

Walk His Way: Discipleship Lessons from Mark's Gospel

Leaders Guide



13 online adult Sunday school lessons

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About Acacia Resources

The biblical witness singles out acacia wood for its uniqueness. The only wood mentioned in the building of the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle and the altar is acacia. Acacia wood is listed with other precious objects—gold, silver, fragrant incense, onyx stones—given to honor God.

Today's acacia tree is known for its value, diversity and durability. Some acacia trees have fragrant flowers used in making perfume. The seeds are edible. The bark is rich in tannin, a substance used in tanning, dyes, inks and pharmaceuticals. Furniture, oars, tools and gunstocks are made of the hard lumber from the acacia tree.

Some 1,200 species of acacia trees and shrubs exist throughout much of the world, including Africa, Australia and North America. The acacia species is tough enough to survive the semiarid regions of Africa where its roots sink deep to capture the rare water which runs quickly into the soil.

The name *acacia* symbolically ties BCE's publishing initiative to our biblical heritage. The acacia tree represents the wise value attached to educational resources, the diversity of needs within churches and the durability demanded for growing healthy Christians, whether they are singles, couples with children or senior adults.

Acacia Resources will guide Christians and draw them godward, as the ark of acacia wood guided the people of Israel in their journey and represented the presence of God in their midst.

For more information about Acacia Resources, call 615-383-3192 or visit our Web site at www.acaciaresources.com.

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A *Walk His Way* Students Guide is also available from Acacia Resources (www.acaciaresources.com).

Preface

If we believe what we read on some bookstore shelves, Christian discipleship is merely a matter of following some fairly straightforward steps. In a few short weeks, it seems, we can become certified disciples, complete with a T-shirt and jewelry that herald to the rest of the world the news that we've "arrived."

Discipleship is not, of course, that simple. To be fair, some good resources exist to help us in the process. The best ones deal honestly with discipleship's demands and reflect Jesus' teaching that discipleship requires much from us, including a radical commitment and a whole new way of living.

They also remind us that discipleship is not a singular event but continuing and deliberate actions. It is a journey rather than a destination. More often than not in our discipleship efforts, instead of moving in a straight and purposeful line, we meander and occasionally veer off course.

In contrast to much in our culture that is easily accessible and immediately visible, discipleship works from the inside out, not the other way around. We can't fast-forward our way through it, and others may not notice much difference in us for a while.

Changing long-held attitudes, rearranging priorities, redefining relationships like family and neighbor—most of the time turning them completely upside down—all of these things take time.

Much stands in the way of our discipleship, a lot of it in the form of what we have. We so value individual freedom that we are often tempted to define discipleship in our own, rather than Jesus', terms.

Some things that we possess also have hold of us—wealth, prestige, status—and lure us away from total commitment. Jesus said that we must be willing to give up our right to all of this, to self-centered living, if we want to follow him.

Discipleship involves more than doing what Jesus said, however. It also includes living as Jesus lived. The way we treat people, especially those on society's fringes, is a pretty good indicator of our commitment to Christ. Jesus caused a lot of religious tongues to wag

when he sought as his disciples those who had not first “cleaned up” religiously.

That’s because Jesus saw potential where no one else could. Our genuine discipleship does too.

In that reality we should find great hope as individuals, families, churches and communities as we try to affect positive change in our world. We can set ourselves and the world right as far as God is concerned, Jesus said, by living a certain way. And then he showed us how, not through rituals and rules, but through love.

In Mark’s account of some of the events in Jesus’ life that teach discipleship, the message of Jesus is clear:

- Welcome, don’t shun, sinners. And who isn’t one?
- Place people’s needs ahead of religious observances that oppress them. People are more important than rules.
- Concern yourself most about what God intends. Doing the will of God changes everything.
- Live confidently within the kingdom of God. In spite of how things look or seem, its success is certain.
- Remember that what alienates you from God comes not from an external source, but from inside. It shows up in the form of attitudes and actions that tear down rather than build up Christian community.
- Forget about me-first living. There’s no place for it in God’s kingdom. Self-centered ambition and discipleship are incompatible.
- Learn to serve, and accept each person as a child of God, Christ’s brother or sister, and your own.
- Enter into and nurture relationships as God originally intended them, and take these relationships seriously. God does.
- Acquire and consume only what you need, and give generously to help those who don’t have enough to survive. Avoid carelessness and wastefulness that create suffering for

others. Work for justice that eliminates the root causes of conditions that victimize people.

- Learn to worship God, and open the doors of worship houses to everyone.
- Love God without reservation, and love others as much as you love yourself.

Becoming a disciple is not something we accomplish only by reading a book or taking a class, though both can be helpful. Much of it we learn as we live our lives in relationship with God and others, modeling Christ’s love.

Jesus’ words and actions as recorded in Mark’s gospel can guide us as we do.

Written by Jan Turrentine, managing editor for Acacia Resources, Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, Tenn.

The Commitment of Exclusive Followership Leaders Guide

Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending their nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Theme: Discipleship begins with followership.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- Use the Preface, personal study and the following ideas below to formulate an introduction for your class to Mark’s Gospel.

Most scholars believe that Mark’s Gospel is the earliest of the synoptic Gospels and provided the background from which Matthew and Luke wrote.

Much more than an historical account of Jesus’ life, it introduces in forthright and fast-paced style the radical nature of Christian discipleship. Always in Mark’s mind as he wrote was the idea that disciples of Jesus follow him exclusively and completely, all the way to the cross.

Mark’s account provides fewer of Jesus’ longer teaching discourses than the other Gospels. Almost immediately readers find Jesus in conflict with the prevailing religious authorities and social order of the day. Mark’s tendency in his literary style to show Jesus and his disciples always moving from place to place and dealing with people at every turn reinforce his message that the gospel and discipleship are about what we do, not just about what we say we believe.

He was also concerned that people understand that the gospel calls us to make a choice between the community of the world and the community of God’s reign. Entering God’s kingdom changes everything, Mark believed, from how we define family and social relationships to how we define true religion to how we practice economics and justice.

Mark’s call to discipleship is direct, even blunt. He doesn’t skirt around its costs.

Discipleship is not synonymous with going to church, Mark might say to us today. Much of it happens “on the way,” as we follow Jesus in how he lived.

- The following online articles can enhance your preparation and provide additional insights to stimulate class discussion:

“The Jesus Experience: Christianity Around the World,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2268;

“Will the Historical Jesus Please Stand Up?,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3346;

“The Way of Discipleship,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2948.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Ask adults to recall various artistic depictions they have seen of Jesus and explain why they consider them memorable. Ask:

▶ *Did this rendering do anything to increase your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus? If so, what?*

Ask a few volunteers to suggest—disregarding skill level—what they would paint, sculpt, draw, etch or otherwise artistically depict if they were asked to create something that reflects what they know about following Jesus. Guide their thinking by asking such questions as:

▶ *Would it focus on Jesus’ birth, death or resurrection, or some point in between? Why?*

▶ *Would it show Jesus teaching? healing? performing other miracles? What would Jesus be doing? Would anyone else be involved?*

After several have suggested their ideas, ask adults to imagine that they live in another culture, perhaps even another time in history. Then ask:

▶ *How would your depiction of following Jesus change?*

▶ *How might your culture and your worldview shape your understanding of who Jesus is and what he taught?*

▶ *How does our culture shape our understanding of discipleship?*

- Connect this discussion to a documentary series from Paulist Productions called “The Jesus Experience: Christianity Around the World,” six segments of which aired on the Hallmark Channel in 2003. (The complete eight-part series is available on DVD and VHS).

Note that this documentary features hundreds of artistic depictions and re-enactments from across time and around the world, crafting a mosaic of how people have both accepted and rejected Jesus. Suggest that this documentary is a vivid reminder of what most western Christians now know: not all Christians picture Jesus the way we do.

“Jesus is painted, sculpted, engraved, discussed, considered and written about as a shepherd, conqueror, king, guru, holy man, thinker, doer, punisher, mystic, radical, rebel, martyr, patron, healer, protector,” wrote culture editor Cliff Vaughn in his review of this documentary for EthicsDaily.com.

“Because ‘The Jesus Experience’ takes on the world’s largest religion, it does no more than paint broad strokes,” Vaughn said. “But because that religion stemmed from a man who simply said ‘Follow me,’ even these broad strokes betray amazingly fine lines.”

- Suggest that our understanding of Jesus—how we see him—provides the context for our understanding of discipleship—how we will follow him.

Explore the Bible

- From your personal reading and study, offer a brief introduction to Mark’s Gospel. Then refer to the following from EthicsDaily.com columnist Dwight A. Moody:

“When I reflect on my own experience as a Christian, I realize my testimony also highlights the words and works of Jesus. At those critical junctures in my spiritual pilgrimage, what I found compelling was not the virgin birth, not the trial before Pilate, not the death on the cross and certainly not the descent into hell (which we Baptists, being ignorant of the creeds, were not even aware of). No, what inspired me was the strong, simple, sacrificial life of Jesus. It was his direct appeal to ‘take up the cross and follow me’ that challenged me like nothing else recorded in the New Testament” (“Will the Historical Jesus Please Stand Up?” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3346).

- Suggest that churches have for the most part done a good job educating people about the key events in Jesus’ life: his birth, death, burial and resurrection.

Ask:

▶ *How well, in comparison, do you think churches do in teaching people about how Jesus lived?*

▶ *How effective are churches in leading people to understand how Jesus wants us as his followers to live?*

- Read aloud Mark 1:14-15. Ask the class to recall details from the life of John the Baptist and his message. Then ask:

▶ *What was Jesus’ message?*

▶ *What did Jesus mean by the word repent?*

▶ *What did Jesus mean by the word believe?*

Point out the difference between intellectual assent and a belief that results in a way of living. Stress that faithful discipleship involves more than a way of thinking or a set of doctrines. It involves a commitment to a way of living. Repenting and believing produce visible results.

- Read aloud Mark 1:16 and note the political and religious diversity surrounding the Sea of Galilee. Then ask:

▶ *What significance do you attach to Jesus beginning his ministry here?*

Then read aloud Mark 1:17-20 and note the immediacy with which Simon, Andrew, James and John left their businesses to follow Jesus. Remind the class of the similar response of Elisha when the

prophet Elijah called him to leave his work and assume the prophetic role. Then ask:

► *What did Jesus mean when he said “Follow me”? What was it about his call that produced an immediate response?*

► *At what point did you understand that conversion/salvation is more than a singular event and involves a commitment to ongoing discipleship? What led you to this understanding?*

Apply Biblical Truth

- Stress that deciding to follow Jesus is a decision that will turn the world—ours and everyone else’s—upside down, if we follow him completely and exclusively. Jesus showed us who he was and who he wants us to be by how he lived. Challenge the class by using some of the ideas below from EthicsDaily.com columnist Chris Sanders.

“Like Jesus, we should bring good news to the poor, set free the oppressed and work for God’s Kingdom,” Sanders wrote. “The rich should feel the sting of the Word, and political and economic leaders should be brought to repentance. In other words, Christians comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”

A good gauge of our discipleship, Sanders believes, is to ask: Are we saving our lives by losing them? “Putting God’s way above our own selfishness expresses a faith that God will provide for all of us, for the whole world.” God honors our faith, he says, when we risk it all in discipleship.

