

Increased Faith

Teaching Tips

May 1, 2016

Bible Study Guide 9

Words You Should Know

A. Trespass ([Luke 17:3, 4](#)) *hamartano* (Gk.)—To violate religious law; sin.



B. Faith (vv. 5, 6) *pistis* (Gk.)—Assurance, belief; a strong and welcome conviction or trust.



Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Facing Up to Failure. Even though Christians may do their best, they may fail and require helpful correction from someone else. What kind of attitude would be appropriate as they seek to correct one another? Jesus teaches His followers that even the smallest amount of genuine faith will cause them to rebuke sin, and if repentance occurs, then the fullness of faith leads to forgiveness and restoration.

A. Pray for your class and clarity about the lesson.

B. Study [Luke 17:1–10](#) and underline key words in the text. Use a Bible dictionary to find the words' theological definitions.



C. Prepare the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Personal Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

A. After receiving prayer requests, ask a volunteer to open the class with prayer including the Aim for Change.

B. Have a volunteer read the In Focus story. Discuss.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask for a volunteer to read the Focal Verses.

B. Examine the verses, utilizing Words You Should Know; The People, Places, and Times; Background; and More Light on the Text sections.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Answer the Search the Scriptures questions.

B. Summarize the Discuss the Meaning, Lesson in Our Society, and Make It Happen sections.

C. Connect them with today's theme.

N—Next Steps for Application

- A. Summarize the lesson.
- B. Remind students to read and meditate on their Daily Bible Readings.
- C. Solicit prayer requests and close in prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Increased Faith

Song: “My Faith Looks Up to Thee”

Devotional Reading: [Jeremiah 23:33–24:6](#)



Bible Background • [LUKE 17:1–10](#)



Printed Text • [LUKE 17:1–10](#) | Devotional Reading • [JEREMIAH 23:33–24:6](#)



Aim for Change



By the end of the lesson, we will: REVIEW what Jesus said about causing another to stumble; APPRECIATE the importance of giving and receiving correction; and IMPROVE our methods and style of godly correcting of others when necessary.

In Focus

Candace went to visit her terminally ill father in hospice.

“Hi Candace, it’s been a long time. I am so glad you came.” She sat down on the end of his bed. He inhaled deeply as the oxygen machine pumped air into his nostrils. “The doctors say I have maybe a week or two to live.” He paused and stared out the window.

“Dad,” Candace paused as she felt years of anger swelling up on the inside and tears streamed down her cheeks.

“Candace, I want to ask you to forgive me for all the pain and suffering I have caused. Your mother and I divorced fifteen years ago because I was unfaithful. But that was no excuse for me not being in your life.”

“It sure isn’t! So many years I blamed myself for you leaving because I thought I had did something wrong! Now, you want forgiveness? I don’t know!” She stormed out the room.

“Candace,” he hollered as loud as he could, “please forgive me.” He stretched his hand out to her as she peered through the glass window of the door.

Candace ran in, grabbed his hand and held it tightly. “Daddy, I forgive you.” She sobbed as she rested her head on his shoulder. He began to weep. “Thank you.”

We have to forgive those who commit wrongdoings against us. What keeps us from extending forgiveness to those who have committed wrongdoings against us?

Keep in Mind

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” ([Luke 17:3](#)).



Focal Verses

KJV

Luke 17:1 Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!



2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?

9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.

10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

NLT

Luke 17:1 One day Jesus said to his disciples, “There will always be temptations to sin, but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting!”



2 It would be better to be thrown into the sea with a millstone hung around your neck than to cause one of these little ones to fall into sin.

3 So watch yourselves! “If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive.

4 Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive.”

5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Show us how to increase our faith.”

6 The Lord answered, “If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘May you be uprooted and thrown into the sea,’ and it would obey you!”


7 “When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, does his master say, ‘Come in and eat with me’?

