



Counter Culture: 4-week series

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COUNTER CULTURE

WEEK 1: Love Your Neighbor.

Bible: Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:30-37

Bottom Line: The words of Jesus call Christians to look past the things that divide us and to love those around us.

OPENING GAME: ACROSS THE OCEAN

Designate a large area in the middle of the room and mark it off with tape; you want to make sure that you have plenty of space for running since this is a physical game.

This will be the ocean.

Divide students up evenly (if possible) into two groups, each on one side of the room.

Choose a student to be in the middle as the “shark.”

Choose an announcer to call out statements pertaining to classifications, always starting off the statement with “Cross the ocean if you...”

Example: “Cross the ocean if you are wearing striped socks.” or “Cross the ocean if you have blonde hair.”

Those students who meet the qualifications of the statement, regardless of what side of the room they are on, must run across the marked off area to the other side of the room.

The “shark” must try to tag those who run across, but he or she must stay inside the marked area.

Once a student is tagged they must sit down where they were tagged.

The students that were tagged are called “urchins” and can tag others as well, so long as they stay seated and do not move from where they are sitting.

The game ends when there is one student left standing; that student then becomes the “shark” and the game begins again.

The game can be played as long as time permits.

TEACH

Even if you live under a rock, over the past years you have heard of crimes, speeches, and statements that were based on division; these come from all kinds of areas and from all kinds of people, from the streets of the cities all the way to the presidential race itself.

It seems that the culture (or “the popular way today”) in our time is to hate or be against anything that is different from you, but is that how we should act as Christians?

We are going to take a look in this series on what Jesus had to say about the culture.

A lot of the things He taught were definitely counter (or “opposite”) to how the culture worked back then as well as to how it works today.

Jesus lived in a time that was not too different from today in some ways; people, no matter what era they live in, still deal with the same basic problems.

It’s just the manner in which they approach them that changes.

In this study we are asking the question “Who is my neighbor?” and more importantly “How should I treat my neighbor?”

Read Matthew 22:34-40.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ time were always trying to find some way to trap Him in some kind of contradiction so they could arrest Him, and this day was no different.

The question they asked Him was “What is the greatest commandment?” (*verse 36*)

Jesus first responds with the greatest commandment, to love God with “all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind” (*verse 37*).

That would have satisfied the leaders, but in classic Jesus fashion He took it a step further.

He said that loving your neighbor was equally important (*verse 39*).

So, what does that mean? Fortunately, Jesus gave us an illustration to go along with His point.

Read Luke 10:30-37.

Luke, the author of this gospel, is telling the same account as Matthew, but he includes what was asked after the part about loving your neighbor.

One of the leaders heard Jesus and asked what He meant by “neighbor”, so Jesus sought to explain it in a parable.

A lot of Jesus’ sayings are in parables, stories that are told to teach something in everyday terms.

Just hearing the story, you might think that it is an easy concept to love your neighbor; just off the top you know someone got hurt, a guy came by, and the guy helped him – problem solved, right?

But that is the thing with parables; they are always deeper than they appear.

So, let’s take a closer look at what Jesus is saying in this parable.

In the beginning, a man is traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Back then, this was the rough side of town – the road was dangerous hillside, and there were a lot of robbers who would wait behind rocks and bushes along the way to get what they could from anyone passing through.

The man is robbed, beaten, and left for dead.

He thinks he has help coming as he sees a man come his way, especially since the man is a priest.

Priests had to be careful to follow the rules about being “unclean,” and the priest could not risk touching the man and getting dirty since he was probably on his way to the temple; so he does not only leave the hurt man there but crosses to the other side of the road to stay “clean.”

A Levite, like a temple assistant, also walks by and does the same thing as the priest.

By now the man is probably losing hope and consciousness; nobody seems to want to help him.

But in rides the hero of the story, and here is where the people in Jesus’ time would have lost their marbles – the hero of the parable is a *Samaritan*.

If you were a Jew in Jesus’ time, you hated Samaritans.

Samaritans were a people group who were despised by Jews mainly because they were different.

Samaritans were Jews who had come from one of the twelve tribes who had intermarried with the people from other groups living around them; the Jews considered them “half-breeds” because they were not “fully” Jewish.

This Samaritan wrapped the man's wounds, took him to an inn to recover, and even paid the bill; this is the man Jesus says was the neighbor to the one who was beaten up.

So, what about us today? What can we take from Jesus' parable?

Jesus thought that it was important enough to tell this parable, so it must be important for Christians today to live out what the parable is trying to teach us.

1. Being a neighbor means you have to get dirty.

There is an old saying that "you will always get dirty when you deal in people's messes."

