

BECOMING EFFECTIVE WITNESSES

2

BECOMING A WELCOMING CHRISTIAN

Luke 14:1–2

By Elizabeth B. Crawford

“But the thought that ought to seize our hearts and fill us with an overpowering, compelling vision is this truth, embedded in the Story of the loving Father: When the lost are found, it gives joy to God—joy beyond our ability to comprehend. At the close of every day, we should stop to take stock of our vision for evangelism. We should ask ourselves, ‘Is there anything in my life this day that has opened a door for a prodigal daughter or prodigal son to come back home? Is there anything I have done today to bring joy and pleasure to the Father’s heart?’”

Leighton Ford

“For a first-century Jew, most if not all of the works of healing, which form the bulk of Jesus’ mighty works, could be seen as the restoration to membership in Israel of those who, through sickness or whatever, had been excluded as ritually unclean. The healings thus function in exact parallel with the welcome of sinners, and this, we may be quite sure, was what Jesus himself intended.... This means that Jesus’ healing miracles must be seen clearly as bestowing the gift of shalom, wholeness, to those who lacked it, bringing not only physical health but renewed membership in the people of YHWH.... These healings, at the deepest level of understanding on the part of Jesus and his contemporaries, would be seen as part of his total ministry, specifically, part of that open welcome which went with the inauguration of the kingdom—and consequently, part of his subversive work, which was likely to get him in trouble.”

N. T. Wright

AIM OF STUDY

- To help us gain God's heart for inviting and welcoming the least and the lost to enter His Kingdom through saving faith in Jesus Christ.

KEY VERSES

"But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the lame, the crippled, and the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Luke 14:13-14

"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'" Luke 14:23

PREPARATION

Read over the notes on "**how to teach the Bible in small group**" and "**some practical suggestions for leading a small group discussion**" in Vineyard Church of Columbus' *Small Group Leadership Training Manual*. Before you read over the Scripture, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then read through the passage and the Bible study below. **You will need to go over the questions and choose which ones you want to emphasize and which you could eliminate if your time is limited.** Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (*). Rather than leaving these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture's truths and applying them to their own lives. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could summarize some of the passage and then go to the final questions.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. The authors are providing this for the leaders' benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to help resource you for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* or *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* as excellent resources for study.

Finally, **make copies** of the handout, "The Roman Road," if you think your group members need this resource. It's printed at the end of the study.

OPENERS

How many of us like parties? Do you like small, intimate, candlelight dinners with family or close friends? Or do you prefer open, festive gatherings with lively music, junk food, and lots of chatter? What was one of the best parties you ever gave or attended?

Allow for a few responses, but don't force the point by going around the room, person by person.

How many of us think of God as a party-giver, one of the greatest hosts in the world? Does that image seem irreverent to you? Do you picture Him alone, aloof, not wanting to be bothered with noisy houseguests? Do you fear He doesn't want your type at His table because your manners are a bit shabby, or see Him pinched-faced, frowning down at you saying "NO!" when you ask for more? Or can you imagine Him beckoning you and everyone around you to a lavish dinner that could rival any smorgasbord, and laughing with His guests as they consume whatever their hearts desire?

In the New Testament, the Greek verb, *kaleo* translated "to invite" or "to host" or "to call" is used 148 times. That is very close to the number of times the verb *agapeo*, meaning, "to love as God loves us," appears [143]. Our God is not greedy or stingy. He is very hospitable and wants to share Himself with as many people as possible. He longs for, pursues, invites, and calls lost and overlooked people to come in, fill up His house, and feast on His bounty. He loves celebration so much that He actually commanded the people of Israel to gather at least three times a year to feast and rejoice in His Presence over the good things He provided. Our God is so welcoming and generous that He cannot be out given. Let's look at a passage that conveys this.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would convey the Father's loving and generous heart to each small group member as you read His Word.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Luke stated in the beginning of this book that he had investigated and attempted to write an orderly account so that the reader, a rich patron, might be certain of his belief in Jesus Christ. Although Luke was not one of the twelve disciples like Matthew and John, and therefore had to rely on what others had seen, he carefully recorded both historical and geographical details that have been verified by many archeologists. But his purpose was to write more than a history text, so at times he may have arranged the order of certain passages to highlight a theme. He was not a Jew, had a Greek education, and worked as a physician. That may account for some of the special qualities of his gospel: Jesus' interactions with non-Jews; miraculous healings; and some of the best Greek writing in the New Testament. He also emphasized prayer, women, families, the poor, and social outcasts. He wrote the book of Acts probably as Part Two to this gospel. In Acts, he continued telling what Jesus did through the Holy Spirit after the resurrection. Luke traveled with Paul, and probably continued to minister in the first century after Paul's death.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Luke 14:1-24