8 No, he says, 'Prepare my meal, put on your apron, and serve me while I eat. Then you can eat later.'

9 And does the master thank the servant for doing what he was told to do? Of course not.

10 In the same way, when you obey me you should say, 'We are unworthy servants who have simply done our duty.'"

The People, Places, and Times


Sycamore/Mulberry tree. The sycamore or sycamine tree was a black mulberry tree. These trees produce a dark edible berry and possess long leaf stalks. In his battles with the Philistines, David was instructed to listen for the sound of rushing wind at the top of the mulberry trees ([2 Samuel 5:23–24](#)), due to the trees' long leaves, which tremble at the slightest gust of wind and the reason the trees have also been called "trembling poplars." These trees populate the rivers and streams of Lebanon and the ravines of southern Palestine. 

Millstone. These stones were used for grinding grain. One stone was placed on top of the other and provided pressure in the process of grinding the whole kernels into flour. Large community mills were comprised of even larger stones and produced grain for the whole community. Millstones were usually made from basalt rock, as this was more porous and provided sharp edges for cutting. These stones were large and heavy enough to kill a man if dropped on his head.

Mustard Seed. The mustard plant was a plant that could grow to about ten feet in height. These were ground to produce a powder for seasoning or into oil. The type of mustard Jesus was referring to is unclear, but evidence indicates that the mustard seed would have been the smallest seed the people of Palestine knew at the time.


Background

As Jesus traveled toward Jerusalem, He used many opportunities to teach the people, including His disciples. He was always concerned about righteous living and proper treatment of others, since these contribute to harmonious living in our communities. Jesus has showed us the way, but we sometimes fail to follow it. Many communities are fragmented by selfishness and deceit. The root of the problems begins with sin and the need for forgiveness.

We are all going to face God on the Day of Judgment, so we must repent of our sins before we die ([Luke 13:1–5](#)). And salvation is open to all who believe, not a select group of people. We have to be humble in all that we do (14:7–11). Jesus wants us to be loving and kind toward others, including the poor, crippled, lame, and blind (14:13–14). They cannot repay us, but God will. We have to seek after the lost because they are valued by God, just like in the parables of the lost sheep (15:3–7), the lost coin (15:8–10), and the lost son (15:11–32). 

Being loving and considerate of others also flows into our management of the resources God has given us. This issue is addressed in the parable of the shrewd manager (16:1–18) and the rich man and beggar (vv. 19–31). We have to be willing to use and share what God has given us to bless others. Moreover, if God has given us His love and forgiveness, we must also extend it to others.

At-A-Glance

1. Forgive Others ([Luke 17:1–4](#)) 
2. Have Genuine Faith (vv. 5–6)
3. Obey God (vv. 7–10)

In Depth

1. Forgive Others (Luke 17:1–4)

Jesus turns His attention to teaching the disciples about offending others and forgiveness. His caution is the same as in [Matthew 18:6–7](#). His concern was to warn them about causing weaker believers or new converts to sin ([Luke 17:1–2](#)). Those who cause others to sin, especially the young and immature believers, are doomed to severe punishment. Jesus said, “It would be better to be thrown into the sea with a millstone hung around your neck than to cause one of these little ones to fall into sin.” A millstone is a heavy stone used for grinding grain. If a person falls into the sea with one around their neck, death would be imminent, but far less severe than to have to face punishment from God.

However, Jesus wants us to learn to forgive and show love toward those who have offended us (vv. 3–4). It is proper to go to the person who has offended us and confront them in private ([Matthew 18:15–17](#)). We have to lovingly explain what the offense was and how it affected us. If the person is truly sorry and acknowledges the sin, we should forgive them. How many times they sin against us does not matter; if they confess and change their ways, we must forgive them (cf. [Matthew 18:21–22](#)). We should pray for God’s grace and mercy to be extended toward them. We can remind them that God forgives them and let go of all our resentment and anger. Our actions allow reconciliation in our relationships.