In order to help someone, you have to step into their problems with them.

There is not a single person who does not have problems; we all live in the messes of our lives, and sometimes we need someone to help us through them.

We all need that neighbor who is willing to pitch in and help with the clean-up of our messes.

The priest and Levite in the parable were too afraid of getting "dirty" in the man's problems, and they may have thought that they had very good reasons not to help.

But Jesus' point here is that they had a chance to be a neighbor and did not do it.

The Samaritan chose to get dirty.

He saw a guy who was hurting (literally), stepped into his mess, and helped him.

We live busy lives.

Between family stuff, church activities, school, sports, hobbies, and all of our other responsibilities, we are constantly on the go.

The Samaritan was a good neighbor because he stopped and helped the man; he was willing to get into the life of the man and help him.

Jesus calls for us to be neighbors to those in need, to step into their problems and not be afraid of getting dirty.

2. Being a neighbor means you have to sacrifice.

The Samaritan was also a neighbor to the beaten man because he gave up some things in order to help.

The Samaritan gave up his abilities; he soothed the wounds of the man and bandaged him up.

I do not know about you, but I do not know the first thing about medicine.

The man was left “half dead” on the side of the road, so fixing him up would have been no easy feat.

You or I may not have the ability to fix the wounds of people as well as the Samaritan, but we can use the abilities we *do* have to help those who are in need of a neighbor.

The Samaritan did not seem to worry about whether he could or could not help the man; he just dove in and did what he could.

That is how we should use our abilities in our lives – we just need to dive in and do what we can, trusting that God will use us in His way.

The Samaritan also gave up his materials.

He let the man ride his donkey and paid for his stay at the inn.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was pretty hilly.

The Samaritan gave up his right to ride his own donkey and put the man on it instead as they walked.

The Samaritan also paid for the man to stay in an inn.

The Samaritan was willing to give up money so that the man would be helped.

When we are neighbors to others, we must be willing to sacrifice for them, to give them what they need to help them.

Sacrifice is never easy, but this is why Jesus is so counter culture.

He takes what society tells us to do and turns it on its head.

3. Being a neighbor means you have to love.

As we said before, the Jews and Samaritans were not the best of friends.

If the Samaritan had left the man to die there no one would have probably batted an eye.

We saw what the Samaritan did in the story, but to what extent did he *have to* help the injured man?

When the Samaritan saw the man, Jesus says he had compassion for him.

Where the others went out of their way to move to the other side of the road and avoid the beaten man, Jesus says that the Samaritan went right over to him.

At the scene of the crime, the Samaritan poured olive oil and wine on the man's wounds - these things were not really a cheap commodity he just had lying around.

The man was put on the Samaritan's own donkey, probably getting blood all over the donkey for the Samaritan to have to ride on later.

At the inn, the Samaritan paid the innkeeper some money; not just a few dollars, two *denarii* was about the same as two days of work, and the Samaritan offered to pay even more when he returned.

The Samaritan did not have to do what he did, taking the man to the inn and leaving him there to heal would have been the decent human thing to do; however, the Samaritan did what he knew was the right thing and went the extra mile even though the man should have been his enemy.

Jesus calls us to show love to our neighbor. He calls us as Christians to go above and beyond to help others regardless of what divides us or how they may treat us.

It all goes back to the golden rule.

Treat others as you would want to be treated or as Jesus put it, "love your neighbor as yourself."

So, who is our neighbor? According to Jesus, your neighbor is not just the person who lives beside you; everyone you run across is your neighbor.

That person who sits by himself at lunch, that guy who is treated differently because he is not like everyone else, that girl who has the bruises that she tries to hide, that guy whose parents leave him to raise himself, that girl that thinks she is too big or too thin, that guy who is depressed that he will never get a girlfriend, that girl that bullies all the other girls – these people are the neighbors that Jesus is talking about.

Just like back in the Bible, Jesus is still calling us to be a neighbor to those in need, to step into their mess, to be willing to sacrifice for them, and to love them regardless of who they are or how they act.

You are not just called to simply be nice to others to be a neighbor but also to love them, to go beyond respecting them as a human being and making personal connections with them.

We are to look to the example of the perfect neighbor, Jesus.

He came so that He could go above and beyond what a mere human would do; He died for all of mankind.

Jesus decided to come into the world as one of us so that He could get “dirty”, so He could step into the messes of our lives and clean house.

As Christians, we are called to take that example and go out into the world, loving our neighbor and being willing to step into their lives and sacrifice our abilities and materials for them in love.

Are you a good neighbor?

