

Called to Humility and Hospitality

Bible Background • Luke 14:7–14

Printed Text • Luke 14:7–14 | Devotional Reading • Luke 14:15–24

Aim for Change

In this lesson, we will: EXAMINE the teachings of Jesus regarding humility and hospitality; REFLECT on selfish personal tendencies; and IDENTIFY ways to respect those who are considered unworthy.

In Focus

Jill was a trustee at her church and an attention seeker. For example, she always sat up front during worship on Sunday and demanded that the ushers save her seat. She even sat next to Pastor Jones toward the head of the table at the trustee meetings. At one meeting, Jill arrived a few moments early to mark her usual seat next to Pastor Jones. She left her belongings and went to the restroom. Upon her return, she discovered that her belongings had been moved. Sitting in the seat was a new member, Stacey, whom Pastor Jones had brought to the meeting. Jill was angry and said, “Excuse me, this is my seat. I am the only one who sits next to Pastor Jones in these meetings. And why are you even here? These are not open meetings. You just joined the church, and the bylaws say that you must be a member for at least a year before taking a leadership position.”

Pastor Jones intervened, “Stacey is my guest. She is coming on board to help us with feeding the homeless on Saturday. Stacey was once homeless and used to sleep at the shelter. Her wisdom is needed because of her experience. I thought that it would be best for her to sit between the two of us as we bring her up to speed on the mission.” Stunned, Jill took a new seat.

How could we be more hospitable toward those who we are unfamiliar with? How could we do better in practicing humility when asked to do something that is out of our normal routine?

Keep in Mind

“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. Bidden kaleo (Gk.) — To call specifically.

B. Feast doche (Gk.) — An elaborate meal, banquet where people are invited.

Say It Correctly

Recompence. REK-uhm-pens.

KJV

Luke 14:7 And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them.

8 When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him;

9 And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.

10 But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

11 For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

12 Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee.

13 But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:

14 And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

NLT

Luke 14:7 When Jesus noticed that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit in the seats of honor near the head of the table, he gave them this advice:

8 "When you are invited to a wedding feast, don't sit in the seat of honor. What if someone who is more distinguished than you has also been invited?"

9 The host will come and say, 'Give this person your seat.' Then you will be embarrassed, and you will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table!

10 Instead, take the lowest place at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, 'Friend, we have a better place for you!' Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests.

11 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

12 Then he turned to his host. "When you put on a luncheon or a banquet," he said, "don't invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will invite you back, and that will be your only reward.

13 Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

14 Then at the resurrection of the righteous, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you."

The People, Places, and Times

Pharisees. A major religious party in Jesus' time, the Pharisees were known for their strict observance of the Law of Moses and reliance on tradition. Portrayed as Jesus' adversaries in all four Gospels, the Pharisees often were outraged at Jesus' teachings and actions that portrayed a loving God who offered grace, while commanding salvation by faith (not works) alone.

Lawyers. This professional group was charged with studying, interpreting, and applying the Law of Moses. In many ways, their work mirrored that of the scribes who were originally priests, but whose roles included these same responsibilities, as well as copying the Law and writing documents.

Background

In Luke's Gospel, Christ has been heading toward Jerusalem—and the Cross—since Luke 9:51. With every step, the tension builds, and Luke 13 only adds fuel to the fire. As He has done on previous occasions, to the dismay of the Jewish leaders, Jesus heals on the Sabbath. But Jesus doesn't stop there. He calls His followers for a commitment to a kingdom where humble beginnings produce something of enormous and lasting value (cf. 13:18–21). As Jesus says, the door to this kingdom is narrow. The point is not how many can come in, or how many can come in at one time. The narrow door refers to the conditions necessary for admittance.

The warning “depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity” must have been, and should be, piercing to the soul (from vv. 26–27). Religious activity and ritual for ritual's sake can numb us to what God is doing and saying and, even worse, can separate us from God.

Luke then presents Christ's way of using a lesson on humility and the attitudes of the heart by exposing how superficial the actions of some in His audience are at common social events such as a wedding, a breakfast, a dinner, or a banquet.

