

March 3

Lesson 1 (NIV)

CALLED TO SERVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 14:15-24

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 14:7-14

LUKE 14:7-14

⁷When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

¹²Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich

neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”



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KEY VERSE

All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. — Luke 14:11

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Unit 1: Call to Discipleship

LESSONS 1-4

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe Jesus' view of humility.
2. Distinguish between behaviors that

indicate humility and those that don't.

3. Demonstrate humility in one choice in the week ahead.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. God's Way Up Is Down
- B. Lesson Context
- I. The Humble Guest (LUKE 14:7-11)
 - A. Unpretentious (vv. 7-9)
Donut Do That!
 - B. Exalted (vv. 10, 11)
- II. The Humble Host (LUKE 14:12-14)
 - A. Wrong Action (v. 12)
 - B. Right Action (vv. 13, 14)
The Night Grace Shone

Conclusion

- A. What Is Biblical Humility?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Abraham	Ay-bruh-ham.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Jerusalem	Juh-roo-suh-lem.
Moses	Mo-zes or Mo-zez.

Introduction

A. God's Way Up Is Down

Some drivers hate to make turns against heavy traffic. Faced with the need

to turn at an intersection across several busy lanes, they will drive out of their way to avoid the turn. In countries where people drive on the right side of the road, they will make three right turns to avoid one left turn. For them, the way left is right, and right, and right again.

Jesus expressed a similar idea throughout his teaching. He taught that under God's reign, the way up, the way of honor and exaltation, is actually down, in lowly, self-giving service to others. Those who seek prestige, power, wealth, and status will be brought low. But those who lower themselves, who seek nothing for themselves and instead minister to others in humility, God will exalt. Jesus, the divine Lord who gave himself in death for undeserving sinners, taught and demonstrated that humility is the way to exaltation. This is the theme of today's text.

B. Lesson Context

Today's text is part of the account of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem; the account extends from [Luke 9:51](#) to [19:28](#). Jesus was approaching Israel's sacred city, having warned his disciples before the trip began that there he would be handed over to his enemies. They would put him to death, but he would be raised again to life by God the Father ([Luke 9:22](#)). Although Jesus stressed, "Listen

carefully to what I am about to tell you,” they didn’t (9:44).

The immediate backdrop of our lesson is an occasion on which Jesus was invited to a Sabbath day meal at the home of a powerful religious leader. At this grand meal “was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body” (Luke 14:1, 2; the 1984 NIV has “dropsy,” which is an older word for “edema”). Jesus confronted the other guests about their objections to his healing the afflicted man on the Sabbath. Receiving only silence as a response, Jesus proceeded to heal the man, pointing out their hypocrisy in the process (14:3–6). Our text is divided into two parts: advice given to guests at a banquet and advice given to the host.

I. The Humble Guest (LUKE 14:7-11)

A. Unpretentious (vv. 7-9)

7. When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable:

Our text today begins with a teaching of Jesus identified as a *parable*. The noun being translated occurs 50 times in the New Testament, and 48 of those are in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Speaking in parables is a key characteristic of Jesus’ teaching. Parables range from brief comparisons (“What is the

kingdom of God like?... It is like a mustard seed,” Luke 13:18, 19), to elaborate stories (“There was a man who had two sons,” 15:11–32). Parables are designed to provoke the listeners’ thought processes and challenge the listeners’ assumptions.

Jesus delivers this parable at a grand meal. Shared meals in Jesus’ culture are occasions for the display of social status. The wealthy could display their abundance on such occasions, and places at the table closest to the host are regarded as carrying the greatest honor. Those not invited to such banquets can observe the proceedings from outside, and the ostentatious display of wealth is often the host’s objective. These factors all play a role in our understanding of Jesus’ teaching in this text, though his focus is on far more than correcting the customs of his day.

Jesus obviously speaks to those present with him at the meal. But by calling them *the guests* (those invited), the writer Luke emphasizes that Jesus speaks to people who are in a position of privilege. Their important host has invited them as his peers to his sumptuous table. None of them are in positions of weakness like the seriously ill man whom Jesus has just healed.