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does it feel to be singled out by some kind of difference?
2. Do you think that it is okay for us to be different?
3. Why do you think that Jesus is so counter to the culture?
4. What does it mean to be someone’s neighbor?
5. What does Jesus mean by “love your neighbor as yourself?”
6. Read **Matthew 5:43-48**. Is it always easy to love your enemies?
7. Do you think that the Good Samaritan followed the teaching of **Matthew 5:43-48**?
8. How can you use your abilities to be a good neighbor?
9. How much should you sacrifice to be a good neighbor?
10. What are some ways you can be a neighbor to someone?
11. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, what reasons do you think the priest and Levite would have given to avoid the beaten man?
12. Has there ever been a time when you did not help someone and that you should have? How did it make you feel?
13. In a time when racial tensions are so high, how can you reach out to others who may look and act differently than you?
14. Who will you be a neighbor to this week?

COUNTER CULTURE

WEEK 2: Love God.

Bible: Matthew 7:21-23

Bottom Line: The life of a Christian must be lived IN Christ, putting God first in every area.

OPENING GAME: JAILBREAK

Have your group pair up (boy-girl) and have all but one pair sit in chairs next to each other with their arms hooked.

Make sure the pairs of chairs are scattered through the room.

If the number of guys or girls is uneven then either a guy or a girl will have to pair with the same gender.

One couple has to remain standing with no chairs.

Every guy in the couple gets a number 1-4.

Then the couple that is standing will either call a number 1-4 or JAILBREAK.

The guys whose number is called must get up with their partner and get to another set of chairs without letting their arms get unhooked.

If a couple becomes unhooked they will have to lose their chairs and stand up for another call out.

If the standing couple calls jailbreak, every one grabs a new partner and different seats.

TEACH

Today, we will be looking at the words of Jesus at the end of His Sermon on the Mount; He is talking in this portion to those who believe.

Before the verses we will read today, we can see that Jesus was telling the people that they are identified by the fruit they produce.

He then goes on to tell the audience this.

That although they may have thought producing fruit was nothing but a one-time conversion or an experience of works, those who do not listen and do not do the will of the Father will not enter the kingdom of heaven no matter how hard they “try.”

These verses are a hard saying from Jesus; He was not cutting corners or playing nice.

Jesus had a thing about always keeping it real, and He is telling us here that if we desire to love God it has to be more than lip service or just trying to win God's approval.

Read Matthew 7:21.

We see three things about loving God that Jesus is telling us.

1. It's about Being, not just Claiming.

When the end of time comes, everyone will be there.

Everyone will stand in front of God for judgment one day and be accountable for the life they've lived.

Part of the life we live is in our relationships.

This includes our relationships with parents, our relationships with one another, our relationship with our finances, and our relationship with your future spouse and children.

You are also going to be accountable regardless of what you believe.

If you say you're an atheist, you won't be any more after you stand in front of God for judgement.

Everyone will also recognize Jesus as Lord.

Everyone will cry out "Lord, Lord" thinking that they too are Christians.

But some people will be surprised.

They will call Him Lord, but their actions will have proved otherwise.

They will realize then that they have been clinging to the false hope of salvation by works.

It may be a sad thing to think about, but everyone will not enter heaven.

This is a God-thing, not an us-thing.

These kinds of statements make us feel uncomfortable; we do not like to think of people going to hell, but God holds us all to a standard because we have all sinned against Him.

These are people who lived their life thinking that they had a sure way into heaven.

Jesus is speaking here to “church” people, the people that thought they knew God, thought they did all the right “motions,” and thought that they were going to heaven because they played the good guy in life.

Just because you claim you are a Christian does not make it true.

You can claim to be a basketball player but not be able to throw a ball into the ocean if you wanted to.

You can claim to be a basketball player all you want - it does not make it true.

Read Matthew 7:22.

We see a second point about loving God in this verse.

2. It’s about Whose You Are, not just What You Do.

We try to “re-define” Jesus and make Him fit our own interpretations.

In a church, there was an altar call.

A man came up and said, “I am Jesus Christ.”

The pastor told him that he couldn’t be Jesus because Jesus was at the right hand of the Father and would not return until the end of time.

The man said, “Well, the plans have changed.”

For years the church has tried to re-define Jesus, to re-define salvation, to re-define what it takes to be a Christian.

One day at judgment we are going to stand before God and say “I think...” and He is going to say “I don’t care what you think.”

We have this need to where we always want to be right, so we try to mold Jesus into what we want Him to be, and that’s where our problem lies.

It is sin and we know we are wrong, but we still feel a need to argue with Jesus.