In this passage, Jesus has been invited to the home of a prominent Pharisee to eat. A “Pharisee” was a Jew who belonged to an influential political party that wanted a separate, religious Jewish society. They hoped for a political Messiah sent by God to restore the nation of Israel to its former glory. Often they opposed the pagan Roman rulers and immoral local leaders. They followed the externals of Old Testament law especially tithing, ceremonial washing, prayer, and fasting. They frequently teamed up with the experts who taught and interpreted the law, referred to in the Bible as “scribes” or “lawyers.”

Since it was a Sabbath day, we can assume that Jesus and his host had been at the local synagogue and were headed home for the main meal. Before arriving, or at least before eating, Jesus noticed a man in front of him with an illness that caused swelling and fluid retention. These symptoms indicated the disease was in an advanced stage. Since Luke recorded that Jesus was being carefully watched, we might guess that the religious leaders had set up this chance meeting hoping to find fault with Jesus if he healed the man on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees had numerous rules about what it meant to observe the Sabbath and avoid work on that day. For example, a faithful Jew could only walk a short distance from his house to synagogue, but longer distances were ruled out. No health care was permitted unless it was a matter of life and death, although exceptions were made for childbirth and circumcision ceremonies. There were even disputes about what kind of knot you could tie on the Sabbath when making sure your animal didn’t stray. So, there was tension in the air as we read how Jesus responded to the sick man and the religious folks who were looking on.

- 1. To begin, we’re going to read aloud Luke 14:1-6. Who would like to do that? How do you imagine the ill man feels when Jesus and the other holy men were discussing his healing?**

He probably was very uncomfortable. Religious leaders often viewed people with illnesses as guilty of some sin, and therefore punished by God through the illness. They excluded anyone who was sick, blind or handicapped from temple worship. Therefore, the very people staring at him would have normally avoided this man. He may have felt conspicuous and dehumanized; it might seem as if he were being probed under a microscope or examined like a specimen. However, other passages of Scripture tell us that Jesus looked on sick people with compassion, so Jesus’ gaze may have made him feel hopeful or cared for (Matt. 14:14; Matt. 20:34; Mark 1:14). He may have appreciated that Jesus did not merely ignore him, scold him, or shoo him away like an unwanted dog.

- 2. Why do you think Jesus asked the leaders whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath?**

Jesus knew what was in their hearts (Matt 9:4-6; John 2:24-25). **1.** He knew that the Pharisees wanted to trap and accuse Him of breaking God’s law so they could

discredit Him. (Luke 12:53-54 says they “...began to oppose Him fiercely and to besiege Him with questions, waiting to catch Him in something He might say.”)

2. He wanted to expose their hypocrisy; they were so rigid about keeping God’s Sabbath holy that they actually taught against and condemned acts of mercy that would express the heart of God. **3.** He also wanted to demonstrate what God’s kingdom was like. N. T. Wright explains Jesus’ message of the kingdom was about inviting people to enter or re-enter a covenant relationship with His Father, the God of Israel and the King of Kings. He welcomed any who would repent of their own agenda, assume His self-denying way of the cross, bring about God’s victorious reign in the same manner as Jesus’ death and resurrection, and take this method/message to the whole world (Wright, p. 660). Notice the leaders did not reply to Jesus’ question. Was this an indication that they could not find fault with His intention to heal? Lewis Foster points out that since they did not protest the idea before the healing, they certainly couldn’t afterwards (p. 1568).

3. How did Jesus respond to the man?

He “took hold” of the man signifying that He was not concerned as the Pharisees would be about whether touching the ill man would defile Him. He healed the man, no doubt out of compassion for this outcast who might be the object of gossip or exclusion in his town. By healing him, Jesus also made it possible for this man to regain entry to the temple to worship God and regain his standing in Jewish society (Wright, pp. 191-193). He therefore made the man well spiritually and socially, too. He offered the man and all those who would meet him a glimpse of the heart of God who longs to have a people loyal to Him that He could bless. Then Jesus sent the man away.

