

THE  
PRESENT WORD

ADULT LEADER'S GUIDE

SPRING 2019

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

## **ABOUT THE WRITER**

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## **COMING NEXT QUARTER**

The summer quarter will teach how Jesus fulfilled the law in the sense that it was given full meaning. Jesus emphasized the deep, underlying messages of the gospel, and this same message is continued through the apostle Paul and the writer of Hebrews. Relationships of faith empower us to live the covenant and spread the gospel message.

Unit I, “A Fulfilled Covenant”

Unit II, “A Heartfelt Covenant”

Unit III, “Covenant: A Personal Perspective”

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# ADULT LEADER’S GUIDE

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**Cover**

A woman comes to Simon’s house at Bethany and anoints Jesus.

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# A Note from the Editor

Dear Partner in Educational Ministry,

Frederick Buechner, a well-known contemporary Presbyterian theologian and author, wrote a popular definition of vocation:

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.<sup>1</sup>

Vocation refers to the work a person is called by God to do. The word comes from the Latin *voca*, which is translated "voice." Various kinds of voices call to us. The problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than the voice of society or self-interest. A good rule for finding out our vocation is this: The kind of work God usually calls us to is the kind of work (a) that we want to do and (b) that the world needs to have done.

The needs of the world are not the whole call, but part of the call. The other part of the call is looking at what gives us extraordinary joy. Think through these two parts of God's call as you reflect on this question: Where does your greatest passion meet the world's greatest need? Your answer to that question will point you in the right direction.

I pray that you will be blessed in the study of God's Word.

In Christ,

Mark D. Hinds  
Editor

1. Frederick Buechner, *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 405.



# The Text in Context

This quarter surveys Christian discipleship and mission by studying calls to ministry and the expectations of those called. Calls to serve God's people, as recorded in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, are highlighted. We also explore Paul's ministry, with attention to God's call to both Jews and Gentiles in the Roman Church. For Easter, we examine Matthew's account of the Resurrection and the call to proclaim Christ's resurrection everywhere.

The four sessions in Unit I, "Call to Discipleship," highlight several aspects of what it means to be called by Jesus as a disciple. Session one promotes the call to humility that goes with hospitality, as Christians welcome and include a broad and diverse range of God's people.

In session two, we study Jesus' expectations for those who follow him, including an awareness of the cost of being a disciple. Session three looks at Luke's account of "lost" stories, especially the Prodigal Son tale and the work of disciples to reach and welcome the lost. The story of Jesus' interactions with Zacchaeus is the focus of session four, as we consider a disciple's acceptance of those whom society rejects.

Unit II contains five sessions under the theme "Call to Ministry" and includes Jesus' message for his disciples following his resurrection. We explore the diverse ways in which Jesus' disciples were challenged to exercise their call to ministry.

Session five compares the synoptic accounts of Jesus' calling fishermen to follow him and be his disciples. In session six, the mission of Jesus' first disciples is compared with the purpose of Christians today. Session seven focuses specifically on the loving kindness of a woman and her devotion to Jesus in anointing him before he faced death.

Sessions eight and nine study the post-resurrection events found in Matthew 28 and the charge to make new disciples through proclaiming the resurrection, preaching, teaching, and baptism.

In Unit III, the focus turns to Paul's message and work as a disciple of Jesus in "The Spread of the Gospel." The unit begins with Paul's introduction of himself to the Jewish and Gentile Christians living in Rome. In session ten, Paul affirms that both Israel and the Gentiles can receive justification through faith in Jesus as their savior. Session eleven explores the freedom disciples find as they walk in the Spirit.

The metaphor of grafting into Christ is used in session twelve to illustrate the Gentiles' place in the family of God as they humbly follow Christ. Session thirteen concludes this quarter's study with a look at the new life one finds in Christ and the use of one's gifts while living as part of Christ's body, the faith community (church).



# Teaching Tips

*God's call: It is to each of us.*

Preachers are called to proclaim God's word. However, God does not limit the call to service to preachers alone. God calls each of us to service in God's world. Similarly, God gives us strengths, ability, and passion for serving in a variety of ways. God's world needs preachers. God's world also needs teachers, singers, social workers, food distributors, justice-seekers, health care providers, and poets. The list is extensive and cannot be exhausted. God calls each of us, as disciples of Christ, to use our gifts for the common good in God's creation.

*What is a call and how do we hear it?*

"Call" is both a transitive and intransitive verb. The transitive sense of the word is direct action from one to another. God calls Moses from the burning bush. God speaks directly to Moses. The intransitive verb "to call" is less straightforward than the transitive. The people of Israel call to God. Their calls are sent in a specific direction, in this example toward God. In the Bible, we find the word "call" used in both senses. When speaking about people being called by God, it is direct action. God speaks directly to individuals with a specific call to discipleship, a particular call to respond to God. God calls us; God invites us; God commands us.

