

THE  
PRESENT WORD

ADULT STUDENT'S BOOK

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 STUDENT’S BOOK

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# Introduction

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.

SCRIPTURE  
SELECTION

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

M Wait to Enter the King’s Presence, Prov. 25:2–7a  
 T Treat the Poor and Rich Impartially, James 2:1–7  
 W Love and Pray for the Persecutor, Matt. 5:43–48  
 T A Life Worthy of God’s Call, Eph. 4:1–7  
 F Serving with Love on the Sabbath, Luke 14:1–6  
 S The Great Dinner for all Peoples, Luke 14:15–24

SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2019

## Called to Humility and Hospitality

**14:7** When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup>“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; <sup>9</sup>and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup>But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. <sup>11</sup>For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

<sup>12</sup>He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. <sup>13</sup>But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup>And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”



## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

Luke's Gospel is rich with parables, including many that aren't recorded in the other Gospels. Rarely does a parable have only one meaning, and sometimes its meaning is obscure. Jesus used parables to teach his audiences and to illustrate his ministry. When warning listeners to repent, Jesus described a fig tree that was judged by its lack of fruit (Luke 13:6–9). When welcoming children and reprimanding a rich ruler, Jesus told a story comparing a Pharisee who bragged in prayer to a tax collector whose prayer was contrite (18:9–14). Like the disciples, we might want to pull Jesus aside and ask, "What do you really mean?" (8:9).

Today's Scripture, Luke 14:7–14, is a parable about a wedding feast. Jesus tells the story to a table of guests gathered for a Sabbath feast.

During the feast, Jesus tells the Pharisee's guests to be polite and humble, to choose seats away from the center of attention and the place of honor. If Jesus says it's a sign of Christian humility to avoid the limelight in social situations, that's fine with me! In the context of a large social gathering, say, a wedding feast, I'm more likely to position myself on the fringes of the crowd than at the center of the dance floor. I'm not naturally an extrovert. From my place on the periphery, I can watch the goings-on, observe people's interactions, and calculate the appropriate opportunities for me to enter the fray, whether catching a small cluster of friends for conversation or spying an empty appetizer tray that needs to be returned to the kitchen (where I am further away from the party).

However, despite my inclination to hide behind Jesus' parable of the wedding feast and use it as an excuse to remain introverted at large events, this parable, like all parables, dodges my efforts to find a simple application. Jesus is not only teaching me—teaching us—about the proper etiquette of parties. Jesus is challenging the guest list altogether.

## A WORD ABOUT HOSPITALITY

The Gospel of Luke was written about 70–90 A.D. to a church that had become increasingly diverse. Some were Jews who followed the way of Jesus. Some were Gentiles who converted to Christianity. Many were Greek-speaking, which demonstrated how far the new religion had spread in the ancient world.

Luke wrote the story of Jesus to help his diverse audience see themselves as equal participants in the story of Jesus in the following ways:

- Luke made connections to the Old Testament and affirmed Jesus' foundation in Judaism;
- Luke highlighted God's word through Israel's prophets even as he celebrated God's word extending to all nations;
- Luke asserted that God's promises were for all people. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus taught that God welcomes all people into the church.

In Luke 14, at a Sabbath dinner in a Pharisee's home, the best and the brightest are gathered for a time of religious conversation and debate. Pharisees and experts of Judaic law (v. 3) choose seats where their voices can be heard and their importance seen. Others gather at the edges of the space, hoping to listen and learn, but not expecting to be noticed.

Jesus sees a man who is ill, and he asks the experts whether the commandment to rest on the Sabbath is more important than the commandment to love others. The Pharisee's guests have no answer. Finding good seats for the Sabbath meal was more important to them than showing hospitality to a sick man.

Jesus heals the man and tells a parable about the danger of valuing ourselves over others. When we assert our own importance, our pride might be chided and our egos embarrassed. It's good to be humble among important people, Jesus says, but it's even better to be humble among people who are deemed to be unimportant.

Jesus tells the host that the wrong guests have been invited to the Sabbath meal. Instead, invite those who can't improve your social status. Seek out guests you don't know, especially those who are different from you. Be hospitable to those who have been treated rudely by society: the sick, the poor, the very young, and the very old.