***Optional: Why do you think Jesus sent him away?**

He may have sent the man away to save him further scrutiny or embarrassment. (In John 9, the Pharisees harshly examined the blind man healed by Jesus and his parents.) Also, the man with dropsy probably wasn’t an invited guest since no pious leader of the Pharisees would associate with someone who could cause their contamination. He was, however, exactly the kind of person that Jesus is going to tell the host that he ought to invite, but you should wait to point that out until after your group has discussed vv. 12-14. And, even better, wait to see if someone in the group notices this before you mention it! Also, Jesus could have sent the healed man away to begin functioning in society again—working, serving his family, and worshipping God. This miracle could now serve as fresh evidence of the kingdom of God that Jesus had been announcing throughout His ministry since the power of the King had triumphed over the power of sickness. Just as God was inviting and welcoming sinners to a new relationship through faith in His Son, this man’s life could remind others that this opportunity, long awaited by the Jews, was at hand (Wright, p. 196).

5. What was Jesus’ follow up question?

Jesus asked a rhetorical question with the implied answer being “Yes.” By this, He rebuked the Pharisees’ hard hearts since most or all of the men would have “quickly” come to the aid of his own child or work animal if something life threatening had happened on the Sabbath. Yet they were probably indignant that Jesus had worked on the Sabbath by healing someone with a serious illness. Although we can’t be sure that the illness was terminal, it might as well have been since it probably meant the man was excluded from worship services, ostracized in social circles, perhaps had difficulty earning a living, and may have been in physical pain or discomfort.

***What kind of people do you tend to avoid socializing with?**

**6. Let’s read verses 7-11 and 12-14. Could two more volunteers read?
Why did Jesus tell a parable to the guests?**

They all wanted to sit or recline at the “places of honor.” However, the most honored guests at a Jewish meal would normally arrive later than the others, so this situation Jesus described could very well happen to those in the crowd. Insecure and self-centered people often try to boost their self-esteem by associating with important or well-known individuals. They assume that others will transfer the popularity or fame of the celebrity to them if they are included in the “inner circle.” Others who cannot actually get physically near the famous person might use name-dropping. Again, Jesus is rebuking the pride of the religious leaders who are full of self-promotion.

7. What was the main point of the parable?

God will humble those who exalt or promote themselves, while those who are humble will be advanced or honored. In Scripture, God is pictured as the One who humbles or exalts a person, while we are called to exalt Him and humble ourselves before His awesome presence. Jesus Himself was a humble man (Matt. 11:18-20), unlike the religious and political leaders of the day. He did not seek His own honor (John 8:50); He came to glorify His Heavenly Father through obediently completing the work the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4). The Father would exalt Him after obeying even to the point of dying on a cross for our sins (Phil. 2:5-11).

The Proverbs, the prophets and the disciples also echo the same idea that Jesus states in v. 11. Notice that the host who asks the presumptive guest to give up a seat of honor does not address that person warmly, while the one whom the host invites to sit closer to himself is called “friend.” To be recognized in front of all the others whether moving up or down on the social scale actually magnifies the person’s reputation since it is a public and symbolic act.

***When are you most tempted to seek recognition or find yourself battling pride?**

8. What advice does Jesus give His host?

Jesus suggests that the host not invite the usual circle of family and friends since they will probably return the favor. Jesus tells his host that getting a reciprocal invitation would be his reward. Instead, Jesus advises the prominent leader to welcome those who are often judged unworthy, overlooked because of their social standing, or excluded due to some unpleasant circumstance in their lives. He advises the man with financial and social means to be merciful and generous (as our Father in Heaven is with us), and that when God judges one who gives freely, he will be rewarded. Jesus' emphasis here is not on the comforts and pleasures of this life, but on the priorities of the kingdom of God and the life eternal.

9. How do you think the host reacted to Jesus' words?

Since he did not say anything, we don't know whether the man accepted these words or felt a stinging rebuke. However, any Pharisee who scrupulously followed the law should have been familiar with numerous Old Testament texts in which God commanded His people to be openhanded towards the poor (Deut. 15:7-11), and the prophets who sternly rebuked the Israelites for neglecting these commands (Zech. 7:8-12). But Jesus seems to be going much further than advising the host to feed the hungry. He is actually suggesting that the hungry and needy become the invited or welcomed guests at the table!

***What opportunities are available to you to assist someone less fortunate than yourself? How do you usually view or approach that person?**

10. Let's continue this passage by reading aloud vv. 15-17, 18-20, and 21-24. What comment did a guest make when Jesus mentioned "the resurrection of the righteous"?

Again, invite three more readers to keep all group members involved.

The guest referred to his hope of sharing in the blessings of God's eternal kingdom pictured in Scripture as a great feast. See Is. 25:6-9 and Rev. 19:6-9 for other references to the meal. You may give these references out for members to read later, but you do not need to discuss them. Perhaps this guest is trying to avoid any sense of condemnation by pointing out that he is waiting for the eternal banquet and rewards in the afterlife. Could he be looking for a commendation from Jesus? He won't get it, will he?