In response to the invitation, and as people generally do, these seek a prominent position at the table (*the place of*

honor). We might think of how people at a crowded event featuring open seating rush to get the best seats with good views.

8. “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

Weddings are common occasions for large meals to which many people are invited. Thus they provide a fitting backdrop for Jesus’ example. His counsel is to avoid the typical behavior of assuming the best position (*the place of honor*) that one can get at the table. To do so is to risk embarrassment. Someone worthy of more honor than oneself might also be in attendance, and that person’s presence might result in a socially awkward outcome!

What Do You Think?

In what ways can your congregation challenge common secular ideas about who deserves honor?

Digging Deeper

How does the parable in [Matthew 20:1-16](#) inform your conclusions, if at all?

As Jesus speaks of those *more distinguished*, we hear an echo of his description of himself on other occasions. In the upper room at the last supper, he will admonish his disciples for the argument

about who is greatest, noting that he, clearly the greatest of their company, lives among them as one who serves ([Luke 22:24-27](#)). Jesus’ own nature as a servant, not their habitual desire for prominence, is what must determine the position that his followers seek.

9. “If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

The end result of seeking the highest, most honored place may well be the opposite: humiliation. The host of the banquet, the one to whom guests are beholden for the privilege of attending the meal, may tell the honor-seeking guest to give up the place of prominence to allow the more honored person to have the proper seat. But isn’t that just common sense? Don’t those listening to Jesus know this (and perhaps have experienced it) already? Most likely! But there’s a point here that must not be missed: it’s not the guests who determine who takes which seats; that privilege belongs to *the host* of the banquet.

Just before telling this story, Jesus had honored an uninvited guest, the man with the swollen body who humbly sought healing, by acknowledging his suffering and restoring him to wholeness. In doing so, he accepted the scorn of

religious leaders who saw his actions as a Sabbath violation. Like the host in his story, Jesus exalted the one who took a low position. Like the wise guest in his story, Jesus willingly takes the lowest place, serving others instead of himself. His permanent move to the seat of highest honor becomes certain ([Luke 22:69](#); [Ephesians 1:20](#); [Colossians 3:1](#)).

What Do You Think?

What are some situations in which you should do better at humbling yourself?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture passage, other than today's text, challenges you the most in this regard? Why?

DONUT DO THAT!

It seemed like a good idea at the time: impersonate a police officer to get a discount on donuts. So Charles Barry pulled up to the pickup window of a donut shop, flashed a sheriff's badge, and asked for the discount for law-enforcement officers.

The plan worked so well that the fake cop returned multiple times! But eventually an employee got suspicious. When he balked during one of Barry's visits, Barry again displayed his badge and pointed to a holstered firearm. The clerk took down Barry's license plate number and

reported the incident to the police.

Barry was caught and charged with impersonating a law-enforcement officer and improper exhibition of a firearm. The police shield and weapon in Barry's possession were real, belonging to his father, a retired police officer.

Posturing catches up with the pretender sooner or later. Pretending we are entitled to something ends up fooling only ourselves. The eventual unmasking and humiliation are quite costly! Most of us know this either from observation or personal experience. So, why do we still do it?

—J. E.

B. Exalted (vv. 10, 11)

10. "But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests.

Jesus' counsel is to do the opposite: to seek *the lowest place* rather than the highest. Doing so not only avoids the potential shame of being moved to a lower place—indeed, there is no lower place—but also makes possible the honor that the host will exalt the humble guest. Jesus adds to this image by having the host address the humble guest as *Friend*. At this banquet, the true friend of the

host is not the person who seeks status but the one who acts in lowliness.

From this new position the humble guest will receive due recognition from *the other guests* and *will be honored*. The host reverses the guests' situations so that the humble guest receives the honor that the self-seeking guest had sought.

Jesus' words mirror [Proverbs 25:6, 7](#):

Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among his great men; it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before his nobles.

The context of Jesus' teaching shows, however, that he goes beyond that well-known wisdom. The person who seeks status ignores not just the threat of humiliation, but also the revelation of God in Christ. The person who humbly puts others above self follows Christ as Lord and example. The wisdom of the banquet is not simply about how to conduct oneself in public but how to live as God's humble servant. Like Jesus, such a servant gives up status for the sake of others.