The word "call" takes on theological significance when God or Jesus are the ones issuing the call. As shown above, they actively and directly call individuals to respond to God's action and to take part in God's work in the world actively. God calls Abraham to leave his home and travel to the land God shows him. God calls Moses to speak to Pharaoh. God calls Samuel to speak God's word. Jesus calls fishermen to follow him. Jesus calls his disciples to go into the world and proclaim what they know about him. Paul calls Roman Jews and Gentiles to salvation in Christ. Paul calls God's people to present themselves to God as living sacrifices: worshipping and serving God, sharing their gifts for God's work and witness in the world. Group members encounter some of these call stories in their studies this quarter. In these stories, group members are challenged to hear and embrace God's call to discipleship that is issued directly to them.

The three units of this quarter focus on three actions into which disciples are called to live. The first is the call to follow Jesus. While this may seem like a simple step, following Jesus is anything but simple. Saying “yes” to Jesus may be easy; living that “yes” is hard. Jesus’ life was difficult. His work was radical. He faced challenges and questions, taunts, and rejection. Of course, his followers can expect to encounter similar difficulties as we embody what Jesus taught. Jesus calls us to humility, to hospitality, to welcome all—even those whom the rest of society might reject or leave behind. There is a cost to following Jesus as we stand against societal norms. We risk being challenged or rejected. We risk losing our place in society. Choosing to heed Christ’s call to discipleship involves a careful assessment of what we lose and what we gain in following Jesus.

As we follow Jesus, we serve Jesus. He is our Lord, whom we honor and serve and proclaim. The woman with the alabaster jar is a clear example of worship and service to Jesus. She purchases costly perfume, entering a room full of men who question her presence and actions. She boldly approaches Jesus and anoints him. Through her efforts, she shows love and devotion to him. She prepares him for the next step in his mission: his crucifixion and death. She embodies a singular purpose: to love and serve her Lord despite the social, emotional, and financial cost. Today’s disciples can measure our devotion and service to Christ by her actions. We are called to a ministry of love and service that is as selfless, bold, and devoted as her service to Jesus.

Matthew 28 gives accounts of various disciples’ encounters with Jesus after his crucifixion and resurrection. In these, we hear Jesus’ call to his followers to keep his message and ministry alive in the world. Paul’s letter to Christian disciples in Rome exemplifies his call to proclaim Jesus’ message and ministry in the broader realms of the earth. Paul insists that God’s call to salvation is issued to anyone who has faith in Jesus as God’s Son. Paul’s focus is in affirming God’s intention to include Jews and Gentiles among God’s children. This affirmation of God’s call extends to us. Each person who responds to God’s call to salvation experiences new life in Christ. Through the Spirit, God unites us as children of God in a community of faith and gives us gifts to enhance and strengthen God’s work in the world.



Christ's disciples, some 2000 years after his death and resurrection, hear the same call that Christ issued to his followers in the Gospels. We receive the same affirmation that Paul spoke to the Jews and Gentiles who sought to follow Jesus. God bestows on us the same Spirit that empowers us to worship and serve our Lord. This call, this affirmation, and these gifts are for each of us. We each are a valuable piece of the whole body of Christ. God does not issue a call solely to the preacher to proclaim God's good news. God calls each person to faith and service. We trust that God bestows us with strength, ability, and passion for hearing and heeding this call.



# Resources to Help the Leader

The following resources are suggested for those who are interested in doing additional research and study.

## **Bible Commentary Series**

Interpretation Bible Studies series. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998–2008.

New Daily Study Bible, by William Barclay. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

The New Testament for Everyone series, by N. T. Wright. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004–2015.

The Old Testament for Everyone series, by John Goldingay. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.

## **Bible Dictionaries**

Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible. Edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

Harper's Bible Dictionary. Edited by Paul J. Achtemeier. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985.

## **Single Book Commentaries**

The Bible from Scratch: The New Testament for Beginners, by Donald L. Griggs. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

The Bible from Scratch: The Old Testament for Beginners, by Donald L. Griggs. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

## **Websites**

*Opening Doors to Discipleship* is a series of four courses in the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition to help teachers and leaders equip themselves to be faithful teachers and leaders ([openingdoorstodiscipleship.com](http://openingdoorstodiscipleship.com)).

## **Worship Leaflets**

Geneva Press offers *The Present Word* quarterly Worship Leaflets. Each leaflet includes a brief service of worship with prayers, hymn texts, and opportunities for reflection on the Scripture passage for the day. Additionally, that session's Scripture passage is printed on the leaflet in a format conducive to a responsive reading. Order your quarterly *Present Word* Worship Leaflets at [pcusastore.com](http://pcusastore.com).



## 1

## AT A GLANCE

**Gathering**

1. Greet the learners.
2. Open with prayer.

**Exploring**

3. Hosts and guests.
4. Hospitality etiquette.
5. In God's kingdom.
6. Genuine humility.

**Responding**

7. Showing hospitality.
8. Close with prayer.

**RESOURCES NEEDED**

- Bibles
- Student's Book
- Worship Leaflets for session 1 (*optional*)
- Bible dictionaries (*optional*)
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Name tags
- Pens

# Called to Humility and Hospitality

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE**

Luke 14:7-14

**A VERSE TO REMEMBER**

“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

—Luke 14:11

**TEACHING POINTS****The session invites learners:**

1. To examine Jesus' teaching about humility and hospitality.
2. To reflect on the human tendency to seek honor and praise for selfish reasons.
3. To name ways to give honor and respect to people who might be considered “unworthy” by popular standards.

