather was a missionary to the Indians. He continued believing his grandson was alive. When visiting an Indian village, he would line up the boys who would be about the age of his missing grandson, and quietly whisper, “Temple, Temple” in the ear of each boy.

He did this day in and day out. On one occasion, he found about twelve boys the age of his grandson — all eight to ten years old — and he started the same procedure. At the middle of the line a little boy’s face lit up, and he responded, “Me Temple!”

We applaud the boy’s being found, especially because his grandfather’s persistence was rewarded. That gives us a look at God’s heart: He applauds persistence in the same way. He loves to reward us because we kept at it in prayer. Remember Luke 18:1? Jesus taught this parable so that we might pray rather than lose heart.

Will God find faith? (v. 8)

This question from Jesus supposes several things:

- “On earth” is the only time for faith. We will not need faith in the coming kingdom, and it will be absent in the second death. We need faith now.
- The Lord looks for faith on earth because faith is pleasing to Him.
- The Lord will also *find* faith. There are no insignificant believers when they believe.
- It is sad but assumed that when Jesus comes, He will be disappointed that many of His children do not have faith. Their salvation is secure, but they are not trusting while praying.

What will Christ see in us when He returns? People who are trying to move our “rocks” by ourselves, or people who are persistently seeking God’s help in our labors? Not losing heart in our prayers is more important than ever to accomplish what God has called us to do. **BA**

Dr. David Downey writes from Burleson, TX.



Nothing Lost

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the crowds to work for the bread that God gives that endures to eternal life.

Work of faith

In saying this, Jesus taught us that salvation is work as well as a gift. We must work to receive the gift God offers us, and that work is the work of faith: “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (v. 29).

Belief is one of the consistent themes of John’s Gospel. The apostle goes to lengths to emphasize that, while Jesus offered those who come to Him eternal life, we must believe in Him as the true Bread of Life to receive that gift.

And when we do believe, and endure in our belief, we ourselves become part of another miracle. Spiritually, we become one with the Bread of Life and, at the same time, separate fragments of Him. Like the crumbs in the miraculous signs Jesus performed, it is His will that none of us should be lost. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds a doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.

Questions & Answers



In the Great Commission we are told to obey Jesus' commandments. Are they different from God's?

In a word, *no*. Jesus' commandments are the heart of God for humanity. Jesus of Nazareth is both truly God and truly man, being with the Father eternally and working collaboratively in creation (Genesis 1:26; John 1:1-3, 10; Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 1:2). Further, in context, these verses describe Jesus as both the agent and purpose of creation. God is never in disunity with Himself. Therefore, the Son's commandments are not different from God's.

Understanding the difference between eternal law and ceremonial law helps prevent misinterpretations. So it is important to consider why Jesus' commandments given while He was on earth cannot be different from God's. There are other questions related to this question that deserve an answer, but space prevents handling them here.

Jesus would never give a commandment that was of different intent than what God had already given. The Son spoke only the words that were the will of His Father. Jesus states, "I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak" (John 12:49, 50; cf. 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28, 29; 14:10). Every word from God agrees with the rest.

So what is different about Jesus' commandments that could have prompted this question? A Pharisee lawyer tested Jesus, asking, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in

the law?" Jesus answered, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40). Just as the Ten Commandments are the summary of the law, Jesus' answer is the summation of the summary.

We should be careful to note that not all of what was given to Israel extended into the Church Age. Jesus stated that He came to fulfill the law, not destroy it (5:17). This means He met all the law's requirements, allowing it to "pass away" after His sacrifice as the means for justification, which is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10).

The good news is that the law of God is intended to be lived out in love full of grace (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16). The really good news is that in the new covenant, the believer is born again by God's Holy Spirit. In their new nature, the believer lives in obedience through grace in genuine love toward God, not through legalistic obedience. This is the model Jesus set forth (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21, 22).

In John 1:29-34, John the Baptist declares that the Holy Spirit remaining upon Jesus identifies Him as the promised Messiah. In a similar way, the child of God is made so by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1:13; Romans 8:9). The empowering presence of God in believers equips them to grow in the direction and nature of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) and obey His commandments.

— Elder Chip Hinds

The Silence of the Parables



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If stories were Jesus' favorite teaching tool, why did the apostles stop using them?

by David Cerqueira

The New Testament does something unexpected after the Gospels: It departs from Jesus' style of teaching. Read the New Testament straight through, and you'll notice it. Jesus tells stories; His apostles do not.

In the Gospels, the air is thick with the scent of mustard seed, the dust of the vineyard, and the bleating of lost sheep. Jesus, the master teacher, rarely speaks without telling a story. He clothes the mysteries of the kingdom in the familiar forms of coins, candles, and wheat.

Through this method, the ordinary becomes a doorway to the eternal.

So why do the parables disappear after Jesus?

As we move from the book of Acts into the epistles of Paul, Peter, and John, the sheep and seeds vanish. The language becomes direct, doctrinal, and starkly plain. Did the apostles simply lack their Master's imagination, or was there a more profound theological reason for the silence of the parables?