How can stories like this parable help us teach and learn valuable life lessons in a different way?

At-A-Glance

1. Humility is Not Self-Gratifying (Luke 14:7–9)
2. Humility Waits for Recognition (vv. 10–11)
3. Humility Seeks Out Humility (vv. 12–14)

In Depth

1. Humility is Not Self-Gratifying (Luke 14:7–9)

Jesus saw the guests pick high places of honor so that they could be seen. In response, He taught a valuable lesson through a parable. Jesus often used parables to bring about not only spiritual but cultural change in the audience's behavior.

In the parable Jesus refers to a wedding and guests who are invited (v. 8). A wedding at that time was not a simple one-day event shared between two new families; it was a celebration that lasted several days and constituted an already established or planned relationship. Family members and townspeople could be invited. Even Jesus did not go into such a setting and assume that He would be the center of attention (John 2:1–11). It was not His celebration! The place of honor would be set for the bride and bridegroom, not those in attendance.

Too often, we try to make ourselves feel important by gaining admirers or “likes” because that is culturally acceptable. Jesus is teaching us that by assuming we should be in the spotlight, we miss the purpose of being invited and humiliate ourselves in the process. Our purpose is to focus on the one being celebrated, not proclaim our position. Does the word “humiliate” have a new meaning to you because of this parable?

2. Humility Waits for Recognition (vv. 10–11)

Jesus uses this parable to teach us that humility is an intentional action. As Christians, we should always consider others before thinking of ourselves. When the host sees that a person with whom they have a relationship has taken the lowest place, they will invite that guest to move to a higher level. Recognition, in this sense, is not just physical—for sake of reward—but it is also relational and spiritual.

Jesus teaches that those who are humble in their actions will soon receive recognition from those who can offer a greater reward.

Have you ever worked hard simply for the recognition, and did not receive it? Why do you think that happened?

3. Humility Seeks Out Humility (vv. 12–14)

Jesus was born in humble circumstances (Luke 2:7) to a family that did not have much social standing yet was spiritually the most important in any society. Through the parable, Jesus teaches that even the host of the banquet must join in creating a social hierarchy that is the reverse of what is expected. It is expected that we praise and invite those with higher social status to our celebrations, but in Jesus' parable the least, last and outcast are to be the guests of honor. Jesus is challenging the societal expectations of His audience while affirming what the Law of God said; to care for those on the margins of society such as the poor, the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, and those with disabilities (Deuteronomy 14:28–29). The poor have no ability to repay the host financially so God promises to repay the host in blessings (Deuteronomy 15:7–11).

Why is it difficult at times for us to invite those who are not like us to Jesus?

Search the Scriptures

1. What consequences of sitting in the seat of honor does Jesus warn about (Luke 14:9)?
2. When might a host be repaid for inviting people to a banquet (vv. 12, 14)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Thinking about your own behaviors, in what ways have you come up short on showing hospitality? How could you improve? How have you excelled in your displays of hospitality? How could you go further?
2. Tell of a moment when your Christian character matured because of a humbling experience. What would you share with a new disciple about humility?

Liberating Lesson

In our world, social status seems like it means everything. Even in the virtual world, we can create a status via social media that usually does not tell the full truth about who we are. We change profile pictures and statuses often to show others who we are at the moment. But at that moment we are offering only a sample of who God has created us to be. Christian discipleship does not typically justify our desire to be important and famous. Christian discipleship requires us to take low places of recognition, which do not always offer immediate reward. Christian discipleship speaks truth to power and offers those who are least likely to be socially important an opportunity to gain recognition.

