

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

***The Unrewarded Servant:
Recognizing that God Owes Us Nothing
Luke 17:7-10***

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the “Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study”. That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session “Background” located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day’s study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

Worship Time Leader:

Sing ***Find Us Faithful*** at the beginning and ending of the worship time. Have the words available to talk about at the closing of the worship time.

Music Sources:

Blessed Be Your Name, *The Worship Hymnal*, #26; CCLI #3798438

I Have Decided to Follow Jesus, *The Worship Hymnal*, #434; CCLI #507724 or 2151540

Find Us Faithful, *The Worship Hymnal* #598; CCLI #18259

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***The Unrewarded Servant:
Recognizing that God Owes Us Nothing*****Focal Text**

Luke 17:7-10

Background Text

Luke 17:1-10

Main Idea

Humble gratitude for God's grace that results in obedient service to God is our only proper response to God.

Question to Explore

What do you think God owes you for your acts of goodness and kindness?

Teaching Aim

To lead your church to state what this parable teaches about relationship with God and explain why fulfilling our responsibilities to God does not put God in our debt.

Gathering together:

Sing **Blessed Be Your Name**, *The Worship Hymnal*, #26; CCLI #3798438

First thoughts:

When young children are first learning reasons for being good they respond to rewards and punishment. As they grow a little more, they develop a sense of "tit for tat" or "I'll do something for you if you will do something for me". Later on, hopefully, they understand doing good because of the expectations of people important to them. They move on to understanding rules and laws and finally develop an internal code of what is right and wrong.

Today's parable talks about us when we expect something in return for something good we have done. "A simple thanks would have been enough", we sometimes say when our good deed has gone unrewarded. As Jesus talks with his disciples in our study

today, he tells them that as servants or slaves of God, we really don't deserve any kind of reward or recognition from God. Whatever we do, however much it may, be is only what is due God who is God. This is the God who sent his son Jesus to die for our sins.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

The Unrewarded Servant: Recognizing that God Owes Us Nothing

Focal Text

Luke 17:7-10

Background Text

Luke 17:1-10

Main Idea

Humble gratitude for God’s grace that results in obedient service to God is our only proper response to God.

Question to Explore

What do you think God owes you for your acts of goodness and kindness?

Teaching Aim

To lead your church to state what this parable teaches about relationship with God and explain why fulfilling our responsibilities to God does not put God in our debt.

Introduction to your personal study:

This parable is not well known to us and because of our own cultural heritage will most likely be a bit difficult to understand. We are talking here of discipleship of the most radical kind – slaves to Jesus Christ.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

This is one of twenty parables recorded by Luke in the famous Perean section of his Gospel -9:51 to 19:28. In this section our Lord is journeying toward Jerusalem and the Cross. Of these twenty, fifteen are found in Luke only, including this story of the unworthy servant” (McQuilkin, R.C. *Our Lord’s Parables*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980, p. 91).

Although this may be the same occasion as the teachings found in chapters 15 and 16 when the tax collectors and sinners were present and the scribes and Pharisees murmured against him, this teaching is focused toward his intimate disciples – perhaps only the 12, but certainly only those closest to him for it centers on attitudes which are only possible for those who are deeply committed to serving Christ.

First, he warns them against being occasions of stumbling in verses 1-3.

Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.”

“But woe...” There are 21 references using the word “Woe” in the gospels. Luke 11:37-52 contain a series of warnings to the Pharisees and teachers of the law using the word “woe”. How sad Jesus must have been to use that expression. He came to seek and to save lost people; his message was a redemptive one. But it was not an easy way. Discipleship costs. To take the role of leader brings serious responsibilities and to fail in those responsibilities has eternal consequences. Jesus is warning those who assume a leadership role that there are expectations and consequences involved.

Paul taught this concept in 1 Corinthians 10: 31-33 ***“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God – even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.”***

Later Paul says in Romans 14:13 ***“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.”***

We will see that this teaching feeds into the radical teaching on discipleship of verse 7-10 of Luke 17. Anytime we have authority – as a parent, a teacher, a mentor or even as a friend and certainly as a pastor, we have the opportunity to influence a person for good or for bad. Sometimes that authority makes us feel that we are more wise and knowledgeable than we really are. Sometimes our human nature makes us want people to agree with our point of view and we may try to use Scriptural backing to make that happen.

Jesus warns us strongly that to lead someone astray by causing them to act wrongly or even believe wrongly is a tremendous responsibility. Jesus says it would be better for that person to have a huge millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea than to lead someone to sin. A quick death has only physical consequences whereas an offense against God's people has eternal consequences.