Understanding why Jesus used this "story" language, and why the apostles eventually set it aside, reveals a beautiful progression in God's Word. Reading through the New Testament moves you from the shadows of mystery into the brilliant light of the revealed gospel.

Mechanics

We often think of parables as simple teaching aids — devices designed to make complex truths more accessible. We treat them like sermon illustrations, little snacks to help us digest the spiritual meat. But when the disciples asked Jesus about His parables, Jesus described them as something far more provocative.

The disciples' question came at the end of a long day of ministry. It was direct and to the point: "Why do You speak to them in these riddles?" (Matthew 13:10).

Jesus' response was jarring: "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (v. 11).

In saying this, Jesus was invoking the sobering ministry of the prophet Isaiah. He cited the ancient warning that some would

“keep on hearing, but . . . not understand” and “keep on seeing, but . . . not perceive” (Isaiah 6:9, 10). Jesus’ answer didn’t offer a bridge as much as it drew a line in the sand.

To the openhearted, the parable revealed. To the hardened heart, it concealed. The parable functioned as a spiritual filter. For the humble, every story was a doorway into the Divine. But for others, what could have been an entrance became a wall.

This reveals a recurring principle in Jesus’ ministry: Receptivity begets clarity, while resistance begets obscurity. Jesus explicitly cited this spiritual law to explain His use of parables: “For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (Matthew 13:12).

The parables functioned in strict compliance with this principle. They were the “more” given to those who were already seeking, but a “taking away” of understanding for those who stood in prideful resistance.

Johannine shift

When we move from the Synoptic Gospels to the Gospel of John, the literary landscape shifts. The short, punchy parables of the Galilean hillsides — the prodigal son, the ten virgins, the talents — are notably absent. In their place, we find longer, intimate discourses and the seven “I Am” statements.

This is what scholars sometimes refer to as *paroimia* rather than *parabolē*. The word *parabolē* is the standard term in the Synoptics. By definition,

parabolē are the “earthly stories with heavenly meanings — what we normally call the parables. However, the word *paroimia* is most commonly found in the Gospel of John. These are more like deep metaphors.

A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things in order to highlight a shared quality or meaning. The “living water” in John 4:10 and the “grain of wheat” in John 12:24 are good examples.

Near the very end of Jesus’ ministry, Jesus himself had something to say about His teaching methods. In the Upper Room Discourse, He said, “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language [*paroimia*]; but the time

Walking in plain speech

When we finally reach the Epistles, the language is predominantly straight forward. While the apostles still utilize metaphors, they no longer use them to “conceal” truth but to illustrate the now-revealed mystery.

The movement from the stories of the Synoptics to the metaphors of John, and finally to the plain speech of the Epistles, was not a mere coincidence of style but a systematic unveiling — a divine necessity of history.

In the beginning of the New Testament, the gospel — specifically, the Cross and the Resurrection — had not yet happened. The stories Jesus told acted as an explanation of a reality that

“With the coming of the Spirit, the “veil” of the parable and metaphor would be torn alongside the veil of the temple.”

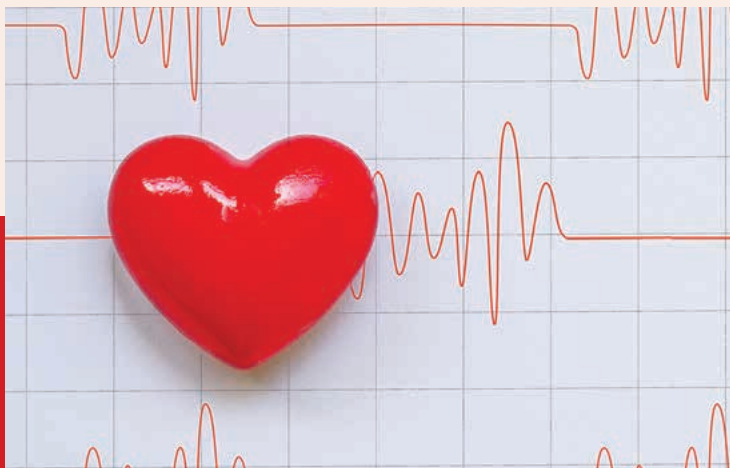
is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father” (John 16:25).

This is a turning point where Jesus identifies that the *paroimia* — the cryptic metaphors — were only for a specific season. But with the coming of the Spirit, the “veil” of the parable and metaphor would be torn alongside the veil of the temple.

was still in the future. By the time of the apostles, history had provided the key to Jesus’ teachings and purpose. The rest of the New Testament is no longer about comparing spiritual life to earthly things but about how to live spiritually on earth.

However, this plain speech of the New Testament was never intended to remain static on

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Sabbath for

by **Santiago Chávez**

For You created my innermost parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, because I am awesomely and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well (Psalm 139:13, 14).

Studying any organ in the human body presents evidence of an immeasurable, intelligent Creator. From approximately twenty-four days after our conception until we die, our heart does not cease to beat, but it rests two-thirds of the time to serve our body. That is a powerful lesson in the importance of sustaining a constant Sabbath to serve others.