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

Jesus ends the first of the two parables with a summary statement, one that he repeats on other occasions ([Matthew](#)

[23:12](#); [Luke 18:14](#); compare [James 4:10](#)). God does not grant glory to those who exalt themselves, but to those who humbly take the lowly position, sacrificing themselves for the sake of others as Jesus did.

History begins with humans who, given an ideal world in which to live, abandon God's provision for the offer of self-exaltation ([Genesis 3:5](#)). In the story that unfolds, God grants his promises and does his work through those in lowly circumstances: Abraham, an elderly, childless man; Moses, a speech-impaired fugitive; David, an immature shepherd boy; even all Israel, a weak nation formed in slavery. Meanwhile, the great nations and people of the world, seeking status and power for themselves, come to nothing at God's hand.

In Jesus that story comes to its climax. He has status that belongs only to God, but he willingly takes the lowly position, even to the point of death, for the sake of those in need. His actions reveal the nature of God and of true humanity made in God's image. Jesus' story of guests at the banquet illustrates this larger biblical story and revelation of God. God always turns upside down our ideas of strength and status.

II. The Humble Host ([LUKE 14:12-14](#))

A. Wrong Action (v. 12)

12. Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.

Jesus’ teaching on humility is for all, host as well as guest. Thus a second story focuses on the *host*, encouraging similar selfless lowliness in the service of others.

Invitations to meals in Jesus’ time are part of a culture of what might be called “returning the favor,” the idea of being *repaid*. Receiving an invitation, whether to the customary late morning meal (translated *luncheon*) or the second meal in late afternoon (*dinner*), carries the unspoken obligation to offer an invitation in return. The savvy host therefore invites those from whom he can expect a similar invitation. Friends and family are natural to invite as guests and can be counted on to return the favor. Invitations to the rich in one’s community promise even greater return on investment. Jesus’ audience is familiar with the customs of inviting such people to a meal with the expectation of receiving an invitation in return.

Jesus, however, rejects all such expectation. Obviously, he seeks and accepts friendship with all kinds of people. But

giving in order to receive is the opposite of Jesus’ teaching of gracious generosity (Luke 6:27–30, 37, 38). For Jesus, such behavior betrays a lack of understanding of and trust in God.

What Do You Think?

What challenges must you overcome in order to practice hospitality toward those who are not part of your demographic or cultural comfort zone?

Digging Deeper

How can your fellow believers assist you in this?

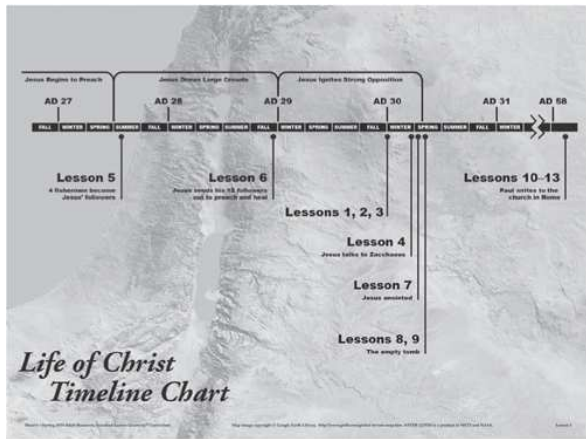
B. Right Action (vv. 13, 14)

13. “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,

In place of friends, relatives, and the rich, Jesus’ recommended guest list features those unable to provide anything in return. Their poverty and disability indicate that they cannot provide adequately for themselves, let alone hosting a meal for others. An invitation to such people would be completely gracious, made with no consideration for returning the favor. It is a gift without strings attached.

The poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind are the same as “the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame” in the story that follows this one (Luke 14:21, same Greek

words). There a wealthy man whose dinner invitations are refused instructs his servants to find such people. It is the weak, not the strong, whom the Lord comes to bless (Luke 5:31; etc.). Jesus had announced as much at the beginning of his ministry in Luke’s Gospel, quoting from the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:18). But this is really nothing new: long before Jesus’ day, God had instructed Israel to use its tithes every three years to be generous with those who had no means of paying back (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29).