Teaching then, is an enormous responsibility. A Seminary teacher often prays at the beginning of each class. ***“Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer”*** (Psalm 19:14).

Bible references related to this are found in 1 Corinthians 10:14-33 and Romans 14: 1-23 which address causing weaker believers to become troubled. The teaching of heresy is addressed in Acts 20:25-31, Galatians 1:6-9 and 2 Corinthians 11:1-4. Seeking self-aggrandizement is addressed in Philippians 2:21 and persecuting believers in Acts 9:1-19. All of these may be considered as ways that one might cause another to stumble.

This does not mean that we should be afraid to teach and lead nor does it mean that we will agree on every issue under study and discussion. But to deliberately or obstinately be determined that people understand things your way rather than seeking to understand Scripture as God leads is a fearful position to take.

After this brief, but very meaningful discussion in verses 1-3 of Chapter 17, Jesus speaks about forgiveness.

“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent’, forgive him”.

Matthew records a more detailed account of the process of forgiveness in Matthew 18: 15-22 and ends with this account. ***“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”***

Jesus is speaking to his disciples about responsibilities that come with following Him. Earlier in Luke 16: 25-35, he spoke of the cost of discipleship. ***“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple”*** (verses 26-27).

In these early verses of Chapter 17, Jesus is outlining some of the responsibilities of that discipleship. Teaching, leading, mentoring and being an example are all involved. Having a forgiving spirit – an amazingly forgiving spirit is another.

Perhaps it is no surprise that the disciples say, ***“Increase our faith!”***

Certainly they are beginning to wonder if they will possibly be able to fulfill the task set before them.

He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea’ and it will obey you” (verse 6).

What Jesus wanted his disciples to understand is that “Faith is”. The very essence of faith is the belief in a God that we cannot not see, but that we believe has the capacity to do things that need to be done for the salvation of souls and the good of the Kingdom. It is not the quantity but the quality of faith that is of concern.

Jesus would want his disciples to have a faith that facilitates healing and that understands the need of Christ to suffer (Luke 24:25-26). Faith should have confidence in God’s providential care (Luke 8:25). Faith must endure (Acts 14:22); will not fall away (Luke 8:13; 22:32). Faith must believe God and grow.

Focusing on the Meaning:

If the disciples were people who could teach without error and could forgive time after time and had faith which could uproot a plant and replant it in the sea, the almost inevitable result would be pride. Perhaps nothing ruins a Christian witness faster than pride. As we do good things, we feel good and then we begin to take credit for having done them.

Perhaps that is the reason Jesus told the story found in Luke 17: 7-9.

Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, “Come along now and sit down to eat” Would he not rather say, “Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink?” Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.”

As is so often true, Jesus tells a story with which the listeners can identify. He is not outlining a model employer-employee relationship. He is describing the situation which occurred when a small farmer had a servant, usually called a bondservant, in his household. For whatever reason, that person lived and worked for the owner and was a servant twenty-four hours a day. Throughout the ages, of course, this relationship has existed although it would not be prevalent in many countries today.

Therefore, the servant would do the work of the day which in this case was work in the field. But when that work was done, he would be expected to continue his work day by preparing a meal, serving the meal and cleaning up after the meal. This mid-day or mid-afternoon meal would be the primary meal of the day. The work day would have

began at sunrise and would end at sunset. After serving the meal, the servant might be free to eat himself and fall into bed or return to work. He would expect that the following day would be exactly the same. His payment was some kind of place to live and food on which to survive. He was not expecting to save for the future, have a vacation or even a day off. Nor would he expect that his employer/owner would express gratitude for his service. If you were born into a certain social class this might be your lot in life or if you had fallen into debt and were paying an obligation to someone, this might be your circumstance for a period of time.

In Robertson McQuikin's book, *Our Lord's Parables*, this is the first of four parables which he lists as Parables of Service. He might have called it a Parable of Discipleship. For in telling this story, Jesus is describing what God has every right to expect of us as disciples. As Master, he can command our service morning, noon and night and he does not need to say "thank you for helping me out".

The disciples would need this teaching very soon. In Matthew 20:20, the mother of Zebedee's sons, James and John, came with them to ask that one of her sons sit at the right and the other at the left hand of Jesus when he came into his kingdom. Of course, she was thinking that Jesus was going to establish an earthly kingdom of power. The other disciples were indignant with the two brothers, but that was because they would also want positions of power.