“The Kingdom of God is our dream and God’s vision of a better life; a better world, now and forever. The world doesn’t necessarily look like God has the whole world in his hands. In the world the way we usually see it, there is a cycle that never changes. The rich get greedier, the poor get more miserable, sick people get cancer and waste away and people only look out for themselves.”

Though the world looks hopeless, he says, “Christians don’t use rose-colored glasses to pretty up the ugly. Justice is a constant struggle against evil. Rather, Christians see through the realistic lenses of faith to opportunities for newness in the Spirit of God expressed in the work of people who follow. God uses us, together, for the Kingdom of God as we walk in the Way of Discipleship. God uses our hands, feet, time, talent, and money.”

- Close with prayer, asking God to give you the courage to risk all in following Jesus.

The Power of Inclusive Fellowship

Leaders Guide

Mark 2:13-17

¹³Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. ¹⁴As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. ¹⁵And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

Theme: Discipleship involves fellowship with those on the fringes of society.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- You may want to include ideas from the following article on EthicsDaily.com either to introduce or conclude your lesson:

"Sitting Down to Eat with Jesus,"
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1738).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Lead your class to broaden their understand of and compassion toward people on society's fringes by relating one or more of the examples below:

► Several years ago, the First United Methodist Church in the Chicago suburb of Western Springs decided to join six other area churches in housing the homeless one night a week. Their decision strained relations with neighborhood residents.

"I think people are afraid that if you bring homeless people into this community, that it will affect the community, and I think they feel the property values will go down," one resident said (www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week322/p-feature.html).

Most Western Springs residents held the widespread belief that their largely well-to-do community simply had no homeless people. But homeless people were "hidden everywhere that you wouldn't even imagine," according to one homeless man.

"That rich neighborhood didn't want us; that's all it was," said another. "And I can almost understand that. You know, the way they think about homeless people is like, you know, the trash and they're going to bring the property values down. But, you know, one night a week to stay in a church, that's no big deal. It's not a big deal at all, you know."

"It was disturbing when I heard, 'We don't want the homeless, we don't want those persons,'" Reverend

Sylvia Pleas said. Those two words—those persons—really bothered her.

Eventually the village government became involved in response to residents' complaints, citing zoning issues. Their experience reflects a nationwide trend in which churches often encounter resistance as they try to fulfill their mission.

"I think this whole issue was a wake-up call to the village of Western Springs. I have said that I think it's providential. I think God is stirring up our own faith within this village, and God is helping us to see that we need to reach out to all persons and not prejudge who belongs in Western Springs and who does not."

► For millions of Americans, the struggle comes not because they are homeless, but because they have a physical, sensory or mental disability. Many want desperately not just to have a life of faith but to participate fully in the life of the church, including serving in leadership roles.

People's attitudes are the biggest obstacles, according to Ginny Thornburgh of the National Organization on Disability. It involves "making a decision about us ahead of time that you can't participate, that we can't be a leader in our congregations, that for some reason we're inept or inadequate" (www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week329/p-feature.html).

Elizabeth Browne, who is blind, wanted to be a lector in her neighborhood church and read scripture. "They thought it would be too awkward, that I would make things look clumsy, awkward, whatever,"

she said. "I wouldn't be taking away from people's spirituality by walking up there and maybe somebody having to show me where the podium is."

Julie Hess works with persons with mental retardation at a church on Chicago's North Side. "They have a profound sense of faith," she believes.

Hess's church tries to provide them with faith experiences by pairing each with a companion who develops a one-on-one relationship with them. "In that relationship, they come to know that they are people of dignity, deserving to be in friendship with others. And through that friendship, they understand that God's really the center of that love."

Ginny Thornburgh believes that "once we determine to remove the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from a full life of faith—barriers of architecture, barriers of communication, and barriers of attitude—we open ourselves to a whole new set of gifts and talents that have been excluded before."

- Stress that many people feel disenfranchised from the faith community because of physical, social, economic, ideological or other differences. Many live on society's fringes for one reason or another—some permanently, others temporarily—and therefore feel they would be unaccepted, or unacceptable, in a church.

Suggest that the world into which Jesus came was no different. Gentiles, prostitutes, lepers, tax collectors, women, children and others on the fringes were rejected and often despised by the religious elite.

Note that Jesus offered an inclusive fellowship that accepted everyone, without stipulation, and empowered people with dignity, purpose and value. While his call to Levi shocked the religious community, it probably surprised no one more than Levi himself. Yet it is representative of Jesus' call to all to follow him. It reminds us that by following Jesus in discipleship, we open our lives and the doors of our churches to everyone.

Explore the Bible

- Read aloud Matthew 2:13-14. Note that Jesus drew a crowd, and he took the time to teach them. "As he was walking along," (v 14), he saw Levi, a tax collector, and issued the call for him to follow. Point out that what Jesus asked Levi to do was more than temporarily stroll along with the rest of the crowd as he walked and talked. The term Jesus used meant "to enroll" or "to serve as an apprentice."

Lead the class to discuss Jesus' unusual choice of follower in Levi by asking such questions as:

- ▶ *For whom did Levi work?*
- ▶ *Why was he so hated?*
- ▶ *What was his social status?*
- ▶ *Why do you think he responded so immediately to Jesus' call?*

- Read aloud Mark 2:15-16 and offer insight on the dinner Jesus attended at Levi's house, using information from the Students Guide. Note the explana-

tion of "sinner" and explain why the Pharisees were so upset by what Jesus was doing.

Also point out the tremendous influence Pharisees had in public life and in the faith community, and explain why, given their background, the idea that Gentiles, tax collectors and sinners could be "family members" was preposterous to them.

Ask the class to respond to the question posed in the Students Guide:

▶ *Why would Jesus enjoy the company of those who ignored the synagogue; trespassed the moral and ceremonial laws and cooperated with the oppressive, pagan foreigners?*

Point out that the reaction of the Pharisees was clear, but we can only speculate the effect sharing this meal had on those who ate with Jesus. Ask:

▶ *What do you think Jesus and the other dinner guests talked about?*

▶ *What did sharing this meal signify to them?*

▶ *How do you think their lives changed following this event?*

- Ask someone to read aloud Mark 2:17 and offer an explanation of Jesus' proverb. Then ask:
 - ▶ *Why do you think Jesus seemed to revel in the company of tax collectors and sinners but often find himself and his mission at odds with leaders of the religious community?*

► *What was different about Jesus and his idea of religion?*

► *While the religious insiders of Jesus' day were ceremonially clean and completely law-abiding, they had a terrible malady. What was it?*

Apply Biblical Truth

- Suggest that what disturbed the Jewish religious leaders so much was not that Jesus said God could save people. They believed that. They were disturbed that Jesus said God would do so without people first cleaning up their lives and becoming righteous and deserving. Jesus introduced and modeled a very different understanding of God's call and mercy. That sinners, not righteous people, can be redeemed by God is indeed good news.

The religious elite of Jesus' day thought that their disapproval and shunning of sinners showed their understanding of God's mercy. Actually, the opposite was true. They didn't understand God's mercy at all.

We face the same temptation: the sins of self-righteousness and exclusion. We show that we understand God's mercy when we welcome those on society's fringes—the disenfranchised, the outcasts, the left-behinds, the invisible.

- Introduce the class to Carmen Renee Berry, author of *The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church*. At one time cynical and distanced from the church, Berry found herself seeking spiritual community following the suicide of a good friend.

A spiritual community, she believes, “is a place where fallible people find relationships that are accepting and encourage them to grow. Not all churches do that,” she said, but many do (www.christianitytoday.com/le/2003/004/30.12.html).

“Where human frailty once served as a reason for me to withdraw from the church, with its unruly and divergent congregants, this is now what compels me back to spiritual community. I had overlooked one essential factor—that I am as finite and flawed as everyone else,” she wrote.

“A church's response to failure is key,” Berry said. “When someone makes a mistake, is there freaking out, a firing, or a flogging? On the other hand, does the church hold those who fail accountable to make amends and grow?”

Berry identifies three things those seeking community hope to find: acceptance, a willingness to get to know them and a place where they can work with friends toward growth and service.

- Close with prayer, asking God to enable your faith community to be a welcoming place for those on society's fringes.

Practicing a Sabbath That Reshapes Culture

Leaders Guide

Mark 2:23-28

²³One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" ²⁵And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? ²⁶He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." ²⁷Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; ²⁸so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

Theme: Discipleship prioritizes human need over religious legalism.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- You may find the following articles from EthicsDaily.com helpful as you prepare to teach this lesson:

"24/7: One Hundred Sixty-eight Reasons to Rest With God," (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1704);

"Lieberman and the Sabbath: A Quaint Commandment?" (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=123).

- You may also find helpful Miguel De La Torre's book, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (Orbis Books, 2002). The Introduction includes an interesting perspective on Sabbath, one which mostly white middle- and upper-class individuals have probably never entertained. You may want to consider his ideas and incorporate them as you lead this Bible study that challenges religious legalism:

Citing Exodus 20:8-10, De La Torre suggests that through typical Anglo, middle-class lenses, we conclude that obeying this commandment is good for us spiritually because it allows us to take time from our otherwise busy lives, study scripture and worship. It is good for our families because it gives us time to spend together. And it is good for us physically because it causes us to slow down from the grueling work week, relax and focus on our relationship with God. A sermon from this passage and with these points would be "soothing balm to the busy and overworked lives of most who are white middle- and upper-class," he writes.

Those on the underside of the economic system—the marginalized ones—would read this passage entirely differently, he says. He utilizes an example from Justo Gonzalez, who recalled a sermon from this text preached at a church composed primarily of very poor parishioners.

The minister began his sermon by asking those in the congregation to indicate how many days they had worked during the last week. Six days? Five days? Four days?

Few people were able to raise their hands in response to any of the questions. Then he asked how many had wanted to work but had been unable to find employment. To that question, almost everyone raised his or her hand.

How can we obey the law of God that commands us to work six days, the minister asked, when we cannot even find work for a single day?

“When we consider that those who are unemployed are disproportionately people from the margins, we realize that our economic system is geared to prevent certain segments of our population from keeping God’s commandment, ‘Six days you shall labor.’ Reading the Bible from the margins, because it is a contextual reading, subverts traditional readings and seriously critiques the dominant culture,” De La Torre concludes.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Introduce the significance of the Sabbath in Jewish life by relating the experiences of Lauren F. Winner, author of *Girl Meets God*, her spiritual memoir, and *Mudhouse Sabbath*.

She recalls Sabbaths of Shabbat candles, braided challah bread, prayer and family time. Sabbaths are truly days set apart from the rest of the week for

observant Jews, she says. The Hebrew word for “holy,” in fact, means “set apart”; as in “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.”

“When I practiced Judaism,” Winner recalls, “I would begin my Sabbath with a relaxed Friday night dinner, followed by a day of worship, rest, and celebration. During the Sabbath day, I didn’t think about my schoolwork, spend any money, ride in a car, or watch television” (www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2004/001/14.16.html).

Then, Winner says, she became a Christian, and though she went to church on Sunday mornings, the day never seemed quite as holy as before. She would even find herself at the shopping mall on many Sunday afternoons.