Visual for Lesson 1. *Keep this timeline posted throughout the quarter to give your learners a chronological perspective.*

The basis for such generosity is no less than God’s own graciousness (compare Matthew 5:45). Though humans may think of themselves as strong and well supplied, we are all weak, poor, and vulnerable in the eyes of God. Our strength is nothing; our wealth cannot last. Yet God gives freely to us, as he gave freely to

Israel enslaved in Egypt. For all weak, poor, helpless, unworthy humans, Christ came to die, providing an incomparable gift that can never be repaid in any part.

Only when we understand that we are weak like those whom Jesus describes can we rightly receive God’s gracious gift. And when we do, then we cannot help but respond with similar generosity. As we do, we will take no thought of our own position or expectation of repayment.

THE NIGHT GRACE SHONE

Several years ago, sports celebrity Tim Tebow revealed an idea he had in an interview in *People* magazine: his foundation would create “Night to Shine.” This would be a worldwide prom for people with special needs. Tebow said that he wanted to redefine Valentine’s Day by encouraging people to show love to the least among us.

The first Night to Shine in 2015 featured 44 simultaneous prom events with more than 7,000 people with special needs. Attendees walked the red carpet while dressed in formal wear. Special hair, makeup, and shoeshine stations helped them look their best as they headed to the dance floor.

Later, on a talk show while reflecting on the successes of his special-needs proms, Tebow revealed that he had never

attended his own prom. The talk-show host then presented Tebow with a corsage, which he in turn presented to a special needs girl in the audience. The band struck up a tune, and the two danced on national television.

Although those with celebrity status can host parties for the rich and famous, Tebow took the command and promise of Jesus seriously. Will you?

—J. E.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways your church can model gracious humility as a whole?

Digging Deeper

How does whole-church humility differ in appearance and action from humility exhibited by individual Christians?

14. “and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Like guests who deliberately take the low position, hosts who invite those who *cannot repay* them look to someone of higher standing still. God promises to bless the openhandedly generous, as they follow the pattern of his own generosity. The generous person trusts him in the act of generosity, knowing that only God can repay or reward when the recipient

cannot.

That reward, however, does not take the form of immediate compensation. Rather, Jesus speaks of repayment to occur *at the resurrection of the righteous*, when God raises from the dead his faith-filled, generous people. This will vindicate our openhandedness. Our generosity will be rewarded with even greater gifts of his grace ([Luke 19:10–19](#)).

The promise of resurrection at the end of this age is the assurance that God will make things right. This assurance also points us again to Jesus’ own generosity and reliance on God. Jesus delivers this teaching while on his way to his crucifixion in Jerusalem, a death about which he knows and has warned his disciples ([Luke 9:22](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can we keep our service motives selfless and pure as we consider the restitution that awaits us at the resurrection?

Digging Deeper

Consider the self-contradictory situation of attempting to develop a sense of humility of which one can be proud.

Confident in God’s faithfulness, Jesus has also promised his disciples that God will raise him from the dead. Jesus’ death will not be a random event beyond his

control; rather, it will be an act of lowly, humble, self-giving service on behalf of others. Jesus is about to give his life for those who have no means of repaying him, trusting that God will restore him to victorious life in response to his generous self-sacrifice.

As the disciples act generously and humbly with no consideration for status or repayment, they follow in their Lord's footsteps. By faith they (and we) commit themselves to God's care. As God the Father will raise Jesus from the dead, so will he do for them (and us).

Conclusion

A. What Is Biblical Humility?

The twin teachings of Jesus in this lesson focus on proper behavior at a grand dinner. But we mistake his intent if we think that the two teachings are merely about such behavior. They combine to reveal that a person genuinely knows God only as he is revealed in the cross of Christ. Such knowledge of God leads to a radical reordering of one's life, from selfish status-seeking to self-sacrificial generosity and service.

The term *humility* is often attached to the point Jesus makes, and that term too is often misunderstood. It is more than modesty about one's accomplishments or sensitivity about displaying one's status.