Read Matthew 7:13-14.

Jesus is talking to the “church” people of the time.

Jesus said that “many” will say...

Jesus says that many will go to the path of hell.

He was talking to the religious leaders of the day here, the people who were in the “pews” every Sunday, the people who were volunteering in the ministries of the church, the people who were in the youth groups.

Jesus is saying that a lot of people are going to miss eternity because they missed Him!

What have you done in this life for Jesus?

People have done some pretty amazing things.

Examples: Salvation Army, Goodwill, Samaritan’s Purse, working in a church ministry, homeless shelter, etc..

The people in **Matthew 7:22** preached, cast out demons, and performed miracles in Jesus’ name; looking from the outside in, we would think they would be a shoo-in to heaven.

But Jesus is saying that many of those people are not in.

The people who responded in verse 22 were more concerned with being in God’s PRESENTS rather than His PRESENCE.

At this point you may want to talk about Black Friday Shopping and how chaotic it is, or add your own personal story about the point of wanting the “stuff” of God without wanting to know Him personally; this lesson is designed with the concept of Black Friday and the idea of the pallets of “stuff” in the middle of aisles.

On Black Friday after Thanksgiving, millions of people go shopping.

Some people make a sport out of it, making a timeline of what time each store opens, making a list of the items they are to get and at what point of the store they are located.

Most stores have the sale items on big pallets, all wrapped up in shrink-wrap in the middle of the aisle; the hardcore shoppers sit around these items with a hand on the pallet, waiting for the time when the store employee comes by to cut the wrapping – then all chaos breaks loose!

We treat God the same way a lot of times.

We have our lists of what we want in life, the stuff that we “need” to be happy, and we seek that stuff.

We want God’s peace, so we seek it.

We want God’s understanding, so we seek it.

We want God’s blessings, so we seek it.

But in the midst of all of our seeking we forgot to seek God.

Read Matthew 6:33.

Jesus says, “If you want My presents, you have to be seeking My presence.”

Does this verse say to seek Him last? Or second?

It says to seek Him first and then it will all be added to you; in other words, God is saying “I will give you all of Me!

You can have everything! If you seek My presence instead of the presents.”

It is kind of silly that we would rather worship the creation instead of the creator, that we would rather worship the gifts, the things, the stuff that we receive instead of giving full and due glory and honor to the One who created it all.

When we seek God’s presents instead of His presence, we miss God.

There was a couple on a date going to see a movie one night.

They found what movie, what time, and headed off; they had a GPS, but being a man, the husband said that they did not need it.

They drove around and around the road they knew the theater was on but never saw it.

It was too late to catch the movie, and it was the last day it was showing and the last time it was showing that day.

They drove back home, just to pass the theater as they were driving back; they just missed it.

Let’s look at Judas, one of Jesus’ disciples.

Did he help preach? Yes.

Did he help cast out demons? Yes.

Did he help perform miracles? Yes.

Did he go to hell? Yes, because he missed Jesus.

We can live a lifetime of good works.

We can live a lifetime of going to church.

We can live a lifetime of doing all of the “rituals” of the church and still miss Jesus.

We miss Jesus because we do not have a relationship with Him; we merely have conversations that involve Him, but we do not have that relationship to where He knows us.

Read Matthew 7:23.

There is a third point that Jesus is making here about loving God.

3. It's about a Relationship not just a Conversation.

We can have a conversation with Jesus, but He requires a relationship.

The people being cast out did great things, they did them in His name, and who is to say that they did or did not work.

But the issue is that they did it because they knew of Him, not fully knowing Him.

Jesus responded to them saying three things:

First, "I never knew you."

The people in these verses did some really good stuff.

All the things they did were positive.

They thought that they knew Jesus.

These people had a conversation with Jesus.

They may have talked to Him, they may have sat in church and felt a pull on their heart, they may have wanted to talk to their pastor about becoming a Christian, but in the end they thought it was not necessary.

Jesus is saying, "We might have had a conversation, but we have never had a relationship."

Secondly Jesus is saying, "Get away from Me."

The only place you can "get away" from God is hell.

Thirdly He's saying, "You who break God's laws." ("You evildoers" [NIV])

No matter what you are doing, there is still sin in your life, and we just cannot bring sin into the presence of God.

Tonight, I am asking you if you know Jesus. I am asking you if you have a relationship with Him.

When we meet Jesus, we change!

When people meet Christ, they change!

We can't meet Jesus and stay the same.

We're not always perfect, but there is a point in our journey (like the Prodigal Son in **Luke 15:17**) where no matter how far away we run from God, we come to our senses.

When we meet Jesus, we change!

