



This

changes  
every-  
thing!

“For by GRACE you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God.”

—Ephesians 2:8



**RainbowTrail**  
LUTHERAN CAMP

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2018 BIBLE STUDY

# **2018 BIBLE STUDY – *THIS* CHANGES EVERYTHING!**

**We are very grateful to the following individuals for their work in writing the  
2018 Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp Bible study.**

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# ***THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING!***

## **INTRODUCTION:**


Every three years, the ELCA hosts its National Youth Gathering. It has become our tradition to use the Gathering theme as the theme of our Bible study on those years. I love how we can take that common theme and make it our own. This year is no different. A study on grace? Sounds pretty Lutheran! But what I love about this study is that it focuses on the **IMPACT** of grace rather than just focusing on grace. We live in an angry society. We all experience it daily through social media, the printed word, and even face-to-face interactions. We need a change. The power of this study is that it can create kinder, gentler people for the world. It is out of God's grace that we can be grace for this world. I believe this can happen!

The days of this study revisit the transformative power of grace in our lives. It is out of living into that grace that we realize we can be game changers in other people's lives. It is in that transformation that we can be humility, mercy, and generosity for the world:

1. **Grace Changes Everything:** Grace is the absolutely life-changing, unending, impossibly far-reaching, unconditional love of God for you. Now if you can only believe it! It is living in this grace that we live radically changed lives.
2. **I Become Humility:** We learn that it is only through the grace of God that we have the freedom to be exactly who we are, to be honest and open about our strengths and our growing edges. This helps us truly understand what it means to "be humility."
3. **I Become Mercy:** Mercy does matter. It matters because we all need forgiveness. But mercy also matters because it is what can join us all together despite our differences. "***Mercy occurs in not getting what you may deserve, and grace happens in receiving what you didn't deserve or earn.***" How can we be mercy in the lives of those around us?
4. **I Become Generosity:** Generosity has nothing to do with having a lot of money or stuff. Generosity doesn't wait until you accumulate riches. Generosity is marked by starting with a heart that trusts in God no matter what the circumstances. Generosity releases your whole life because God has given us God's whole life.
5. **Grace-Fueled To Be The Change:** God's Grace in Christ changes everything; even, and especially, you and me. We become humility, mercy, and generosity. Having been changed and filled with power from on high, grace-fueled, we become the change the world is so desperately needing—the change God needs us to be. It is out of our willingness to take risks that we will experience the new life that Jesus wants us to know—an abundant life full of love and grace!

Morning Watch is an important part of each day at camp. We will begin each Morning Watch with a welcome, some scriptural reading, a current song, and then move to about a half hour of God Time and reflection. We hope that this discipline of quiet time during the day is one that many will take home with them as they seek to grow in their relationship with God.

I am very excited about this study. This is going to be a challenging study. I hope this study can move campers, staff, and adult leaders to wake each morning, to think about their day ahead, and be more gentle and more kind people in the name of Christ throughout their day. If this happens, they will transform the lives of others, and in doing so, they will be transformed as well. I also hope this study will help you to continue to grow in your own faith journey. Thank you for the opportunity to be partners with you as we serve the youth, adults, and families of the Rocky Mountain Synod and beyond.



Dave Jarvis,  
Executive Director



# 2018 BIBLE STUDY – *THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING!*

## DAY 1 – “GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING”

### A. Introduction To The Theme

My whole life I've known Jesus. My parents took seriously their role of teaching faith to their children. And so, I can't remember a day I didn't know that Jesus loves me. And I never really questioned that...Jesus was a part of life just like brushing my teeth, making my bed or going to church. When I got to college, trying out my freedom, I thought I'd live my life my own way. Jesus wouldn't miss me for a little while would he? I mean there's this grace thing I've heard about my whole life, right? So I went my own way. Ignored and walked away from the Jesus I knew. Trusting he'd be there when/if I decided to come back. He had to, that's what grace means, right?

Well, it kind of seemed true...because Jesus kept showing up in people, in conversations, in circumstances...so much so that I decided instead of being a teacher I would become a youth director. But was I worthy of this? Could I really be good enough to lead kids in faith? After choices I had made, things I had done and not done...was I really good enough? I wondered...but pushed forward. Maybe if I made my life “better,” I'd earn God's favor. For 20+ years I tried to earn God's favor – to be good enough for God's grace. I tried. Hard. I served. I studied. I had my quiet time, was part of Bible studies. I prayed. And I worked harder. But I always fell short.

Oh there were joys along the way, and I believe God used me in my imperfection, but deep inside I was always afraid someone would find out who I really was...and then everyone would know I wasn't good enough to be doing what I was doing

I worked harder. Life got harder. I got hurt. I was angry. I railed at God. I shouted my fear and questions. I flipped him off more than once and told him he could take his idea of love and grace, I wanted out. I wanted nothing to do with this God. But he wouldn't let go. No matter how many times I yelled and walked away, I'd turn around and he was there.

*Psalm 139...Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.*

When I couldn't fight God any longer...I lay down and wept. Was this all there was to following Jesus? You try and try and still fail? I still went through the motions of leading God's people. I didn't know how to do anything else. And I could hide the shame, the fear by being as successful as I could be...just keep going...until...

A faithful, Spirit filled counselor came into my life and helped me and in the midst of that journey...I heard Jesus whisper...you don't have to try so hard...what if you already have my favor? You have my love. It doesn't matter where you go, what you do or don't do...I love you for you. Not because you serve, not because you lead. Stop, beloved one and rest in me. I've got you...I'm holding you. I have been and will...forever. Always. No matter what.

And that, my friends, is grace.

No matter what you do or don't do, no matter how hard you try or don't...grace has chosen you and said – I love you. Period. Nothing more and never anything less.

The dictionary says grace is the free, unmerited love of God. And guess what? It's yours. It's mine. And we can't un-earn it because we didn't earn it to begin with. We can't be good enough for it, but it doesn't matter - - that's what makes it so amazing.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith,  
and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—  
<sup>9</sup> not the result of works, so that no one may boast.  
<sup>10</sup> For we are God's masterpiece,  
created in Christ Jesus for good works,  
which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.  
Ephesians 2:8-10*

This summer, you get to be agents of God's grace in the lives of countless campers. You get the amazing, awesome, life-giving opportunity to make sure every camper knows beyond the shadow of a doubt that they live, breathe and have their being in God's grace. There is nothing more freeing or perhaps more powerful, nothing that can change our hearts and lives more than knowing the God of the universe has chosen you, loves you for who you are...as you are. This is the grace that changes everything and everyone.

When Grace becomes the very air we breathe, the atmosphere we live and have meaning in...that's when it changes us from the heart-side out. Today you will set the scene for the rest of the week. As we look at "Changed By Grace" ...campers have to know first and foremost it all starts with God's grace for them – not just as a group but as individually, beloved children of God. Whether they know everything there is to know about Jesus, or they know nothing at all – God reaches out to them first and claims them in his love and grace.

The rest of the week will be learning how to live out of grace, but for today...it's all about accepting, and breathing deeply the grace of God for them. To help them understand how God's grace works first, we'll look at the stories of Zacchaeus and the woman caught in adultery, letting these stories teach us how God reaches out for us first accepting us as we are and then as we accept and put our hand in his – changing our lives.

*The pages of history they tell me it's true  
That it's never the perfect; it's always the ones with the scars that You use  
It's the rebels and the prodigals; it's the humble and the weak  
The misfit heroes You chose  
Tell me there's hope for sinners like me...*

*Grace is a kingdom with gates open wide  
There's seat at the table just waiting for you, so, come on inside  
Matthew West, "Broken Things"*

## **B. Objectives for This Day of the Study**

- Campers will come to understand what grace really is
- Reframe camper's sense of identity away from the world and based in the grace of God
- Campers will discover how grace can actually change them
- Campers will be bathed in grace in life giving ways
- 

*\*\*Today's goal is to totally immerse each camper in the amazing grace of God...shower them with love and grace. Infuse their hearts with the depth of God's love for them by living grace into their lives in surprising ways!*

## **C. Morning Watch**

### **WELCOME**

Welcome to this day, may this time each morning be a blessing to you and the community that you are a part of this week. May you fully grasp the tremendous love that God has for you and may God empower you live into the gift grace we have received.

## INTRODUCTION

Today we're going to discover God's grace –  
*the absolutely life-changing, unending, impossibly far-reaching, unconditional love of God for you.*

## WHY THIS PASSAGE WAS CHOSEN?

Today's scripture reminds us that God's grace is free - a gift freely given by God to us. We can't earn it, can't be good enough for it – we simply get to receive it. And that is great news!

Ephesians 2:8-10: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

## SONG

**Broken Things** by Matthew West

If grace is a kingdom  
I've stopped at the gate  
Thinking I don't deserve to pass through after all of the mistakes I've made  
But I heard a whisper  
As Heaven bent down  
Said, "Child, don't you know that the first will be last and the last get a crown?"

Now I'm just a beggar in the presence of a King  
I wish I could bring You so much more  
But if it's true You use broken things  
Then here I am Lord, I am all Yours

The pages of history they tell me it's true  
That it's never the perfect; it's always the ones with the scars that You use  
It's the rebels and the prodigals; it's the humble and the weak  
The misfit heroes You chose  
Tell me there's hope for sinners like me

Grace is a kingdom  
With gates open wide  
There's seat at the table just waiting for you  
So, come on inside

## QUESTIONS FOR GOD TIME

- What do you think grace is?
- The scripture verse says you are "God's masterpiece" – what does that mean to you? What do you think it means to be God's masterpiece?
- When you think about what you know about God and what it means to follow Jesus...does God's love feel like a free gift? Or does it feel more like something you have to earn? What makes you think what you do?
- Have you ever thought you've made too many mistakes for God to love you? How might your life change if you chose to believe God loves you just the way you are - not in spite of the way you are?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, sometimes it's so hard to believe you even know me let alone love me. Help me today, to experience how great your love is for me, so I can receive it and believe it. In your name I pray...AMEN.



## **D. The Scripture Study**

We speak of “God’s grace” all the time, but ask someone to define what grace is...and it gives many pause. It’s a church “buzzword”...and while we know it and have an idea, it gets a little fuzzy. So here’s a definition for you:

*Grace, at its truest and greatest is the absolutely life-changing, unending, impossibly far-reaching, unconditional love of God for us.*

Grace then, not only accepts us, but deeply loves us...just as we are. And when we let the truth of grace bathe our hearts and being – we are changed. From the inside out.

Grace always starts with God...our Creator, Savior, Empower-er...reaching out to our soul and claiming. Where we go wrong with understanding grace is when we start trying to earn it. When we start putting ourselves before grace thinking we somehow have to prove we are good enough. It’s easy enough to do...there is very little if anything in this world that truly comes to us before we earn it. In fact, we are taught from very early on we have to earn everything. Things, position, love...we have to be worthy of it.

This is what makes grace so absolutely amazing and life-changing. It cannot be earned. It. Cannot. Be. Earned. So much of our struggle in the Christian life could be transformed if we could simply live and breathe true grace.

Zacchaeus and the woman caught in adultery are two people whose lives were changed by their encounter with grace. These two never tried to “be good enough” for Jesus – in fact, both of them are caught off guard in their encounters with grace. One is sitting in a tree, one is being hauled outside the city gates to be stoned. Pretty sure neither one expected what happened that day. Both were bathed in the grace of Jesus, changing their lives. Today, as we share in their stories, we will lead campers into that place of grace for themselves.

### **Luke 19:1-10**

*Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. <sup>2</sup> There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. <sup>3</sup> He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” <sup>6</sup> Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. <sup>7</sup> But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled. <sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” <sup>9</sup> Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”*

I love the story of Zacchaeus! Here’s a guy nobody likes. Many tax collectors were Jews working for the Roman government. Strike #1 against him. Then, it was a well-known practice that tax collecting was a great gig, because tax collectors would add “a little extra” to the official tax and pocket it for themselves. Fairly lucrative, but not great for dinner invitations! Strike #2. He’s on his way out...

By the time this story appears in Luke (and it only appears in Luke), Jesus has been at this whole ministry thing for a while. He’s healed lepers and servants, welcomed social outcasts, irritated the good church people by “working” on the Sabbath, told some good parables and been accused of hanging out with sinners. Right before meeting Zacchaeus, Jesus is traveling, on his way to Jerusalem. On his way, Jesus and his disciples enter Jericho. By this time, Jesus’ reputation has grown and people were probably very excited they’d get to see this prophet, rabbi, healer in their very own town! On top of Jesus’ reputation already, as he and his disciples come to town, they encounter a blind beggar whose sight is restored by Jesus. Talk about a grand entrance!

Zacchaeus, along with the rest of town, invariably has heard what happened. Everyone wants to see and hear this amazing man! From what we know of Zacchaeus, not only was he not a popular person in town, he was short. So, in trying to see Jesus in the crowds, he was at a double disadvantage. He couldn’t see from behind

everyone, and no one was going to go out of their way to let Zacchaeus see. Why should they? He certainly didn't deserve it.

Zacchaeus, though, is compelled to see Jesus. So he runs (something respectable men never did in his time) ahead and climbs a tree. (and I'm thinking if running for men wasn't cool – climbing trees wasn't up there either!) All Zacchaeus wanted was to see Jesus. But because of grace, he got so much more.

Jesus doesn't just see a guy in a tree and pass by. But he stops – and calls Zacchaeus by name. A celebrity calling a nobody by name. And not only did Jesus call Zacchaeus by name – but he invites himself over for dinner! Of all the people in town who were probably longing for the chance to invite Jesus to dinner – nobody ever expected Zacchaeus to get that privilege – and he didn't even have to ask. Because grace always moves first.

The most remarkable thing that happened that day is that grace came and openly claimed Zacchaeus and captured his heart. And Zacchaeus' life changes. He promises to give half of what he has to the poor and then reimburse anyone he has cheated – not just what he took but paying back x4 for anything he took. That's a pretty big change of heart!

The crazy thing about the story is this scenario isn't just true for Zacchaeus. It can also be true for us.