As a Christian, she understood that her life was not directed by Sabbath laws from Hebrew scripture, yet she believed the concept of Sabbath to be important and struggled with how to practice it. “Good Sabbaths make good Christians,” an old Puritan saying, somehow resonated with her.

Of course, honoring the Sabbath was much easier in Puritan New England, where almost everyone took it seriously and practiced it the same way. Businesses and shops were closed and everyone went to church.

Today, with our culture’s emphasis on productivity and busyness and an economy that requires that many people work on Sundays, observing the Sabbath runs counter to culture. The realities of single-parent incomes, tough economic times and

the value we place on individual freedom mean that Sunday may be just another day for many.

- Note that Jews of Jesus' day traced Sabbath all the way back to God's creative acts (Gen 2:1-3). The Ten Commandments include the admonition to keep the Sabbath holy (Ex 20:8-11). Then ask:

▶ *Is practicing Sabbath still an important spiritual discipline? Why or why not?*

▶ *What does it mean for Christians today to practice Sabbath? How can we do this effectively?*

Lauren Winner says that she has found it helpful to mark the beginning of the Sabbath by gathering with friends on Saturday evenings for a relaxed time of food, fellowship and prayer. In addition, two commandments that govern Jewish Sabbath observances continue to guide her: do no work on the Sabbath and be joyful.

"On Sundays, I don't shop, I don't grade papers, and I don't touch my phone," she says. "I even try not to make any plans for the week ahead. Instead, I do things that will give me and God joy. I take long walks with friends. I take extra times for Bible study. And I'm never overly meticulous about these guidelines.

"The way into Christian Sabbath observance isn't so much about rules as orientation," Winner says, as it is something that moves us "away from the busyness of the week and towards the Creator who rested."

Explore the Bible

- Note that Mark 2:23-28 is part of a larger section of Mark's Gospel that records Jesus at odds with religious and social expectations. This encounter between Jesus, his disciples and the Pharisees originated from the disciples' violation of Sabbath laws. The Jews who observed Jesus' disciples on this occasion considered what they did to be irresponsible and irreverent, worthy of harsh penalties. But Jesus used the occasion to teach his followers another lesson about discipleship and what it involves.

Ask someone to read aloud Mark 2:23-24. Using the Students Guide, lead adults to find answers to the following questions:

▶ *At what points could the Pharisees have perceived that Jesus and his disciples were in violation of the law?*

▶ *Did the Pharisees have a legitimate argument in their objections?*

▶ *Do you think Jesus and his disciples did what they did deliberately, so as to raise objections from the Pharisees and then engage them in dialogue?*

- Read aloud Mark 2:25-26 and note the historical reference Jesus made. Then ask:

▶ *Why do you think Jesus used this example?*

▶ *Do you think the Pharisees were convinced by Jesus' logic? Why or why not?*

Ask someone to read aloud verses 27-28. Remind adults that Jesus had earlier irritated the Pharisees by claiming he had the authority to forgive sins. His statement here became more troublesome to them than the original actions of his disciples. Ask:

- ▶ *What was Jesus actually saying here?*
- ▶ *How did the Pharisees interpret what he said?*
- ▶ *How do you think his disciples understood this statement?*
- ▶ *What relationship to the law do you think Jesus intends his followers to have?*
- Suggest that the religious legalists were boring in on a singular and ultimately minor point, while Jesus was trying to get them to see the bigger picture. Once again, Jesus revealed the upside-down nature of discipleship. God did not create people to be subservient to the Sabbath, he said. Instead, God created the Sabbath to serve the needs of the people. It was a difficult concept for everyone to understand, but once they did, it changed the way they lived. People became more important than the law.

Apply Biblical Truth

- Suggest that the real issue this passage raises is: what is appropriate or acceptable behavior for someone who loves God? And who determines this?

Note the questions that open the lesson in the Students Guide, and ask adults to respond to them:

- ▶ *Where is the line between what you do out of faith convictions and what you do out of cultural conditioning?*
- ▶ *How much of your religious conviction is shaped more by cultural conditioning than by faith?*
- ▶ *Suppose this encounter between Jesus' followers and religious legalists took place today. What do you think might precipitate it? How would you respond?*
- ▶ *Where do you draw the boundaries that delineate acceptable or "right" behavior in practicing your faith? Do these boundary lines ever move or change? If so, why?*
- Relate some of the following ideas from syndicated columnist and Episcopal priest Tom Ehrich. In a column titled "Moving On," Ehrich noted our tendency to get stuck in old ideas, harmful situations, inherited prejudices and other things that paralyze or imprison us. Moving on, he wrote, is essential to survival.

Suggest that this advice is similar to that which Jesus gave as he taught his followers and dialogued with the Pharisees about the Sabbath. "It is time to move on to the bigger picture," Jesus seemed to say.

Ehrich wrote of the difficulty religious folk have in moving on, noting some of the battles that have

erupted over resistance to change. “Our instinctive response has tended to be the same,” he said. “Bluster against change agents, castigate modern culture, quote Scripture, draw lines in the sand, take votes, reject votes, pack a bag, deny reality, ride the ship down, wonder who’s to blame when drowning occurs.”

Jesus, instead of engaging in “dueling Scriptures and dueling traditions,” according to Ehrich, said what he had to say and moved on. “His entire ministry was a process of moving on from old ways.”

- Close with prayer, asking God’s help in changing attitudes so that you can move beyond religious legalism to the true nature of discipleship: meeting human needs.

Refocused on the Family Leaders Guide

Mark 3:31-35

³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” ³³And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Theme: Discipleship is about doing the will of God.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Introduce the concept of redefining family by asking adults to recall the ways television has depicted changing family structures over the past 50 years or so. Ask them to cite specific examples, and supplement their suggestions with notes such as these:
 - ▶ “Leave It to Beaver” and “Father Knows Best” supposedly portrayed the “typical” American family

for their time: white; two parents, father employed outside the home, mother not; middle- to upper-middle-class; two-three children.

▶ “The Andy Griffith Show” featured a widowed father raising a young son with the help of his older, single aunt.

▶ “Julia” portrayed a professionally employed widow raising a young son and was ground-breaking because the lead character was black.

▶ “My Three Sons” featured a widowed, middle-aged father raising three sons with the help of his older bachelor uncle. The father later marries a woman with a very young daughter, further changing the family’s landscape.

▶ “The Brady Bunch” offered a glimpse into the blended family, with its widowed mother of three daughters marrying the widowed father of three sons. The ever-present live-in housekeeper was an integral part of the family too.

▶ “One Day at a Time” provided a glimpse into the lives of a woman and her two teenaged daughters whose lives and outlooks were changed by divorce.

▶ “My Two Dads” featured two single men raising an adolescent daughter whose mother had died. Either of the two men could have been the girl’s father; that mystery was never revealed. The two chose to raise the girl together in a somewhat unconventional living/parenting arrangement.

▶ “It’s All Relative” features a highly educated young woman who was raised by two affluent homosexual

men. She becomes engaged to a young man who works in the working-class neighborhood bar his Irish Catholic parents own.

As each example surfaces, ask questions such as:

▶ *What was the family’s composition? Why did this family’s structure seem to work, or fail to work well?*

▶ *What were some specific scenarios that strained family relationships and placed the families at points of crisis? Were these resolved? If so, how?*

As a final example, ask someone who has seen the movie “Secondhand Lions” to suggest how Walter, the character played by Haley Joel Osment, finds “family” with his great-uncles after his mother leaves him in their care.

Of this film, EthicsDaily.com culture editor Cliff Vaughn notes, “This isn’t a notion of ‘traditional family,’ but it should be. It’s nothing new. People have been finding and making family in all sorts of ways since time began” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3122).

- Connect this idea to the yearning each person feels for family and the way Jesus found a new family in the company of those who joined him in doing God’s will. Suggest that some people puzzle over Jesus’ seemingly harsh response to his family in the incident recorded in Mark 3:31-35 and struggle to make it fit with the picture of the kind, gentle Jesus with which they are most comfortable.

Note that we do not have a full account or explanation of all that happened when Jesus’ mother and

brothers asked to see him on this occasion. He may have talked with them. Mark recorded for his readers what they needed to hear: that discipleship involves doing the will of God, and nothing is more important than that. Jesus did not dismiss the importance of family; rather, he broadened its definition and challenged his followers to think of family in a new way.

Note that followers of Jesus face the possibility that their family members will not understand their decision to walk the path of radical discipleship Jesus demands. Those whose family members reject them or fail to understand their commitment to Jesus find a new family within the Christian community.

Explore the Bible

- Note the statements in the introduction of the Students Guide about “church family” and “family of God,” and ask adults to respond to the questions that follow:
 - ▶ *Who belongs in the Christian family circle?*
 - ▶ *What are the “family rules” for entrance inside the circle?*
 - ▶ *How does this Christian family compare to our biological family?*
 - ▶ *To which family does our highest allegiance belong?*

Remind adults that Mark 3:31-35 should guide us in defining the Christian family in Jesus’ terms and can

also help us correct the imbalance of overemphasizing family relationships to the exclusion of discipleship’s demands.

Set the stage for examining this text by noting Mark 3:13-19a, in which Mark records Jesus’ calling of the twelve disciples. From there, the crowds went to a home. Read aloud Mark 3:21-22 and note the response of Jesus’ family to his growing popularity.

- Read aloud Mark 3:31-32 and point out that the size of the crowd prevented Jesus’ mother and brothers from going inside where he was. He evidently did not know they were outside until someone told him.

Note that those in the crowd that day placed a high importance on family relationships, so everyone likely would have understood if Jesus had immediately excused himself to talk with his family.

Ask someone to read aloud Mark 3:33. Then lead the class to discuss answers to questions such as:

- ▶ *How do you interpret Jesus’ reply to the messenger’s statement that his family wanted to see him?*
 - ▶ *How do you think Jesus’ family interpreted his hesitation in meeting their request?*
 - ▶ *Do you think Jesus was disrespectful to his family? Why or why not?*
- Call attention to Mark 3:34-35 and ask adults to respond to it by asking such questions as:

► *What did Jesus try to teach through this incident?*

► *What other Scriptures can you recall in which Jesus interacted with his family or spoke about family? What do these passages add to your understanding of how Jesus felt about family?*

► *How did Jesus redefine family?*

► *What should we conclude about our biological family relationships as a result of Jesus' teaching here?*

► *What should we conclude about our relationships within the family of God as a result of Jesus' teaching here?*

Apply Biblical Truth

- Summarize some of the following key points from syndicated columnist Tom Ehrich's column "The Yearning for Family," written as his family members gathered for his mother's funeral:

Durable families survive, he wrote, because people are willing to merge their lives, yield their wills, submit self-interest and trust in the future.

"Families are formed in the seemingly unremarkable rituals of evening meals, bedtime stories, games, trips, walks around the block, and letting go. ... Families are formed when harsh words are spoken and resolved, when children disobey and are forgiven, when everyone fails in due season and is trusted with another chance, when new personalities are allowed to enter and the family to change. Families are formed when death occurs and life goes on."

Ehrich contends that the yearning for family might, in fact, be the strongest yearning of all, surpassing the desire for wealth, prowess and fun. These, he suggests, are "substitutes for what we really want, namely, to be in close and loving relationship with a few other people."