We see a clear cycle of work-rest in the life of our Lord that was not restricted to praying only on the Sabbath. Luke documents that Jesus' custom was not to only observe the weekly Sabbath but also "often slip away to the wilderness and pray" (Luke 4:16; 5:16). Mark and Matthew

mention that Jesus regularly sought solitude (Mark 1:35; Matthew 14:23).

Cardiac sabbath

It is remarkable that the heart has its own pacemaker, triggering a chain of electrical and muscular actions that make it beat 100 times per minute.

The pressure in the aorta immediately outside the left ventricle is normally around 120 millimeters of mercury (mmHg) upon contraction. Each contraction requires a great deal of effort, but only lasts one-third of the cardiac cycle. The leaflets of the aortic valve seal the openings to the coronary arteries to protect them. Otherwise, such force would tear the delicate vessel walls.

The pressure decreases to almost half (80 mmHg) during relaxation. This phase lasts two thirds of the cardiac cycle. Blood passively flows toward the heart, filling the four chambers and flowing toward the closed pulmonary and aortic valves. The aortic valve changes shape into a three-sided pyramid that directs blood flow to fill the coronary arteries.

Our heart lasts an entire lifetime because it rests in every cardiac cycle — about 40 seconds of every minute (40 minutes of each hour). It is broken up into rest cycles — a cycle of sabbaths, presented here as a "cardiac sabbath." Our heart protects this sabbath because it needs it to survive and serve the body, which provides it with oxygen and nutrients.

Detractors of Sabbath rest

Likewise, our life must include the practice of Sabbath for the good of our spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health and so that we can serve others.

However, we should avoid associating with certain types of people to protect our practice of Sabbath, just as Jesus did.

One such person is like a bottomless well. They demand your help, consume your time, and then hold a grudge against you if you don't provide enough time for them. This kind of ungrateful person suffers from a malignant cancer of entitlement. They do not view your kindness as a gift; they view it as something you owe them.

the Heart

Jesus had followers that exclusively followed for the fringe benefits: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate some of the loaves and were filled” (John 6:26).

There can also be a smiling saboteur, a “Judas” nearby who tries to detract from your Sabbath. Declared enemies are easy to deal with, but this detractor conceals a dagger behind a smile. They may even claim to be rescuing us from our own ambition, but they are driven by envy, the most destructive force in any circle of friends. “Judas” is often a person close to you — a friend who has stood by your side from the very beginning or a colleague who started at the same level as you. You advanced over time, while they remained stagnant. They are cunning; they do not attack you openly.

Jesus understands this. He was not surprised when Judas betrayed Him to the religious authorities (Luke 22:48).

Besides these examples, an arrogant fool is the enemy of wisdom and growth and, if you are not careful, the enemy of your own sanity. This is not simply

someone lacking intelligence. Ignorance can be cured with knowledge. Rather, this fool is someone who refuses to know, someone enamored with their own opinion — even when that opinion is destroying their life. It is impossible to teach anything to a person who already believes they are a god. This sort of person makes the same mistakes repeatedly. They choose the wrong partners, they repeatedly invest in scams, etc.

Jesus lays out the recklessness of a fool: “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is demanded of you; and as for all that you have prepared, who will own it now?’” (Luke 12:20).

A call to rest

Like the heart, we can serve adequately only after the proper rest. I am not suggesting that we never try to help these difficult people, but they will frequently interfere with our practice of Sabbath if we let them. We also must recognize that we, too, can be these kinds of people. Yet the most precious thing about Christianity is that we can change. We

do not have to stay the same (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Jesus calls us to rest in Him:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

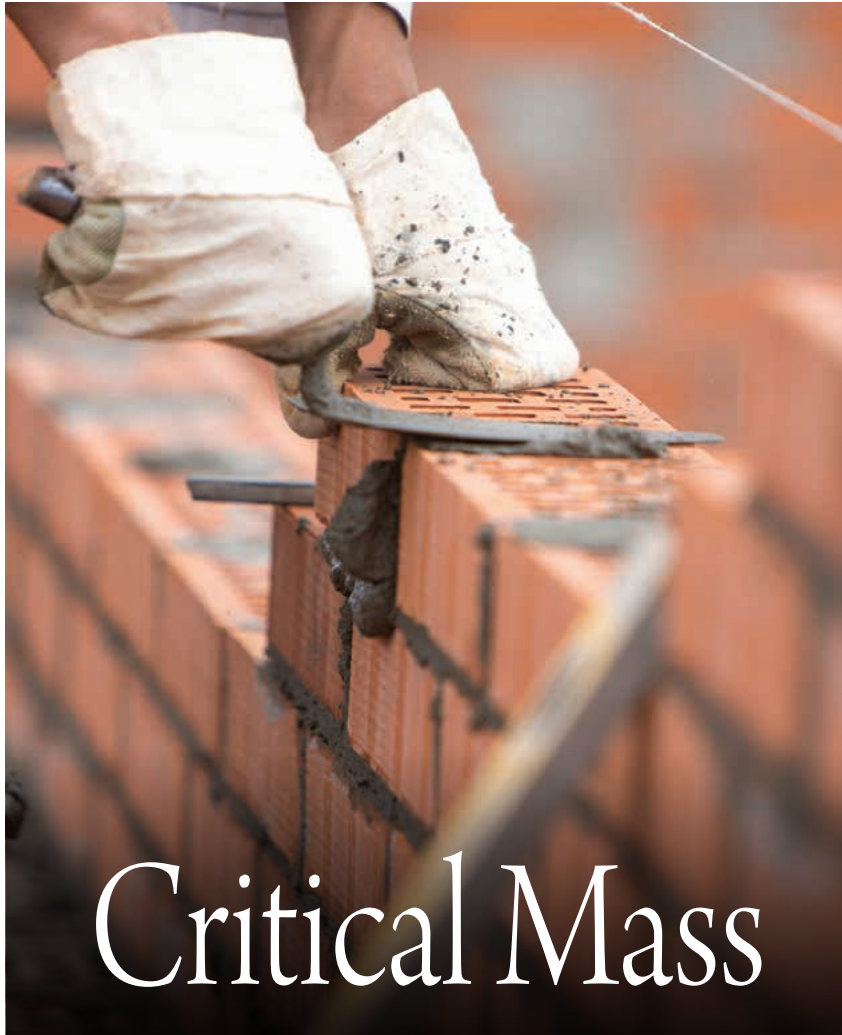
I invite all of us to live the Sabbath every day of our lives, that we may be fruitful for the work God has called us to do. **BA**