We cannot come to church, pray a prayer, and go live however we want!

You might be thinking, "This is making me uncomfortable."

Good. Because for so long we have become so comfortable that we have neglected the Gospel!

Because we are so comfy in our little religion, there are people who are going to go to hell because we cannot share the truth with them!

Jesus embraced uncomfortably on the cross; it is time that we got uncomfortable for Him.

You are either living for Jesus or for hell.

There is no middle area.

Read Ezekiel 36:25-27.

Being a follower of Christ is to believe that He died on the cross for your sins and that God raised Him up three days later.

Being a follower of Christ means that you will wear yourself out pursuing the things of God rather than the things of this world while you ask God to stamp His seal of approval on whatever you want to do.

Have you changed?

Do you have a relationship with Jesus or have you just had a conversation?

Being a Christian is so much more than just praying a prayer or going to church or being involved in whatever ministry you want to be involved in.

It is about a lifestyle, an everyday decision when you get out of bed each morning and say "Today, I'm living it for You, God."

You cannot go to heaven and live like hell.

One day you are going to face Jesus; we all are.

What do you want Him to say about you?

You could be born in the church, could be a deacon's kid or a preacher's kid, and that will not save you.

You could be heavily involved in the church, in every ministry that there is, and that will not save you.

You could go to a camp and rededicate your life once a year every year, and that will not save you.

What saves you is a new heart; what saves you is fully trusting in Jesus every day you live, trusting Him to show you His righteousness.

What saves you is living every day for Him and Him alone; that is when He will say, "I know you."

So, what would Jesus say about you?

Close in prayer.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has your life changed since you met Jesus?
2. How does Jesus change a person's life?
3. How do loving God and following Jesus go hand in hand?
4. What is Jesus talking about in **Matthew 7:21-23**? (*The end of time*)
5. Why do you think this saying of Jesus is counter culture?
6. In what ways do we claim to be Christians but not act like it?
7. What is the difference between a conversation and a relationship?
8. How can a person do all kinds of good things and still go to hell?
9. Why would God send people to hell?
10. Why do you think we make light of God's justice in our lives?

11. What are some ways you could get to know Jesus better?
12. How can you be more concerned with God's presence than with His presents?
13. Do you think we all act like Judas when we do things that are against the will of God?
14. What things do you need to let go of to be closer to God?

COUNTER CULTURE

WEEK 3: Love to Follow.

Bible: Luke 18:18-23

Bottom Line: Jesus requires that when we follow Him we must be willing to be a trader, to give up the things we hold dear in this world for a better life of eternity with Him.

OPENING GAME: ELECTRICITY

Arrange everyone into two equally numbered teams and have both teams line up in parallel lines facing each other.

At the end of the lines, place an object about five feet away (in equal distance from the ends of both lines); you will be at the head of the line.

Everyone in line will need to hold hands and close their eyes.

Only the first person of both lines can keep their eyes open.

Flip the coin in the air, catch it, and reveal the quarter to the first person on both teams.

If the quarter comes up as heads, the first person squeezes the next person's hand.

The second person squeezes the next person's hand, and so forth.

At the end of the line, the last person opens their eyes and runs to grab the object and the team that grabs the object first wins a point for the round.

If the quarter comes up as tails, then no one squeezes anyone's hand.

If there is an accidental hand squeeze when the quarter comes up as tails, the team that grabbed the object loses a point for the round.

For the second round, the first person goes to the back of the line and the game continues; the first team that reaches 10 points wins the game.

TEACH

In this lesson, make sure to have a device capable of showing a video and a way to project it so that everyone can see. The video can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVJAAS8JYwE>.

In the game we played, you had to follow the person whose hand you were holding; you had to trust that they saw the coin and that they knew whether to squeeze your hand or not.

It is hard to follow someone, especially when it comes to stuff that is important to us.

We are going to look at an encounter Jesus had with a rich, young ruler – someone who had plenty of desire to follow Jesus but did not want to give up the stuff that he had in order to actually put one foot forward.

Let's break up this conversation that the ruler had with Jesus and look at it more closely:

1. The Issue at Hand

*Have a student read **Luke 18:18**.*

The rich young ruler had a question about eternity, the one thing he knew that he could not buy with all his material wealth.

The rich young ruler wanted an answer to a question, and he knew to go to the “Good Teacher” for the answer he wanted.

The people in that time did not call anyone good except God, so the ruler knew he was asking God Himself a question.

If you could ask God a question, what would you ask Him?

This guy wanted to know how to be saved, and there is nothing wrong with asking that.

You see, the ruler came to the right person with the right question and received the right answer, but he made the wrong decision.