Biblical humility is the lowly spirit that puts others before oneself. As such, it combines Jesus' counsel in these two teachings: we are to seek the lowly position first and seek always to serve others generously.

As we embrace Jesus' teaching, we take no thought of what we think we are entitled to receive in return. Biblical humility is not just social reserve. It is following a lowly Master who willingly surrendered his life for the weak and undeserving. It is Christlike love put into action, with no thought of having earned the right to receive anything in return. It faithfully trusts God's promise of victorious resurrection.

How might Jesus offer these teachings if he were addressing them to our time and place? How might he describe the humble servant-disciple in the workplace, in the neighborhood, in the family, in the school or church? How would those stories challenge our deeply held assumptions and cherished attitudes? How can you live out stories like that in the places where you find yourself? How can you live as one who is called to serve, who understands that God's way up is down?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are overwhelmed as we contemplate your Son's humility. May we respond as humble

servants who take the lowly position. As we give no thought of receiving earthly reward, may we trust your promise of resurrection. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's way up is down.

VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 238) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Spring Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 3629119 from your supplier.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student

Into the Lesson

Challenge learners to name the title of the movie as you describe this scene:

Evelyn was about to pull into a parking spot when two women in a red sports car zipped into it first. When she complained to them, they said, "Face it, lady. We're younger and faster!" As they walked off, they heard a crash as Evelyn rammed their car. Before Evelyn drove off she said, "Face it, ladies. I'm older and I've got more insurance."

After you reveal (if no one else does) the movie to be *Fried Green Tomatoes*, say, "I'm sure we've all been in similar situations where someone acted selfishly." After a brief time for responses, continue: "Today's lesson has something to say about humility that we may find surprising."

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Defining Humility" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Give students no more than a minute to complete it, then reveal the answers. Say, "All of the quotes except for the last one contain at least one element of what it means to be humble. As we

study what Jesus has to say, we'll learn his viewpoint on humility."

Into the Word

Recruit a student in advance to be interviewed as the healed man of [Luke 14:1-6](#). Provide the following questions to your actor as part of that preparation:

- 1-Where was Jesus when you came to him?
- 2-What was your medical condition?
- 3-What did Jesus say before he healed you?
- 4-What example did Jesus use from everyday life to justify healing on the Sabbath?

After the interview, give each learner an 8½" x 11" sheet of paper upon which you have printed a large arrow. Form learners into small groups of three or four, then designate each group as either a *Banquet Guest Group* or a *Banquet Host Group*. Inform your groups that as you read aloud the text that is relevant to their designation, group members are to hold up their arrow cards as they use them to indicate how the position of the guest or host changes position.

Proceed to read [Luke 14:7-11](#) slowly for the *Banquet Guests Group(s)*. Expected arrow responses as you read: *the guest puts himself **up** at the wedding feast, but he*

*is forced to go **down**; it's better to go **down** to a low spot and then be raised **up** by the host.*

Then read [Luke 14:12-14](#) slowly for the *Banquet Host Group(s)*. Expected arrow responses as you read: *the host had put himself **up** by inviting only family and wealthy friends. Jesus said he should invite those **down** in society. He would be lifted **up** and blessed at the final resurrection.*

Option. Add one or more *Healed Man Group(s)*. Start the activity by reading [Luke 14:1-6](#) slowly, expecting the following responses from group(s) of this designation: *the man was **down** because of his disease and position in society; he went **up** when Jesus noticed him; he was **down** because the Pharisees didn't think he should be healed on the Sabbath; he was **up** when Jesus healed him anyway.*

Into Life

Give each group a sheet of paper that features a giant V, the word *Heaven* printed at the top of the V, the word *earth* at the bottom of the V, and the text of [Philippians 2:5-11](#) (you create). Ask groups to write each of the seven verse designations on one of the three points of the V to describe Jesus' position as a given verse indicates. Groups should consider the passage of time from left to right across the V. After a few minutes, lead a discussion regarding proper

placement of the references, which are obvious from the text. Wrap up by posing this question: How will you demonstrate the humility of Jesus this week?

Alternate. Distribute copies of “Could You Do It?” from the reproducible page. Have students pair off and discuss.