Santiago Chavez

and his wife, Lourdes, attend the Lanham, MD church. He is Assistant Dean of Academics in Spanish for Artios Christian College.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*.





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What it takes to carry out the missions mandate.
by Ronald Rousseau

The term *critical mass* may be understood in different ways. I may not define it technically or precisely, but here I want to think about the term in light of Luke 14:28 and our work at GC Missions: “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?” (NIV).

A simple illustration of critical mass is the amount of force necessary to hammer a nail. If you want to drive the nail with two taps, you need to hit it with a certain amount of critical mass.

How does this apply to GC Missions? Besides the financial needs to accomplish a task, we must also consider material and human resources, planning, and all the tools needed to finish a project as Jesus describes in Luke 14:28. All this amounts to critical mass.

Finishing a project is never guaranteed, but starting it with sufficient critical mass is essential for success. This is especially true

of missions. Critical assessment and discipline are needed at the start if we are to see the project come to fruition.

Three stages

In project management there are three stages: storming, norming, and performing. These characterize what happens at the beginning, middle, and end of a project. Since the beginning of a project typically includes the development of ideas and planning, it tends to be somewhat chaotic. This sometimes occurs because people are learning their roles or aligning with estimates. This storming stage can reveal that we have too little or, most often, not enough staff to start a mission project.

After getting past the storming phase, the team starts to react in a normal fashion and sometimes advances to the performing phase.

At each level, there is a degree of critical mass that is needed to continue to the next, but the beginning can be the hardest. Typically in the storming phase, identifying what’s critical and what is not a priority is essential to getting the project off the ground. In the storming phase, it’s sometimes difficult to identify all that it will take for the team to elevate to the next level: better training, tools, funding?

To comply with Luke 14:28, we have to know not just what the goal is but also what the obstacles are. We have to know how to stay focused and how to recognize when we are becoming too comfortable, lest we lose the critical mass to succeed.

Goals and obstacles

All this comes to mind when I think about the goals and obstacles of Missions. I pray daily for our mission partners as they deal with various opportunities and difficulties where they are called to work.

In February 2026, a team of seven missionaries, including my wife and me, took a trip to Lomé, the capital city of Togo in Africa. We went there to evaluate the mission that has been started in Togo and to see what opportunities exist to do more mission work there.

People in Togo speak French, English, and Ewe. Not being able to speak at least two of those languages can become a hurdle for anyone doing missionary work there. We also have to consider culture, geography, and civil laws.

One of the common challenges in Togo and beyond is registering local churches with the national government of the country where they reside. Obtaining registration and national recognition for churches beyond just a low-level church mission status has not been a priority in the past, but it should be when establishing a church.

Items that need to be identified when planting a church or mission include the following:

- planning and executing an evangelistic campaign;
- church registration;
- a plan for establishing a permanent church home;
- a plan for growth;
- a plan for sustainability.

Each of these items must be done with critical mass — having the funds, logistics, and support

to get the tasks done in a reasonable amount of time. Critical mass can come from having more resources to apply to problem solving or more focus on the problems before us. A disciplined and unified approach is necessary to get the mission done. Sometimes it requires us to say no to something new in order to keep our commitment to finishing the projects we've already started and get those missions to a good state of being. This would include several things:

- discipleship, the spiritual infrastructure for making and teaching disciples;
- a mission statement that is understood in their communities;
- a path and plan for growth through evangelism;
- a financially self-sustaining ministry.

This is not a fully exhaustive list, but the idea is to see the plan come to fruition. We in GC Missions have many missions partners around the world, and there is a hunger to maintain and grow those missions. But we need focus and unity. Focus means that we are committed to put critical mass on the commitments we've made. Unity means

that we are not distracted and agree on our purpose and goals.