### **John 8:1-11**

*Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, <sup>2</sup> but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. <sup>3</sup> As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. <sup>4</sup> "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" <sup>6</sup> They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. <sup>7</sup> They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!"<sup>8</sup> Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. <sup>9</sup> When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" <sup>11</sup> "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."*

Once again Jesus shows up embodying grace. Teaching in the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus finds himself at the center of a lot of attention and questions. One morning while he is there, a group of church leaders come barreling in...bringing along a woman who's been caught in adultery touting the Law of Moses for their own purposes. Here's the thing though...the Law of Moses calls for the death of both the man and the woman. (*Deuteronomy 22:22 - <sup>2</sup> If a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.*)

Here she stands – beloved child of God, shamed by church leaders, caught in the midst of a trap, not for her, but for Jesus. And grace steps in. Makes the bold statement – the one of you who hasn't sinned – you throw the first stone. He immediately levels the playing field. Making this one standing in shame, in the midst of injustice an equal to the "good, upstanding" church leaders.

When the leaders can't stand up in truth to grace's challenge...they slink away. And this beloved child of God sees grace in action – I don't condemn you. Go...live. We don't know exactly what happened to that woman – but I find it hard to believe her life didn't change. Facing an unjust death sentence – she is given life. Just like we are.

Whether it's our own actions, the actions of someone else or a combination of both, that lands us in what feels like beyond grace, Grace shows up and says, "Nope! You're mine and I love you...it's not because of what you do or don't do – I love you because I can and do. That's it – so come on, get up, and live, really live."

Zacchaeus, this woman – they could be any of us. And Jesus/Grace comes and meets them and us where we are, loving all of who we are – not in spite of who we are. We don't earn it, but we do get the amazing chance to live out of it. And that's the power of grace. In grace we are made new, claimed, loved and sent into life not needing to earn God's love and favor, but walking in the power and truth of already being claimed and loved no matter.

### **Ephesians 2:8-10**

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

*For by grace you have been saved...* Grace – the unmerited, free gift of God's love is what saves us

*...through faith* – this is what we “do” – we receive and believe Grace comes first and always

*...and this is not your own doing* – we can't earn it, be good enough for it, nothing we do makes us merit grace, it is the gift of God – yep...gift!

*...not the results of works, so no one can boast* – it's not about what we do, how good we do it, we can't earn it, even if we want to or try to

*...For we are God's masterpiece* – think about that! Crafted, created masterpiece of God – not a trial piece, not a practice piece – a masterpiece!

*...created in Christ Jesus for good works* – because we already know grace, we can spend our time doing good works, not to earn our place but out of thanksgiving for what God has already done

*...which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life* – want to know what God wants you to do with your life? Here it is: live the grace you've been given. This is God's plan, God's design for you. You don't have to wonder, seek, figure out – it's all right here – our lives are lives of doing good, bringing grace to the world. That's pretty amazing and pretty awesome. We get to be agents of grace in the world. Doesn't matter your career choice, age, talent, abilities – everyone gets to and can be agents of grace in the world!

It's all here – but do you believe it for yourself? Don't spend 30 years trying to earn what it already yours! Embrace your “graced-ness”. Because it is really hard to give what you don't believe yourself. So check yourself – are you busy trying to earn God's grace? Challenging God to see how far you can go and still be in grace? Or do you live breathing the very life giving air of grace? Have you let it change you? Change your heart? Are you willing to give 4x more than you've received? You can you know...that's how grace works! Let it change your life so your very presence in the midst of your campers is the very real presence of grace for them. Because you can...and it can change a life.

### **ACTUAL POSSIBLE STUDY**

*This is the first day for you and your campers. They don't really know you yet nor you them. Take this into consideration as you do the activities and ask them to share. Make it as easy for them as possible and level the playing field whenever possible. Ideas how to do this:*

- *if you have one who really likes to talk and others who are really quiet, have campers answer in order, or when you call them by name*
- *Have a talking stone – you can only speak when you have the stone in your hands. As leader you make sure each person gets a fair chance at having the stone in their hands*
- *Specifically ask people to answer, or start the answers at a different spot in the group each time if everyone is answering*

### **Supplies you need for this study:**

- Mirror
- Piece of paper and writing utensil for each camper

## Getting Started

### Check-in: (7min)

Today you get to set the atmosphere for Bible study time for the rest of the week here. As important as the content of each study is, it is as important to create this space as safe space to share themselves, their ideas, their experiences, thoughts and questions.

One great way of helping create that safe space with your group is by checking in. During check-in each person gets to answer each question and when they are done, they say, "I'm in" and the group responds with, "Bless you". This helps campers pay attention but it also helps everyone know when the person is done speaking. You, as the leader always go first, modeling the depth of sharing.

- 1<sup>st</sup> round: State your name and then one thing you really like to do and one thing you really don't like doing
- 2<sup>nd</sup> round: State your name and tell us one thing you're really good at

*\*\*If you have a group that has a hard time paying attention or needs distractions while they talk...here are some ideas to help:*

- *have everyone turn to a partner and share their answer with their partner...then have partner's share each other's answers with the group or simply have each person share what they shared with their partner*
- *have everyone stand up and once they have spoken have them sit down (or vice versa)*
- *while you're walking to your bible study spot, walk for a short way then stop and ask a question. After everyone has answered, walk a short way further, stop ask another questions. Keep this going till you get to your bible study spot.*
- *have a talking stone – when you hold the rock that's your time to talk*

### KIRBERG game – round one (10 min)

Play for fun...with 'losers' and 'winners' – See Appendix

### Intro Today's Theme: Changed By Grace

Today is all about God's grace – that unmerited, extravagant, absolutely life-changing, unending, impossibly far-reaching love of God for us. This is not what your campers experience in life on a daily basis. Even the youngest campers have learned they have to earn what they get – for example: if you want to get to go first – you have to earn it by being quiet. Want a good grade – you have to earn it by working hard. You get the idea. Today is about something totally foreign to our cultural way of life. So, you can't just talk about it – you are going to have to live this into your group today and all week long.

### Have everyone sit down...then ask: (12 min)

- When I say the word grace – what do you think of? (table prayers, something you hear at church, a friend's name, etc)

Then say something like this:

*Well, today we're going to discover God's grace for us – and it's way more than someone's name or a prayer we say before meals. Grace is actually God's amazing unending love for each one of us. (For older campers you can use the "real" definition: Grace is the absolutely life-changing, unending, impossibly far-reaching love of God for us.) So first we're going to look at a couple of stories of God's grace that we find in the Bible.*

Give one story to half of your group and the other story to the other half of the group...saying:

*I'm going to give you a story to look up (assign stories). When you find the story, you can either sit and wait or help others find the story they are looking for.*

Once everyone has their stories – read them aloud. You can do this in a variety of ways:

- Have one person read each story

- have each person read a certain number of verses of the story they have (making sure you read all of one story before you read the next!)
- read silently

Once stories are read, ask:

- What did Zacchaeus do for a living? (tax collector – and he cheated people out of money doing it)
- In the story of Zacchaeus, what did he have to do in order to see Jesus? (run ahead, climb a tree)
- What did Zacchaeus have to do in order to get Jesus to come to his house? (nothing, Jesus invited himself)
- Jesus picking Zacchaeus out of the crowd – even when he was probably one of the least deserving – is a picture of God’s grace – loving even when we don’t deserve it. How did God’s grace change Zacchaeus? (gave away half of what he owned, paid back those he cheated at 4x what he took)
- In the woman caught in adultery story...what does it mean to be caught in adultery? (sleeping with someone else’s husband/wife)
- What was Jesus doing when they brought the woman to him? (teaching in the Temple area)
- The Law of Moses (the laws the Jewish people lived by) actually says this: *Deuteronomy 22:22 - <sup>2</sup> If a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.* Knowing that – do you think the scribes and Pharisees were actually worried about doing the right thing? (no) What makes you say what you do? (If they were really trying to uphold the law, the man would have been there too.)
- Where did Jesus show grace to the woman? (when he told the crowd the first one who hadn’t sin could throw the first stone and then telling her he didn’t condemn here either)

### **KIRBERG Game round 2 (10 min)**

No ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ – See Appendix

#### **After the game ask:**

- Which way do you think is more fun to play? What makes you choose that way?
- How is the first way we played – where there are losers – like how life is for you and/or others? (there are always winners and losers. In this world, life is set up so there are always winners and losers)
- Do you think it’s possible to live life like the second way – where there are no losers? What makes this hard? What makes it unrealistic do you think?
- If you had to say God’s grace was more like the way we played first or second – what would you say? What makes you say what you do?

### **God’s Grace For You (15min)**

You will need a mirror.

(no mirror involved yet)

After the game have everyone sit in a close circle. Go around the group and have each person say, “My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am \_\_\_\_\_.” They can say whatever they want to say, they just have to really believe it. This is not a time to try and make sure everyone’s answer is positive. Let their answers be what they are.

After everyone has had a chance to answer, take your mirror out and say:

*We’re going to pass this mirror around to each person, and when you have it in your hands, I want you to hold it so you can look into it and as you look I want you to tell the group what you see. After each person has had a chance to tell us what they see, we as a group will add – and you are a loved child of God. When you’re done, simply pass the mirror to another person in the group and then they will do the same thing. We’re going to do this until everyone has a chance to look into the mirror. When you are listening, I encourage you to really listen to what the other people have to say, so when you speak everyone will also listen to you. Also, we honor each other when we give our attention to whoever is speaking and that’s a great thing to do for each other.*

As leader, you start...looking into the mirror and being very specific about what you see (blue eyes, brown hair, a crooked nose, dark skin). But also encourage each to see beyond the obvious physical traits (a daughter/son,

hockey player, singer, dancer, friend, cousin, good student, etc). You might have to help the group say the line “and you are a loved child of God” to you.

When everyone has had a chance to go...say to the group:

*Do you know why we added that last line for everybody? Because it's true. Whether you know God well or not – he has claimed you as someone he loves. Look around the circle – God's grace – that love of God's that will seek us out again and again and again...won't give up on us, no matter what...that grace claims every single one of you. You don't have to be good enough, you don't have to try and please God all the time, you don't have to do anything – other than believe God really loves you. And the amazing thing is when we chose to believe God's grace is for us...our lives can change.*

*I know some of you might not believe that right now. You know you've screwed up. You've been taught in order to be loved by God you have to be a “good person”. Maybe your church or your family isn't a place of love. Maybe it seems like Jesus is all about following a bunch of rules...but I want you to know this. Most important thing to God is that you know he loves you. Listen to this: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” Did you catch that? Not because of something you've done or not done – but just because God loves you. How amazing is that?*

*Sometimes, what we've been taught, or what we've experienced makes us question if God really even knows we're alive let alone, loves us. And so this is what I'm gonna ask you to do...I'm gonna give you a piece of paper and something to write with and I want you to write down all the reasons you think God might not love you. Are there things you've done or said? Or not done or said? Are there questions you have? Whatever it is write it down.*

Once everyone is done...gather the writing utensils and then have them fold up their paper and hold it in their hands. Tell them you have a quick story to tell them...and tell – don't read – the following story:

*True story: Once there was a family who adopted a daughter who had been adopted by another family previously. The first family never quite made their adopted child truly one of their family. After a couple of rough years, they dissolved the adoption, and this new family ended up welcoming an eight-year-old girl into their home.*

*For one reason or another, whenever the previous family had vacationed at Disney World, they took their biological children with them, but they left their adopted daughter with a family friend. Usually - at least in the mind of the little girl...this happened because she did something wrong that made it impossible for her to go on the trip.*

*And so, by the time this new family adopted her, the little girl had seen many pictures of Disney World and she had heard all about it. But she had always been the one left on the outside. Once her new dad found out about this, he made plans to take her to Disney World.*

*He thought he knew all about taking kids to Disney World. He knew from previous experiences that the seeing cast members in freakishly oversized mouse and duck costumes somehow turns children into squirming bundles of emotions.*

*What he didn't expect was that the very idea of visiting this dream world would produce a stream of downright devilish behavior in their newest daughter. In the month leading up to the trip, she stole food when a simple request would have gained her a snack. She lied when it would have been easier to tell the truth. She whispered insults that were carefully crafted to hurt her older sister as deeply as possible — and, as the days on the calendar moved closer to the trip, she got worse.*

*A couple of days before the family headed to Florida, the little girl's daddy pulled her into his lap to talk through her latest escapade. “I know what you're going to do,” she stated flatly. “You're not going to take me to Disney World, are you?” The thought hadn't actually crossed his mind, but her behavior suddenly started to*

*make some sense. She knew she couldn't earn her way into the Magic Kingdom — she had tried and failed that several times before — so she was living in a way that placed her as far as possible from the most magical place on earth.*

*So, her daddy asked her, "Is this trip something we're doing as a family?"*

*She nodded, brown eyes wide and tear-rimmed.*

*"Are you part of this family?"*

*She nodded again. "Then you're going with us.*

*Sure, there may be some consequences to help you remember what's right and what's wrong — but you're part of our family, and we're not leaving you behind."*

*Well, her behavior didn't really get better after that moment. Her choices pretty much spiraled out of control at every hotel and rest stop all the way to Disney. Still, they headed to Disney World on the day they had promised, and it was a typical Disney day with lots of lines, lots of people, expensive food, all mingled with just enough magic to consider maybe going again someday.*

*In their hotel room that evening, a very different child emerged. She was exhausted, thoughtful, and a little weepy at times, but her month-long rebellion had faded. When bedtime rolled around, her daddy prayed with her, held her, and asked, "So how was your first day at Disney World?"*

*She closed her eyes and snuggled down into her stuffed unicorn. After a few moments, she opened her eyes ever so slightly. "Daddy," she said, "I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours."*

*It wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours. -*

*edited from: PROOF: Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace By Daniel Montgomery and Timothy Paul Jones*

Then say something like this:

*This. This is grace. You can yell at God, you be your worst self and God is gonna love you like crazy. So, what if we decide right now, at least for this week, to believe in God's grace for us? What if you chose to believe in God's grace for you? If you're willing to give it a try...here's what I invite you to do: Take that piece of paper you're holding...and give it to me. I'll hold onto them until campfire tonight. Then, at campfire, we'll take them and put them in the fire and let them go. After you hand me your paper, I'll hand you the mirror. As you look in the mirror – I'll say to you – Child of God – God's grace is for you. I'll ask you to repeat it, looking into the mirror saying Child of God, God's grace is for me. After everyone who wants to do this, had done it...we'll pray. Know this—if this is hard for you. If you don't know if you can let go of the paper right now, you don't have to. Hold onto it. If or when you're ready, if that's later today or not until Saturday – you come find me - and we'll take your paper to a fire and burn it together. Let me pray for us as we do this and then I'll pray after too.*

*Dear Jesus, we want to believe your grace is for each one of us. Even if we're scared, or not sure we believe, give us the courage in this time to choose to trust you and your grace for us. In your name Jesus, we pray, Amen.*

After everyone who wants to has had a chance to do this (and remember to make it OK if someone isn't ready to let their paper go)...gather the group together in prayer – hold hands or stand close, and pray something like this:

*Jesus, you are amazing! And so we want to live out of a place of grace with you. Thank you for meeting us here today and giving us the courage to step into your grace (For those of us still trying to figure this out, we pray you'll shower them so much with grace this week, that they too can trust you.) Be our courage to live out of your grace today and every day. In your name and power, Jesus, we pray – and all God's children say....AMEN!*

## **E. Additional Study Ideas**

### **\* IF THINGS AREN'T GOING WELL...**

- Activity is always a good thing if things aren't going well. Especially with younger campers. Play one of the games again. Or pick your Bible study up and move it to another place. Or do Bible study and purposefully move to a couple different places during the time together.
- While you're walking – have everyone answer questions...or do more check in rounds like:
  - Tell us the name of any pets you've had
  - What's your favorite thing about school? Least favorite?
  - How do you feel about camp so far? What makes you say what you say?
  - What's your favorite thing to do during school breaks?
  - What's your favorite meal?