2. Have Genuine Faith (vv. 5–6)

The disciples felt incapable of measuring up to Jesus’ standards. They asked of Him, “Increase our faith” (v. 5). The disciples wanted a greater outpouring of God’s power that they could ultimately be able to forgive others, and not offend others nor be offended. Forgiving people who have offended us is not always easy, and only by God’s grace and mercy can we do so.

Jesus acknowledged the little faith they possessed. The mustard seed represented their small faith. If their faith was genuine, they could do the impossible. God’s power is unlimited, symbolized by being able to pull up a sycamine (mulberry, NLT) tree and put it into the sea (v. 6). God gives us the power to live out our faith. We have to rely on Him to help us. We will grow in faith and spiritual wisdom as we obey God and treat others with kindness and love according to His demands.

3. Obey God (vv. 7–10)

Jesus used a parable to teach about obeying God. He uses the slave-master relationship to communicate His message to the disciples about performance of duty. Jesus shared that the slave’s duty is to work both in the field and the house. The slave has to serve the master because it is his duty; his time and labor are controlled by the master.

The master is not obliged to the slave. He does not have to say “thank you” to the slave, because it is his duty to serve (v. 9). Jesus “came to serve and not be served.” We must not look for others to serve us. Our duty is to serve Christ and others. Jesus presumably used this parable to remind the disciples that their leadership position did not give them the right to special treatment (v. 10). We are all servants who need to thank God for the opportunity to be of service in His kingdom work. In the end, we will be rewarded with the gift of eternal life with Jesus Christ.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did Jesus tell the disciples to rebuke a believer who sins ([Luke 17:3](#))?
2. Why did the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith (v. 5)?

Discuss the Meaning

Jesus wanted the disciples to remember it was important to confront a person about their sin. The person then has the opportunity to repent and experience forgiveness. How difficult is it to forgive others? When a person confronts us

with our sins, how do we usually react?

Lesson in Our Society

God wants us to treat one another like we want to be treated. We do not like it when others offend us and never say, “I’m sorry.” So when we offend others, we need to repent and ask for forgiveness. The failure to apologize after offending someone has caused much strife in our churches, families, and communities. This is part of the reason violence has increased in our society. We can only have peace in the world when we each acknowledge our sins, repent, and seek forgiveness.

Make It Happen

Sometimes it is not easy to forgive others. If we do not forgive those who sin against us, God will not forgive us ([Matthew 6:15](#)). Therefore it is vital we pray and ask God to help us forgive others, no matter how many times they sin. This week, think about those who have committed offenses against you. Ask God to help you to have the strength to find a way to forgive them. And if you have offended anyone, confess and seek forgiveness from God and the person.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

[Luke 17:1–10](#)

1 Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!

The disciples are the immediate recipients of this message. In the preceding chapter, Jesus spoke to an audience of Pharisees (16:14–31).

By this time on their mission with Jesus, the disciples had seen Him perform miracles and knew they were called. As they prepared to do Jesus’ works and spread His Word, some possibly worried they would become isolated from human concerns and failings. Here Jesus reminds them of their human condition, and the situations that await as they continue in ministry with Him and after His departure. They needed to defend against anything that distracted them from justice and compassion for the poor and needy.

According to Joel B. Green, the potential of stumbling was grounded in Luke’s framing of hostility and opposition to the plan of God. “All do not identify with and orient themselves around God’s purpose” (Green 612). The threats causing temptation are also noted by Gospel writers in [Matthew 18:6–7](#) and [Mark 9:42](#).

2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

A millstone was a heavy upper stone used for grinding flour in a large rotary mill driven by a mule or donkey. Death by millstone was favored over not showing compassion to the poor who deserved justice.

3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

The warning issued here to disciples reflects the warning issued earlier in 12:1 regarding not being like hypocritical Pharisees. Here Jesus references concrete practices identified with the Pharisees talked about in Luke, who would have had little regard for “the little ones” and sinners while preoccupied with status. A similar saying regarding forgiveness is also found in [Matthew 18:5, 21–22](#).