Engage with missions

Please reach out to GC Missions when you see a mission opportunity you want to be involved in. We may know something that would be good for you to know about this opportunity. We ask that you please reach out to us when you are motivated to donate or engage. This plea comes from a desire for the Church to stay focused and unified in our goal to do missions.

The work we do is mandated in the Great Commission. We want to represent our God, our church, and our Lord in the most excellent way we can. As a church, let's bring critical mass to the commitments we have made by staying focused and unified. We are better together. **BA**

Ronald Rousseau

is the director of GC Missions and superintendent of the Central District. He writes from Chicago, IL.



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How Much Is Too Much?

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scale back our possessions and work to cultivate an attitude of contentment. The person who is content with their place in life and what they own has discovered one of the secrets of happiness: “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6).

Unthankfulness. When I was a child, my mother often reminded me, “Remember to say ‘Thank you.’” I wondered if those words were so important.

They are. God is pleased when His children express gratitude to Him. Paul writes, “Always [give] thanks to God the Father for everything” (Ephesians 5:20).

He also instructs, “Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, . . . always giving thanks to God the Father for everything” (vv. 15, 20). The simple act of bowing our heads before eating a meal, or recounting blessings at the end of a day, is pleasing to our Creator.

Possessions are temporary. Our relationship with God is eternal. Christ assures us that when we seek first the kingdom of God, “All these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). We will have enough. **BA**

Jewell Johnson

writes from Fountain Hills, AZ. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.



No Regrets

William Borden walked away from the wealth of his family business to become an international missionary. He died while still in language training. A short time before his death, Borden wrote in his Bible, “No Regret.”

Prior to his death at the hands of the people he served, missionary Jim Elliot wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Although their lives were cut short, both men continue to challenge believers to faithfully follow God’s call. They also draw unbelievers to the one and only God worthy of such sacrifice. They and countless others have chosen to follow God rather than pursue the wealth of this world. In the process, they gain the treasures of heaven and leave a laudable legacy.

God calls each of us to follow Him. Whatever the cost, He shows us the way and grants us strength. Our paths may remain close to home or lead us to other countries and cultures. Wherever and however God calls, we face the same question: When we reach the end of our lives, will our choices leave us with no regrets?

— Diana Derringer

The Silence of the Parables

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a page. It was designed to be the blueprint for a new kind of storytelling — one where the parchment is the human soul and the ink is the character of Christ. As the apostles taught the life of salvation, they did so with the expectation that those truths would be “fleshed out” in the lives of believers. We are the new parables — flesh-and-blood narratives intended to draw other seeking hearts back to the Master. We are essentially the New Testament in 3D.

The parables did not truly disappear; they simply changed their medium. The dust of the vineyard and the scent of mustard seed have been replaced by the grit of our daily endurance and the fragrance of our quiet faithfulness. If the world is to see the kingdom today, it will not be through a riddle told on a Galilean hillside but through the narrative of a life transformed by the gospel.

We are the continuation of the Master’s method — living stories that make the eternal visible once again. The parables have not fallen silent; they have finally found their voice in us. **BA**

David Cerqueira
writes from Cranston, RI.



David Discovers

How to Follow Jesus



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by **Marcia Sanders**

"No, Skip. Over here. Walk beside me," David pleaded. "I've told you that a hundred times!"

"What's up?" Dad asked, walking outside.

"I'm trying to teach Skip to walk beside me. I've explained it to him, but he just doesn't listen."

"Have you tried using a treat to reward him when he does come to stand beside you?"

"No, I haven't," David answered. "I don't want to bribe him into obeying me,"

"It's not bribery. It's how to teach dogs to do what we want them to do," Dad explained. "Skip doesn't understand words, so the explanations don't help. You can, however, teach him simple commands like 'heel' and 'come' by giving him a small treat each time he responds correctly. Let me show you."

"Skip, here!" Dad commanded. The dog trotted to him, tail wagging.

Dad turned to David. "Now, you try it."

David imitated the action, and Skip came right to him. "That's good," David said. "But he already comes when I call."

"So, take it to the next level. Walk a couple of steps and repeat the command. This time, if he follows you, give him a small treat. I brought a few because I thought that was what you were doing out here. Now you try."

David followed Dad's advice, and soon Skip was walking by his side through the yard.

"Thanks, Dad," David beamed. "I didn't realize that I needed to control my words, break the task down into smaller steps, and give Skip a reward. That really worked!"

His dad smiled. "You know, Jesus had a special way of teaching people how to follow Him, but it didn't involve any treats. He used stories to help people remember. Can you think of any?"

"Are you talking about parables?" David asked.

"If so, yeah, I do. Let's see . . . there was the one about planting seeds in different kinds of dirt. And others — God's kingdom as a treasure, talents, what a good neighbor is, lost things getting found, a son's obedience. . . . Oh yeah, and the one about the unforgiving servant. What a loser that guy was!"

"Good memory!" Dad exclaimed. "I'm proud of you! Do you know why Jesus told such stories instead of the lessons He wanted people to learn?"

"Hmmm . . .," David thought. "I've never considered that. I remember stories easier than rules."