He challenges religion to "stop its haughty moralizing and instead do what Jesus did. Jesus formed circles of caring and then insisted they remain open. Those circles confused his contemporaries, because they were non-traditional, grounded in unconditional acceptance." His insistence on remaining open also confuses us, "because once we have found our belonging-place, we often tend to close ranks and pull up the drawbridge, as if sharing the gifts would mean losing them."

Grace, he concludes, is more pliable than that. Rather than a treasure to be hoarded or regulated, he says, family is "a dozen more invitations waiting to be issued."

Jesus, instead of shutting out his family, widened its circle to include everyone who joined him in doing the will of God.

- Close with prayer, asking God to help you understand discipleship in new ways and widen the circle of your church's family to include everyone who is committed to doing the will of God.

What Can We Become?

Leaders Guide

Mark 4:30-32

³⁰He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth;³²yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Theme: Discipleship is about the potential of the insignificant becoming significant.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- The story of how Jeff Hawkins turned an idea into a cultural phenomenon is suggested as an introduction for this lesson. You may wish to read more at "The Next Small Thing," (www.fastcompany.com/magazine/15/smallthing.html).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Begin by asking for a show of hands from everyone who owns a personal digital assistant. Then ask:

► *Does anyone know who is responsible for developing these products, and how they launched the idea?*

Briefly summarize for the class the story of Jeff Hawkins and Palm Computing Incorporated:

When Jeff Hawkins was a teenager in the mid-1970s, he and some of his friends took a ride down the Hudson River in a contraption his father, an eccentric scientist, had invented. It was an air-cushion vessel with eight retractable legs and was inflated with vacuum-cleaner motors. Unfortunately, a strong current slammed the vessel into a railroad bridge, shutting down commuter trains to and from Manhattan for an entire day.

That experience, and many others Hawkins was exposed to thanks to his father, was not wasted on him. "My dad was always coming up with spectacular, impractical ideas. We were exposed to crazy things. But we learned to look at the world from all kinds of angles: mechanical, electrical, even business" (www.fastcompany.com/magazine/15/smallthing.html).

Hawkins went on to create one of the fastest-selling consumer electronics products in history. It sold faster than cell phones, pagers, even color televisions. It became the fastest-selling computer product ever.

Small enough to fit into a shirt-pocket and powered by AAA batteries, Hawkins's device was powerful enough to store thousands of names, addresses and telephone numbers; a calendar and To-Do list and a memo-writing function.

“In short, a very small thing had become the Next Big Thing—an innovation that affects how people work and live,” Pat Dillon said, writing about the device in 1998. “Most new-product launches follow the same course as Hawkins’s trip down the Hudson: They’re a wild ride, and they end with a loud crash.”

Hawkins was not the first to try to enter the hand-held computer market. Apple spent \$500 million on a device it called the Newton before it stopped development. A start-up company called GO Corporation spent \$75 million in the handheld market, and it went out of business.

Hawkins and his colleagues at Palm Computing spent only \$3 million in developing their working model, a fraction of what those who had tried and failed had spent.

- Point out that though it may appear that Hawkins experienced overnight success, the process actually took about 15 years. That’s how long he says he was obsessed with the “intellectual challenge at the heart of this tiny device.”

Suggest that in the kingdom of God, neither size nor time is a reliable indicator of value or growth. Things are not always as they seem. In spite of appearances that might indicate otherwise, the kingdom of God realizes certain and inevitable success.

Explore the Bible

- Read aloud Mark 3:30-32 and point out how Jesus began his explanation of the kingdom of God: He asked a question. In doing so, he affirmed the difficulty of understanding the kingdom of God.

Stress that there are no human parallels, so Jesus’ followers then and now often struggle to grasp the concept.

- Ask someone to read aloud again verses 31-32, and ask everyone else to listen closely for at least four shocking characteristics of the kingdom of God.

Call for volunteers to suggest these characteristics and help interpret them. Supplement their discussion with information from the Students Guide and the following summary statements:

1. The kingdom of God begins in small and almost unnoticeable ways. Ask:

► *How do the life and ministry of Jesus reflect this reality?*

2. The kingdom of God is neither coincidence nor happenstance; it is a miracle. It begins and grows intentionally.

3. The emphasis in the kingdom of God is not on the process of growth but instead on what it becomes. It is fundamentally different in character from that which is expected.

4. The kingdom of God accomplishes more than we expect or anticipate.

- Guide adults, based on these characteristics of the kingdom of God, to suggest some implications for our discipleship, such as:

► Our understanding of growth and success is not a valid measure for that of the kingdom of God.

▶ God works in the world in ways completely different from the ways we act and work, so we cannot judge God's activity the way we do our own.

▶ We must expect that God will do things we can attribute only to God. We must raise our expectations for our lives of faith.

▶ We must broaden and deepen our understanding of the kingdom of God and acknowledge that it is not just about us and what we want. Often it includes ministry to those outside the kingdom and involves difficult and costly efforts that seem to produce no results. Those ministries are part of the kingdom of God and pave the way for others to enter.

Apply Biblical Truth

- Ask adults who have seen the "Toy Story" movies to describe for the group the characters Buzz Lightyear and Woody.

Recall that in a scene from one of the movies, Woody, a toy cowboy, says to Buzz Lightyear, a toy astronaut, "You're not a space ranger! You're an action figure—a child's plaything."

When Buzz realizes he cannot fly and Woody must therefore be right, he becomes disillusioned and says, "I'm just a stupid, little, insignificant toy."

Woody reminds Buzz about the little boy who owns them and thinks Buzz is great. "It's not because you're a space ranger; it's because you're his."

Then Buzz notices something on the bottom of his boot: the name of the little boy to whom he belongs,

marked in permanent ink. Buzz's whole outlook changes and he is determined once again to become his best self.

Suggest that our discipleship—the fact that we are followers of Jesus—gives our lives meaning, purpose and value. Our significance as individuals and as churches comes not because someone else notices growth or productivity, but because we are faithful to the things to which God calls us. Jesus' teaching in this parable reminds us that God will accomplish divine purposes, things far greater than anyone can imagine or anticipate.

- Close with prayer, asking God to increase your expectations and guide you as you live in and help grow God's kingdom.

Garbage In, Garbage Out?

Leaders Guide

Mark 7:14-23

¹⁴Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." ¹⁷When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, ¹⁹since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. ²¹For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²²adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Theme: Discipleship involves an inward journey toward authentic piety.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- To read the complete story that forms the suggestions for introducing this lesson, see "Halal-Kosher Dining at Dartmouth" (www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week519/profile.html).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Guide adults to think about the role of rules and regulations in faith practices by relating the following example:

After years of planning and collaboration by Muslim and Jewish faculty and students, in 2002 Dartmouth University opened a new dining hall that accommodates Jewish kosher rules, Muslim requirements known as "halal" and a strict Hindu vegetarian diet called "sakahara."

Once considered bastions of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, Ivy League schools like Dartmouth have begun heeding calls from their diverse faculty and student body to facilitate practice of their religious traditions.

Doing so is a complex endeavor. Dining services must take into consideration the dietary laws of each religious tradition, and in the process of offering foods that fall within those traditions, make certain that no one's food is contaminated.

In Dartmouth's case, that means "having four separate kitchens, three sets of cooking implements, and two dishwashing rooms. To avoid confusion and contamination, the staff has an elaborate color-coding system for everything from chopping knives to serving trays. Since kosher rules prohibit preparing and serving meat and dairy foods together, one of the kitchens is literally locked while another is in use" (www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week519/profile.html).

Both Muslim and Jewish laws prohibit eating pork, but the two differ at many other points. Under the Muslim “halal,” it’s not necessary to separate meat and dairy products, but items such as vanilla extract are prohibited because they contain alcohol.

While food choice and preparation are distinct and separate, interestingly, the Pavilion has served to bring students of different backgrounds together.

Jason Spitalnick, a Jewish student, noted when he visited the Pavilion, Jews and Muslims were “sitting down for lunch together, and I expect that to happen quite a bit.”

Students have expressed the hope that sharing meals every day will be a bridge between communities that often experience conflict throughout the rest of the world.

Yousef Haque, a Muslim student, said, “It will change the relationships and cultivate, kind of, more support between the communities and, you know, encourage dialogue.”

- Suggest that while such dietary requirements may seem unusual to us, they are an important part of many religious traditions. Religious adherents within these traditions believe that contact with or exposure to certain foods leads to internal impurity, and that by avoiding these foods, they remain pure.

Note that Jesus encountered this belief within Judaism. Mark 7 opens with Jesus engaged in dialogue with Pharisees and teachers of the law about the eating habits of his disciples. He used this exchange to warn his followers about what really

makes us unclean and, conversely, what qualifies us before God.

Explore the Bible

- Read aloud Mark 7:14-15. Enhance adults’ understanding of the importance those within the Jewish tradition attach to keeping kosher and abiding by other laws by relating information such as the following:

In Judaism, the law stands at the center of the relationship between God and people. Because Jesus and his disciples were Jews, it went without saying in the minds of the religious leaders that they would be observant of the laws. Keeping the law was what separated Jews from other races, and they placed special emphasis on things like circumcision, Sabbath keeping, food laws and purity rituals.

While all four Gospels portray Jesus as expressing a very positive attitude toward the law, they also show that he broke the law on numerous occasions, especially in the minds of the Jews. He violated their Sabbath practices, ate with sinners and seemed to ignore their understanding of the law when it came to issues like divorce, diet and ritual cleansings. The Gospels document well his exchanges with religious leaders over such things.

Jesus summed up the law in terms of love. When it came to the law’s concern for external purity and separation, he showed no tolerance, instead focusing on the need for inner righteousness and right relationships between people and God.

Guide adults to continue thinking about the role of rules within faith practices by asking such questions as:

▶ *Which, according to Jesus, is more powerful: impurity or purity? How did he explain or justify this?*

▶ *What is the function of rules and laws? What can they do? What can they not do?*

- Before moving to Mark 7:17, briefly note the absence of verse 16 in most translations. Using information from the Students Guide, offer explanation about its omission.

Ask someone to read aloud verse 17 and note that Jesus' disciples understood what he had just said as a parable. Explain that while we generally think of parables as stories, this literary device is really much broader and includes all sorts of sayings and figurative language. Jesus regularly used parables to explain how things ought to be or to help his followers catch his vision.

Note that Jesus' statement in verses 14-15 requires no interpretation for us; we can immediately understand it. But in light of the tremendous care these listeners gave to what they did and did not eat, Jesus' disciples were confused by what he said. They needed to know more about what he meant.

Read aloud verses 18-19, and call attention to the parenthetical statement Mark inserted at the end of verse 19. Stress how revolutionary such a statement was, and how resistant many were to this idea.

- Call attention to Mark 7:20-23, and note the list Jesus uses to identify what makes a person unclean. The heart, Jesus said, is the source of evil intentions, and each of us is at risk for letting evil take hold of our hearts. The result is any number of bad behaviors, and each of us can find ourselves somewhere on this list. Rather than external rituals, Jesus said the remedy is a change of heart, an inward change that works its way out and results in righteous living.