**PREPARING TO LEAD**

Humility is the quality of life a person experiences when their worth is based on acceptance in the eyes of God. A humble person is not driven to seek esteem or recognition by their peers. Social status does not determine their worth, which frees a disciple to pursue a life in God, modeled after Jesus. The quality of life improves when a person is not seeking status or position. There is freedom to extend welcome, grace, and hospitality to each of God's people.

The social norms around sharing meals showed a person's social status. One's social position decided where one was seated or what one was served. People of high status sat in one room; those of low status were served in another.

One of the rules of hospitality in biblical times was to give food to visitors and strangers alike. This obligation is still present in most communal cultures. Psalm 23 proclaims that God “prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Hospitality makes people feel important and welcome.

Jesus urges guests to choose the lowest seat rather than exalt themselves to a place of high stature. Disciples place themselves among the outcast and lowly. Instead, a disciple offers hospitality, affirmation, and honor to the poor, lame, and blind—the outcasts. Hospitality is not about repayment. It is about welcome among God’s people and in God’s kingdom.



## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Read Luke 14:15–24. What is the message about hospitality? What does the text say about the kingdom of God? What answer do you give to God’s invitation?



## LEADING THE SESSION

### Gathering

1. Greet the learners.
  - Greet the learners and make any guests feel welcome. Provide name tags and pens as people arrive.
  - If appropriate, provide simple refreshments; ask volunteers to bring refreshments for the next few gatherings.
  - Agree on and review simple ground rules and organization (for example, time to begin and end; welcoming of all points of view; confidentiality; and so on).
  - Encourage participants to bring their study books and Bibles.
  - Are there ways that you can make the learners more comfortable?



**My Notes:**

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2. Open with prayer.

Lead the group using the **Worship Leaflet** for the session (see Resources to Help the Leader) or offer an opening prayer or song of your choice.



**My Notes:**

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## Exploring

### 3. Hosts and guests.

Imagine that the group is preparing for a wedding banquet or a fancy sit-down meal. Name the expectations and practices of hosts and guests.

Ask:

- How do you welcome someone into your home? Are there specific guests you make an extra effort to impress?
- What are the repercussions or consequences of not following social norms?
- In what ways do these practices indicate good hospitality and humility?



**My Notes:**

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### 4. Hospitality etiquette.

Read Luke 14:7–14. Invite all to listen for a word or phrase as the passage is read aloud and to reflect on that word or phrase in silence. Invite volunteers to share the word or phrase that spoke most deeply to them.

Use notes from *Preparing to Lead* and the **Student's Book** to interpret the norms of hospitality for hosts and guests in Jesus' day. *Option:* Distribute **Bible dictionaries**. Look up hospitality etiquette for guests and hosts in Jesus' culture. Ask:

- Where are these ancient social norms for hospitality still practiced?
- How does your church practice hospitality?
- How do you welcome someone into worship?



**My Notes:**

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5. In God’s kingdom.

Comment that Jesus was introducing a new teaching—the importance and rewards of crossing social boundaries to include people already humbled by life’s circumstances. This was a sign of God’s kingdom.

Read and compare the two stories in 14:7–11 and 14:12–14. Ask:

- What do these stories say is essential in God’s kingdom?
- What is the relationship between discipleship and humility?
- How does your church practice hospitality to those who are in need while also respecting their dignity?
- What do you think it means to “be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous”?



**My Notes:**

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6. Genuine humility.

Use notes from Preparing to Lead and the **Student’s Book** to introduce a discussion about humility. Ask:

- What constitutes genuine humility? (Read Philippians 2:3–4.)
- What is false humility?
- What influences the development of humility?
- Why does Jesus emphasize humility among his disciples?
- Who do you know that exemplifies Christian humility? How is their Christian witness empowered by their humility?



**My Notes:**

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## Responding

### 7. Showing hospitality.

Name activities or ministries of your church that offer hospitality to others. Name other ways that you and your church can show honor and respect to those considered outcast or “unworthy.” Discuss:

- What are the social norms for giving and receiving hospitality?
- How do these ministries reflect Jesus’ message in verses 12–14?
- What role will you have in showing hospitality to the outcast or “unworthy”?



**My Notes:**

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### 8. Close with prayer.

Use this prayer from the **Student’s Book** or a prayer of your choice:

Merciful God, we are grateful that you welcome us to your banquet table. We hear your call to extend your hospitality to all people. Reprimand our pride and renew our humility, so that we can love without ceasing. Amen.



**My Notes:**

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## MORE IDEAS

1. Philippians 2:1–5 illustrates one of the pivotal points of Luke 14:7–14. What insight does this text give to the value and practice of humility for disciples?
2. Review the YouTube.com clip “This Is Me Lyric Video” from the film *The Greatest Showman*. How does the video affirm the value of a person who is considered outcast by society?
3. Write “hospitality” in large letters down the left margin of a **newsprint** sheet. Brainstorm acts or ministries of Christian hospitality that begin with each letter of the word.