The rich young ruler wanted to have eternal life.

He was asking in terms of the Law. He was essentially saying, “Jesus, which rules do I have to follow to get in?”

We tend to do this a lot in our lives.

We try to figure what we have to do to get the best grade, the best friends, the best phone on the market. It does not work that way for getting into heaven.

2. The Response

*Have a student read **Luke 18:19-20**.*

Jesus gave the young man a list of things that the Law (*the OT*) required.

Jesus essentially asked the man, “How good is good?”

How good do you think you are?

The ruler thought he was a pretty good guy, but Jesus proved otherwise by letting the man's choice call him out.

Jesus told the man to follow the Ten Commandments; sounds easy, right?

Which Commandments have you followed?

*Have a student read **Exodus 20:2-17**.*

If you have broken only a part of one commandment, you have broken the whole thing.

If you have broken one commandment, you have broken them all.

Jesus only used a few of the Ten Commandments for a reason.

The first four (**Exodus 20:2-11**) deal with our relationship with God, and the last six (**Exodus 20:12-17**) deal with our relationship with others.

We think it is easy to follow the last six, but hard to follow the first four.

However, each Commandment is related to the others.

3. The Law and the Ruler

Read Luke 18:21.

This rich, young ruler was probably like a modern-day Bill Gates or a giant bank CEO.

We know he was rich; this is a man who had a lot of money.

He had it all, and it was all his.

He was probably well known as well, because being rich in those days was a rarity.

We know that he was young; this would have also made him famous.

He was young, meaning he had a whole lifetime ahead of him to be able to enjoy his money.

We know he was a ruler; he was an administrator, a leader.

There were people under him. He had power and authority as well as money and fame.

The ruler told Jesus this to vindicate himself; he wanted to make himself feel good about all the "stuff" that he did (keeping those commandments).

He was in essence asking, "Okay, I've done that."

Now how much will it cost me to get this ticket to heaven?"

He thought that his good deeds following the Law would be enough, but Jesus was about to show him otherwise.

4. The Offer

Read Luke 18:22.

Jesus told him there was still one thing that he had not done.

Keeping the commandments are great, but Jesus said here that there was more to religion than just keeping rules and laws.

Jesus told him that the ruler needed to change his mindset if he wanted to follow Him.

The ruler had been living a life that was all about him; Jesus was asking him to change that by giving everything away to the poor.

Jesus knew that the man's issue was with his money and self-centeredness.

The ruler said he had kept all the Commandments, but yet there was one that he had not followed; money was his god, and therefore he had broken the first one.

5. The Challenge

Read Luke 18:23.

The ruler walked away in tears because he knew he could not pass up his wealth, he knew he could not give it all away.

The young ruler misunderstood the request from Jesus.

Jesus was not asking him to give it all away (v22), He was telling him to trade it all for something better (*treasure in heaven*).

We may look at the ruler with disappointment because he could not follow Jesus, but we forget that the ruler at least got the price up-front.

Although he was wrong, we have to respect the fact that the ruler had some courage to get up and walk away.

How many of us know what the Word of God says, know the price, and yet refuse to follow God and still expect a shower of blessings to fall on us?

The ruler wanted Jesus to just fix his problems so that he could get into heaven.

A lot of times we do the same thing.

The Bible says forgive.

We do not forgive and we sit around and wait on God to fix it.

The Bible says love your neighbor, and we go around being judgmental and bitter to everyone we meet and we sit around and wait on God to fix it.

The Bible says to witness, and we do not talk to anyone about Jesus and we sit around and wait on God to fix it.

The Bible says to live like Christ, and we refuse to live a Christian walk and we sit around waiting on God to fix it.

God cannot fix anything in your life until you trade your life for His.

God cannot fix anything in your life until you trade your selfishness for His gentleness and peace.

God cannot fix anything in your life until you trade your pride for His humbleness.

God cannot fix anything in your life until you trade your shyness and fear for His passion and love for others.

God cannot fix anything in your life until you trade your weights and burdens for His righteousness!

That is what the ruler could not do. He could not trade his life of luxury, fame, and power for something better...heaven!

At this point, show the video "Being a Trader" –
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVJAAS8JYwE>.

So, what about you? How are you like the rich young ruler?

We live in a world where we are called to get more and more for ourselves.

God says it is not about you; it's about others....it is about Him.

What do you have to trade?

Well, a lot of things - A life of insecurity for God's life of His presence, a life of fear for God's life of peace, a life of questions for God's life of understanding, a life of pride for God's life of humbleness, a life of hate for God's life of love, a life of hell for God's life in heaven.