- Note that the relevance of this scripture for us has little to do with hand washing or dietary choices. Suggest, however, that we have constructed false systems of righteousness that emphasize the wrong things and keep us from the internal heart changes God desires. Ask adults to suggest answers to questions such as these:

▶ *Who have the "righteous" proclaimed unclean today?*

▶ *What groups of people, if any, has the church declared unclean?*

▶ *Are there individuals or groups of people we neglect with our ministry and witness for fear that association with them will somehow make us impure?*

▶ *Who, because of our concerns over right appearances and correctness, has been left standing outside our fellowship?*

▶ *What are the gospel's demands for righteous living? What do we try to add to those demands?*

► *Over what issue in our church would Jesus declare, "It's not _____ that matters, but what is in your heart."*

Apply Biblical Truth

- Reinforce the idea that the changes in our lives resulting from commitment to discipleship first occur inside of us. We determine that certain attitudes, ideas or beliefs are incompatible with our commitment to Christ, and we set about on the sometimes painful journey of change. Even if we determine that we must make an outward change, it is that inward change of heart that precipitates it.

Use the following ideas from syndicated columnist Dale Hanson Bourke to help adults apply the truths of Jesus' teaching to their lives:

In a column titled "The Miracle of Change," Bourke recalled how, as a child, she was burned on the hand by a cigarette her father was holding. She had run up to him, not realizing he was holding the cigarette until it was too late. Her father, she said, never smoked again. Many years later, when she was a teenager and he caught her smoking, he recalled that incident with tears in his eyes. He apologized again for having hurt her, the regret still very painful for him.

"We change when the pain becomes great," Bourke wrote. "We change because we believe that who we are now is worth abandoning for who we might be. We change because it hurts too much not to change."

It does no good, she says, to make change seem any easier than it is. "Change will be hard. It will take discipline and hard work. But it will also take an element of grace. If we really want to change we have to face the facts. And then we have to understand that all change is somewhat miraculous."

Reinforce Jesus' teaching that what defiles a person is what is inside. An unwillingness to change alienates us from God and exhibits itself in attitudes and actions that tear down Christian community.

- Close with prayer, asking God to help you change attitudes, beliefs, priorities and values that stand in the way of complete commitment to discipleship.

What God Wants

Leaders Guide

Mark 8:34-38

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

Theme: Discipleship is about denial of self for the kingdom of God.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- For more information on the PBS special "Affluenza" from which introductory suggestions come, go to www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Begin by reading aloud the following questions and asking adults to offer answers (adapted from <http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza/diag/what.html>):

1. Which most compares in size to a typical three-car garage: a basketball court, a fast-food hamburger restaurant, a recreational vehicle or the average home in the 1950s?
2. In what year did the percentage of Americans calling themselves "very happy" reach its highest point?
3. How much time will the average American spend during his or her lifetime watching television commercials?
4. How much personal debt do Americans collectively carry, not including real estate and mortgages?
5. Which did more Americans do in 1996: graduate from college or declare bankruptcy?
6. In which country of the industrialized world is the greatest disparity between the rich and the poor?

Supplement adults' answers and discussion with the following facts. If you prefer, use additional questions and information from the Web site cited above.

1. The average size of an entire home in the 1950s was 900 square feet, the size of many garages today.
2. Although we consume twice as much as we did in the 1950s, people were just as happy then, although they had much less. The number of "very happy" people was highest in 1957; it has remained stable or declined since.

3. The average American will spend an entire year of his or her life watching commercials on television. They spend, on average, only 40 minutes each week playing with their children.
4. Americans carry an average of \$4,000 in personal debt for every man, woman and child, not including real estate and mortgages, for a total of \$1 trillion. While Japanese save an average of 16 percent of their income, Americans save only 4 percent.
5. More than 1 million Americans declared bankruptcy in 1996. That's three times as many as in 1986.
6. The disparity between the incomes of the rich and the poor is greatest in the United States.

Note that since 1950, Americans alone have used more resources than everyone who ever lived before them. Though Americans make up only five percent of the world's population, they use nearly one-third of its resources and produce almost half of its hazardous waste. In addition, note that the average person in North America consumes five times as much as the average Mexican, 10 times as much as the average Chinese and 30 times as much as the average citizen in India.

Point out that Americans discard 7 million cars every year and enough aluminum cans to make 6,000 DC-10 aircrafts. They dispose of 2 million plastic bottles each hour.

- Suggest that achieving the most extravagant lifestyle in the world does not come without high cost. Ameri-

cans work longer hours, realize increasing personal stress, watch family and community life erode and despair as personal debt grows. In the meantime, they continue to search for meaning and purpose in life.

▶ *What message does our culture most consistently send about what it takes to have a good, happy life?*

▶ *How has that message changed in your lifetime?*

▶ *How do Christians justify self-indulgence?*

▶ *When Jesus talked about self-denial for the sake of God's kingdom, what do you think he was talking about? Did he mean we should not have and enjoy things?*

▶ *What do you think God wants from us? What does God expect that we will do if we commit totally to Christian discipleship? How will that commitment change the way we live?*

Explore the Bible

- Briefly summarize for adults the events recorded in Mark 8, up to verse 34. Note especially the exchange between Jesus and Peter in verses 27-30 and Jesus' specific teachings about his death and resurrection in verses 31-33.

Note that while the disciples indicated they understood that Jesus was the Messiah for whom they had waited, they had more than a little difficulty grasping what Jesus said about the way he would suffer and die. Remind adults of all of the miracles

and amazing things they had seen Jesus do in the short time they had followed him. Beyond wondering how it could be possible for someone who could do these things to suffer and die, they also likely wondered what his suffering and death would mean for them.

- Ask someone to read aloud Mark 8:34. Suggest that in these few words, Jesus gets straight to the heart of discipleship and what it means to follow him. Then ask:

▶ *How do you think Jesus' listeners understood these words that day? What do you think they thought Jesus meant for them to do?*

▶ *How have Christians historically interpreted Jesus' call to "deny, take up the cross and follow"?*

▶ *What does it mean specifically for us to "take up our cross" to follow Jesus?*

▶ *Do you think that Christians have unique burdens or problems to bear, any more than others? Is that what Jesus meant? Why or why not?*

Stress that Jesus was direct and straightforward as he explained discipleship and its costs. It requires, he said, an unqualified commitment, even to death.

- Ask someone to read aloud Mark 8:35-37 and note the choice Jesus said people have: We can give up our rights to ourselves—lose ourselves—and in the process gain life, or we can hold onto things that have no eternal value and bring on moral and spiritual death.

Suggest that self-denial for the Christian is not a matter of simply giving up certain things. Instead, it means giving up the right to self-centered living. It involves placing God's desires and the divine agenda ahead of our own. Discipleship is more than following along behind Jesus. It means taking on God's will completely, just as Jesus did.

- Read aloud Mark 8:38 and note the warning Jesus gave his followers. He knew that they, and we, would sometimes be tempted to deny our faith. The consequences, he said, are serious.

Stress that Jesus was careful to paint a realistic picture of discipleship, one that many are unwilling to accept. The cost, they say, is too great. The cost of failing to follow him, Jesus said, is even greater. Nothing—no amount of wealth, material possessions, status, power, not even gaining the whole world—can make up for losing one's soul.

Apply Biblical Truth

- Call attention to a book titled *Living It Up*, written by James B. Twitchell (Columbia University Press, 2002). This University of Florida professor has written extensively on advertising, materialism and modern culture. "We understand each other not by sharing religion, politics, or ideas," Twitchell says. "We share branded things."

People did not all of a sudden become materialistic, he wrote, but have always been that way. He believes people gain a kind of emotional satisfaction from shopping for and obtaining things, especially those outside their standard budget.

Further, he highlights the trends of spending for its own sake, accumulating things we don't really need and obtaining status-symbol items like cars and houses. The problem is that what one generation identifies as luxury, the next believes is necessity. The wide availability of credit makes much of this available to almost everyone.

Even in the wake of economic downturns and terrorist attacks, Americans' luxury spending has gone unabated, growing four times faster than overall spending. Political leaders have even indicated it is vital to America's economic health, suggesting it is somehow patriotic. Twitchell calls "the democratization of luxury ... the single most important marketing phenomenon of our times" and believes that the shopping experience for Americans "has roots in the spiritual, the religious, and transcendent."

- Ask:

- ▶ *Do you agree with Twitchell's conclusions? Why or why not?*

- ▶ *Do you think materialism and the quest for things is the biggest obstacle to our complete commitment to discipleship? If not, what is?*

Recall for adults the story of Tiffany McCullough from the Students Guide, as she struggled with the decision to become a nun. Note her conclusion that "I just knew it was God saying, 'I want this.'"

Stress that this is what self-denial for the sake of God's kingdom involves: placing what God wants ahead of what we want. It may involve giving up

certain material things. It certainly means giving them lower priority. It always means resisting the temptation of self-gratification, in whatever form that comes.

- Close with prayer, committing to follow God's agenda over your own and give up the right to self-centered living.

Serving Others Leaders Guide

Mark 9:33-37

³³Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Theme: Discipleship includes serving others.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- To read more about Gilbert Bilezikian, whose story is suggested as a way to help apply this scripture, read "The Man Behind the Megachurch" at www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/013/4.56.html.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Lead adults to begin thinking about serving "the least of these" by relating the following or a similar example:

Every day, Mark Kramer, pastor of Trinity Church in Tacoma, Washington, would watch children, many from lower-income families, come and go from the school across the street. From conversations with the church's secretary about how they might help the children grew the School Supplies Carnival, an event where children play games and earn points to "purchase" donated school supplies.

Now some 60 churches in the Tacoma area participate in this annual ritual that resembles something between a block party and the state fair. In five years, the event grew to five locations across Pierce County and provides not only a fun-filled day but also much-needed school supplies to 5,000 children each year.

Diane Brown, a social worker at Spanaway Elementary School, praised the event and its results. She says that in the past, they "would spend several weeks after school started looking for supplies for kids who didn't have any. Sometimes those kids wouldn't start school because their parents would want to have supplies first" (www.christianitytoday.com/bcl/areas/churchministries/articles/le-scan-030224.html).

Kurt Mach, pastor of another church in the area, quickly teamed up with Kramer to encourage other churches to participate. The project, now well-organized and orchestrated to include follow-up with families, involves churches in filling large trash cans with school supplies during the summer months. Local retailers provide backpacks and lunch boxes, and other groups also provide support.

At the carnival locations, children and their families are entertained with games, music and food, in addition to demonstrations from police officers and firefighters. The local health department also provides free immunizations.

Even the state's education department has taken notice of and endorsed the effort. "If you believe in children, you'll get involved and show them you love them," assistant superintendent Andrew Griffin said.

Perhaps the best thing is that the idea is reproducible in any community, regardless of size.

- Suggest that the children who benefit from the School Supplies Carnival might easily have fallen through the cracks. At the very least, their needs would have gone unmet—perhaps even unnoticed—for a very long time.

Stress that commitment to discipleship is incomplete without serving others, including those we tend look beyond or fail to see. Note that Jesus made service, not status, wealth or power, the key to leadership. He gave new identity and value to the socially invisible and marginalized. They were just as important and significant to him as anyone else and said that serving them was, in fact, like serving him.