### **HAVE YOU EVER...**

- ...been embarrassed by your parents? What'd they do? What'd you do?
- ...been in an ambulance? When? Why? What happened?
- ...laughed so hard you wet your pants? What were you laughing about? What did you do? Did anyone notice?
- ...regretted something you said to your parents? How did it happen? What did you say? How did you feel?
- ...felt left out? What happened? Did you do anything about it? What?
- ...had surgery? When? What for? How did you feel before and after?
- ...wanted to change one thing about your school? What was/is it?
- ...wanted to change something about yourself? What was it? Why did you want to change it? What have you done about it? What has changed?
- Especially since this is the first day, you could play Two Truths and a Lie – each person tells the group three things about themselves that are not obvious (like toothbrush color, favorite vacation, something they've done that is cool, number of siblings, etc). Two of the things they tell should be truths and one should be a lie. The group then tries to guess which of the three things is the lie. Go around the whole group this way, until everyone, including you have told 2 truths and a lie about yourselves and the group has to guess which are which.

## **F. Ideas to Incorporate the Theme Throughout the Day**

### **\* The Amazing (g)Race Day**

All day long is a “race” – teams where a certain color to identify them (red, blue, yellow, etc) by a piece of fabric or a stripe of paint, etc. Each part of the day has a “great race activity” to complete?

- All Camp – Amazing Race – based off the Great Race on TV – each team is given a clue to where they have to go and what they have to do once there. Once the event is complete, to the satisfaction of a “judge” they are given a clue to the next place they have to go and thing they have to do. Be creative with the tasks to do.

Pinterest is a GREAT supplier of awesome ideas...but some suggestions might be:

- Whole team has to cross the creek barefoot in a minute or less
- Team has to play a round of Gaga ball until only one person is left
- Whole team has to crawl the length of the field together
- Tie entire team's legs together, then “3 legged” run to the other side of field
- Detour ideas:
  - Dress in a ridiculous costume and run 3 laps around lake
  - Build a bike and ride 1 lap around lake
- Meals - could be from different countries or a meal could be part of the race!?!?
- Worship –
  - Morning could be the start of the race,
  - Evening the “finish line” or champion's circle...but what happens is that there is no “winner” because in God's grace we are all winners. We get what we don't deserve...the



prize of God's grace forever and always. Here is where you could stress the awesomeness of grace is that no one loses!

- Snack/dessert – talk about if you add an 's' to desert you get dessert – have everyone make their own ice cream sundae or snack/dessert of some kind

#### \* Desert Oasis

God's grace is an oasis in a dry a world

- All Camp could be a scavenger hunt that is around finding water (water bottles, cups of water, stream water, etc.)
- Scripture you could use for worship:  
Psalm 107:35 He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.

Isaiah 35:5-7 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6 then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; 7 the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

Isaiah 55:1 – All who are thirsty, come to the water!

- Songs: All Who Are Thirsty,

#### \* Time Travelers

God's grace is timeless

- All Camp could be a 'race' to see which group could go to each station and complete the tasks. Each station would be set up as a different time era and the task has to do with that era: caveman, (be a dinosaur) wild west 'shoutout' – (throw stones at pop cans to knock over) Renaissance (paint like DaVinci), Roaring 20's (dance the cha-cha), etc.
- Worship: different elements could be done in different time eras – Gregorian chant style, contemporary, traditional

### **G. Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, Suggestions**

#### \* Songs

- #25 – Psalm 25
- #34 – Borning Cry
- #45 – Dance with Me
- #43 – Isaiah 43
- #49 – Light the Fire
- #59 – Jesus, Lover of My Soul
- #81 – Grace Like Rain
- #121 – Psalm 121

#### \* New Songs:

- Amazing Grace/My Chains are Gone (Chris Tomlin)
- Your Grace is Enough (Matt Maher)
- This is Amazing Grace (Phil Wickham)

(all these can be found on Worship Together:

<http://worship-songs-resources.worshiptogether.com/music>

OR <https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/tab>)

#### \*Scripture

John 1:14, 16

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth....<sup>16</sup> From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Romans 11:5-6

<sup>5</sup> So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. <sup>6</sup> But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup> Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it

would leave me,<sup>9</sup> but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

## **H. Ideas to Adjust the Study Down for Juniors**

### **\* Ideas to try with Junior Age (4-6 grade)**

- When reading the stories – you might want to use slightly easier questions like:
  - Zacchaeus:
    - What did Zacchaeus do for a job? (explain what a tax collector did and that people didn't like tax collectors)
    - Why couldn't he see Jesus? (he was short)
    - What did he do so he could see Jesus? (climbed a tree)
    - What did Jesus do that surprised Zacchaeus? (asked to come to his house)
    - What did other people think of Jesus going to Zacchaeus' house? (they grumbled)
  - Woman caught in adultery:
    - What is adultery? (sleeping with someone else's husband/wife)
    - Why would that be bad? (goes against what God tells us, hurts other people)
    - What did the scribes and Pharisees do? (brought the women in front of Jesus and a crowd)
    - Do you think they really wanted to have the woman killed? What makes you say that?
    - What did Jesus do? (He made the others own up to the fact that they were sinners, too. He cared about the woman and didn't condemn her for bad behavior)
    - After the mirror activity:

*Do you know why we added that last line for everybody? Because it's true. God loves you just as you are. Look around the circle – God's grace – that love of God's that is there for you always...that grace won't give up on us, no matter what. You just believe God really loves you. And the amazing thing is when we chose to believe God's grace is for us...our lives can change.*

*I know that might be hard to understand right now. You know you're not good all the time. And maybe, you've learned that Jesus wants you to be a “good person”. Maybe your church or your family isn't a place of love. Maybe it seems like Jesus is all about following a bunch of rules...but I want you to know this. Most important thing to God is that you know he loves you. Listen to this: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” Did you catch that? Not because of something you've done or not done – but God loves you and all you do is accept that love for you. How amazing is that?*

*And sometimes, what we've been taught, or what we've experienced makes us question if God really even knows we're alive let alone, loves us. And so this is what I want you to do. I'm gonna give you a piece of paper and something to write with and I want you to write down all the reasons you think God might not love you. Are there things you've done or said? Are there questions you have? Whatever it is write it down.*

- After the story:

Here again you might use a little simpler language, something like:

*This is grace. The daddy had great grace for his daughter. He didn't give her what she deserved based on her behavior – he gave her what he knew was best for her. God is the same way only more! You can yell at God, you be your worst self and God is gonna love you like crazy.*

*So, what if we decide right now, at least for this week, to believe in God's grace for us? What if you chose to believe in God's grace for you? If you're willing to give it a try...here's what I invite you to do: Take that piece of paper you're holding...and give it to me. I'll hold onto*

*them until campfire tonight. Then, at campfire, we'll take them and put them in the fire and let them go. After you hand me your paper, I'll hand you the mirror. As you look in the mirror – I'll say to you – Child of God – God's grace is for you. I'll ask you to repeat it, looking into the mirror saying Child of God, God's grace is for me. After everyone who wants to do this, had done it...we'll pray. Know this—if this is hard for you. If you don't know if you can let go of the paper right now, you don't have to. Hold onto it. If or when you're ready if that's later today or not until Saturday – you come find me and we'll do this together. Let me pray for us as we do this and then I'll pray after too.*

## **I. Ideas to Adjust the Study Up for Senior High**

\* Ideas to try with Sr High (9-12 grade)

During the Mirror activity...especially at the end, instead of it being you that does the blessing exchange (Child of God – God's grace is for you. Child of God, God's grace is for me) you might have each camper do it with the next person. This could be a great group bonding activity.

- Also with the Mirror activity, before they give you the sheet of paper, you might ask them to read aloud the things they wrote. There is power in naming these things out loud, and it also helps others know that there are others who struggle with the same things they do. If you chose to do this, remind the group that all this is held in strict confidence within the group. There's no sharing with someone else outside their Bible study group what someone wrote on their paper. This is VERY IMPORTANT!

Let them wrestle with the text a bit more. Don't give them answers. You could also do the actual text study Lectio Divina style. (Don't be afraid of this with high schoolers – they have amazing abilities to do this style of Bible Study) This is an ancient practice involving letting scripture speak to you. It empowers people and helps them realize that the Spirit speaks to us all – not just counselors or leaders or pastor or youth directors. But the Spirit speaks to them as well.

- Here's how it works:
  - Make sure each person in the group has something to write with and write on.
  - Tell your group you are going to read a passage from scripture. They are to listen. Notice what jumps out at them – what words or phrases catch their interest.
  - After you have read through the passage there will be a time of silence for people to think about what they just heard and to write down what caught their attention, if they had any questions, write those down too.
  - Then you will read the scripture again and they will listen again. In the silence that follows they can write down anything else that caught their attention/came to mind. Ask if there are any questions now.
  - After everyone is ready – do exactly what you said you would. Read the text, leave some silence (like at least a minute or two – it's ok if no one is writing, let them think about, swirl around their hearts and heads. Then read the text again and then again the minute or two of silence.
  - Next have group members share what caught their attention, what did they hear? What questions or thoughts did they have? You don't have to be able to answer questions, but you can mull them over as a group. Be prepared for some profound thoughts and ideas!

## **J. Parent Devotional**

### **Scripture**

Ephesians 2:8-10

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

## **Reflection**

Grace – it's a church buzzword, yet when asked to explain it – often people trip up over how to exactly define it. So, here's a definition for you: *Grace is the absolutely life-changing, unending, impossibly far-reaching love of God for us. For you.*

Today at camp, we are diving into the one thing that changes everything – God's amazing grace. The problem that is so often present is that we get this warped idea that we have to somehow earn God's grace and favor. Because it can't really be true that God's grace is free – nothing is free. So we have to work for it, right? We don't want to disappoint God, do we? Problem with that line of thinking is that we will inevitably fail...and "disappoint" God if we're basing God's grace on who we are.

But here's the GREAT NEWS...God's grace is based on who God is – not on how good we are/aren't. Ephesians reminds us grace is a free gift of God...given to us – God's masterpieces! If we lived our lives out of THIS place instead of trying to earn grace...how different our lives could be.

One thing your child will have done at camp is write down what they think keeps them from believing God's grace is for them. Today you are invited to do the same thing. Once written...tear it up, destroy it...look in the mirror and tell yourself – Child of God, God's grace is for you...as you are. Say it until you start to believe it.

## **Activity**

Once your child is home, you could talk about what you wrote on your sheet and what they wrote on theirs. Together decide you will no longer let those things define your worthiness...but instead think about ways you could live differently believing God's grace is for you just as you are – today, tomorrow and every day. Figure out ways to remind each other how great God's grace for you all really is...and then live those reminders out in each other's lives.

Take time to listen to Matthew West's Song: Broken Things...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwKuz8a8Jnk>

*The pages of history they tell me it's true  
That it's never the perfect; it's always the ones with the scars that You use  
It's the rebels and the prodigals; it's the humble and the weak  
The misfit heroes You chose  
Tell me there's hope for sinners like me...*

*Grace is a kingdom with gates open wide  
There's seat at the table just waiting for you, so, come on inside*

## **Prayer**

God, we so easily discount your grace or try to make it harder to receive by putting rules around it or limits on it. Today, let me breathe in the truth that your grace is for me – always, no matter what. In your name I pray, Jesus. Amen.



# 2018 BIBLE STUDY – *THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING!*

## DAY 2 – “I BECOME HUMILITY”

### A. Introduction To The Theme

In a world where pride and self-promotion are rewarded above almost everything else, somehow learning humility changes us to the point where we realize that lifting up other people and serving others, the less our own successes matter. There is true joy in a community that can lift each other up rather than individuals needing to be “more” or “better” than others. Once we understand fully that we have been changed by grace, then we can discover that, as a reflection of that grace, we have the freedom to become more than we ever were before. We can “become” humility rather than simply being humble when the opportunity arises and it is convenient.

Ironically, saying “I am humble” is an oxymoron. Rather we seek to make the process about becoming humility so that others see it in us. This is why it is so much more than a one-time action but something that should be done so much it becomes a lifestyle. It becomes not something that we do but simply something that we are. This is reminiscent of Matthew 5: 16 – “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Our light of humility should shine so bright through the grace of God that others see it in us and want to emulate that same sense of humility. Now THAT also seems like a contradiction. Isn’t humility by its very nature inconspicuous? If people can readily see that we are being humble, are we really being humble? I think this, again, is the difference between being something that we do and something that we are. When it is just part of who we are, part of our character, then people will see it for the genuine characteristic that it is.

Humility is recognizing that God and others are actually mostly responsible for the achievements in our lives. Humility is seeing the gifts in others and lifting them up without needing to compare our own gifts to them. Humility is the simple act of kindness in seeing the beautiful child of God that others are, and in so doing, showing them the grace of God to help them recognize their own beauty and divinity.

For many people, humility is the most important part in learning. With humility, we look inwardly and figure out what we don’t know and maybe what we want to know. In our humility, we ask questions of those who may know more about these things than ourselves, perhaps a teacher, a parent or a pastor. In your preparation to lead this study, maybe think about the following questions. What things do you want to know more about or how to do? Who in your life could teach you these things?