Application for Activation

During this week, gauge how important other people are to you. Is your day filled with thoughts about yourself, such as what you can gain and what you wish to satisfy in your own life? God is a selfless God and yet He would have no other gods take His place in our lives. God offers love freely to all out of His selflessness. Ask yourself whether you can honestly fulfill your purpose in life by only thinking of yourself. Is your walk with Christ about making personal gains? The choice to be a disciple is simple in the beginning, but as time goes on we must understand that our choice to follow Jesus is a choice to be selfless. We can offer the love of God to those He has allowed us to come into contact with by considering their needs first.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Luke 14:7–14

7 And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them.

Jesus is challenging the accepted wisdom of the day with a parable critiquing expected norms of His society and presenting a spiritual truth. Luke says Christ put forth a parable. Parables in the Gospels have spiritual implications (see Mark 4:13; 7:17; Luke 8: 9–11; 18:1). Even before reporting Christ’s words, Luke prepares his audience for what is to come. The word bidden is a translation of a passive form of the word kaleo (Gk., kah-LEH-oh), meaning “to call, specifically by name.” Each guest received a personal invitation to attend the event. Just as the guest list was determined by the host, so were the seating arrangements. The decision of who sat at the best seats, the seats of honor (Gk. protoklisia, pro-to-klee-SEE-ah; “first seats”), was at the discretion of the host. The KJV translates this word as “rooms,” although the word simply means space or place, in this case a seat at the table.

Humility begins by being thankful to have received an invitation, which is a much different attitude than “Now that I am here, who can see me?” It can be safely assumed that even for this meal, the invited guests took concerted efforts to select for themselves seats of honor, places where others might assume they were important and had a special relationship to the host and his special guest Jesus. This practical lesson has significant spiritual overtones. Where we think we ought to stand in relation to others is in all likelihood an indication of where we think we stand before God. Christ decided to use this particular social gathering as an opportunity to give a spiritual lesson on humility toward God and people.

8 When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him;

The custom in antiquity was that the most distinguished (Gk. entimos, EN-teemos, “with honor”) guests at a dinner or feast arrived late and reclined (Gk. kataklino, ka-ta-KLEE-no, “lie down”) in the space at the table closest to the host. Jesus admonished the disciples not to be like the other guests vying to sit in the places of honor before all the other guests arrived because someone of higher social status might still come. Jesus’ choice of a wedding banquet is also a metaphor for the kingdom of God (Revelation 22:2). On another occasion, Jesus taught a parable about a king who held a wedding reception for his son as an image of the heavenly feast (Matthew 22:1–14).

9 And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.

Verse 9 reinforces the idea that the host decides who should take the seats of honor. There is nothing said about the rank or stature of those invited, but it can be reasoned that the listeners understood the parable's situation. The chief seats were normally elevated and positioned in the center of the room. Being publicly asked by the host to step down and go to the back of the room, however discreetly, would leave the other guests second-guessing not the intentions of the hosts but the worthiness of that guest. Honor has a positive value for men in the society, and "shame" (Gk. aischune, ice-KHOO-nay) in this case would be the opposite of it. The man forced to move from the privileged seat at the head of the table down to the lowest end in front of all the other guests would be shamed by being relocated. Peter later writes, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). When we strive to achieve or acquire recognition for ourselves, we are on our own. Godly humility is our best defense and remedy against the scarring emotional pains of public humiliation.

10 But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

The word "but" in this sentence is a translation of a powerful Greek conjunction, alla (al-LAH), establishing a strong contrast to what has just preceded. Alla in this context sets up the contrast: Instead of exalting yourself, there is another way—live in such a way that is recognized by Jesus, the only one who really matters. Jesus commanded the disciples not to follow the example of the other guests but to do the unexpected and show humility by sitting at the farthest end of the banquet table. The expectation was that the host would seat the honored guests who arrived late at the front of the table near himself. However, it is the host's prerogative to seat guests wherever he chooses and he may invite the guest with the lowest social status to move up to the higher place of honor. This part of the verse implies God's goal to exalt us as we see in the phrase, "Friend, go up higher."

The Greek word for "worship" is doxa (DOKE-sah) and also means "glory and honor." It is a term usually reserved for God today. However, in the cultural context of Luke's day, it can refer to the enhancement of one's reputation or social status. It is the opposite of shame. The act of seating the guest of more modest status at the higher end would signal that this person was now worthy of honor. Humility is not contrary to knowing our position in Christ. Exhibiting humility, however, may be contrary to maintaining our position in the world.