It all sounds well and good, but it is really hard to give things up; we want to hold on to what we have because it is what we know.

But God is calling you to trade in your sorrows, your sins, your desires for this world for something better, something pure, something heavenly.

He waits for you to make the move, but you have to be the one to make it.

You have a choice to make.

The ruler made the wrong decision although he had all the right information.

You make a choice everyday whether to follow Christ or follow your own desires.

You can choose to do things your way, and things may be great for eighty or so years.

You can choose to do things God's way and to seek after Him and be joyful for eternity.

Read Deuteronomy 4:29.

If you seek after Him, you will find Him.

God is not a God who hides in the shadows from you; He wants you to find Him and to seek Him, to follow Him wholeheartedly.

Seeking after Him requires commitment, but in the end is far more than worth it!

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it really easy or really hard to follow someone?
2. When was a time that you followed someone and they messed you up?
3. How hard do you think the rich young ruler's choice was?
4. Have you ever made a hard choice?
5. Have you ever traded something in for something else?
6. What does it mean to trade in your life to follow God?
7. What do you think it really means to follow Jesus?
8. How does following Jesus make the most of your life on earth?
9. How can we explain how to follow Jesus to others?

10. Why is it so hard to keep all the commandments?

11. Why do you think Jesus answered the ruler the way He did?

12. What are some things that you need to trade in today?

COUNTER CULTURE

WEEK 4: Love to Forgive.

Bible: Mark 11:25

Bottom Line: Jesus calls Christians to forgive others just as He has forgiven them.

OPENING GAME: MUMMY WRAP

Gather students and divide them into two teams.

Give each team several rolls of toilet paper and instruct each team that they are going to be a group “Mummy.”

On go, both teams will attempt to wrap themselves, as a whole group, like a mummy with the paper you have provided.

The first team to use all the paper wins.

You can make a variation on the game and make the teams run to a certain point in the room without breaking the paper.

You can also save back some paper and use it for alternatives to the game such as wrapping the leaders, individual students, objects, etc.

TEACH

In this lesson you need a computer (or smartphone) and a way to show a video from YouTube. The video can be found at <https://youtu.be/o2BITY-3Mp4>.

During the lesson, it may also greatly enhance the teaching if you add your own stories of forgiveness.

Feel free at any time during the lesson where appropriate to add in a personal story about forgiving someone who had wronged you.

When you were being the “Mummy” was it completely possible to cover every part of you?

In the Old Testament, one of the words that we use for to forgive (*kaphar*) literally means to cover up.

When we forgive someone, we are to cover up whatever they did against us and put it out of sight and out of mind.

Unfortunately, this is easier said than done many times.

Just like in the game, a lot of times we try to cover up others' trespasses only to leave spaces and spots.

Some things that are done to us are hard to forgive and forget.

However, Jesus says different.

We have been discussing over the past weeks about the sayings of Jesus and how they are counter to His culture and the culture we live in today.

People have always had a hard time forgiving others; it is much easier to be forgiven than to have to actually do the forgiving.

So how do we do it?

We are going to take a look at what Jesus had to say about forgiveness.

We catch Jesus just after He had cleared out the temple.

The previous day He had cursed a fig tree because it had no fruit and the disciples had walked back by the tree and saw that it had withered away.

They pointed it out to Jesus, and He took the opportunity to talk about having faith.

But He adds something interesting about forgiveness in the midst of His teaching.

*Have a student read **Mark 11:25**.*

How powerful can a prayer be?

According to Jesus, pretty powerful if you have faith.

Prayer is our most powerful weapon when it comes to our relationship with God.

However, there is something that can hinder that relationship – sin.

Just like a failed call on a phone with a weak battery, our prayers can be hindered when we are continuing in sin.

A lot of times we may feel like our prayers are just hitting the ceiling, and a lot of times we may look to find an answer as to why our prayers may not be effective.

Sin keeps us from being connected to God. It disrupts the relationship between God's blessing and our being close and personal with Him.

Look at the verse again; who would have thought that not forgiving someone could be a sin?

So why is it a sin?

Jesus plainly says here that God will not forgive our sins while we cannot forgive the sins of those around us.

God sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross so that our sins against Him could be forgiven.

When we become a Christian, we take on the characteristics of God and seek to imitate Him, which means we should be forgiving just as He is forgiving.

When we do not forgive others, we are not being like Jesus; we are choosing to hold the power of forgiveness for ourselves.

While God is perfect and He can show perfect forgiveness, we can still strive to show extreme forgiveness when we are wronged by those around us.

But how?