It’s important to recognize that being humble doesn’t mean you don’t strive to be the best or to win the race you’re running. It’s more about recognizing that you could not have done it completely on your own. Many professional athletes will point to the sky or do the sign of the cross after a big score or athletic achievement and while I think there are arguments to be made against that, at least the athlete is admitting that their achievement was with God’s help. In the same way, despite being known for being all about themselves, the fact that actors who win academy awards almost always run out of time saying thank you to all the people who helped get them there is a nod to humility, whether it is sincere or not.

Humility is also not the other direction, that is, considering yourself to be inadequate or of LESS value than anyone else. You are what you are, with your strengths and weaknesses, your skills and your scars, all of which define you. You are loved for exactly who you are. But none of that makes you any less loved or on less equal terms with others. It’s how we relate to others in our successes and who we give the credit to for those successes. You do not have to put yourself down to be humble nor remove yourself from possibilities to prove how humble you are. Humility gives space for everyone to shine.

We will read biblical and real-world examples of people who learned, sometimes the hard way, that humility turns what we think we know about the world upside down. It develops character, compassion and wisdom in us that we may never have found otherwise.

We will talk about two scriptures which illustrate the idea of humility. In the first, from Luke 18: 9-14, we will investigate the short parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector and talk about what humility looked like to Jesus and how we see that humility and the pride and selfishness of the Pharisee reflected in those around us. In the second, the story of the general Naaman, we will learn about how sometimes stubborn pride can interfere with our own growth and healing.

Throughout it all, we learn that it is only through the grace of God that we have the freedom to be exactly who we are, to be honest and open about our strengths and our growing edges, which helps us truly understand what it means to “become humility”. We will also see that there is a natural progression to the week. If someone can understand what an amazing gift grace is, then being humble, “becoming humility” will come more naturally, leading to a better understanding of what being merciful means, which comes in tomorrow’s theme.

## **B. Objectives for this Day of the Study**

Most campers will assume automatically that they are humble, so part of the challenge will be to get them to understand the strong draw for pride and being “the best” or being #1. Putting others first and recognizing the achievements of others is actually often difficult. Part of the challenge of this week is that it helps to first truly understand what grace is, and to be courageous and willing to believe that this grace is for us and accept it in our lives, AND THEN learning that modeling that grace for others is most evident in an attitude of humility.

- \* We will understand what humility is, AND what it isn’t.
- \* We will see that breaking the cultural norm of “me first” and being humble is not weakness but strength. Being vulnerable takes far more courage than being strong.
- \* We will think and talk about the strength in Biblical and real-life heroes through their humility.
- \* We will encourage the campers to model humility in lifting up others.
- \* We will give the campers space to ask questions of what is and what is not humble in the public sphere and why that is important.
- \* We pray that campers will be able to apply the practice of humility here at camp and especially when they return home.

## **C. Morning Watch**

### **WELCOME**

Welcome to this day, may this time each morning be a blessing to you and the community that you are a part of this week. May God empower you to find strength and courage in Humility. May the grace we receive from our God be a motivation to be humble in our lives.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today we will talk about the complex and countercultural subject of humility as modeled by Jesus.

### **WHY WAS THIS PASSAGE CHOSEN?**

This idea of humility that Jesus presents is so counter cultural it can be difficult to wrap our brains around it. But that’s exactly why it is so important. When we meet people who live out humility, we feel relaxed and open and included. This is because we know that we are fully being seen, heard, and accepted for who we are, our strengths and skills and our faults. To be treated by someone else with humility is to get a small taste of what grace from God is all about, to be loved and accepted and even honored, for being exactly who we already are, without any judgement or competitive comparison.

Luke 18 : 14b “for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

### **SONG**

*Humble King* by Brenton Brown

Oh kneel me down again  
Here at Your feet  
Show me how much You love humility  
Oh Spirit be the star that leads me to  
The humble heart of love I see in You

**CHORUS:**

You are the God of the broken  
The friend of the weak  
You wash the feet of the weary  
Embrace the ones in need  
I want to be like You, Jesus  
To have this heart in me  
You are the God of the humble  
You are the humble King

**QUESTIONS FOR GOD TIME**

- What does it mean to admit your weaknesses and your faults?
- How do you feel when you are criticized? Do you view it as a way to learn and grow or do you resent it? Why?
- In conversation, do you tend to talk about yourself or do you ask about the qualities in others and how they got them? Be honest with yourself when you think about this question.
- How often are you brave enough to say “I don’t know.”? Why is it sometimes hard to say that?
- Who in your life has shaped you to be the person you are? What positive things about you have you picked up from others?

**CLOSING PRAYER**

God, you made me perfect just the way I am. My strengths and skills as well as my flaws and weaknesses are all part of who I am and I am grateful for all of it. Help me to see that admitting my weakness is actually strength and that any strengths I have, I have only developed thanks to God and the help of the community around me that supports me, teaches me, and helps me grow. Amen.

**D. Scripture Study**

Thoughts on the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

This is a short and simple story by Jesus. But it highlights a characteristic common not only in Jesus’ time but in our own, that of the need for humility in world that doesn’t reward the humble but instead rewards the proud, the vain, and the egotistical. As is typically the case with Jesus, he turns our common perceptions on how the world works upside down.

We can see examples of this throughout the Bible and we will talk about a few examples but something that might be more surprising is that in many cases the most effective world leaders have been the ones who exemplified humility or learned humility along the way to become better leaders and better people.

It may be the most important part of the parable that both people are telling the truth. It’s not in what they are saying but in how they are saying it. The Pharisee is simply stating what he actually does. He fasts twice a week and tithes (gives a tenth of all that he has) to the church. He is probably a good, upstanding member of the church community who many people admire and desire to be more like. But the problem is that the Pharisee separates himself from others, trying to show himself to be better than others. It doesn’t change his actions but it puts them in a different light. Imagine if the Pharisee had simply said nothing. Would your opinion of him change then even if his actions stayed the same? I believe even Jesus would say yes. So, it’s not the actions but the self-evaluation of those actions that we need to call into question. It’s not that we try to do our best, to be the best human beings we can be, but how we evaluate ourselves in relation to others and to whom we give the credit.

In contrast, whenever Jesus uses a Tax collector in a parable or example, he is doing so because tax collectors were some of the most despised people in their culture. They were hired by the government to collect



taxes on the surface but they were known to extort more money for themselves and to take great advantage of their position. People did not like tax collectors. It is significant that Jesus even called a tax collector to be one of his disciples. Jesus has a habit of making the likely heroes in stories to be the villains and the likely villains out to be the heroes.

In this case, the tax collector recognized his own shortcomings, his own faults, and was so aware of them that he found it difficult to even look up to heaven and show his face. In one short sentence, he recognizes that he is a sinner who makes mistakes and is in need of the grace of God. Unlike the Pharisee, he doesn't put himself above anyone else, despite his position as a tax collector. This does not mean that he is any more scrupulous than other tax collectors. He may indeed do all the shady actions of the typical tax collector. But, like the Pharisee, humility is less about the actions and more about how they view their actions and their lives in relation to other people and to God.

**Opening Prayer – Feel free to use this prayer, make up your own, or ask your campers if anyone would like to pray.**

Dear God, thank you for making me who I am. Thank you for this time we have together to study your word. Help us to challenge each other to learn why humility is so important in a world where being the best seems to be all that matters. Please help me to understand that it is by your grace and by the gift of people who love me that I am even here at all today. I will work to recognize the wonderful gifts and talents in others as I also learn to appreciate that all I am is owed to you and the love and care of those around me. AMEN

**Opening Questions/Starters –**

**Counselor** – Consider one or more of the following options:

1. Have campers give you their highs and lows since yesterday at this time.
2. Have them talk about their day, what they did, perhaps from the hike day.
3. Ask a question or two of this list to get the group thinking about the concept of humility?
  - What is your definition of Humility, in your own words?
  - What are a few things that you are really good at, better than most others your age?
  - What are some things that other people are far better than you at?
  - When you are really good at something or you do really well as something, how do you react?
  - How do you see others acting when they win or succeed at something? How are these actions a good way or a bad way to act?

**Luke 18:9-14**

<sup>9</sup>He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ <sup>13</sup>But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

(Included is verse 14 of the Message translation of the Bible because that verse is written in a way that might hit the campers in a more meaningful way. Try to use both if you can.)

Luke 18: 14The Message (MSG)

**14** Jesus commented, “This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you’re going to end up flat on your face, but if you’re content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.”

Look back at:

## Verse 9

1. Who was Jesus telling this parable to? Why is this so important?
2. What does it mean, in your own words, to “regard others with contempt”? (feeling that others are below them)
3. Most of us at some time in our lives have regarded others with contempt? Can you remember a time you did this and why?
4. Do you think Jesus would have been talking to you here? Maybe not. Can you think of people you know who fit the audience Jesus was likely talking to?

## Verse 10-12

5. One hard part about this passage is that it’s easy for any of us to judge the people that the Pharisee mentions: thieves, rogues, adulterers and tax collectors. We probably feel at least a little, right now, that we are better than those people. But how does it make you feel that God loves them just as much as you? That God sees them just as special and amazing as you are? Does that seem fair? As words from the Relient K song “Be My Escape” go, “...the beauty of grace is that it makes life not fair.”
6. Can you think of types of people that are generally looked down on or thought of as **less-than** other people? Why are they thought of that way?
7. The society of the Pharisee looked very highly on the fact that he followed the law and fasted and gave a significant portion of his income. Does this make him a good person, because of his actions? If you hadn’t heard him speak, how would you think of him? Does your opinion of him change simply because of what he says? Why?
8. Visualize the Pharisee. How is he standing? What is his posture? Is he standing tall and proud or is he hunched over? What is the expression on his face?

## Verse 13

9. In contrast to the previous question, visualize the tax collector. How is he standing? What is his posture? Is he standing tall and proud or is he hunched over? What is the expression on his face? Why does the passage specifically say that he “would not even look up to heaven”? What does it mean in this passage that he “beat his breast”? What does that visual mean to you?

## Verse 14 (from the Message version, if used!)

10. The wording of the end of this passage is a bit different in the Message version of the Bible.

“If you walk around with your nose in the air, you’re going to end up flat on your face, but if you’re content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.”

Have a camper explain this part of the verse in their own words.

## 2 Kings 5:1-17

**(Feel free to read the entire story, depending on time. A summary is written below which may be enough for this Bible study)**

In another story, Naaman, a very powerful and rich general, suffered from Leprosy. He heard of a prophet, Elisha, who could cure him of his disease. When he came a long journey to Elisha, he was given simple instructions to be cured; to wash in the river Jordan seven times. He complained about this cure saying

essentially, “If it was that easy, surely I didn’t have to come all this way to be cured, I could have washed in any local river where I live.” He left in a rage. But then he was reminded that if the prophet had asked him something far more difficult in order to be cured, wouldn’t he have done it? He then humbled himself, got over his rage, and washed in the river Jordan seven times as he was told. He emerged from the river cured of his disease. Elisha also, understanding his own humility, would take no payment for this healing, giving all the credit to God.

Thinking about this story, fill in the blanks in the following sentence for a few people in your life, either presently, or in the past...

Much of the reason I am good at (some skill or activity) is because of (Person’s Name).

After each one of these, answer this question: How did this person help me be who I am today?

Can you think of a way to thank this person when you get a chance in the future?

Naaman comes off as a person who is a “know-it-all”, unable to admit when he doesn’t know something. Sometimes someone who is a “know-it-all” is afraid to learn, afraid to be humble, afraid that humility in them will be seen as weakness. And they don’t want to look weak. Have you ever acted like that?

Bible study closing prayer - Though it is often a good idea to let the students give a closing prayer on other days, the following prayer by the famous monk, theologian and writer is just perfect for the closing prayer on this day of talking about Humility. Please use it here and consider using it again at closing worship. Its good enough to hear more than once.

***The Merton Prayer***

My Lord God,  
I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
Nor do I really know myself,  
and the fact that I think I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
does in fact please you.  
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.  
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.  
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,  
though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore I will trust you always though  
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,  
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

**E. Additional Study Ideas**

“An interesting Story about George Washington, our first president and one of the founders of our country:

George Washington... had to struggle his entire life to become—and stay—humble. As a young man, his ego was enormous. Like the young Benjamin Franklin, his ambition outstripped his accomplishments.

Sometimes portrayed as a stolid, even stony man, Washington in real life was an individual of intense passions. His ability to rein them in has given us the impression today that he had none. This was not the case. A man of volcanic temper, vanity was a constant temptation for Washington; he knew he looked good in his military uniform (first British, then American) and so did the ladies around him. Arrogance of the sort that is heedless of others’ advice also plagued George Washington in his formative years.

An expert social climber and adept self-promoter, Washington displayed an early rashness on the battlefield that helped ignite a global conflagration. As he discovered, it is one thing to want to change one's lot in life; it is another to be so eager to do so that the means of self-improvement do not matter. Greatness at any price is not real greatness.

In Washington's early haste to achieve greatness, he sometimes let his ambition outpace his virtue. He gradually realized this, and he calibrated his actions accordingly. Rather than just cloaking his ambition, only to exert absolute rule when given the chance, Washington recognized that the more he served others and the cause of justice, the more his success would matter. The less his ambition was about his own fame, the more he would deserve the honors he received. Virtue in this sense, he discovered, can be its own reward.

Twice given dictatorial authority by the Continental Congress during the Revolutionary War, General Washington did not abuse his power. In fact, he laid down his sword after achieving America's victory—at precisely the peak of power when most conquering generals throughout history have anointed themselves indispensable to political rule. Greatness of soul spurs people to soar above the rest. Humility issues a warning against flying too high.”

Excerpt from a book, “Humility: An Unlikely Biography of America's Greatest Virtue.”  
by David J. Bobb

### Kirberg Game –

Consider incorporating a Kirberg game as time permits. You will need to get the materials ahead of time, which consist of enough sections of para-cord with loops at both ends as you have campers. Put them into pairs and have them put on the para-cord like handcuffs. The loops should be very snug on their wrists. But the pair should loop through each other so that they are connected. They are then simply supposed to separate, without touching or loosening to loops on their wrists. This is SUPPOSED to be difficult, but it is possible. Part of the point is that some or even most pairs will not be able to do it. It may be strange to have a game that seems impossible but sometimes this is exactly the sort of thing that helps to teach us about humility. Only give them a few minutes to figure it out and make sure they don't try to cheat. They may try to be very creative to solve it and that can be fun to watch.