Learning about servanthood came hard to the disciples just as it comes hard for us. It is a lifelong lesson that we must learn and today's parable helps start us on that journey of understanding. In this day of expectation of entitlements and of rewards for ordinary service, this parable challenges our thinking. We tend to expect rewards from God for ordinary service – simply for going to church, for example. This parable also corrects our easy familiarity with God and Jesus as "our cosmic pals". Jesus calls his disciples friends, but Jesus was still their Master (John 15:15,20).

Your Goal as the Leader of this Study:

Emphasize the overwhelming importance of God's grace, which calls for our absolute humility, dependence and gratitude. Fulfilling our responsibilities to God does not put God in our debt.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

The Unrewarded Servant: Recognizing that God Owes Us Nothing

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the **Focal Text** in their Bibles. Also, share with them the **Main Idea** to be learned from the Scriptures, and the **Questions to be Explored** by the group.

Focal Text

Luke 17:7-10

Background Text

Luke 17:1-10

Main Idea

Humble gratitude for God's grace that results in obedient service to God is our only proper response to God.

Question to Explore

What do you think God owes you for your acts of goodness and kindness?

Teaching Aim

To lead your church to state what this parable teaches about relationship with God and explain why fulfilling our responsibilities to God does not put God in our debt.

Connect with Life:

A church recently recognized the twenty year ministry of their pastor by a special offering. The money raised will be used to drill several wells in the country of Niger. This church had adequately provided for their pastor through the years and knew that he and his wife would appreciate being "rewarded" for their service by passing that blessing on to those in a very needy country.

Guide the Study:

Remind the students that Jesus is journeying toward Jerusalem and the cross. Although his disciples did not yet understand that Jesus would die, he is preparing them for that reality and for their life of discipleship after his death, burial and resurrection.

Have some read Luke 17:1-3.

Seek an answer: What are ways in which a Christian can cause another person to stumble? (Being unkind; being dishonest; being rigid in doctrine; teaching error; living an immoral life style – there are others which your group will mention).

Add: How serious is it for a Christian to lead another person astray? (Better to die first)

Again: Will the disciple of Christ be a teacher? (It is inherent in following Christ that one will teach others. First, one may lead someone to Christ, then teach that person about Christ.)

Now encourage a response to this: What does verses 3-4 of Chapter 17 say about forgiveness?

Ask: Why does Jesus introduce this concept there? (Soon the disciples will be arguing over who should have the most prominent place in the kingdom. Forgiveness is going to be needed!)

Encourage a brief discussion: Why do you think the disciples said, “Increase our faith”? (They realized that to teach without leading anyone astray and to forgive over and over were impossible tasks for them in their present condition).

Look for a response: Is that a prayer we make or need to make? Why?

Pose this question: What radical thing did Jesus say about faith in verse 6? (***“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea’ and it will obey you.”***) Allow time for discussion, but admit that this is a saying of Jesus that we have yet to understand in its fullness.

Have someone read Luke 17:7-9.

Urge the group to discuss the role of the servant/slave.

Have a person read Matthew 20:20 and review the story of James and John’s mother seeking a place of honour for her sons.

Then search for a brief discussion of this: How does the teaching of Luke 17:7-9 relate to this story? (James and John and probably most of the other disciples had not yet learned that discipleship means servanthood).

Ask: What are some ways we expect to be recognized for our service to the Lord? (Appreciation given by students, recognition by the church, monetary rewards.)

Continue: What is the tension here for the church? Should we never say thank you to people for a job well done?

Encourage Application:

Have someone summarize the teaching of the parable.

Encourage members to do something for someone or some cause this week which will never be acknowledged.

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

The Unrewarded Servant: Recognizing that God Owes Us Nothing Luke 17:7-10

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Duty? Recognition? Service? Agggggg!

The weekly newspaper in the small town where this writer lives is often filled with stories of the athletic achievements of young people in the town. Other achievements such as musical and academic are also acknowledged. Several very meaningful money making events have been spearheaded by young people – earning money to combat sex trade slavery in developing countries; helping a family whose teen age son suffered from leukemia are only two of a variety of activities written about in the paper.

This seems to be a very positive recognition of the good things youth do. In fact, newspapers are sometimes criticized for just the opposite – writing only about the things teens do which are destructive.