4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

The act of forgiveness would have no limits, and be considered a daily way of life. In order to continually forgive, the one offended must remain in communion with their offender. Thus, followers of Jesus must not keep sinners at a distance, but seek their restoration and stand ready to forgive.

5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

As they followed Jesus and encountered people in need, especially those they tried to send away when they could not heal or help them, the disciples realized they fell short in many ways. They request faith so they can meet the tasks and mandates Jesus now issues. For the disciples, faith would be needed to truly forgive, and would lead to faithful behavior. By asking for their faith to be increased, they showed their understanding that faith was a gift that could not be obtained outside of God. Similar sayings regarding faith are also found in [Matthew 17:19–21](#) and [Mark 9:28–29](#). For Luke, faith is manifested in faithfulness.

6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

Jesus knows that difficult times are ahead, and replies to the disciples’ request for more faith. For faith to have its perfect work, Jesus tells them to have faith as a mustard seed, and that even a small faith can accomplish great deeds.

In the natural world, commanding a tree to be uprooted through word alone sounds like an impossible task; however, Jesus reminds the disciples that all things are possible with full dependence on God. The size of the mustard seed is explained in [Mark 4:31](#).

Considered one of the smallest seeds, Jesus is telling them that even just a smidgen of faith can initiate the impossible. Even a little faith can move or dismantle what appears to be deeply rooted and strong.

In other translations, the tree may be identified as a sycamore, which is also deeply rooted but this was a different variety of tree than either the eastern Mediterranean or the American sycamores.

7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? 8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? 9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.

These three verses deal with the obligation of obedience to God, which is more duty than effort for a reward. This kind of obedience to service can be found earlier in [Luke 12:35–36](#).

There is a quick shift from the discussion about faith to this parable of the worthless slaves. In some translations, the word “slave” is used instead of “servant.” In the Roman Empire, there were hired workers (Gk. *misthios*, **MEES-thee-ose**; see [Luke 15:17](#)) and servants/slaves (Gk. *doulos*, **DOO-los**; [Luke 17:10](#)). Hired workers were free persons who were hired for daily, seasonal or yearly terms, whereas servants worked for their masters with no monetary compensation, only accommodations and food. Servants could become part of a household through war or debt, and they could be lifelong servants or servants who were free after working off a debt. Jesus is saying that the disciples should not expect to be regarded or rewarded for their service to others. Just as they should

forgive anyone who sins against them (vv. 3–4), so they should serve others without expectation of anything in return. Jesus is not suggesting that the master-servant relationship is an ideal one, upholding the difference in power and treatment. Instead, He is speaking in language the disciples' would have understood in order to make His point that in this world, people are not always treated properly, but people of faith should continue to serve out of faith rather than expectations of reward.

10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

The Greek word for “duty” is *opheilo* (**oh-FAY-lo**), which means here “we owe (out) to do.” Jesus continues with the servant metaphor, using language of debt, suggesting that perhaps the disciples should think of themselves like indentured servants. They owe a debt, and they do the things they are commanded to do as part of paying back that debt. He is not saying that they actually have a debt to pay, but that this is the type of attitude people of faith should have. Grateful to God for what God has given and done, they follow God’s commandments and do for others (6:31) because this is what God has asked of them.

Say It Correctly

Sycamine. si-ka-MINE.

Trow. TROH.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Kept by God’s Faithfulness
([Genesis 28:13–17](#))



TUESDAY

Fed by God’s Faithfulness
([Deuteronomy 2:4–8](#))



WEDNESDAY

Helped by God’s Faithfulness
([Psalm 121](#))



THURSDAY

Saved by God’s Faithfulness
([Jeremiah 23:33–24:6](#))



FRIDAY

Living with Integrity
([Psalm 101:1–4, 6–7](#))



SATURDAY

Strength for Faithful Living
([Luke 21:33–38](#))



SUNDAY



Increased Faith
([Luke 17:1–10](#))