"Exactly! We all remember stories better. Just as Skip didn't listen to your explanations, people don't listen to explanations as well as they do stories. When we remember the story, then we also remember the lesson. Look at how many stories you remembered just now," Dad pointed out. "What was the lesson with that unforgiving servant?"

"We should forgive others because God has forgiven us," David answered. "I don't want to be like that guy!"

Dad laughed. "Agreed! Keep studying your Bible, son — especially the parables — and you won't be."

BA

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.



My Favorite Verse

Proverbs 3:5



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“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.”

by Sherri Langton

Three weeks before her death, I visited my grandmother, a solid Christian who influenced my walk of faith. Even as her health failed, her confidence in God remained strong.

In the precious moments we had, I tapped into Grandma’s wisdom one more time. “What advice can you give me?”

Grabbing my hands, Grandma stared straight into my eyes. “No matter what happens, trust Him. Just trust Him!”

That is Proverbs 3:5 in a nutshell. And though she didn’t say it, I knew Grandma believed the rest: Don’t ever depend on yourself.

I have tested the breadth and depth of Proverbs 3:5 many times. Its simple premise, covering mundane and major challenges, is why it ranks as my favorite verse.

Living it out, however, hasn’t been easy. To use a common term, I was “boots on the

ground” — in the moment — when life dished out some of its worst. I’m the one hearing the doctor say, “You have cancer.” I’m the one seeing medical bills mount higher than my income. I’m the one, years before that, laid off at another organization, watching my bank balance dwindle every day.

My understanding quickly stepped into these situations and sketched a dismal future:

The chemo treatments are too intense. You’ll develop other health issues that will plague you the rest of your life.

You’ll never pay these medical expenses. The hospital will take every dime of your savings.

Don’t wait for God’s choice of a job. What’s wrong with temporary employment to help you pay the bills?

In these events, I trusted God with all my heart and pushed aside my understanding. The intense chemo achieved remission; I remain cancer-free thirteen years later, with no ill effects.

God also provided additional work that paid all the medical bills.

And I’m glad I didn’t pursue temporary employment when I was laid off. I might have missed an interview with Jerry Griffin, then editor of the *Bible Advocate*, who hired me. Thirty-seven years later, I still see my editorial job as a match made in heaven.

By practicing Proverbs 3:5, I’ve gained some insight as to why Solomon wrote it. I live in a speck of time; God sees beyond it to how my decisions in the chaos will impact my future. I want immediate answers, but He has my ultimate good in mind, and that often means delays. And those “boots on the ground” moments? He promises to be with me, taking the weight of decisions on Himself.

That’s why no matter what happens, I will trust Him. **BA**

Sherri Langton is associate editor of the *Bible Advocate* and editor of *Churchright*. She lives in Denver, CO.





A Conversion

(Luke 7:36-50)

She kneels at His feet,
feet blistered into toughness
from trekking miles
to aid
the hurting.
Feet washed clean
by her repentant
tears.

She listens to His words,
words that assure her
He accepts her attempts
to say
she is sorry.

She opens her heart,
opens it wide enough to receive
His love,
His affirmation,
His forgiveness.

Chris Ahlemann

Spring Has Sprung!

Planning for our Biennial Convention makes its way through the seasons.

In fall (the months following convention) we enjoy memories and celebrate successes, the bittersweet glow of embers fading yet faintly burning.

In winter, we settle into family routines and local church ministry patterns. Attention is rightly planted elsewhere, and thoughts of our gathering hibernate under the snow. New visions and dreams bide their time, waiting for the spring rains to stir.

Spring kicks off the long season of vision and planning for a new convention in one year! Ideas germinate, excitement sprouts, and life is infused into the details. Assignments are filled, sessions are planned, opportunities for connection are faithfully fertilized.

When the summer of convention year arrives, the gathering of the family of God is in full bloom! Ah, the moments we have been waiting for. The Spirit of unity moves among us as we share in the camaraderie and love. What a divine picture of the coming day of the Lord, with eternity in tow!

Spring has sprung, my friends! Planning for our 2027 Convention is finding its footing, and we invite you to begin dreaming with us about our approaching

time together. Fill this season of spring with growing anticipation and move with us to our summer culmination in 2027.

That summer gathering will last but a short week. Yet don't despair. Participate with us in this plentiful spring season when your plans and ours move quickly and decisively toward their goal. The journey is before us, and our destination faithfully awaits!

Water the seeds of prayer as we seek God's mighty move among us. Call into bloom the excitement of joining a thousand voices in worship, foreshadowing

millions who will gather with the elders before the throne of the Ancient of Days. Let the springs of hope gush as we dream of shared time together that will refresh our souls and renew our faith.

GC Convention '27 (June 28 - July 3) in Greensboro, North Carolina, awaits. Summer may still be close to a calendar year away, but the time will fly. Plan now to share in these precious moments with us. The warmth of that summer is quickly approaching!

— GC Convention
Program Committee





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Register at my.artioscollege.org/en/courses, and check what courses are available to audit.



Missionary Support

GC Missions invests in sending missionary pastors and evangelists who share the gospel and equip others to do the same. Financial support enables them to teach and preach the good news and establish active congregations in new regions.