Follow up questions:

- How did it feel when you were unable to figure it out?
- If a pair figured it out, how did they act after they succeeded?
- If a pair figured it out, how did you feel about it?
- Is it okay to not succeed at a task sometimes?

### F. Ideas to Incorporate the Theme Throughout the Day

As this will likely be the hike day for many of the weeks of onsite camp, low key activities will help to fill out the day. One relatively easy way to model humility is to be a servant leader. Perhaps find ways that campers can serve other campers in a meaningful way. Consider doing any of the following, if these don't work, it may help to think about them as a seed for the campers own ideas:

- A footwashing: Though this can be largely symbolic, many people think their feet are not beautiful. Simply to have the courage and humility to take off your shoes and let someone simply pour water over them and personally dry them with a towel is powerful both for the washer and for the washed.
- Serving at meals: The camp is normally set up to eat “family style” where people share the food and individuals get plates of food to bring to the entire table. Imagine how powerful it would be if the village of the day ate after everyone else was done and during the regular meal time poured all the drinks, served all the food and did so cheerfully. No food or drinks would be on the table but one or two people would be at each table to take care of everything. They would also clear the table and scrape the plates. It is important that this is done joyfully and not with resentment.
- Individual Village Gift/Cheer/Honor – Maybe the Village of the Day could find a way to serve each other village in its own way. Maybe they could have a cheer that highlights each other village and how

great they are. Maybe something could be made for each OTHER village like a village flag or something, as a gift for that village.

Morning and evening worship – These could also incorporate this idea of servant leadership and humility. Think of ways to serve or honor the campers from the other villages as part of the worship.

Closing prayer at each evening worship -

Lord,  
it is night.  
The night is for stillness.  
Let us be still in the presence of God.  
It is night after a long day.  
What has been done has been done;  
what has not been done has not been done;  
let it be.  
The night is dark.  
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives  
rest in you.  
The night is quiet.  
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,  
all dear to us,  
and all who have no peace.  
The night heralds the dawn.  
Let us look expectantly to a new day,  
new joys,  
new possibilities.  
In your name we pray.  
**Amen.**

**G. Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, Suggestions**

Some suggested songs from the camp song sheet for today:

Humble Thyself (30)  
Just Be (51)  
Just a closer walk with thee (93)  
Open the Eyes of My Heart (69)  
Come let us worship and bow down (#?)  
Take my life and let it be (#?)

Quotes to spawn thinking:

“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep the streets even as Michelangelo painted or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”  
Martin Luther King

“During the 1950s my parents, who were anti-apartheid activists, knew Nelson Mandela. I remember the story he told them about the occasion he saw a white woman standing next to her broken car in Johannesburg. He approached her and offered to help. After fiddling with the engine, he fixed the car. Thankful for his help, she offered to pay him sixpence.

“Oh no, that’s not necessary,” he said, “I am only too happy to help.”

“But why else would you, a black man, have done that if you did not want money?” she asked quizzically. “Because you were stranded at the side of the road,” he replied.”

- South African photographer, Steve Bloom, whose father, Harry Bloom, was a political activist.

A CHALLENGE for the campers:

Ask them to be observant and find one or more people to sincerely lift up for something that they are good at. For instance, tell another camper who is really good at basketball exactly that. It will involve looking at the campers around them and seeing the strengths and skills in others and letting them know that you see that in them. It is very important that this is sincere and not done as a joke...NOT something like, "You are really good at drinking milk", but "WOW, you are so great at woodcarving!"

## **H. Ideas to Adjust Study Down for Juniors**

\* Ideas to try with Junior Age (4-6 grade)

- I would attempt to read the above scripture as they are but limit the questions ahead of time. Some questions, perhaps #1, 3, and 7, are a bit more complex and abstract. At the very least, with this age group, focus on questions 6, 8, 9, and 10.

Consider reading the following well known story to them which puts the idea of humility into terms that may be easier to understand.

The Tortoise and the Hare

There once was a speedy hare who bragged about how fast he could run. Tired of hearing him boast, Slow and Steady, the tortoise, challenged him to a race. All the animals in the forest gathered to watch.

Hare ran down the road for a while and then and paused to rest. He looked back at Slow and Steady and cried out, "How do you expect to win this race when you are walking along at your slow, slow pace?"

Hare stretched himself out alongside the road and fell asleep, thinking, "There is plenty of time to relax."

Slow and Steady walked and walked. He never, ever stopped until he came to the finish line. The animals who were watching cheered so loudly for Tortoise, they woke up Hare.

Hare stretched and yawned and began to run again, but it was too late. Tortoise was over the line.

After that, Hare always reminded himself, "Don't brag about your lightning pace, for Slow and Steady won the race!"

Some Questions you may ask:

- In what ways was the Hare NOT humble?
- What words would you use to describe the Hare before and during the race?
- In what ways do you think the Hare changed from the experience of the race?

## **I. Ideas to Adjust Study Up for Senior High**

This may be a Bible study where an adjustment for grade level up to Senior High is less necessary. Certainly as you go through the material, especially the questions after the primary Bible text, be flexible with your group as to which questions you ask and maybe even how you ask them.

I feel that the questions and the scripture are well aimed at a middle school age level. At the middle school level of development, most campers that age are at least aware of the concept of humility, even if they might not be able to put words to the idea.

For high school age campers, their understanding and experience with humility is likely to be much different as most of them will be in a very different level of development.

In the end, what this means is that Middle School and High School students will probably answer the questions very differently. Be prepared for the middle schoolers to bring up experiences of being bullied perhaps and feeling inadequate. This is not the same as being humble. Remind them that they are loved exactly as they are. Very often, senior high students need an additional dose of humility. Perhaps add additional questions about like the following.

- Can you name humble famous people?
- Can you think of a time when you were not humble?
- Do you ever do things without taking credit?

## **J. Parent Devotional**

### **Scripture**

#### **Luke 18:9-14**

<sup>9</sup>He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ <sup>13</sup>But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

### **Reflection**

This week, your campers spent some time talking about humility and how lifting up others around us is far more affirming for everyone involved, especially in a culture that is so focused on a “me first” selfish way of dealing with the world. We looked very closely at the parable in Luke 18, where Jesus compares the Pharisee and the Tax collector and considered that it isn’t their actions that are in question but how we respond to those actions. We learned that, by recognizing the strengths and skills in others we more fully lift up the grace of God that is given to all people.

### **Activity**

A few things to try when you are home to reflect on this days Bible study:

- A practice of gratitude is often a good way to begin the understand the concept of humility. Recognizing the strengths and skills in ourselves and then thinking about how we developed those skills. Usually this involves someone else. What better way to practice humility than to find a meaningful, concrete way to thank someone who has had an impact on our lives? Find a way to thank some of these people in your lives.
- Another test of character comes in being able to properly respond to praise. Practice how to defer praise as a practice of humility. Following are some examples you can try with your family:
  - o Wow, you are so great at Baseball!
    - Thank you, it is only because of God working in me and the people who helped me develop my gifts.
  - o This poem you wrote is so awesome!
    - Thank you, my teachers have helped me to refine my writing style and find my own unique voice.

I know these examples seem silly, but learning to deflect praise and give credit to others is such an important part of growing and maturing in faith. It also helps to be aware of when people give false praise as a form of sarcasm. It might be helpful to talk about when praise is authentic and when it is done as a form of mocking someone.

**Prayer**

Lord, help me to see the wonderful, God given gifts in others and teach me how to show my appreciation for others. Help me to be authentic, to be aware of and open about the things I don't know and to be grateful about the things I have learned. Thank you for an amazing week of growing into the fullness of who I am supposed to be. AMEN





## 2018 BIBLE STUDY – *THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING!* DAY 3 – “I BECOME MERCY”

*“The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’  
Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt. Matthew 18:26-27*

*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:36*

### A. Introduction to the Theme

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy. Although these words of the Kyrie that we use many times in our Lutheran liturgy appear to be the foundation for what we believe about who God is and who Christ has been for us, **mercy** is not a word we hear often in our world. We may hear talk of grace, and love, and blessings, and peace, and redemption, but very few conversations about mercy.

As we listen to what the world says about mercy we are driven even further from the vision that God has for us in community. The definition of “show no mercy” in Merriam-Webster is “to treat someone very harshly.” In our media we may hear: “Although the mayor had apologized already, the press showed him no mercy.” When we are engaged in our sports we hear: “We will show **No Mercy** to the opposing team!” As you reach “way back” into the 1980s we had an album by the heavy metal rock band called Slayer called Show No Mercy. Song tracks on this album included Evil Has No Boundaries, The Anti-Christ, Die by the Sword, Fight ‘til Death, and Tormentor. It appears that we equate “showing no mercy” with strength, power, domination, giving people what they “deserve”, and always being in control.

In his homily on March 17, 2013 Pope Francis said: “I think we too are the people who, on the one hand, want to listen to Jesus, but on the other hand, at times, like to find a stick to beat others with, to condemn others. And Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think — and I say it with humility — that this is the Lord’s most powerful message: mercy.”

Stick, versus mercy. Punishment versus forgiveness. Condemnation versus unification. Hate and revenge versus kindness and compassion. Indifference and hostility versus blessing and generosity. The world we live in seeks the harsh path and misses the blessings of living in mercy.

If we look at the root of the word mercy in other languages, specifically the historical languages associated with Christianity, all of which have been around for centuries, another meaning becomes very clear. When we pray for mercy, what we’re really asking is for God to **love us**. In old Greek, the word for mercy comes from the word for olive oil, which, since the beginning of time, has been used to **soothe the pain of wounds, bruises, and injuries**. In Hebrew, the word for mercy means **steadfast love**. In Eastern Churches the word for mercy has many related connotations: **Tenderness, kindness, sweetness, endearing, compassion, and pity**. Mercy is not simply crying “Uncle!” It is not for the weak of heart or body. It is a beautiful gift that will indeed change not only me, but the world.

The concept of mercy is found in numerous passages of Scripture. When Moses pleaded with God to forgive the people rather than destroy them after their actions of unbelief at Kadesh-barnea, he made that request on the basis of God’s great mercy (Numbers 14:19). When Daniel prayed for forgiveness for his people, it was on the basis of God’s mercy (Daniel 9:4,9). Jeremiah probably made it clearer than anyone else when he boldly declared, “It is [because] of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed” (Lamentations 3:22 KJV). Jesus show mercy multiple times as he forgave the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), shared mercy in the story of the wayward son returning home (Luke 15:11-32); and when he forgave Peter, his closest disciple, after Peter’s denial (John 21:15-17).

According to the Bible, mercy does matter: It matters because we all need forgiveness. But mercy also matters because it is what can join us all together despite our differences. “**Mercy is not getting what you deserve, and grace is getting what you didn’t deserve or earn.**” Jesus does not specify as to whom we are to give mercy. Jesus does not specify a race, gender, circumstance or particular “people group” to extend mercy – rather He suggests we give mercy to all. Mercy is a “love that responds to human need in an unexpected or unmerited way.” Mercy begins by opening yourself to those with whom you might strongly disagree. Mercy

doesn't end there, of course, but it begins with such small acts of understanding, which can lead to life-changing experiences of love.

This truth of the gift of God's mercy in our lives is revealed in Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant. This servant owed his master the sum of hundreds of thousands of dollars. There was no way he could ever repay it. Yet, as foolish as it seems, he thought he could somehow pay back the debt, and so he begged for more time. The lord of that slave felt compassion and forgave the debt. And yet, this unmerciful servant, missed the gift of mercy. He went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a mere twenty dollars, took him by the throat and demanded payment. When the fellow servant could not pay, he required the full extent of the law and had him thrown in jail. No mercy. No blessing.

God shows all of us mercy. To show mercy is to love. To love is a gift of grace and this changes me and it changes our world.

## **B. Objectives for This Day of the Study**

- We will explore the definition of mercy and how we understand this word.
- We will explore the parable of the unmerciful servant from Matthew 18:21-35 and how refusing mercy harms us more than the pain or revenge we seek to give others.
- We will explore acts of mercy and how they have changed the world.
- We will explore how becoming mercy empowers us to live mercy and love others in the process.

**Staff goal for each week:** Model mercy along with grace, humility, and generosity. As we study mercy we realize that we do not get what we deserve. We are graced by what we do not deserve, and we are blessed. Breathe. Ask for help from others if you are tired. Be mercy-filled and be the change you wish the campers to be in this community. □

## **C. Morning Watch**

### **WELCOME**

Welcome to this day. May this time each morning be a blessing to you and the community that you are a part of this week. May God empower you to show mercy for the healing change of the world.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today we hear about the gift of mercy and how we are to respond in kind to the mercy that God provides us each and every day. Listen to these words from Jesus about the parable of the unmerciful servant and from the book of Luke about the merciful nature of God.

### **WHY WAS THIS PASSAGE CHOSEN?**

A reading from Matthew 18: 26-27: "The poor wretch threw himself at the king's feet and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.' Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt."

And a reading from Luke 6:36: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

### **SONG**

*This is where the healing begins* by Tenth Avenue North

So, you thought you had to keep this up  
All the work that you do  
So, we think that you're good  
And you can't believe it's not enough  
All the walls you built up  
Are just glass on the outside

So, let 'em fall down  
There's freedom waiting in the sound

When you let your walls fall to the ground  
We're here now

This is where the healing begins, oh  
This is where the healing starts  
When you come to where you're broken within  
The light meets the dark  
The light meets the dark

Afraid to let your secrets out  
Everything that you hide  
Can come crashing through the door now  
But too scared to face all your fear  
So, you hide but you find  
That the shame won't disappear

So, let it fall down  
There's freedom waiting in the sound  
When you let your walls fall to the ground  
We're here now  
We're here now, oh

This is where the healing begins, oh  
This is where the healing starts  
When you come to where you're broken within  
The light meets the dark  
The light meets the dark

Sparks will fly as grace collides  
With the dark inside of us  
So please don't fight  
This coming light  
Let this blood come cover us  
His blood can cover us

This is where the healing begins, oh  
This is where the healing starts  
When you come to where you're broken within  
The light meets the dark  
The light meets the dark

OR

**Three feet or so** by Carrie Newcomer      **I would love your feedback friends of which one is best!**  
**Please notice how each song ends...interesting and I did not plan that! ☐ This is the gift of mercy!**

When I'm weary lost or sad  
Overwhelmed or just fed up  
I say grace for what I have  
And most the time that is enough

We are body, skin and bones  
We're all the loss we've ever known  
What is gone is always near  
We're all the love that brought us here

And the things that have saved us  
Are still here to save us  
It's not out there somewhere  
It's right here, it's right here

If I start by being kind  
Love usually follows right behind  
It nods its head and softly hums  
Saying "Honey that's the way it's done."