11 For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Note these conjunctions. Luke introduces verse 11 with the conjunction "for" (Gk. hoti, HOE-tee). This conjunction is used to suggest that what is about to be said explains what preceded, or it provides the logical reasoning behind the previous statement. Can Christ make it any plainer? The person who does not humble himself or herself will invite public humiliation. The word "whosoever" is a translation of the word pas (Gk. POSS) meaning "all." This biblical principle applies to everyone. People who lift themselves up hupsoo (Gk., hoop-SO-oh) suffer the inevitable fate of humiliation. The Greek word for "abased" is tapeinoo (tah-pay-NO-oh) and can mean to be geographically at a low point, or in human terms, a loss of esteem or status. It is the passive form of the same word used for Jesus humbling Himself to the point of the Cross in Philippians 2. Essentially the contrast is either you choose to humble yourself or you will be humbled. These words continue the spatial metaphor used in this entire passage (near, far, low, high) both at the banquet and in relationship with the host.

In a culture where honor is such a coveted designation, a loss of honor would be a significant blow to one's standing in the community. In contrast, those who humble themselves shall have their status elevated. The real lesson Jesus is trying to impart to the disciples is that in God's kingdom, God will bring about a reversal of

human social constructs. The ones considered among the lowest socially will be exalted or lifted up, and those who have enjoyed the highest social position, either as a result of the family they were born into or wealth acquired legitimately or through trickery, will be lowered.

12 Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee.

Jesus next turns His attention to the host. Some scholars note that the host, like the guests, is more concerned with social status than the needs of those lower on the social rung. Jesus addresses this by advising him that when he prepares dinner, he should not exclusively invite his friends, siblings, extended family members, or neighbors who have material wealth and will be obligated (and able to fulfill the obligation) to invite him to dinner in kind. The Greek word for “recompence” (antapodoma, an-ta-PO-do-mah) means repayment. In the ancient world, gift giving was reciprocal and built relationships between the giver and receiver. However, a poor person could not repay a rich person’s invitation to dine, a fact that would have been obvious to the host. This is Jesus playing out Deuteronomy 15:7-11: Don’t just give to the poor, but invite them to the table to glorify God!

13 But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:

Notice the types of gatherings Christ uses to make His point. In verse 12 it was a dinner or supper, where the focus is the meal itself. Here in verse 13 Christ refers to a feast (Gk. doche, dow-KHAY). A feast is more than a common meal, it is a gathering of people, a banquet called by the host to celebrate a particular event in a grand way. These were usually important gatherings, where those attending were often the most important people in the local community or region.

In a reversal of societal expectations, Jesus commands the host to instead invite the poor and physically disabled. The poor, maimed, lame, and blind were members of society who were dependent on public generosity for their welfare and did not have the financial resources to repay their host. Jesus counsels the host to invite society’s outcasts. Jesus was very concerned with those pushed to the margins of society because of their economic disadvantage, uncleanness, or physical disability. Luke is passionate about sharing that concern.

14 And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

Humility receives a reward in this parable. The Greek word for “blessed” is makarios (ma-KAH-ree-occe). This is the same word Christ uses in His Sermon on the Mount to describe those who will inherit the kingdom (see Matthew 5). Those who humble themselves in their thoughts and actions are blessed because they are not looking for temporal rewards. Rather, their focus is on Him who rewards His faithful followers for all eternity. Jesus tells the host if he invites the outcasts to his home for dinner, he will be blessed. Jesus’ message is that performing such acts of kindness without the expectation of reward will not only bless the individual here on earth. (Luke 18:29–30) He or she will also receive a heavenly reward at the resurrection of the just (cf. Daniel 12:2–3).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Wait to Enter the King's Presence
(Proverbs 25:2–7a)

TUESDAY

Treat the Poor and Rich Impartially
(James 2:1–7)

WEDNESDAY

Love and Pray for the Persecutor
(Matthew 5:43–48)

THURSDAY

A Life Worthy of God's Call
(Ephesians 4:1–7)

FRIDAY

Serving With Love on the Sabbath
(Luke 14:1–6)

SATURDAY

The Great Dinner for All Peoples
(Luke 14:15–24)

SUNDAY

Humility, the Right Path for Believers
(Luke 14:7–14)