Explore the Bible

- Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 9:33-34. Note that just prior to this exchange among Jesus and his disciples, Peter, James and John had experienced Jesus' transformation. They were no doubt both

mystified and energized by it. Coupled with witnessing Jesus' miraculous healing of a young man, they and the rest of the disciples were probably abuzz with talk about the power and possibilities that could come as a result of following along with Jesus. At this point, their discipleship learning curve was still quite sharp.

Lead adults to dialogue about this exchange by asking them to respond to questions such as these:

- ▶ *What was the source of the disciples' argument?*
- ▶ *Why do you think Jesus waited until they were inside a house before he asked them about it?*
- ▶ *Why do you think the disciples were silent when Jesus asked them what they were arguing about?*
- ▶ *What do arguments about greatness prevent us from seeing? doing? becoming?*
- ▶ *What are some examples of social ills today that have resulted from people's arguments over greatness?*
- Read aloud Mark 9:35. Then ask:
 - ▶ *What did Jesus mean by what he said?*
 - ▶ *How do you think the disciples understood his statement?*
 - ▶ *What does it mean for us to be last and become servant of all? What does it mean for our church?*

- Ask someone to read aloud Mark 9:36-37. Explain how unusual it was that a child would even be anywhere around when a teacher like Jesus was speaking with a group of men. Remind adults of how marginalized and invisible children were in that culture.

Stress how unusual Jesus' actions and statement were: He used perhaps the most "insignificant" person in society—a child—to represent himself. He told his disciples that if they really wanted to be great, they would serve the child, and in doing so, they would serve him.

Note that according to Jesus, greatness in God's kingdom comes when we are completely unconcerned about things like wealth, status and power and become most concerned about serving the least important.

Apply Biblical Truth

- Read aloud the following statement: "I have read the Synoptic Gospels. From those it seems clear what Jesus would do, even without looking at a WWJD bracelet. ... Every homeless person we see huddled under a viaduct should tug at our conscience. But, every persistently unutilized room in a house of worship should evoke words like 'shame' and 'dishonor,' and 'disgrace.' That profound sin of omission should lead us directly to the study of our minister/rabbi/priest, where our appeal should bear the reminder that before one can save the world, he must bring the 'wretched poor' into his home."

Attribute this statement to Marc Howard Wilson, a rabbi, syndicated columnist and community relations consultant from Greenville, South Carolina. Wilson wrote about the issue of chronic homelessness and the need for houses of worship to open their doors to them during the week for meals and shelter, especially during the winter months. He challenged especially pastors, rabbis and priests to issue the call from the pulpit to obey what he understands to be a biblical imperative to feed and shelter the homeless. He cited Isaiah 58: "This is the fast I desire ... to share your bread with the hungry and to take the wretched poor into your home."

- Suggest that servanthood is a quality of individual disciples, but it is also characteristic of churches. Relate the following example:

Many evangelical Christians are familiar with the Willow Creek Community Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and its pastor, Bill Hybels. But fewer know the theologian behind the church, Gilbert Bilezikian, without whom Hybels says, "There would be no Willow Creek" (www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/013/4.56.html).

Bilezikian fled Armenia with his parents during the genocide of 1915 and settled in France. He became a Christian at a Salvation Army meeting, and a series of events led him to the United States, where he joined the faculty of Wheaton College. Hybels was one of his students in the 1970s.

Community is an extremely important concept to Bilezikian, but beyond concept, it must be reality in churches, he believes. "Without community, there is

no Christianity,” he wrote in his book *Community 101*. But that community goes beyond what happens in the church in small groups and Bible studies.

“Christianity is not about being served, it is about serving,” he asserts. He sees ministry as every Christian’s responsibility, not just those who are ordained.

Servanthood, in fact, is one of two main components of community, according to Bilezikian. And according to all accounts, he practices what he preaches, stopping to wash dishes even when others are around who are paid to do that. Understanding this man, says John Ortberg, one of Willow Creek’s teaching pastors, means understanding his zeal for servanthood.

When people think of Willow Creek, they tend to think of size, impressive music, theatrical productions and numerous conversions. But church leaders stress the concepts of community and servanthood, which are qualitative and not quantitative.

- Close with prayer, asking God to open your eyes both to see and respond to needs through serving others, especially those on society’s fringes.

The Marriage Test Leaders Guide

Mark 10:2-12

²Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” ⁵But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.’ ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” ¹⁰Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

Theme: Discipleship affects the marriage relationship.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- Carefully consider your class and its composition as you plan to lead this Bible study. Regardless of adults’ present marital status, most will have had

personal experience with divorce. Some have been divorced; others have had parents, siblings or close friends who divorced. Still others will have had other experiences with marriage that will affect how they hear and respond to what you and others say. Some may have been involved in abusive relationships that have left painful scars. Single adults in your group will read and hear this passage through the filters of their own experiences.

Choose discussion questions and illustrations carefully in light of those in your group and their experiences. Recognize that emotions may lie close to the surface for many.

Think of specific ways to reinforce the fact that failed marriages do not prevent people from experiencing God’s forgiveness, restoration and healing.

- You may find the following articles from EthicsDaily.com helpful as you prepare comments and guide discussion:

“Research Shows Why Marriage Matters”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=421);

“Starter Marriages: Gen X Giving Up Too Early?”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=532);

“Nine Words of a Christian Marriage”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1268);

“Love Is Caring, Not Gaming” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2125);

“Love at First Write” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2212).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Guide adults to think about marriage and divorce by relating information such as the following, compiled from a number of studies. Again, consider your group and their marital histories. Be aware of those for whom some statements may trigger painful memories. If you prefer, gather additional or other statistics that will engage your class in dialogue, or follow the suggestions at the next bullet.

Explain that you will relate information that studies and surveys have revealed, but you encourage adults to express their opinions and offer differing views based on their experiences.

► While recent Census data revealed that fewer Americans get married with each passing decade, it also showed that they are marrying for the first time at older ages and that more than nine out of ten Americans eventually get married.

► One nationwide survey showed that nearly six out of ten adults under the age of 35 had not yet married. That figure was only 14% for adults 35 to 49 and 6% for adults 50 or older. The survey revealed that among all people 18 or older, 73% had been married at least once.

► People who identify themselves as born-again Christians are just as likely to divorce as those who do not identify themselves that way.

▶ Adults who are married and who also have a college degree are less likely to divorce.

▶ Divorce is least likely in the Northeast and most likely in the West, according to one study.

▶ Another study revealed that children who grow up outside intact marriages are more likely to later experience divorce themselves.

▶ Married people, particularly men, have longer life expectancies than singles who are otherwise similar to them.

▶ Married people experience better overall health and lower rates of injury, illness and disability.

▶ Married women seem to have a lower risk of experiencing domestic violence than women who cohabit or date.

- Introduce the concept of “starter marriages” by relating information from the Students Guide and “Starter Marriages: Gen X Giving Up Too Early?”

Lead adults to express their opinions by asking such questions as:

▶ *How do you feel about “starter marriages”?*

▶ *Why do you think many people marry too early?*

▶ *Is marriage at a very young age or following only a brief relationship automatically a recipe for divorce?*

▶ *To what degree do you think that people enter marriage with the idea that divorce is always a viable option?*

▶ *What makes marriages succeed?*

Explore the Bible

- Ask adults to assign themselves a number of 1, 2 or 3 and make the following assignments. If your class is open to the idea, ask them to form small groups according to their assigned number. If not, suggest that they work on their own.

1: The Riddle: Read Mark 10:2-4 and the related information in the Students Guide and answer these questions:

▶ *What was the Pharisees’ purpose in questioning Jesus?*

▶ *What dilemma did Jesus face, regardless of how he answered?*

▶ *What prevalent understandings of the marriage contract existed during this time?*

▶ *What questions and concerns about divorce do you think Jesus’ followers had?*

2: The Solution: Read Mark 10:5-9 and the related information in the Students Guide and answer these questions:

▶ *How did Jesus answer the Pharisees’ question?*

▶ *What was Jesus' point, based on the way he answered?*

▶ *What is God's intention for marriage?*

▶ *What did Jesus' teaching on marriage do for the women in this culture and time?*

3: The Lesson: Read Mark 10:10-12 and the related information in the Students Guide and answer these questions:

▶ *Why do you think Jesus' disciples questioned him further about what he had said?*

▶ *What did Jesus tell them?*

▶ *How does this fit with Jesus' other statements about marriage?*

▶ *What do you think Jesus was most concerned about?*

- After several minutes, ask volunteers to read aloud the Mark passages, section by section, and offer their answers to the questions. Be prepared to supplement their answers and guide discussion based on your own study and understanding.
- Point out that Mark's Gospel recognizes that marriages will face tests. Discipleship—following Jesus and becoming part of God's kingdom—redefines the marriage relationship just as it does everything else.

Jesus addressed divorce within the context of God's purpose for marriage. He was more concerned about God's original intentions for marriage than about the circumstances that might permit a man to divorce his wife. Further, in God's kingdom, both men and women must take responsibility for their decisions and actions and are equally responsible moral agents. Within God's kingdom, relationships can exist the way God originally intended them.

Stress that discipleship always asks *What does God intend?* rather than *What does the law allow?*

Apply Biblical Truth

- Carefully craft closing comments and challenges specifically for those in your group, considering their present marital status, history and family experiences. One of the following ideas may be appropriate for your group:

▶ Tell the story of Earlene and Lonnie Rowell, based upon "Love at First Write," or relate the story of another couple you know who has enjoyed a marriage of 50+ years. Note columnist Michael Helms' reference to Matthew's account of Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees concerning divorce. Close by reading aloud the following from Helms' column:

"I don't suppose it really matters how love begins. What matters is whether the commitment to love another is genuine enough and deep enough to forsake all others, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in

health, until death comes. For this to happen, the depth of love one has for another has to grow, for most of us don't have a clue when we marry the kind of commitment we are making. Love that doesn't grow deeper will grow weaker."

► Summarize thoughts from columnist Dwight Moody's "Nine Words of a Christian Marriage," noting especially the following:

"Words have power: power to create and power to destroy; power to build up and power to tear down; power to bless and power to curse. . . . Nowhere is this admonition more needed than in the marriage relationship. The words that a husband and wife speak to one another can either nurture their love or undermine their affections. . . . (T)his gift of words is a gift from God and has the power to fill any relationship with grace."

► Relate the following ideas from columnist Gary Farley in "Love Is Caring, Not Gaming":

"Being a Christian is essentially a matter of learning to be a 'lover.' It is a matter of loving God and loving people. Loving God is usually easier than loving people. We learn about Jesus and his sacrifice to cover our sin. We experience the joy of forgiveness. We relish the beauties of God's creation. We bask in his care and protection. And we respond by saying, 'Thank you God for loving me.' . . . Loving people, at least for me, has been much harder. I have had to learn the difference between caring for someone and controlling them. I have had to learn that main-

taining a relationship with a person or group is more important than striking back or seeking revenge for disappointment. I have had to learn that God does a much better job of bringing justice to relationships than I can."

- Close with prayer, asking God to guide you to live in relationships as God intends them.