11. How does Jesus continue to use the theme of "invited guests" to teach the Jewish elite what God desires?

He tells another parable, with a great banquet, invited guests, the host, his servant, and those who originally were not invited. The image of a "meal" was an accepted picture of salvation or inclusion in God's kingdom as just noted above.

12. Who is the main character and what does He repeatedly command?

The wealthy host continually “invites” people to come to his house and enjoy a feast. It was common for an upper class Jewish or Roman host to first send out the invitation, and when the meal was ready, to again send out his servant to call people to come dine. (Remember, they did not have telephones, faxes, e-mail, microwaves, or other modern conveniences that would speed up communication or food preparation.) Since he is not satisfied with the excuses of those who reject his summons when the meal was ready, he twice sends his servant out to gather in more guests so that his house could be full. Obviously, the host represents the Lord who is inviting people to share in His salvation and a kingdom relationship.

13. How do the invited guests respond when the meal is ready?

They all begin to make excuses even though they had previously been invited!

14. What is strange about the excuses they make?

None of the excuses make sense, so they seem made up on the spot to avoid the host’s hospitality.

- 1.** The first guest states that he has bought a field sight unseen. Most real estate investors would not make such a risky decision. Even if some trusted agent had made the arrangements, this owner now needs to conclude the deal and begs off the meal.
- 2.** The second guest has also just made a significant purchase of five pairs of oxen. That might be the equivalent today of some heavy-duty farm machinery. It also seems doubtful that such an expensive transaction would be made without the new owner first inspecting the health and quality of these animals. Much of his farming operations would depend on their condition.
- 3.** The third guest gives the most peculiar excuse of all. Being newly married exempted an Israelite man from going to war for the first year of marriage, but he wasn’t being drafted. So why would he refuse an opportunity to party? One could argue that he doesn’t want to abandon his new wife, but this man doesn’t even apologize or ask to be excused from the dinner. So, if he were so sensitive to his wife’s feelings (which most ancient men did not have the reputation of being), then surely he would also feel some need to apologize to his generous host.

Each of these excuses seems to point to some aspect of everyday life that has come between the intended guest and the invitation to join the kingdom of God, e.g. wealth, business, family relationships, etc. Immediately following this parable, Jesus warned His followers not to love anything more than Himself (Luke 14:25-26), echoing the first of the Old Testament Ten Commandments, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3).

***What excuses did you give God when He was inviting you into a relationship with Himself?
What things preoccupy you now when God calls?**

15. How did the host react to the excuses?

He became very angry. Rejecting a king's invitation would obviously offend him. Because the guests had advance notice of the dinner, they were both snubbing him personally as well as refusing his generosity. Remember that he would not have had a large freezer or vacuum sealing equipment to store up all the uneaten food. It probably would have to be thrown out. Also, all the work hours that his servants put into the preparation would have counted for little.

16. What did he command the servant to do twice?

He sent the servant out twice to invite others. The meal was ready and he wanted to share his bounty. First he sent the servant quickly (v. 21) to the streets and alleys within the town to bring in the poor, crippled, blind and lame. All these people would have been beggars in that culture (Marshall, p.590), so they were totally dependent on the generosity of others. None of them could have earned a living wage, and there was no welfare system to provide assistance to the poor and disabled. Secondly, he sent the servant out again since there was still room. He didn't want any empty seats (v. 23)! The servant had to go farther this time—perhaps representing that the Gentiles were now to be included in the kingdom. Note that the commands given to the servant are “bring in” (v. 21) and “make...come in” (v. 23) indicating that the servant was to do more than invite. He was to be persuasive and not accept refusals this time. You might want to underscore the king's insistence reflecting how deeply God wants people to receive His offer.

***How were we like beggars when the gospel was first presented to us?**

None of us deserved the mercy and generosity of God who gave His only Son as a guilt offering for our sins when we had lived in rebellion against Him. Moreover, none of us deserved the benefits of being counted righteous, being cleansed and included (adopted) in God's family, and sharing in the inheritance or privileges that only our perfect older brother, Jesus, had full claim to. None of us were righteous and none of us were seeking God when He came towards us with a merciful and heartfelt invitation to be reconciled through the bloody sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Is. 53:5-7, 10; Rom. 5:6-11).