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Engaging students in adult Bible study remains a priority of the Bible Advocate Press. Short introductory videos for each lesson are designed to

guide students and teachers toward the author's purpose for the quarterly.

We encourage you to watch each video before the lesson and use them to enrich and edify one another during your local Sabbath Bible study. View our lesson video archive on our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@cog7> or <https://cog7.org/video-archives/>.



New BAP AI Policy

The Bible Advocate Press has a long history of commitment to biblical truth in what it publishes, striving to clearly represent the Word of God. We are also committed to maintaining high Christian ethics in our publications.



This can be a challenge in our society that leans heavily on technology, especially artificial intelligence (AI). We therefore have clarified what is permissible use of AI in our publications and what is not. Read the details of this policy at baonline.org (About/Write For Us).



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What does spreading the gospel really mean?

by Kurt Lang

Engaging in Witness. As one of the ten vision points of a Vibrant 21st Century Church, which we as the Church of God (Seventh Day) strive to be, this is a catchy phrase for evangelism. Is your evangelism vibrant? What exactly is evangelism? Why do we engage in it (or not)? What are the best practices? Can it be done with a burger and fries, or is coffee required?

You grab the coffee, I'll slurp a Dr Pepper, and let's have a vibrant conversation about what is expected of us as Christ followers.

Evangelism theology

As church leaders, we recognize the scripture that says God calls some to be evangelists (Ephesians 4). Yet too easily we allow this to be an excuse. "I am a teacher, not an evangelist, so I don't need to worry about practicing evangelism."

A good theology of evangelism, taking the whole of Scripture into account, will reveal that sharing the good news of the gospel is not an option for the believer. It is an integral part of our new way of life!

This plan of God is scattered throughout the scriptural narratives. But for the sake of time, let's find its culmination in Christ himself. Jesus ended His earthly ministry with a command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . ." (Matthew 28:19).

We recognize this as our call to evangelism, and it pairs nicely with how Jesus' ministry began as He called His disciples: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (4:19). Jesus revealed to us what evangelism is all about, how to do it, and why it is still relevant for us today.

Evangelism is a concept tied directly to Jesus Christ:

"My kingdom is not of this world . . ."

"For this reason I came . . . to testify to the truth."

"I am the light of the world."

Basically, all of what Jesus said and did illuminates and inspires the picture of evangelism. He came to show us the Father and to restore our relationship with Him. And this is evangelism: to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven because of the

redemption found in Christ Jesus, our Messiah. This is the good news!

In their book *The Insider*, Jim Petersen and Mike Shamy note, “We are to live kingdomly in the midst of this lost world.” This involves more than just our words; evangelism is how we live as a citizen of God’s kingdom inside the setting of where He has placed us in this world.

Evangelism motivators

In his *Evangelism Handbook*, Alvin Reid writes, “Our motive for sharing Christ should start with God.” The character of God and the love of God should be two motivating factors in evangelism. Because of His grandeur and His grace, we love God and want others to enjoy the same experience.

Five reasons relate to us: obedience, spiritual growth, eternal rewards, the state of unbelievers, and future joy/judgment. God tells us to share Him with unbelievers so we and they can grow in spiritual maturity and secure God’s relationship and rewards for eternity. Which of these seven most motivates you to extend the good news to the lost?

What hinders our motivation? Various times we find ourselves saying we are too busy, or we feel that we don’t have the right answers. Or we feel nervous because we don’t want to fail. We don’t think we have the prayer of faith or of healing. Maybe sometimes we focus on thinking others will call us stupid or a hypocrite, rather than listening to God’s reassuring voice.

What is your biggest hindrance when it comes to

jumping into the action of living and sharing your faith?

Evangelism resources

How does God assist us in sharing Him with the world? Foundationally, He fills us with His Holy Spirit. The more we give consistent control of our lives to the leading of the Spirit, the more natural evangelism becomes. Reid writes that “Being filled means to be controlled. The question is not so much, How much of the Holy Spirit do you have? But, How much of you does the Holy Spirit have?”

The Spirit builds more resources into our lives that assist us in becoming more engaging in wit-

your experience, and nobody can refute it.

Your character is also one of your most powerful resources. Do others look at you and want what you have? Living a life with integrity, humility, passion, purity, conviction, and a positive attitude is the proof of kingdom citizenship and of your strength as an ambassador. Reid continues, “What really matters is the attitude we convey toward the things that matter to God, toward circumstances, toward the gospel. Therefore, our attitude affects our witness.”

Does your character match that of Christ so you are accurately representing Him to others?

“Does your character match that of Christ so you are accurately representing Him to others?”

ness. Spiritual disciplines, such as Bible study and memorization, prayer, fasting, solitude, and the like, should be regular habits for all of us. Never underestimate the power of prayer! God has given us direct access to His thoughts, as long as we are willing to listen.

Your personal testimony of what God is doing in your life is one of your best resources. It’s

Evangelism arenas

God has given each person different gifts, which likely gives us a more favored method or arena of evangelism. You may find personal, one-on-one sharing easier than other arenas within the church context: worship events and mass evangelism, like a tent revival or youth camp; church planting among the unchurched. In the family context,

the arenas are city vs rural and the like.