Paul in Romans 12:13b calls us to practice hospitality—literally, to “pursue the love of strangers” (Hebrews 13:2). First Peter 4:9 builds on the instruction to practice hospitality and reminds us that our attitude is of utmost importance. We are to practice hospitality without complaining. Every time we host someone is an opportunity to minister with a “heartly attitude” (Colossians 3:23).

Welcome everyone. Be humble, and your reward will be the joy of following Jesus more closely.

## **A LESSON ABOUT HUMILITY**

The Apostle Paul wrote the church in Philippi:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3–4)

Humility is hard. We pride ourselves in faithfulness, in professional excellence, in physical fitness, or in generosity. Each of these can be a good attribute, yet pride in ourselves easily becomes a judgment of others. “I am faithful, and that person is not. I have improved my skills better than that person. I can do what you can’t do.”

False humility is also tempting. “See how hard I’ve worked. I don’t have much, but it’s obvious that you need me. I’m not very talented, so continue without me.”

To be humble is to recognize our worth as well as our limitations. Humility in faith demonstrates trust in the conviction that we are valued as God’s children and called as Jesus’ disciples. We are dust-to-dust humans and imperfect disciples.

Humility is an internal attitude; hospitality is its external expression. Hospitality is how we demonstrate humility. We welcome others—strangers and friends alike—at banquet tables and at church, with a friendly “hello” in the grocery store, or with courteous patience when the barista is slow with our morning coffee. We take care to monitor our judgments, not assessing others by their potential benefit to us, but by their inherent worth as children of God. With humility, we do not covet the best seat at the wedding feast. With hospitality, we look up from our own plate to see who’s absent from the table, and we offer them our place.

To be humble disciples, we must remember that there is always more for us to learn from Jesus. To be hospitable disciples, we must remember that we are not the hosts at the banquet table, but the guests of Jesus.

Examples of humility and hospitality can be found throughout Scripture:



- Abraham showed hospitality to three strangers and found himself humbled by their news: a promised son by his wife, Sarah.
- Elijah humbled himself to request a meal from a widow in Zarephath, and her hospitality to him was multiplied in the renewed supply of flour and oil.
- Jesus welcomed children who rushed to greet him, much to the humbled chagrin of his disciples.

The blessings of humility and hospitality are unexpected but without fail.

## **STEPPING INTO THE WORLD**

Jesus' call to humility and hospitality is hard to follow in a world that values competition and pits us against one another for resources and recognition.

We would gladly focus on the needs and interests of others rather than our own if only the world could be trusted not to take advantage of us.

We would throw open the doors to our churches for all people if only it didn't make us feel so uncomfortable to sit next to strangers.

We would rejoice to give someone else our seat at the banquet table, or in the boardroom, or on the church committee, if only we could be assured that our presence wouldn't be forgotten and that our sacrificial work wouldn't be reversed in our absence.

Much like Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts of law to choose between righteousness and healing, Jesus asks us:

Is it better to be important or to be helpful?

To be right or to be welcoming?

To be celebrated or to be faithful?

We are not called to be disciples who are important, right, or celebrated. We are not called to exalt ourselves because we are not the center of faith's attention: Jesus is the center. We rightly acknowledge Jesus as the center when we welcome all people, when we share leadership and other seats of authority, when we seek out the wisdom of those with life experiences unlike ours, when we accept with humble gratitude the invitation to sit at someone else's table.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- ❓ How do you welcome someone into your home? Are there specific guests you make an extra effort to impress? How do you welcome someone into worship?

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- ❓ How does your church practice hospitality to those who are in need while also respecting their dignity?

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- ❓ When have you received hospitality and generosity that you could not repay? How did you experience humility, and how has that experience influenced your practice of humility in discipleship?

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## PRAYER

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.

## A LOOK AHEAD

People are always faced with choices between the comfortable way and the more helpful but challenging way. How do we make the right choice? Jesus challenged his hearers to count the cost and recognize the consequences of discipleship.

### Background Scripture for Next Time

Mark 1:16–20; Luke 14:25–33