We don't have to search for love  
Wring our hands and wring our hearts  
All we have to do is know  
The love will find us in the dark

And the things that have saved us  
Are still here to save us  
It's not out there somewhere  
It's right here, it's right here

I can't change the whole world  
But I can change the world I know  
What's within three feet or so

We are body, skin and bones  
We're all the love we've ever known  
When I don't know what is right  
I hold it up into the Light  
I hold it up into the Light  
I hold it up into the Light

#### **QUESTIONS FOR GOD TIME**

- Where have you seen mercy?
- When is it hard to have mercy for others?
- How is mercy a healing gift of God?
- What behavior does God want me to change to be mercy for others?

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Dear God, thank you for your mercy that comes to us each and every day. Fill my heart with mercy that I not only to pour out mercy and love without measure on other people, but that You would use me to encourage others to show the same mercy and forgiveness to others they meet in the world. Lord I know that in and of myself I have nothing on my own to give and yet with your power I can share your mercy with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

#### **D. Scripture Study**

##### **Context**

Believe it or not we have made to the middle of the week and your campers are starting to think about going home. They know the rhythm of the week of camp. They have worked through the awkwardness of not knowing one another and not knowing what the week will be like. Hopefully they have worked through homesickness and the cliques that may get created in cabins or in villages. And yet they know you. They know the rhythm of your Bible Study. They have prayed. They may have cried together. They are definitely tired from days full of activities and late nights. Continue to encourage your campers to pray at the beginning and the end of your time

of Bible study. If they have not gotten a Bible, please make sure they have one. Keep checking in with “does that make sense?” or “can someone give me an example of this?” as you go through your study. Often campers may not feel comfortable asking questions unless they are clear that they are in a safe place to do so. Checking in with them will help you gauge where they are and this is especially key for our understanding of *Mercy* because it can be very abstract, and mercy is not something we talk about in our world. If you have been asked questions you did not know the answer to in the first couple of days, make sure you get back to your campers with answers you have obtained from the many resources you have at camp.

Today we are exploring the understanding of mercy. Mercy is not a concept that our world seeks out, rather the call is often to “show no mercy.” Strength, as defined by the world, is about dominance, power, and often annihilation. Our goal is to have our campers understand the gift that mercy can be, especially given the mercy God has given us.

## Study

- ❖ Welcome the campers to your Bible study. Continue to find locations that are not too distracting to your study and allow them to sit in a circle or at a table where they can see and hear each other. Keep in mind that for some of your more active campers using a stick in the dirt, or becoming friends with an ant hill does not mean they are not paying attention, it just means they are challenging that beautiful energy.
- ❖ Think about opening with highs/lowes for the day, or ask them to name God-moments. Keep in mind that they do not need to sit still for 60 to 90 minutes to have a “real Bible study.” You can add in games or get the campers to switch positions to keep them engaged.
- ❖ Opening prayer: ask one of your campers to open with prayer and think about anything that was shared during your gathering time as prayer requests for the group. This prayer can be individually lead by one camper or in “popcorn prayer” style by the group. You may also use the prayer of the day from Morning Watch.
- ❖ Explore the summary of what they have learned thus far in the week – ask for members what they have learned, what they remember, anything that they are still curious about, etc. Is the understanding of grace sinking in yet? Have they identified what it means to be humble? Repetition is our friend! □
- ❖ Ask your campers: Has anyone heard the term: “Show no mercy”? What examples have you seen in sports, movies, politics or other areas?
- ❖ Play Kirberg’s game of juggling: After having them use their names as they toss, then ask them to “become” synonyms for mercy. Examples to use are compassion, kindness, pity, benevolence, blessing, charity, forgiveness, generosity, grace, leniency, or tolerance.
- ❖ Ask them “When you hear the word mercy, what immediately comes to mind?”

Read Matthew 18:23-35 This version is from Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*:

<sup>23-25</sup> “The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn’t pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market. <sup>26-</sup>

<sup>27</sup> “The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.

<sup>28</sup> “The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay up. Now!’ <sup>29-31</sup> “The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ But he wouldn’t do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a

detailed report to the king.<sup>32-35</sup> “The king summoned the man and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn’t you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?’ The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that’s exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn’t forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy.”

### Let’s explore a couple of verses:

#### Verses 23-27

1. Was the king right in asking for what was his?
2. Was there anyway the servant could pay back such a large amount given the little money he made as a servant?
3. Was the king logical in forgiving all of that money from the servant? What do you think motivated him to erase the debt?
4. Do you think the servant felt the full gift of mercy?

#### Verses 28-31

1. How did the unmerciful servant respond to the servant who owed him money?
2. Was the size of the request between the two servants the same?
3. Why do you think the unmerciful servant treated the servant who owed less, like a criminal?
4. Did he think throwing the servant in prison would allow him to get his money back?
5. What was the unmerciful servant’s anger about?

#### Verses 32-35

1. What did the King do in response to the lack of mercy on the servant he forgave?
2. Do you have an idea about why the unmerciful servant was not compelled to forgive as he was forgiven?
3. What could have been different if the unmerciful servant gave the mercy that he was given?
4. What can we gain in our own lives by giving mercy unconditionally?

This truth of the gift of God’s mercy in our lives is revealed clearly in this Jesus’ parable of the unmerciful servant. This servant owed his master the sum of hundreds of thousands of dollars. We are not told how he incurred an incredible debt, but it is obvious that on a servant’s salary of a few cents a day he could never repay it. He was in a miserable, hopeless predicament. Yet, foolish as it seems, he thought he could somehow pay back the debt, and so he begged for more time: “Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything” (Matthew 18:26). Jesus went on to say, “And the lord of that slave ***felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt***” (verse 27). That was mercy. First there was the intense feeling of sympathy, followed by an unprecedented act of kindness in which the master held back the punishment he could have exacted and forgave the servant the entire debt, more than he ever could have expected. What a beautiful illustration of mercy!

And yet, this unmerciful servant, as many of us, never seemed to grasp the significance of what had happened to him. This great gift was totally lost on him. In fact, it appears he never even heard that his debt was wiped out. This servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a mere twenty dollars, took him by the throat and demanded payment. When the fellow servant could not pay, he required the full extent of the law and had him thrown in jail. When the master heard what his servant had done, he was incensed. “Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?” (Matthew 18:33)

We may hear people say, “I don’t want any favors from God. I just want what I deserve.” People may not fully understand what they are saying. The human heart is filled with hate, selfishness, pride, envy, strife, adulteries, lies, blasphemies, and every form of wickedness. If we got what we deserved, we would feel the full force of all God’s righteous wrath against sin. It is not justice we need, but mercy—the compassion that shows patience when justice demands punishment. If a criminal is found guilty, justice calls for a sentence to be

pronounced. The best the convicted felon can hope for is that the judge will suspend the sentence, hold back the penalty he deserves. To show mercy in hope of change.

**Ask the campers to think about a time when they did not feel mercy-filled.** If they struggle ask if they have siblings and how difficult it is to show mercy to a brother or sister. □

God shows us what mercy looks like. We have been judged guilty. We are sinful human beings who deserve punishment and yet, the Psalmist gives voice to God's mercy.

**Invite the campers to read Psalm 103:11-12:**

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.  
As far as the east is from the west,  
So far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:11-12).

How rich is this mercy! God looks on us sinners with compassion, sympathizes with us in our painful places, then proceeds to remove our transgressions from us as far as our minds can imagine... as far as the East is from the West.

**Say something like:** The lesson is clear. We as God's children have received an enormous measure of God's mercy. We have been forgiven a debt of sin we could never repay, and we have been blessed with daily mercies we can never number. Now God wants us to show the same kind of mercy to others, to have the same tender feelings of sympathy toward them in their misery, the same eagerness to minister to them and help them in their times of distress, the same willingness to hold back retribution and to forgive them when they wrong us. By showing others mercy, we are relieving their misery and inviting them into being changed by God's grace. Think about that what we said in the beginning: In the Greek, the word for mercy comes from the word for olive oil, which, since the beginning of time, has been used to soothe the pain of wounds, bruises, and injuries. ***Mercy brings healing.*** To do anything less reveals that we have little understanding of the immense debt of sin from which we have been released. To be stern and exacting, as the unforgiving servant, or to insist on getting even with those who have injured us, exposes a heart that has no concept of its own sinfulness. When we understand the depths of our own sin and the enormity of God's mercy in forgiving us, we will be changed to freely forgive those violations committed against us, great or small.

**Closing activity for the campers:** As you review that in the Greek mercy comes from the word for olive oil tell the campers that you are going to give a blessing with oil on their foreheads or hands with oil. Have the group stand in a circle and as you mark a sign of the cross on each camper say: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Be sure to close your study with prayer.



## E. Additional Study ideas

Show the following images and discuss what is seen about mercy:



\*Consider sharing this quote from Henry Nouwen: "Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human." To show mercy is compassion and this changes the world.

## **F. Ideas to Incorporate the Theme Throughout the Day**

\* Theme for the day ideas: Consider having the opposite of “Show No Mercy” to Show Lots of Mercy in games and skits. Allow for the games you do to have winners and more winners such as the Kirberg game high, low, names. No one gets out and you are reminded that “God shows mercy.”

\*Activities : Give up one kind of food/beverage for the day and offer the money you saved to an organization in need. Maybe consider the Ecuador offering if that is what RTALC is still working on.

\*Suggest to campers that they can try to have a conversation with someone that they may not find particularly pleasing. (Mother Teresa did this all of time and look how awesome she was.) Smile at someone who looks like they need it! Say something genuinely kind to an unkind person. Mercy does not have to cost anything. Serve yourself last at lunch or dinner. Pick up someone else’s trash that they’ve left behind. When tempted to complain about someone, say something they do really well instead. Allow someone to go ahead of you in line. Find kind things to say to people who are going slowly in the check-out line. Cover a lunch/meal/coffee for someone in need or for a random stranger. Give time listening to someone, even though you might have many errands and tasks to do. Creating a space of listening can lead to mercy. Instead of worrying and wasting valuable time, practice the attitude of gratitude. Praise God for all the blessings in your life. Thank God for the positives, and don’t focus on the negatives.

\*Morning and evening worship ideas: Consider using the Kyrie: “Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.” We often will take a moment to ask for God’s forgiveness however do not use the formal liturgy as we do in our Sunday morning worship services in our churches.

\* Have any type of meals used to emphasize the theme or mercy. Consider having a meal that may have a similar object lesson as hunger meals and yet give permission to allows those who have much to share with those who do not.

\*\*Please consider having the following prayer from the New Zealand Anglican Prayer Book at the end of closing worship each night:

Lord,  
it is night.  
The night is for stillness.  
Let us be still in the presence of God.  
It is night after a long day.  
What has been done has been done;  
what has not been done has not been done;  
let it be.  
The night is dark.  
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives  
rest in you.  
The night is quiet.  
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,  
all dear to us,  
and all who have no peace.  
The night heralds the dawn.  
Let us look expectantly to a new day,  
new joys,  
new possibilities.  
In your name we pray.  
Amen.

## G. Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, Suggestions

\* Songs from the camp song sheet:

#23	Here I Am, Lord	#68	Breathe
#26	Someday	#72	Every Move I Make
#44	Lord I Lift Your Name On High	#88	We Lift Up Our Prayers

## H. Ideas to Adjust Study Down for Juniors

Have these younger ones play the game “Mercy Chair.” Arrange everyone in a circle and have them continue to step in closer and closer until their shoulders are touching. Next have everyone turn to the side so that they are back-to-front and have them step even closer together and have them sit down. The result should be that everyone will end up sitting on each other’s knees, without the “structure” falling down. Process with the campers what happens when we are not willing to support each other, what happens when we do not trust each other, and how we can build structures together that will hold us all.

## I. Ideas to Adjust Study Up for Senior High

Many of our high school students have watched Grey’s Anatomy. Season 10, Episode 3 entitled “Everyone’s Crying Mercy” Meredith Grey has a voiceover that says: “In the game of mercy, when one kid cries out, the other one listens and the pain stops. Don't you wish it was that easy now? That's not a game anymore, and we're not kids. You can cry mercy all you want but nobody's listening. It's just you screaming into a void.” Ask the older students if they can resonate with this or if they have ever felt like this? Can they imagine what our world would look like if we slowed down and listened to what others say and try to understand their pain?

## J. Parent Devotional

### Scripture

Matthew 18:21-35 – Read this parable of the unmerciful servant. This story brings clarity to how mercy can transform lives or how the lack of mercy can stop possibilities for the future. Imagine being the different people in this story. How do you feel? What did you notice? What did you wonder?

### Reflection

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy. Although these words of the Kyrie that we use many times in our Lutheran liturgy appear to be the foundation for what we believe about who God is and who Christ has been for us, **mercy** is not a word we hear often in our world. We may hear conversations about grace, and love, and blessings, and peace, and redemption, but very few conversations about mercy. We will discuss with our campers that the world is so more willing to “show no mercy” with domination, control, and punishment. Showing mercy has connotations of weakness even though we have mercy given to us from our great God of strength and love each and every day.

### Activity

What did you notice about how each person treated one another in this story? When have you been given mercy? When have you given mercy? How do you give each other mercy at home?\_In the upcoming weeks, think about acts of mercy. Consider having a **Jar of Mercy** in which you place coins as you give mercy to someone or after someone has shown you mercy. At the end of a month or two, consider giving those coins to an organization that shows mercy to those in need. Turn this kind of mercy into love for those who wonder if the world really cares.

### Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank you for your mercy that comes to us each and every day. Fill my heart with mercy that I not only to pour out mercy and love without measure on other people, but that You would use me to encourage others to show the same mercy and forgiveness to others. Lord I know that in and of myself I have nothing on my own to give and yet with your power I can share your mercy with others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

## 2018 BIBLE STUDY – *THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING!* DAY 4 – “I BECOME GENEROSITY”

### A. Introduction to the Theme

Today we dive into “becoming Generosity.” The language this week of relating *being* and *becoming* is intentional. Because God’s grace changes everything, everything – *literally everything* – is different: all of reality, from the outer reaches of the cosmos to the depths of my own heart. On account of grace, on account of game-changing grace, how we live our lives will be changed as well.