Living Justly Leaders Guide

Mark 10:17-22

*¹⁷As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
¹⁸Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” ²⁰He said to him, “Teacher I have kept all these since my youth.” ²¹Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” ²²When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*

Theme: Discipleship may make wealthy Christians uncomfortable, especially if they value possessions more than following Jesus faithfully.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- The following articles from EthicsDaily.com can provide additional insights and illustrations as you lead this Bible study:

“U.S. Poverty on the Rise, Census Bureau Reports”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3049);

“Addressing Rural Poverty”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3471);

“Seeking Justice in the Family”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=267);

“What To Do With Stuff and Things”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1647).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Ask adults to describe conditions that poverty creates in the following areas, and contrast that with the possible situations for those living in the middle- and upper-classes:
 - ▶ income
 - ▶ housing
 - ▶ overall health and healthcare
 - ▶ employment
 - ▶ education
 - ▶ diet and nutrition
 - ▶ goals and future outlook
 - ▶ crime

► social and civic involvement

After their examples and discussion, point out that data from the 2000 Federal census also reveals that because much of the nation's poverty is found in rural areas, those who live in poverty are much more likely to be or have been a member of a Baptist church.

- Call attention to the illustration in the introduction of the Students Guide about St. Francis of Assisi and note what he understood discipleship required of him.

Engage adults in additional dialogue by asking such questions as:

► *To what degree do you think our culture equates wealth and prosperity with God's blessings?*

► *How does our culture influence our attitudes toward money and possessions and how we use them?*

► *Is it possible that our consumption and spending create suffering for others? How?*

► *How does our attitude toward money and possessions affect our relationships with the broader community and our pursuit of justice?*

- Read aloud Jesus' words in Mark 10:21: "... go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

Ask:

► *What do Jesus' words mean to us today? What is our responsibility in terms of the resources we have?*

Explore the Bible

- Briefly summarize the events recorded in Mark 10, up to verse 16. Note especially the contrast between the children and their lack of status and power, and the man Jesus encountered next. Point out Jesus' commendation of the dependent quality children display.
- Point out that each of the Synoptic Gospels records a story similar to the one found in Mark's Gospel. Each has some distinctions, but they all likely refer to the same encounter.

Suggest that people today tend to respond to this story based upon their own socioeconomic status. Admit that for many of us, it can be troubling.

Read aloud Mark 10:17-18 and note that Jesus' encounter with this man happened as Jesus was on his way somewhere else. Nonetheless, Jesus took the time to talk with the man and address his concern.

Ask:

► *What was unusual about what this man did when he approached Jesus? What did it indicate?*

▶ *What was unusual about how this man addressed Jesus? What do you think he meant?*

▶ *Do you think the man was sincere in what he asked Jesus? Why or why not?*

- Read aloud Mark 10:19 and note the commandments Jesus listed for the man. Point out the difference in order and specifically the variation he used when he said, “You shall not defraud.”

Ask:

▶ *Why do you think Jesus changed the wording in this particular commandment?*

- Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 10:20-22 and guide adults to discuss the man’s reply to Jesus and Jesus’ further instruction to him. Ask them to suggest answers to questions such as these:

▶ *What do you think was missing from this man’s life? Why do you think he sought what he lacked from Jesus?*

▶ *What did Jesus mean when he said, “You lack one thing”?*

▶ *What stood in the way of this man following Jesus?*

▶ *Given the man’s shock and grief, why do you think he was still unwilling to do what he needed to do to follow Jesus?*

- Lead adults to apply Jesus’ teachings by suggesting that, while money and possessions do often stand in the way of our complete commitment to discipleship, Jesus was speaking about much more. Ask them to suggest things in addition to possessions and wealth that we sometimes value more than following Jesus.

Apply Biblical Truth

- Suggest that our resources and how we prioritize them affect our commitment to discipleship. Placing wealth, possessions, prestige and status ahead of complete commitment to Christ affects not just us but those around us. Concern only for ourselves and what we have and can additionally get blinds us to the needs of others.

When we overlook and neglect the legitimate needs of others through our own selfishness, we contribute to injustice. We can unconsciously make life more difficult for others by taking and using more than we need and by being careless and wasteful. But when we let go of the hold things have on us, we become more concerned with issues of fairness and justice and want those not just for ourselves but for others, too.

- Relate the following insight from EthicsDaily.com columnist Dwight Moody:

“I admire anyone who can resist the urge to accumulate stuff and things—like Wayne Oates, longtime minister, author and professor right here in Kentucky. Seems he and his wife were hosting friends and toward evening he said, ‘We are going to bed. Stay up as long as you like.’

Whatever you see in our home you are free to use. If you need something you do not see, ask. If you need something we do not have, we will teach you how to live without it.' Is it possible to live without stuff and things—I mean, really live? I wonder."

- Close with prayer, asking God to help you place discipleship and God's kingdom ahead of everything and guide you in practical ways to use what you have to pursue justice for everyone.

True Worship Leaders Guide

Mark 11:15-19

¹⁵Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; ¹⁶and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."¹⁸And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. ¹⁹And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Theme: Discipleship involves right worship.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- To read more about the North Coast Church, whose worship model is suggested as a way to introduce this lesson, go to: www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week539/feature.html.
- Before you lead this Bible study, enlist several adults to participate in a special project. Assign 1-2 adults to each entrance of your church facility. Ask them,

prior to this study, to walk through their assigned entrances as though they had never been inside your church before. Ask them to record their impressions and reactions. Would they know where to go for Bible study? worship? other opportunities? What questions would they have as a first-time visitor? How comfortable would they feel?

Also enlist some volunteers to participate in a worship service as objectively as possible, as though they were first-time visitors. Would they know what to do? What might make them uncomfortable or uneasy about participating? What about the service seems inclusive of everyone? exclusive of some?

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Guide adults to examine their attitudes toward “right” worship by relating the following example:

San Diego County’s North Coast Church, a non-denominational evangelical congregation, meets in a converted industrial park complex that might resemble to some people a religious street fair. It offers simultaneous services, each with its own type of music and leaders, from rock and roll to traditional hymns to “coffee-shop casual.” Worshipers choose the service they want to attend based on personal preference for worship style, but everyone hears the same conservative, evangelical sermon, which is telecast to jumbo video screens in each venue.

The inspiration for the church comes from the shopping mall: a boutique approach to worship. “It’s an

example of retail thinking in the service of religious faith” (Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Feature, “Cineplex Church,” www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week539/feature.html). The congregation numbers 6,000, and attendance continues to grow.

“I am very comfortable with a consumer mindset and use that as a tool to help reach people, as long as I’m not compromising the message,” says pastor Larry Osborne.

Osborne believes that people have very strong opinions about worship and tend to think that God likes only what they like. God’s tastes, he says, are much broader than those we tend to embrace.

- Ask adults to offer their opinions on this church model by responding to questions such as these:
 - ▶ *What about this church model attracts or interests you? Why?*
 - ▶ *What, if anything, disturbs you?*
 - ▶ *Would you be able to worship in a church like this? Why or why not?*
 - ▶ *What do you think constitutes “right” worship?*
 - ▶ *Are there wrong ways to worship? What are they?*
 - ▶ *Is it wrong to ‘market’ the church in an effort to draw in more people? Why or why not?*

- Note that Mark’s gospel addresses the real nature of worship and serves as a warning to us when we lose sight of God’s intentions for worship. It calls each of us to examine our reasons for worship and our willingness to open the doors of our worship facility to all people.

Explore the Bible

- Read aloud Mark 11:15-16. Point out the important role the temple in Jerusalem played, and remind adults that it was the central place of worship for the Israelites, the place where they believed they could best worship God. Review the role of the high priest and the Sadducees in facilitating temple worship, as noted in the Students Guide.

Lead adults to discuss Jesus’ actions by asking such question as:

- ▶ *What was most disturbing to Jesus?*
- ▶ *What was happening in the Court of the Gentiles that Jesus considered wrong or inappropriate?*
- ▶ *What message was Jesus sending to the Sadducees about his relationship to the temple?*
- ▶ *What did the overturned tables symbolize for Jesus?*

- Read aloud Mark 11:17 and note Jesus’ reference from Isaiah 56:7. Point out that while the temple is designated as a house of prayer throughout Hebrew scripture, the phrase “for all the nations (peoples)” is unique to Isaiah 56:7 and Mark 11:17, and the word “nations” was the same word as “Gentiles.”

Then ask:

- ▶ *What did Jesus’ words mean for Gentiles in Jerusalem and everywhere else?*
- ▶ *How do you think the religious leaders interpreted Jesus’ statement?*
- ▶ *On what levels had the temple become “a den of robbers”?*
- ▶ *What do you think Jesus’ statement meant for the strict sacrificial system that had been such an integral part of worship?*
- ▶ *What was most important in worship, as far as Jesus was concerned?*
- ▶ *What seemed to be most important in worship to the temple leaders?*

- Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 11:18-19. Point out that even the chief priests and scribes understood that Jesus was not rejecting the Jewish people but instead the temple leadership and its corrupt system.

Note Mark’s assessment that the crowd was “spell-bound” by Jesus. His popularity was unparalleled, and the religious leaders did not yet know how they could handle this or respond to it. All they knew is that things were changing because of Jesus, and they did not like the changes they saw.

Also point out that Jesus, having said what he needed to say and do what he needed to do, left the city with his disciples. This was a healthy pattern

Jesus established, according to syndicated columnist and Episcopal priest Tom Ehrich. On another occasion, he noted, “Rather than remain in Nazareth and argue with his townsfolk, he ‘passed through the midst of them and went on his way.’” In this case, “Rather than engage in dueling Scriptures and dueling traditions, he said what he had to say and moved on. His entire ministry was a process of moving on from old ways.”

Religion, Ehrich believes, has the hardest time moving on. But it is “essential to mental, emotional and spiritual health. Too often we get stuck—stuck in old ideas, stuck in harmful situations, stuck in inherited prejudices We find ourselves paralyzed or imprisoned by ourselves, by other people, by situations beyond our control.”

Jesus, he wrote, will be found not in the past but in the present, moving on to someplace new, “. . . not the tried and true, but onward, toward a promise, dreaming of wholeness in the midst of brokenness and life in the midst of death.”

Apply Biblical Truth

- Call attention to the example from “Worship Today” in the Students Guide and summarize it. Then ask the volunteers you enlisted earlier to give an assessment of their observations as they entered your church’s facilities and participated in worship.

Lead adults to consider honestly the possibility that an “invisible Court of Gentiles” exists around your church. Ask:

- ▶ *How homogenous is our congregation?*
- ▶ *How welcomed would someone who looks and lives differently from most of us feel in our church?*
- ▶ *What message do we send to those outside our church about who can worship here?*
- ▶ *To what degree are we tempted to “compete” with other churches in our area for members by trying to market and offer “bigger and better” facilities, programs and activities?*
- ▶ *To what degree are we stuck in old ways, afraid or unwilling to move on?*
- ▶ *What do we need to change in order to help our church become ‘a house of prayer for all people’?*
- Close with prayer, asking God to guide you to true worship and make your church a place where everyone can encounter God’s presence, pray and worship.