Given today's parable, How do we deal with the tension between appropriately recognizing achievements and developing an attitude that every act of kindness or goal scored deserves a newspaper article? How do we understand that our service to God is the only response that our relationship demands? – It is our duty to serve. But it is a duty that carries within it its own reward.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***The Unrewarded Servant:
Recognizing that God Owes Us Nothing
Luke 17:7-10*****Beginning the Service:**

Sing **Find Us Faithful**, *The Worship Hymnal* #598; CCLI #18259 and
I Have Decided to Follow Jesus, *The Worship Hymnal*, #434; CCLI #507724 or
2151540

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

Most Tibetans awake before dawn, offering incense, sacrifices and prayers to their gods, whom they wake up by ringing bells.

One of these Tibetan prayer bells started to ring during a Christian worker's language lesson. This worker had been praying for an opportunity to share his faith with his tutor. He was able to share that our God never slumbers or sleeps and that we don't need a bell to rouse Him. He delights in hearing our prayers.

Pray that the Tibetans' eyes will be opened to see the Light of Christ. Pray that they will seek the one true God who never slumbers or sleeps.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant Matthew 25:21

“His Master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness’ (Matthew 25:21).

The parable of the talents found in Matthew 25:14-30 gives another view of God’s expectation of our discipleship.

In this parable, a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted his money them. To one he gave five talents of money; to a second he gave two talents and to a third, he gave one talent according to the ability of each one.

The five talent servant put his money to work and gained more money as did the one with two talents. However, the servant with only one talent dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

When the master returned from his journey, he asked for an accounting of the money. He was pleased with the first two servants and promised that they would be put in charge of other responsibilities. However, the servant who only buried the talent given him was chastised, his money taken away and he was dismissed from the master’s presence.

There are various teachings that exist in the parable but for purposes of our worship time we want to focus on the words of the master to the two servants who used well the talents given them.

“Well done, good and faithful servant.” In contrast to the parable of the unworthy servant, the master here expresses gratitude to the servant for his stewardship of the money. He further promised that the servant would have greater responsibilities.

And perhaps, most important, he was invited to share his master’s happiness.

Luke 12: 35-37 tells the story of the servants who are dressed and ready for service and have kept the lamps burning. **“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.”**

Thus, we see a picture of the master’s generosity. It is because of the Saviour that the servants can work in the kingdom in the first place, and, although he chooses to reward them for their service, they can never claim credit for their work. Their attitude can only be that of humble, grateful servants.

Sharing in the master's happiness is the reward for Christian service. That happiness comes when someone comes to Christ as Saviour. Remember that ***"There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"*** (Luke 15:10). There is rejoicing here on earth when someone we have prayed for and ministered to comes to Christ.

Jesse Morales, pastor and chaplain, died in August of 2009 of ALS. In the nineteen months since his diagnosis, Jesse, like other victims of ALS continued his unrelenting downward spiral into helplessness as far as what his body would do. His spirit, however, never lost its desire to love and serve the Lord. In the months before his death, three care givers and a housekeeper came to salvation because of the testimony of Jesse, his wife Kathy and their family. On the week that he died, his nurse found salvation as well.

A year before his death, he challenged others with the words, "If you were to live with the perspective that today would be your last day on earth, what would you do to make a difference in the kingdom of God."

His family chose as the verse to represent their goals ***"If only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace"*** (Acts 20:24).

Only three weeks before his death, he laboriously printed out on the computer words to his four daughters. He said,

"Live for Jesus; you will have no regrets.
Don't let this ALS discourage you from walking with God.
I am excited to meet Jesus."

In the midst of suffering, Jesse Morales had learned the lesson of sharing in the Master's happiness.

(Notes from a message by Kathy Morales, Seminary Women's Night, March 18, 2010, Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary, Cochrane, Alberta.)

Sharing in the Master's happiness comes any time we see good overcome evil; the plans of the Lord brought to completion; our families choose to serve God; peace come to individual hearts even in the midst of war and suffering.

That is our reward for service. It is occasionally an outward expression. At Jesse Morales' funeral over a thousand people came to honour his life. The expression ***"Well done, thou good and faithful servant"*** was spoken by those who had been blessed by his ministry. Jesse's reply would have been that of the servant studied in our Bible study today, ***"So you, when you have done every thing you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"***

Call to Commitment:

Prayerfully sing ***Find Us Faithful***. Close the service by asking for comments on the meaning of the words to the participants.

Concluding the Service:

As a blessing for the church, from among the Psalms choose a scripture that will praise God and describe his faithfulness to us.