A passage from 1 John speaks to the relation between who “I am” and who “I will become.” *The Message* translation puts it freshly: “What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we’re called children of God! That’s who we really are. But that’s also why the world doesn’t recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he’s up to. But friends, that’s exactly who we are: children of God. And that’s only the beginning. Who knows how we’ll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we’ll see him—and in seeing him, become like him.” (1 John 3:1-2).

So, we are children of God now. We are Grace now. We are Humility now. We are Mercy now. We are Generosity now. And yet, that’s only the beginning. Even as we are these things, we become these things! In the gift of grace, *life is the journey of becoming what we are!* As the 1 John passage puts it, who knows how we’ll end up! But as we see Jesus, we will become like him.

Jesus speaks – as do the whole scriptures – of generosity. Generosity itself is not a uniquely Christian or biblical virtue. All spiritual and religious traditions value generosity. There is even current scientific study on generosity: what motivates it and what results happen in human communities where people practice generosity. More will be said about this in the Additional Study Ideas section further on.

What Christian faith and the whole biblical tradition bear witness to, however, is that generosity flows from the very heart of God. God is generous and is the dynamic, flowing source of all generosity. “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,” we sing. Just look at Psalm 23: “You prepare a table for me...you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” God is generous with the overflowing gifts of goodness, mercy, and forever.

*And yet.* While generosity seems to be valued universally, how we set up our lives works against it. The ruling narrative of our culture actually denigrates generosity (and the closely related notion of abundance) and operates from the basis of scarcity. Scarcity is the idea that there is not enough to go around. If people live believing that there really isn’t enough for all, then we create a life of competition for what little there is perceived to be. Our economic system operates on this basis; our markets value more highly what is scarce. Think simply of the price of rare commodities. When there is less of something, it costs more. At root, scarcity is the deep belief that no matter how much we have, it is not enough.

But what if there *is* enough to go around? What if we operated not from the basis of scarcity, but of abundance? This is the game-changing witness of Scripture. There *is* enough, and that “enough” comes from the generosity of an abundant God, who richly blesses all and supplies the needs of all God’s beloved creatures. If grace and love, mercy and goodness flow unstoppably from the heart of God into the life of all creation, then we have the opportunity to practice generosity and become generosity. Perhaps we can imagine abundance as the starting place and generosity as the engine of abundance.

Our study today identifies two core scriptures that will help campers unlock the reality of the generosity of God and a path for becoming generous people. The first, Matthew 20:1-16, is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard and is intended for all audiences except the youngest campers. This is the story of day laborers a landowner hires throughout the day, up to the last hour. At the end of the day, the landowner pays all the laborers the same amount, regardless of how many hours they worked. As you can imagine, those who worked

longer complained about this. This is a great story that helps unmask our assumptions and emotions about both scarcity and generosity.

The second, Mark 12:41-44, shared as the core text for younger campers, is the very brief story of the offering of the widow, a woman who gives to the treasury her last two copper coins. Jesus notices this act and regards her as giving more than people who put in large sums. This is offered as the core text for younger campers. I will suggest that a simple way to engage this text is to have the campers act it out.

Additionally, a number of biblical examples of generous people and some other Bible stories will be offered as resources for exploring further the dynamics of generosity.

## **B. Objectives for this Day of the Study**

- Have campers share stories that demonstrate that there *is* enough to go around. What are some human practices that demonstrate the goodness of overflowing generosity and what happens in relationships and life when people are generous?
- Have campers tell stories of scarcity, sharing examples that reinforce the idea that there may *not* be enough to go around. Have them share how they have witnessed and practiced scarcity. How has the fear of not having enough manifested itself in their lives? Have they hoarded, stolen, refused to share, because in some basic sense they have feared loss?
- Have campers share real life examples of how they have witnessed and practiced abundance and generosity. How has being treated generously affected them? What changed in them because they shared generously with others? How have they been treated by others because they have acted generously?
- Talk about generosity and scarcity in non-monetary forms. There are ways to be generous (in relationships, in willingness to be helpful, in sharing time, etc.) or ungenerous (out of fear and worry) apart from money.
- Help campers envision ways they can live from the basis of abundance and generosity. Help them see that in acting generously, they become Generosity.
- Campers will acknowledge that they are on a journey to become what they are.
- Staff goal: model living from a place of abundance, rather than scarcity. Scarcity says that we can never be satisfied with what we have. Abundance says that what we have is enough. When you think of your interactions with campers and fellow staff, how can you express satisfaction with what you have: your energy (or lack of it), your personal resources (even the limits of your knowledge and the borders of where your best gifts end), your level of patience (or impatience), etc. Consider that what you have this week is enough. Share a sense of that with everyone.

## **C. Morning Watch**

### **WELCOME**

Welcome to this day. May this time each morning be a blessing to you and the community you are a part of this week. May you experience here the grace of God that changes everything, even you.

### **INTRODUCTION**

As God's children who receive God's generous gifts, we can be giving people who change the world through our generosity.

### **WHY WAS THIS PASSAGE CHOSEN?**

God is good to all, in ways that may even strike us as unfair – especially if we feel we've done more than others to deserve what we receive. Consider this story from the Gospel of Matthew (20:9-15).

*When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take*

*what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’*

## **SONG**

***Kind and Generous*** by Natalie Merchant

You've been so kind and generous  
I don't know how you keep on giving  
For your kindness, I'm in debt to you  
For your selflessness, my admiration  
For everything you've done, you know I'm bound  
I'm bound to thank you for it

You've been so kind and generous  
I don't know how you keep on giving  
For your kindness, I'm in debt to you  
And I never could have come, this far without you  
For everything you've done, you know I'm bound  
I'm bound to thank you for it

Oh, I want to thank you for so many gifts you gave  
The love, the tenderness, I wanna thank you  
I want to thank you for your generosity, the love  
And the honesty that you gave me  
I want to thank you show my gratitude  
My love, and my respect for you, I want to thank you  
Oh, I want to thank you, thank you; thank you, thank you  
I want to thank you, thank you; thank you, thank

## **QUESTIONS FOR GOD TIME**

- In this song, the singer expresses thanks for the kindness and generosity she has received. When you receive unexpected generosity, what response rises up within you?
- Imagine a world in which there was enough for everyone. What would that world look like to you? How does that compare with the world you live in? How would you help our world become like the world of “enough”?
- In the story Jesus tells, the workers who worked all day were paid the same amount people who worked one hour. The owner says it’s his to choose how much he gives. How does that make you feel?

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Generous God, from whom all blessings flow, everything we have, every breath, every moment comes from you. Thank you for your goodness. Help me to be generous also, so that through me, your blessings may flow to all I meet. Amen.

## **D. Scripture Study**

Reflect upon how the week of Bible studies is unfolding with your campers. This is Thursday, and soon the week will be over. What’s the mood? How are campers relating by now in the Bible studies? Is there a level of trust? A willingness to express vulnerability? Are there stresses or challenges in the group dynamics? Do some checking in.

As stated in the introduction, two stories will be offered as the day’s core texts; a short story for younger campers and a different, longer one for others.

## First, the short story...

Mark 12:41-44 *The Widow's Offering*

*[Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."*

### *Commentary*

Imagine being this poor widow...alone in life now, her husband gone. She seems to have almost nothing left. Until, upon giving her last two small copper coins, she actually has nothing left. But, she seems not to be hopeless. Her act seems resolute, on purpose. She contributed her coins to the treasury of the temple, investing all that she had in the kingdom of God. Her hope was in the Lord and she was willing to let go of everything in order to receive whatever God would provide.

Professor Karoline Lewis of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN comments on this story:

"Her whole life." That's what she gave, friends. The Greek is certain. Clear. Little room for wiggle room. Not a portion. Not a tithe. Not a percentage. But her whole living.

Her whole living? That should be a moment for pause. None of us can give that to the church, or to anyone or anything, for that matter. So we cannot reduce her donation to a percentage or a portion. We cannot rationalize her offering for the sake of dedication to some calculated stewardship campaign. She gave her whole life to God.

Her whole life. Why? Out of obligation? Respect? Demand? Expectation? Religiosity? Piety? All of the above? She gave her whole life because there were no other options. She gave her whole life because that's what was expected of her. She gave her whole life because her life depended on it. Caught in a system of quid pro quo, trapped in expectations that demanded more from her than she could practically give, knowing that her future depended on her present, she had to do what she did. She acted out of assumptions and assertions and assessments that located her, managed her, and determined her life. There was no other recourse than to give her whole life.

Jesus sought to inject ways of thinking about God that might have been experienced as resistant to the status quo...The ministry of Jesus was meant to be counter, could be counter, and countered everything in part because the ways of imagining God in the world had already been called into question and had exceeded expectations. The more we remember this the better.

We cannot miss that her offering of her life foreshadows Jesus' own act for us.

Jesus will have to give his whole life, his entire life. He already did, in fact, prior to the cross. He constantly embraced rejection. He consistently accepted the questioning of his followers. He confirmed over and over again that following him would mean whole life giving and whole life living. The widow's example should be nothing new and at the same time should be everything new.

She embodies Jesus' own ministry. She acts out Jesus' own call. She believes that what she does will manifest itself in something beyond herself. In the end, that is truly discipleship...But more so...this is the essence of God.

God knows nothing else than to give God's whole life. God has shown that time and time again to God's people in the Hebrew Scriptures and we should expect no different now. This is the essence of God -- to give God's whole self. And here, now, in this unnamed widow, God is doing it again.

Generosity has nothing to do with having a lot of money or stuff. Generosity doesn't wait until you accumulate riches. Generosity is marked by starting with a heart that trusts in God no matter what the circumstances. Generosity releases your whole life because God has given us God's whole life.

### *Teaching Ideas*

I recommend that you act out this story with your younger campers. There are several actors in the scene. Split up the roles best you can:

- The widow
- Jesus
- A crowd putting money into the treasury
- Jesus' disciples

The actions are simple and easy to learn. The camper playing Jesus could either memorize or have a Bible at hand to read the words of Jesus. After acting out the scene, have the campers settle down and allow a moment of silence. After a moment of quiet, read the story to them. Then, invite the campers to share what they notice or what they wonder about in the story.

Explore, especially, how it doesn't take great wealth to be a giving person (or, in kids' terms, having a lot of stuff: toys, video games, popularity...explore what "wealth" might look like in their lives; it might include money but it might be all kinds of other things).

Explore, especially, the idea that generosity isn't necessarily related to money. One can be generous with money, but also with time, kindness, helpfulness, friendship, etc. Share that God has a giving heart and so do we as a gift from God.

### **Now, the longer text...**

Matthew 20:1-16 *The Laborers in the Vineyard*

This is the core text for all but your youngest campers.

#### *Text*

*[Jesus said] "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*

#### *Commentary*



The Australian pastor Peter Lockhart offers this interesting commentary on this text:

### **The Generous Landowner**

In the story of the generous land owner Jesus indicates that the reward at the end of the day's labour that is shared out is distributed equally - everyone gets exactly the same regardless of the time spent working.

This is one of the parables that really upsets the apple cart. It grates against the sentiment Jesus expresses that we should store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. It grates against our notion of a fair days work for a fair days pay.

For many who listen to this story the question of injustice is raised. Is it fair that those who work the longest are not rewarded for their extra labour? Our gut response is no!

Yet, if we think about the process in the story with the landowner returning throughout the day to the marketplace where the labourers waited maybe our sense of justice might shift.

If we consider the first trip to the marketplace there can be little doubt the the landowner would be pick the strongest workers, the fastest, the fittest, possible the most enthusiastic. They would be the workers that he knew would work hard all day and give the best results.

When the landowner returns for his next trip to choose extra workers once again he would choose the best of those who were left waiting to join his other workers.

And so on through the day until he comes for the final time.

Imagine who might be left at this point: maybe the elderly, the infirm, the inexperienced, those who have an injury or disability. People who would possibly not have survived the whole day in the field in any case but people who still have the same needs, desires and aspirations of those chosen at the first part of the day: to provide for their family, to have a sense of worth, to build some financial security.

Yet, the randomness of life denies them the opportunity to work the full day to be as successful. For many the burdens they already carry are work in themselves.

The generosity of the landowner in this case shifts our thinking away from what a person can achieve or offer to the way in which a person and their very life is valued by the landowner.

The landowner wants to give value and opportunity for life to even the weakest within the community of workers!

Just as in Jesus day the workers who came first grumbled and no doubt many of Jesus listeners wondered at how unfair the parable seemed so too in our context it is a difficult story.

Living in a free market economy ruled by supply and demand and where people are paid for their supposed skill set the parable rubs against the grain; it feels unjust.

Most workers are generally paid by the hour and often proportionally to the demand on their skills within the community. Overtime and time and a half are expectations for extra effort. I heard today that the average CEO in Australia earns over \$4 million dollars per year, about 64 times than the average worker!

Jesus' parable calls into question the way our world operates and how it devalues people and, let's be honest, exploits many who work long hours in appalling conditions so those in wealthier countries can

have cheap products.

Whilst it might feel unfair for those who already have access to wealth and opportunity because of their skills, that is to say those like the labourers who are chosen first, the reality is that life itself has been unjust in different ways to those who are chosen last.

Maybe, this is what Jesus is trying to help us realise: that good news is not just for the privileged few but for all. And that as many times as it takes God will return seeking us out to join in the labour.

The kingdom of heaven is like this, God seeks us all out and all are rewarded, all are given the dignity of work, all are rewarded with life and hope; rewarded with a future; rewarded for a great effort or a little labour at the 11th hour. Who are we to be envious?

Each week we pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”.

Heaven, God’s rule, is a rule that promises generosity in life that for us living in a market driven world which is almost unfathomable – yet this is the kingdom we pray for. Good news for all!

### *Teaching Ideas*

In my personal experience as a pastor, I have heard more objections to this gospel lesson than any other. One person told me once, “I hate this story!” I had suggested engaging this story as a way of working through a problem he was having with someone in the congregation he felt had not pulled their own weight in a fundraising effort and didn’t deserve to share in the benefits of what had been raised (and had agreed from the outset to be shared equally). When I reference this text, my parishioner stormed off after declaring his hatred for this lesson. Even though that was a challenging interchange, I was grateful that he was honest about his reaction and feelings. This is what scripture does: gets under our skin.

Help your campers get this story under their skin. While you may be “armed” with thoughts shared in the commentary above – and have some from other resources – I suggest holding your own thoughts in reserve and allow the text sink its hooks into your campers.