Love Your Neighbor Leaders Guide

Mark 12:28-34

²⁸One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” ²⁹Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³²Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; ³³and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Theme: Discipleship is about loving neighbors.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- The following columns from EthicsDaily.com contain illustrations you can use as you lead this Bible study:

“When I Was Hungry You Gave Me Food,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3422);

“Poor Voices in the Darkness,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2078).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Begin by relating the following incident:

When Lincoln Brownell, president of the Liberian Baptist Theological Seminary, returned to Liberia in the fall of 2003, he discovered that his country was even more depleted than when he had left. Young rebel fighters, vying for power, had tried to take anything of value, and food was in extremely short supply.

Brownell recalled seeing some 20,000 displaced persons at the Samuel K. Doe Sports Complex looking for hope and for food. “When 500 bags of relief supplies of rice and beans are being distributed, the crowds keep pressing in on the visiting mission team led by Pastor James Graham. A bag of rice bursts open. One helper sweeps the rice out of the pickup truck, as the driver slowly moves away from the hungry crowd. Some 12 children crawl on the ground, scoop up the raw rice, blow the sand away, and eat the raw rice” (“When I Was Hungry You Gave Me Food,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3422).

In spite of this poverty and suffering, Brownell has attempted to keep the seminary open and continue to train students in Christian ministry.

- Ask:

► *Is this a concern for us? Why or why not?*

► *What is our relationship to people in other countries of the world? What should it be?*

EthicsDaily.com columnist and pastor Michael Helms, who told Brownell's story, concluded: "We can't help them all,' you say. That is true. 'We can't force these people to live in peace,' you say. That is true, too. Still, if someone doesn't reach out a hand, as small a gesture as it might seem, the problem will only get worse. Furthermore, we will not have been obedient to our Lord. We will be like the priest and the Levite who saw the wounded man in the ditch but chose to pass by on the other side. Only if we reach out and help people such as these and those around us in our own city and county, will we be like the Good Samaritan in Jesus' story."

Helms can write passionately about people in Liberia, he says, because he knows them by name. A mission trip there several years ago changed his worldview.

"When we can name someone who's hungry," Helms wrote, "we care a lot more. We become more involved."

- Stress that we should care about the people and situation in Liberia, and people everywhere whether we know them or not, because according to Jesus, they are our neighbors.

Point out that Jesus' concept of neighbor was much broader and much more inclusive than that of most

people in his day and in ours. Further, it was more important to Jesus to love and help neighbors than to follow strictly religious rituals and rules. The idea that love of God and love of neighbor are more important than rules and rituals parallels the complaints of the prophets against those who paid attention to ritual but ignored issues of justice.

Jesus taught that the Christian community can fulfill the will of God as expressed in the commandments without participating in Jewish rituals and sacrifices, an idea that many had difficulty embracing.

Our neighbors include more than those who live near us and share our values. Our neighbor is anyone who has a need. The way we define and show love to our neighbors—those we know and those we may never meet—reveals much about our discipleship.

Explore the Bible

- Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 12:28-31. Explain the function of scribes, using information from the Students Guide. Note that while many of Jesus' encounters with the Pharisees and their scribes were full of hostility and resistance, the one involving this scribe seemed to be genuine and sincere. Suggest that perhaps this scribe was indeed looking for something beyond the unfulfilling rules and rituals he had long followed. He asked Jesus, quite simply, "Which commandment is the first of all?"

Lead adults to examine Jesus' reply to the scribe by posing questions such as these:

► *How did Jesus answer the scribe? Why was his answer significant to him?*

► *What did Jesus say was God’s intention for individuals? for the people of God?*

► *How did Jesus say we show our love and devotion to God?*

- Read aloud Mark 12:32-34 and highlight carefully the scribe’s response to Jesus. Note that he said that Jesus was “right,” and that he understood Jesus to speak the truth. Then call attention to Jesus’ observation that the scribe “answered wisely,” and ask:

► *What did Jesus mean when he told the scribe that he was not far from the kingdom of God?*

► *How do you think the scribe understood Jesus’ assessment of him? What do you think he did next?*

Point out the statement from the Students Guide that “This encounter between the scribe and Jesus becomes in itself an illustration of the Great Commandment. By accepting the primacy of love of God and love of neighbor, Jesus and the scribe transcended political and religious hostility and therefore were able to treat each other as neighbor.”

- Note the relative brevity of this encounter between Jesus and the scribe, and point out how Jesus connected what the man already knew with taking the next step and living the way God expects us to live.

Admit that loving others and being neighbors to them—especially those who are different or whom we suspect might take advantage of us—is usually

difficult, and in fact is not a very natural response for us. What motivates us to show love is our grateful response to God’s love for us. Love, Jesus said, is the foundation for our relationship with God and with others.

Apply Biblical Truth

- Relate the following experience of Michael Helms (for a full account, see “Poor Voices in the Darkness,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2078):

Helms recalled an occasion when he was leaving a store hurriedly on a cold January evening to get home for an NFL playoff game. He dropped a penny, and as he stooped to pick it up, he heard a voice and recognized a bearded man walking his way.

The man resembled one who had come by Helms’ church a number of times, looking for handouts. After the church had helped him many times, they realized some of his stories were not true, so they curtailed their help.

On this night, Helms said, he pretended not to hear or see the man and went on his way. Driving home, however, he thought about how he’d taken time to pick up a penny but not to listen to an old man.

It’s much easier to help people—to be a neighbor—when we know they are trying to help themselves. It’s rewarding when we know that our money will help with legitimate concerns such as food and shelter. It’s troubling when we consider that our resources might be wasted or abused.

Helms echoed a challenge from the prophet Isaiah: “If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then light will rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday” (Isa 58:10).

“Although people have a responsibility to help themselves,” Helms challenged, “it doesn’t alleviate our responsibility to raise our light in the darkness and help those who cannot help themselves.”

- Close with prayer, asking God to help you broaden your definition of neighbor and show love to others in response to God’s love for you.

Authentic Generosity Leaders Guide

Mark 12:38-44

³⁸As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! ⁴⁰They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” ⁴¹He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Theme: Discipleship may express itself authentically in acts of generosity.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- The following articles from EthicsDaily.com can provide additional insights and illustrations as you lead this Bible study:

“A Modern-Day Drummer Boy,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3529);

“Considering Kids Who Are Homeless”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=775);

“Half of Americans Think Volunteering More Important Than Giving Money” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3638);

“How Much Is Enough? Hungering for God in an Affluent Culture” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2465).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- Begin by describing the following incident:

As Marcus Wells, a physical therapist from Moultrie, Georgia, was preparing to go on a medical mission trip to La Esperanza, Honduras, he used the opportunity to teach his young sons, Reed and Cason, about those he would be helping. He explained to them that everyone there was so poor that their village didn't even have stores where they could shop.

When Cason asked if the boys there played baseball, Wells explained that they probably were more likely to play soccer. They likely didn't play baseball because they didn't have any gloves or bats, he explained. Cason couldn't imagine a world where boys didn't play baseball, so his dad reminded him again that the people had very little money and no

stores. And some of them, he told his sons, didn't even have shoes or adequate clothes.

Cason went away but returned about 30 minutes later, still thinking about children who not only couldn't play baseball but also didn't have clothes or shoes. “Can you take my glove, bats, and balls and give them to the children?” he asked his father.

Wells was moved by his son's generosity, but he gently explained that none of the other children would have gloves, so they still would be unable to play. And he needed all of the available packing space for medical supplies.

Cason was undeterred. He went away and returned again, this time with a solution. “If we could get a Nerf ball and bat, the kids wouldn't need gloves. And besides, it is small enough to fit in your suitcase.”

Needless to say, the Nerf ball and bat found their way to Honduras and into the hands of some children who, unaware of everything they didn't have, simply enjoyed the things they had, and soon learned how much fun it is to play baseball.

- Note how often it seems that those who have the least to give are the most generous. Children, especially, seem willing to share everything they have and stand up for issues of justice and equity.

Remind adults that one of the things Jesus confronted among the religious legalists of his day was the tendency of many who exploited their positions for personal gain. Not only were they unconcerned for those who had little materially and financially, they were greedy and contributed to the injustices that

led to their poverty, all the while commending themselves for their righteousness.

Suggest that we can learn a lot from those who have little but give everything, people like children who give away favorite toys and struggling widows who give their last cents. They teach us that generosity is defined not by the size or amount but instead by spirit. Authentic generosity is an attitude before it is an act.

Explore the Bible

- Read aloud Mark 12:38-40. Point out that in some regards, people have changed little from those in Jesus' day who were concerned with appearances and placed material and financial concerns ahead of spiritual ones.

Ask:

- ▶ *What did the long robes of the scribes signify? What message did they hope to send by how they dressed?*
- ▶ *What do you think Jesus' disciples thought when they first saw them?*
- ▶ *What did Jesus mean when he accused the scribes of devouring widows' houses?*
- ▶ *What did he mean when he said they would "receive the greater condemnation"?*

Note that, while the scribes might have fooled some people with their pious acts, Jesus was not fooled

for a minute. He knew that they abused the generous gifts of faithful people to finance special perks and privileges for themselves. Their attitudes and actions were symptomatic of an even greater problem: their lives did not know the transforming power and presence of God.

- Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 12:41-42. Using information from the Students Guide, remind adults about how the temple offerings were collected.

Suggest that probably everyone except Jesus was in awe of the large offerings the rich people gave. Then ask:

- ▶ *Why did Jesus notice the smallest offering?*
- Read aloud Mark 12:43-44; then ask:
 - ▶ *Since Jesus knew of the corruption that existed among those who received the temple offerings, why do you think he didn't stop the poor widow who gave everything she had? Why didn't he tell her to keep her money?*

Note that for Jesus, authentic giving results from gratitude and faith in the God who has already given us everything. The only adequate response is for us likewise to give everything.

- Read aloud the following from Richard J. Foster's book, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life*:

"When we let go of money we are letting go of part of ourselves and part of our security. But this is precisely why it is important to do it. It is one way to

obey Jesus' command to deny ourselves. ... When we give money we are releasing a little more of our egocentric selves and a little more of our false security. ... Giving frees us to care. It produces an air of expectancy as we anticipate what God will lead us to give. It makes life with God an adventure in the world, and that is worth living for and giving for."

Apply Biblical Truth

- Summarize the example from the Students Guide about the five-year-old son of Bob Fox who wanted to give his entire allowance to a friend at church who was collecting money for starving children.

Call attention to Fox's admitted adult but faulty counsel to his son and his startling realization that he "had more in common with those flowing robe Pharisees than the widow whose gift I had often praised. Inside, I really questioned whether giving everything was the wisest choice."

Fox realized his son could give everything he had because he trusted that his needs would be met. "He was so confident that he did not need to provide for himself; he could afford to give everything."

His young son taught him what the poor widow knew: Authentic generosity comes only from a deeply abiding faith.

- Relate the following example from EthicsDaily.com columnist Karen Zurheide, who wrote about a most unusual bedtime prayer her then four-year-old daughter offered:

"With the kind of sincerity heard only in a young child, she asked God to 'let the poor have everything we have.'"

The prayer, she said, caught her completely off guard. "To be sure, I was teaching my child to care about those less fortunate. I wanted her to grow up with an attitude of gratitude and a spirit of generosity. But where did she get the idea that the poor should have everything we have? I had never taught her that!"

- Close with prayer, asking God to expose your lack of faith that God will provide for your needs. Pray that God will challenge you to display the courage to give out of abundance, not excess.

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