Choosing to not forgive is choosing to let hatred rule in your heart. It is choosing to let that person's offense consume you.

Over the last few weeks, we have seen a theme in the sayings of Jesus.

They all come down to one word that should be how we conduct ourselves in everything, especially in forgiveness.

Love.

When we love God and prioritize Him first, we act like Him.

Since He is love we are able to show love to others.

This also goes for loving those who do something to offend us.

What does this mean for us?

When someone does us wrong, we have choices on how we can respond:

1. We can strike back in anger and hatred.

Getting back at those who do us wrong or holding a grudge against someone may feel good at first, but eventually those feelings of anger and bitterness can start to wear and tear on you.

We live in a world today where the people with the loudest mouths and the hottest heads rule the day, and this is why Jesus is so controversial.

We are taught that revenge is sweet, that if someone wrongs you that it is okay to go back at them twice as hard.

But that is not what we hear from God's Word.

Read 1 Peter 3:9.

In the first passage we read, Peter was the one who noticed the fig tree was withered. When he was writing this book, he may have thought back to that day and remembered what Jesus said about forgiving others.

Now there is a difference between revenge against a wrong and justice. There are rules that we all live by and the court takes care of that, but there is ultimately God's justice.

Read Romans 12:9.

When we seek revenge, we are repaying an evil with an evil; we want to make whoever wronged us feel as bad as they made us feel.

We have no right to strike back against someone who sins against us because God is the One who will deal with it; repaying an evil with an evil is not how God operates.

When we forgive, we give the power of justice to God where it belonged all along.

2. We can forgive in love.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:14.

When it says to do all things with love, you can be sure that it is also talking about forgiving others.

It's not enough to just forgive someone; it must be done in love.

When we forgive others, we do it firstly because we love God and want to live the way He desires us to live.

That love pours over to others; when we love God and follow His Word, we develop a love for others that no wrong should be able to pull apart.

What does forgiveness look like?

To answer that, let's look at what forgiveness is *not*.

Forgiveness is *not* forgetting.

When you forgive someone you do not have to forget what they did.

You just choose not to hold what they did against them.

You do not have to act like the offense never occurred.

It is okay to talk to the person who offended you about how you feel because holding the offense back can cause resentment.

Forgiveness is *not* instant healing. Just like a wound, it takes time to heal.

When you forgive someone, the feelings of hurt will not just go away.

You will heal over time, and you have to let God lead you to it.

Forgiveness is *not* a free pass. Actions still have consequences.

If you get caught cheating on a test and fail, the teacher can forgive you all he or she wants but it does not change the fact that you failed the test.

Forgiveness is *not* just for the offender. It is for your own sake.

When you forgive someone, you are freeing yourself from the prison of resentment and bitterness that holding a grudge causes.

But what does forgiveness to others look like when it is done with love?

This video may help us get a glimpse as to what it means to forgive.

Show the video from <https://youtu.be/o2BITY-3Mp4>.

Mary Johnson was able to show extreme forgiveness to the man who killed her only son.

The man who killed her son still had to go to jail. Forgiving Oshea did not come right away. She did not forget that he had killed her son, and she did not forgive for the killer's sake.

What Mrs. Johnson did do was *choose* to forgive, and that forgiveness transformed Oshea's life.

Forgiveness can make all the difference in someone's life; it can release the offender from a life of guilt and you from a life of resentment.

After all, do not forget what God did for you.

His forgiveness paved the way for us to be able to live with Him in heaven even though we could have never earned it or deserved it on our own.

Do not let resentment hold you back.

Time does heal wounds and you will be able to get over an offense.

Give that bitterness that you may hold toward someone to God and let Him deal with it.

Forgive in love and learn to let go so that God can transform your life.

Forgiveness is one of the hidden blessings that God gives us in life; do not let it slip by you.

Forgive someone today.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been wronged by someone?
2. How did it make you feel?
3. Is it hard to overlook someone for what they did?
4. When people do wrong things, does that reputation tend to stick with them?
5. Have you ever felt as if your prayers have hit the ceiling?
6. Why do you think it is so important to God for us to forgive each other?
7. Do you think there is anyone who could ever deserve God's forgiveness?
8. Was there a time in your life when you were the one at fault and you had to be the one to ask for forgiveness?
9. What happens when you ask someone for forgiveness and you do not receive it?
10. What is the difference between revenge and justice?
11. Is there ever a proper time to seek revenge on someone?
12. How does forgiveness free us?
13. Why do you think forgiveness is so hard?
14. Do you think you could have helped the man in the video if you were Mrs. Johnson?
15. Is there anyone in your life that you need to forgive?