17. What did the host declare about those who rejected his offer?

He firmly promises that those who refused to come when he called would not receive even a doggy bag of leftovers, so to speak. This might refer to Jews occasionally sending some of their festival food to the less fortunate (Derrett cited in Marshall, p.591). This was a solemn warning to the Jews listening to

Jesus, that if they rejected Him, the invitation to enter God's eternal kingdom would be extended to the non-Jewish people instead. See Matt 8:10-12 also.

APPLYING THE TEXT

***Optional: What impact do you think Jesus' three parables had on those at the meal? How might they impact you if you were there?**

How would any of us feel if the honored guest at a party spoke one stinging rebuke after another? We might feel indignant not only that we but also our host was offended. Just as in the beginning of the passage, no one replied to Jesus. Were they too stunned by His warning that the unclean and the Gentiles would be the beneficiaries of God's mercy? Were they thinking that Jesus was insane? At the same time, no one at the meal dared to argue or correct Jesus, so some might have recognized the validity of His words. Did any of them change? Probably not at this point.... Only God's Holy Spirit convicting us through His Word can change a hardened, stubborn, selfish heart.

***Optional: What is God's invitation that He eagerly wants people to accept?**

This may seem like an obvious question, but if you think your group members need it restated or clarified, then have one or two people put the gospel into his/her own words. However, don't get bogged down at this point. Even brand new believers can simply invite someone to visit one of our church services or outreach events in which they will have the opportunity to hear the gospel or speak with someone who has more understanding of the kingdom message.

If you think your group members need to learn a simple presentation of the gospel, you can always give out a simple outline such as the "Roman Road" printed as a handout below.

***Where do you see yourself in the last parable?**

***Who do you usually include in your social or fellowship activities? Why?**

Our goal is not to make people stop having times to fellowship or socialize with other Christians. We're commanded to not neglect meeting together (Heb. 10:25)—though that verse is perhaps directed more to regular times of worship, preaching, etc. We are supposed to show hospitality to other Christians, too (1 Pet. 4:9; Rom. 12:13.) But we should not use these commands to justify excluding non-Christians from our lives. And we do want to examine our attitudes towards those who may often be overlooked or excluded from the mainstream of our church or social circles.

***Who do you think God is sending you out to invite this week?**

Close by praying for one another; either as a group or by breaking down in small groups and praying for opportunities to invite someone to a church service, to investigate Jesus through an Alpha course, or to attend another upcoming outreach event. Ask the Holy Spirit to widen our hearts to include all those the Lord wants to extend His invitation to through us.

WRAPPING IT UP

Each of us has been invited into a wonderful experience of God's love, blessing, and eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This week, let's remember to ask the Father who is missing at His banquet table and listen for His promptings to invite others to join us at the feast!

“The Roman Road”

This is one version of a simple gospel outline using verses just in the book of Romans. It is easy to memorize and avoids having to flip all over the Bible when you sit down with a non-Christian to talk about the gospel.

1. All have sinned against a holy God. We have ignored, disobeyed, and offended God our Maker and the ultimate Ruler of life and death.

Romans 3:32 “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

2. The result of our sin is that we are separated from God, dead spiritually, and will one day die bodily.

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death....”

3. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, died to pay the death penalty for our sin. This way the debt we owed God for disobedience was paid by Jesus’ life of perfect obedience and his death of undeserved sacrifice.

Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

4. Believing Jesus Christ died in our place but was raised to life by the power of God; receiving God’s forgiveness and offer of a whole new life by inviting Jesus to be our Savior and Lord; and telling others that we have made this about face or reversal from living a self-directed life to living under God’s direction, will secure us in God’s love and family forever.

Romans 10:9 “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Doan, Eleanor, ed. *Sourcebook for Speakers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968.

"Dropsy." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 1: A–D*. Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986.

Ellis, E. Earle. *The Gospel of Luke*. Ed. Matthew Black. The New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983.

Evans, C. F. *Saint Luke*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990.

Ford, Leighton and James Denney. *The Power of Story: Rediscovering the Oldest, Most Natural Way to Reach People for Christ*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994.

Foster, Lewis. "Luke" *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version*. Ed. Kenneth Barker. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985.

Goodrick, Edward W. and John R. Kohlenberger, gen. eds. *The NIV Exhaustive Concordance*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.

Harrison, Roland K. "Disease." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 1: A–D*. Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986.

Marshall, I. Howard. *Commentary on Luke*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Vol. 3. Eds. W. Ward Gasque and I. Howard Marshall. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.

Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Christian Origins and the Question of God. 2. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.

Wyatt, Robert J. "Pharisees." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 3: K–P*. Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986.