

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT?

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- become familiar with Jesus' teaching style (parables, question & answer, object lesson)
- synthesize accumulated knowledge about Jesus' life into an evaluation of his lifestyle and priorities
- develop a summary of Jesus' teaching about possessions
- notice and be inspired by Jesus' attention to prayer and "alone time" as spiritual essentials supporting a demanding public ministry
- grapple with the idea that personal use of time and money reflect spiritual values
- use the Lord's Prayer as a template (model prayer) for personal prayer
- seriously evaluate their giving patterns and resolve to allocate their finances to reflect their gratitude to God more accurately

[Process Objectives]

- bring diverse opinions about Jesus' lifestyle into a cohesive whole, by deciding upon his "weekly calendar" and comparing it to their own
- experiment with group participation in prayer time (Lord's Prayer paraphrases)
- continue to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- submit their intentions in spiritual practices to the group for prayer support

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 48-51)

Jesus' ministry included a lot of teaching, either to small groups (e.g. the disciples) or large crowds. With the reminder that Jesus was/is the smartest man in history (see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 93-95, 134-136), his teaching method reached peasant and privileged alike. Jesus used methods that brought ideas into concrete, daily life. His agenda was set by the context of the moment, out of which might flow a parable or an object lesson. When the two brothers brought him the question about their inheritance, Jesus took the opportunity to teach on the subject of greed and the relative significance of wealth. For Jesus, life offered many opportunities to reflect on God, the Kingdom and the gospel, and he capitalized on them all to help his followers understand what is important in life.

PAGE 48 NOTES:

The eight stories cited first on this page highlight different aspects of one's relationship with God, with wealth, and with each other. Storing up wealth for oneself is not favored, but becoming "rich toward God" is urged. Securing one's inheritance tempts a person to greed, but all benefit of accumulation vaporizes at one's death. Wealth can prevent a person from full devotion to Christ, or in Zaccheus' case, wealth can be turned into an instrument of repentance. The overall message is Be Careful! Listen to what Moses and the Prophets have said about wealth, and hold your assets lightly in this world!

The six boxes at the bottom of the page pinpoint occasions in the gospel when Jesus prayed. The *Who* is Jesus, of course, and the *What* is "withdrawing to pray." The *When*, *Where* and *Why* of each story varies: sometimes the prayer time was all night, or at the end of the day, or the beginning of the day. Sometimes Jesus prayed alone, other times with a few disciples. Sometimes the prayer was recovery time from a grueling day of ministry; other times it was preparatory to big decisions or spiritual challenges. No set pattern is intended here; suffice it to say Jesus prayed *wherever* and *whenever* he needed to, for as long as it took to accomplish his purposes! And prayer seems to be at least as rejuvenating as a night's sleep.

PAGE 49 NOTES:

If you're interested in the 17 mealtimes referred to in Luke's gospel, here is where they can be found:

Luke 2:41, Luke 5:29, Luke 7:36-50, Luke 9:12-17; Luke 10:38-41, Luke 11:37-54, Luke 12:45-46; Luke 13:29; Luke 14:1-6; Luke 14:7-11; Luke 14:15-24, Luke 15: 22-24; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 17:26-27; Luke 19:1-5; Luke 22:7-23; Luke 24:30

Jesus time was spent in private prayer, discipling his followers, teaching crowds and healing individuals. He also walked from place to place, socialized with people, etc.. Though it is anyone's guess precisely how Jesus used his time, we know he observed the Sabbath (from Friday night through sundown Saturday), and had significant times of prayer (sometimes all night) every day. The only real "down time" we hear about is his dinner with Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Luke 10). [And in John's gospel we have his rest at the well in John 4.]

The questions on the bottom of the page are personal reflection questions meant to give the participants an opportunity to take stock of their time, in order to be open to some alterations. A helpful method for doing this can be found in Gordon MacDonald's book *Ordering Your Private World* (chapter 2).

PAGES 50 AND 51 NOTES:

The exercise on the Lord's Prayer is meant to help the participants see a pattern that can be adapted for one's private prayer. The pattern elements include praise of God, welcome of his Kingdom reign, request for provision, spiritual cleanup, relational harmony and protection (internal and external), closing with an affirmation of God's power and glory.

Jesus' attitude toward possessions was non-dependent. He understood how an abundance of possessions can lead to complacency, greed, insensitivity to the needs of others, and pride. He himself, with little or no tangible assets, was content and well taken care of.

His teaching about possessions included at least these three points:

1. they do not have eternal value—you can't take them with you (Luke 16:19-31)
2. life consists of more than one's possessions—what you have is not what defines you (12:15)
3. possessions tend to dull one's spiritual senses (e.g. 18:18-30)

Being "rich toward God" means being aware that one's possessions really belong to the Lord and are available at all times for God's use and purposes. In our everyday lives, being "rich toward God" is expressed in a spirit of generosity, tangible giving for the work of the Kingdom, and non-reliance upon material possessions for ultimate security or meaning in life.

Jesus links prayer with possessions in his teaching to the Rich Ruler in Luke 18:18-30. There he says, "You can take your devotion to God further by selling all you have and giving the proceeds to the poor." The Lord's Prayer encourages us to pray for what we need today, and for strength against temptation. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) demonstrated contrasting views: the Pharisee—who was not rich, but tithed his income—sought to preserve his reputation through the use of his assets, but at the expense of having a humble relationship with God. The tax collector—who could have been rich—was rich toward God by repenting and recognizing his unworthiness. In Luke 19:45f (not cited in our study yet), Jesus throws the money-changers out of the temple because they were diverting focus from prayer to commerce in God's house.

The questions on page 51 are personal and could feel uncomfortably probing. Really, what they are intended to do is to enable participants, in the privacy of their own thoughts, to assess honestly the use of their money and their time. Some discomfort is to be expected, but most people have no idea how their time and money is used, and this exercise is simply a first attempt to discover reality in these areas. The outcome of this exercise will not be discussed in the group, unless someone brings up the subject.

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGE 52)

Open your meeting with prayer that Jesus Christ will enter into the details of your lives and help you align them with his teaching.

PAGE 52 NOTES:

See notes above about the calendars. Jesus' calendar will be sketchy (let the group members struggle with this a bit, until they land on the features that were clearly seen in the gospel), but the idea is straightforward: Jesus spent significant time cultivating a relationship with God in prayer and Sabbath-keeping; cultivating relationships with his disciples in teaching and fellowship; cultivating relationships with "the lost" in social situations; and releasing people from the consequences of sin and mortality in his healing ministry.

In the remainder of the discussion, once the text is established and everyone is together on what Jesus taught, encourage them to be honest about their concrete application related to possessions and money. Particularly if you see attitudes changing from a self-centered to a God-centered view, be affirming of progress and acknowledge the challenge of living wholly for the Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

To close your time together, have each person read his or her version of the Lord's Prayer. Then pray for one another to take the concrete steps necessary to live out Christ's teaching in the areas of time and money.