The most important take-away is to believe that any size event, large or small, can be an effective witness based on the amount of preparation you put into its planning and organization. And in how much you pray for it in advance! Even if the event is impromptu, you have prepared for it through regular prayer and study.

Reid again: “. . . organizational preparation matters little without the presence of God.”

Evangelism methods

We avoid evangelism because we fear failure and rejection. However, remember that Jesus said those who share Him will be persecuted. It is actually a sign we are doing the right thing. The goal is simply to be obedient and

share the gospel; it is the Spirit who will lead others to Christ when they are ready.

Evangelism involves approaching people with a heart of love, in a spirit of prayer, with an attitude of expectancy, and with sensitivity to the Spirit.

How do we evangelize? We live like Jesus! Modeling it for others and giving them the opportunity to practice alongside us is the best way to teach someone else. Evangelism is caught more than taught. Its lessons are not taught in a classroom, but in real-life scenarios.

Three main ways to evangelize include 1) planned evangelism, where churches plan an event, such as door-to-door witnessing; 2) missional/relational witness, where you share in the context of everyday life situations, like your job or in your neighborhood among those you

know; 3) spontaneous evangelism, where you share with someone random that you will likely never see again.

What lies beneath any method is the emphasis on servant evangelism — what Reid describes as “intentionally sharing Christ by consistently modeling biblical servanthood.” Sharing the gospel is an action, not just a concept. So it makes sense to teach someone how to do it by modeling it. Christian leaders need to make evangelism a priority in their church setting to model and teach sharing the gospel.

What would this look like in your life, your family, or your local congregation?

“Follow Me”

Jesus lived out the gospel, the good news of salvation. Jesus showed to us the Father. Jesus lived as a citizen of the kingdom in the context of the world arena He came to. Jesus didn’t come to sell, as if He were just competing as one option in our pluralistic world. He came to give Himself away, and the Spirit that He gives empowers us to accurately display His image when we choose to live as He lived.

But then, *Spirit Formed* is another point of the vibrant vision. That’s a story for another day. . . .

BA

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Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.



This article provides a summary of training in evangelism offered by Artios Christian College in the MIS 311 course. If your appetite has been whetted and you have been inspired to grow in your vibrant witness, consider taking this course! Visit artioscollege.org.

The General Conference also offers training and resources that assist in developing methods of sharing the gospel through personal evangelism, small group studies, and welcoming churches. Visit cog7.org/evangelism.



Kingdom Ethos

“My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

With His crucifixion clearly in view, Jesus made this declaration as He stood before Pilate. Jesus’ words were likely received with skepticism and contempt. This governor of Judea had the notable privilege of being well positioned within an earthly kingdom whose wealth, prestige, and power were unparalleled in the ancient world (Daniel 2:40).

One would rightly conclude that the kingdom Jesus spoke of — wholly other than the kingdoms of this age — would be governed by a radically different ethos than the kingdom Pilate served. In this surreal moment, as Jesus and Pilate came face to face, the contrast in values could not have been starker. Two men — serving differing kingdoms, holding differing worldviews, and whose kingdoms faced eternally contrasting destinies — would now see their kingdom ethos come unmistakably into focus.

Serving his kingdom, Pilate, knowing the truth of Christ’s innocence (John 19:4), chose to ignore his own conscience and good judgment. In an act of mockery, he paraded Christ before the crowd as he ridiculed Him: “Behold the Man!” (v. 5). But serving His kingdom, Christ chose to stand before the same mob, bearing the shame of the condemned (vv. 1, 2) and accepting the affliction of the mocked. In this moment, Christ, setting aside His own need for self-preservation and in an unmistakable contrast of kingdom ethos, willingly gave His perfect life (8:46) as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

Serving his kingdom, Pilate washed his hands and delivered Jesus to be crucified (Matthew 27:24; John 19:16). Serving His kingdom, the Son

of Man washed the dirty feet of those He called His own (John 13:5, 8).

Serving his kingdom, Pilate feared his loyalty might be questioned (19:12, 13). He sat down in the judgment seat of Gabbatha, and delivered the innocent One to be crucified (v. 16). Serving His kingdom, with unquestioned loyalty to His Father, Jesus cried out, “Not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39).

What kingdom ethos drives you: the still small voice of the Spirit (John 10:27) or the bedlam of the mob? What kingdom wealth drives you: the temporary power structures of a world in chaos or the glory and wealth of the Father’s declaration “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 17:5)? What kingdom morality informs your choices: the approval of today’s political structures or the needs of the one cast down and without hope? Indeed, what kingdom ethic defines you: self-preservation or self-giving?

Kingdom ethos: no small matter. Jesus said, “He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25). Pilate loved his life, seeking to preserve it, cling to it, exalt it — no matter the moral cost or the cost to others. Jesus loved His life also. But His kingdom ethos guided Him to let go of the things of this life in service to others and to the glory of His Father!

Perhaps there has never been a more urgent moment for Christendom in the West to reconsider, with fresh eyes, the kingdom ethos of the eternal kingdom. By His grace, may it be so.

— Greg Lincoln



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