I’m a big fan of “lectio divina” engagement with a biblical text. I suggest reading it to your campers, or having a single camper read it through to the group. After doing some group check-in and orienting the campers to the theme of the day, let some silent time pass before reading the text. Then, read the text conscientiously. After concluding, allow a bit more time to pass and read the text again. Perhaps have a different person read it, to give the sound of a different voice.

This time, *during* the second reading, instruct campers that they are invited to say out loud *while you read*, “I notice...” or “I wonder...” when something in the story moves them to share. Don’t stop your reading or stop to engage in conversation ...just pause momentarily while they say what they notice or wonder about.

After the second reading, and when campers have shared their noticings, engage them in conversation about what they have brought up.

As prompts, ask them to imagine being in that scenario. How might they feel in real life if they saw people working only a short time being paid what they had been promised. Would they become giddy assuming they’d receive more? When they received an equal amount, would they feel disappointment or would they feel joyful for those who received equal pay for less work?

Do some exploring around the objectives for the day:

- Have your campers share stories from real life that demonstrate that there *is* enough in life to go around. What are some things they’ve seen or done that demonstrate the goodness of overflowing generosity? What have they seen happen or imagine to happen in relationships when people are generous?

- Have campers tell stories of scarcity, sharing examples that reinforce the idea that there is **not** enough to go around. Have them share how they have witnessed and practiced scarcity. How has the fear of not having enough manifested itself in their lives? Have they hoarded, stolen, refused to share, because in some basic sense they have feared loss?
- Have campers share real life examples of how they have been treated generously. What changed in them because they may have shared generously with others? How have they been treated by others because they have acted generously? Have they been rewarded? Punished?
- Talk about generosity and scarcity in non-monetary forms. There are ways to be generous (in relationships, in willingness to be helpful, in sharing time, etc.) or ungenerous (out of fear and worry) apart from money.
- Help campers envision ways they can live from the basis of abundance and generosity. Help them see that in acting generously, they become Generosity.
- Encourage campers to know that they are on a journey to become what they are. There is constant, abundant grace!

### Further Scriptures About Generosity...

Here are the stories of four generous people in the Bible:

#### 1. The Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7–16)

*Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” So he set out and went to Zarephath.*

*When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.” As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” But she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”*

*Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.” She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.*

Here you see a widow with so little food that she’s cooking her last meal before she and her son starve to death. Elijah shows an incredible amount of gall by telling her to go home and cook something for him before preparing something for herself and her son.

When we think about the excuses that we give not to be more giving, they’re not as persuasive as this widow’s would have been. After all, this is her last meal. But Elijah makes her an interesting promise. If she feeds him, she’ll find that her supply of flour and oil will not run out. But the only way she’ll discover whether this promise is true is by giving away what she has.

Christian generosity is always a response to God’s grace. While God’s Word doesn’t say that we can give and never run out of resources, it does say that we should give because we can trust the Giver of every good and perfect gift to care for us (James 1:17).

#### 2. The Shunammite Woman (2 Kings 4:8-10)

*One day Elisha was passing through Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. So whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for a meal. She said to her husband, “Look, I am sure that*

*this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God. Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us.”*

Elisha was Elijah’s protégé in more ways than one. Not only were they both important Old Testament prophets, they both found provision at the hands of generous women.

A wealthy woman in Shunem struck up a relationship with Elisha and invited him to eat with her family. It’s unclear if she offered ongoing hospitality or if Elisha just assumed that this was an open invitation, but this woman and her husband fed him every time he came through town.

If we were in her shoes, after a while we might be tempted to feel taken advantage of, but not the Shunammite woman. She goes to her husband and suggests that they give Elisha his own room where he can stay when he comes through town. She even lists out the amenities they need to include.

Why would she offer such generosity? The answer lies in her words. She calls him “a holy man of God,” a sign that she sees her generosity to Elisha as a generosity to the God he serves. When we learn to see our giving as generosity offered to God through the blessing of others, it can revolutionize the way we look at our resources.

### 3. Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57–60)

*When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.*

A tomb like Joseph’s didn’t come cheap. It was literally hewn from the side of a hill, and it was back-breaking, time-consuming work. On top of the price, supply was limited. Someone like Joseph would purchase his tomb early—not simply to be prepared ahead of time, but to ensure they received a good plot. Joseph’s sacrifice was irreplaceable.

The last three words Matthew uses here are so telling. Joseph offers up his tomb, lays Jesus’s body in it, rolls a stone in front of it, and goes away. He doesn’t hang out waiting to be compensated or to be recognized for his altruism. He was moved and he gave. While God promises us a return for our generosity, true generosity is apparent when it expects nothing in return.

### 4. The Churches of Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

*We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints—and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us.*

The church in Macedonia was impoverished. No one would have been surprised if their response to those in need was, “We’d love to help, but we’re strapped.” Instead, they begged for the opportunity to take part in the relief effort.

It’s easy to dream about the generosity we intend to show when we have the means. The truth is that God cares more about the \$5 we have today than the \$100 we intend to have in the future. When we can look at our time and resources through the eyes of opportunity instead of through a veil of limitation, there’s no end to what God can do through us.

Here are four more Bible stories of generosity:

#### *Feeding of the Five Thousand*

- Matthew 14:13-21
- Mark 6:30-44

- Luke 9:10-17
- John 6:1-15

#### *Do Not Worry*

- Matthew 6:25-34
- Luke 12:22-31

#### Manna in the Wilderness

- Exodus 15

#### *The Healing of Naaman*

- 2 Kings 5:1-19

## **KIRBERG GAME**

### **River Crossing – See Appendix**

I have given you a lot to work with in this study. Take the time to shape your lesson plan for this study. This could be one of the most powerful studies of the week.

Be sure to close your study with prayer.

### **E. Additional Study Ideas**

#### **THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF GENEROSITY**

As mentioned in the Introduction, in addition to wisdom and guidance from holy texts and spiritual traditions, generosity as a human phenomenon is currently being studied through scientific, empirical, and interdisciplinary means. The University of Notre Dame operates something called The Science of Generosity Initiative. This initiative aims to bring together diverse approaches in order to create a field for the study of generosity in all its forms.

From the Science of Generosity Initiative website (<http://generosityresearch.nd.edu/more-about-the-initiative/>):

*Established in 2009 with a \$5 million grant from the John Templeton Foundation, the initiative grew out of Christian Smith's work on Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money (Oxford 2008). That book examines the complex reasons for the illiberal financial giving of American Christians, and suggests that more liberal giving could accomplish world-transforming change. The research Smith began there is now being extended and developed by a Notre Dame research group conducting interviews around the country in order to understand why some people practice generosity and others don't.*

Here are summaries of three fascinating current projects of The Science of Generosity Initiative:

#### **Causes, Manifestations and Consequences of Generosity**

Principal Investigator: Christian Smith, Sociology, University of Notre Dame

Smith and Co-Investigators, Kraig Beyerlein (ND), Jessica Collett (ND), Steve Vaisey (University of California Berkeley), and Trish Snell Herzog (ND) will conduct a primary data collection research project based at the University of Notre Dame. The project will use multiple mixed methods to seek to better understand the basic causal mechanisms that operate to generate, encourage and obstruct the exercise of generosity among people in a variety of settings.

For the purposes of this project, the researchers define generosity as *the virtue of giving good things to others freely and abundantly*. Generosity also involves giving to others not simply anything in abundance but rather giving those things that are good for others. Generosity always intends to enhance the true wellbeing of those to whom it gives.

What exactly generosity gives can be various things: money, possessions, time, attention, aid, encouragement, emotional availability, and more. Generosity, to be clear, is not identical with pure altruism, since people can be authentically generous in part for reasons that serve their own interests as well as those of others. Indeed, insofar as generosity is a virtue, to practice it for the good of others also necessarily means that doing so achieves one's own true, long-term good as well. And so generosity, like all of the virtues, is in people's genuine enlightened self-interest to learn and practice.

In the view of the researchers, too much research in related areas simply seeks to find significant correlations among demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral variables. They by contrast intend to focus on identifying the actual causal mechanisms that produce generous and ungenerous dispositions and behaviors. The question is not what associates with generosity, but what causes it? Too little research to date has pursued that level of explanation.

To address the need for more and better social scientific research on the sources, manifestations and consequences of generosity, the researchers will conduct an original, primary data research project that will take a multi-methods and multi-step approach. There is no need in the current project to compete with longitudinal survey strategies already being fielded in other of the supported projects. Rather the complementary approach here is to bring in the critical realist perspective, taking a non-positivistic focus on the *causal social mechanisms* generating and depressing generosity, not simply statistically significant associations among variables. This approach leads to research more focused on real social situations, including people who have traditionally refused to provide financial and volunteering data such as personal incomes or congregational budgets, and proactively sampling low generosity and high generosity research participants across several demographic characteristics.

The researchers plan to conduct research for this project in five temporally progressive and methodologically synergistic steps and methods. Those are:

- performing one-year ethnographies in religious congregations representing major religious traditions with the goal of better understanding cultures and practices of *whole communities* of people operating in local congregation settings over time, to see not only what specific individuals say, but actually how entire religious organizations, work as contexts of faith, organizational ecologies, and practicing communities of believers.
- fielding high response-rate in-person interviews via congregational sampling to conduct interviews with members sampled based on their congregation-reported giving behavior, allowing the researchers to match observed giving behavior with self-reported behaviors and explanations for giving.
- designing and implementing a nationally-representative survey with individual Americans incorporating best established measures of generosity and new measures of generosity based on the previous phases of the study – including studying generosity in its multiple forms of financial giving, volunteering, giving blood or donating organs, political involvement, and relational generosity.
- conducting follow-up in-person interviews with a sample of survey participants for in-depth household and family studies that interview multiple household members and collect observational data on families, households, and neighborhoods.
- exploring the possibility of conducting natural field experiments examining reactions to moral dilemmas within real-world settings.

The combination of these five research steps and approaches will allow the researchers to examine contextual, institutionally-nested causal effects that individual-level survey research alone simply cannot measure. By conducting these studies within religious congregations and among the general public more broadly, we will study both religious and non-religious motivations for and expressions of generosity. The combination of methodologies will enable the researchers to study generosity through more traditional discursive methods, such

as surveys and interviews, as well as through non-discursive methods of participant observation and ethnography. This approach will also aid in exploring the multidimensional nature of generosity through investigating in one integrated project the generosity of money, time, talents, and relational giving.

### **The Social Contagion of Generosity**

Principal Investigator: Nicholas Christakis, Sociology, Harvard University

Co-Investigator: James Fowler, Political Science, University of California, San Diego

Generosity is a key predicate for the formation and operation of social networks, a fact only recently beginning to attract attention from network scientists, social scientists and biologists.

If people never really behaved generously or altruistically toward one another social ties would dissolve and the network around us would disintegrate. Some degree of generosity is therefore crucial for the emergence and endurance of social networks. Moreover, once networks are established, cascades of generous acts—from ordinary acts of kindness to organ donation—can spread through them. This project is grounded in the idea that understanding generosity requires taking account of the social connections in which the disposition to generosity occurs.

Christakis and his research team will use two different methodological approaches to study this phenomenon. First, they will continue a joint survey project done with Gallup that uses a representative sample of 3,000 Americans, to which they will add longitudinal follow-up. They will use the survey to collect information about respondents' social networks and about their generosity, and will assess the relationship between these phenomena, paying particular attention to causal relationships.

Second, the research team will conduct behavioral experiments in which volunteers will be assembled into networks. These networks will then be led through sequences of interactions in a way that will allow researchers to test whether we can induce cascades of generosity such that generosity spreads from person to person to person within the network.

With these two types of data, Christakis and his research team pose two broad sets of questions and hypotheses. First, using the survey data they will evaluate whether or not structural aspects of people's social relationships (such as how many friends they have or whether their friends know each other) affect how generous they are. Perhaps people with more friends are more generous; or perhaps they have more friends precisely because they are more generous. Or perhaps people whose friends are close to one another are more generous, compared to those whose friends don't get along with one another.

Second, using the experimental data, researchers will evaluate whether or not generosity can spread from person to person to person. They hypothesize that acts of kindness and altruism can spread, and that if I am generous to you, you will be generous to others (and not just to me). Determining the extent of this phenomenon, and the rules governing it, has important implications for our understanding of generosity, its determinants and its consequences.

### **The Neural Circuitry Underlying Altruistic Behavior**

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Brown, Social Psychology, SUNY Stonybrook and University of Michigan

Co-Principal Investigator: James E. Swain, Department of Psychiatry, University of Michigan and Yale Child Study Center

Co-Investigators: S. Shaun Ho and Israel Liberzon, Psychiatry, University of Michigan and Sara Konrath, Psychology and Institute for Social Research University of Michigan

Studies have shown that altruistic behavior directed toward relationship partners has psychological and health benefits for the helper. Attempts to understand these benefits suggest that altruistic behavior can engage a suite of cognitions, emotions and neurophysiological circuitry that amount to a caregiving behavioral system that motivates parental and other forms of caretaking behavior.

The evidence to support the idea of a neurobiological system oriented toward caregiving comes from functional neuroanatomical studies of maternal caregiving in social mammals. These studies have identified specific neural circuitry that is recruited to direct maternal behavior in rats and other rodents; they indicate that maternal behavior is regulated within the hypothalamus, which turns on maternal motivation and influences sensory-motor integration to facilitate maternal responsiveness, including inhibiting competing avoidance and fear motivations. Despite this work there have been no human neuroimaging studies that have explicitly tested whether or not human altruism activates brain circuits that support maternal care.

This project addresses this gap in the literature by conducting a neuroimaging study with parents and non-parents that aims to identify the neural circuitry underlying human altruism. Researchers on the project will scan 20 female parents and 20 female age-matched non-parents as they view infant videos and then work on tasks to help themselves (control tasks) or tasks involving helping a partner (helping tasks) who is either a stranger or someone to whom they have become close. Next, all participants will be exposed to a stress induction in the scanner and researchers will measure cardiovascular and hormonal indicators of stress and administer self-report questionnaires to track changes in positive mood and motivational state.

The aim of this research is to determine three things:

- whether human altruism and human parenting responses activate similar networks of brain regions
- whether activation of these networks is associated with beneficial health in the helper (e.g., accelerated stress recovery), and
- whether or not activation of these networks differs as a function of the relationship between the helper and recipient and/or, the helper's prior maternal experience (parents versus non-parents), and the helper's level of dispositional empathy.

Ultimately work on this project might elucidate brain mechanisms underlying social influences on health, and thus could lead to the design of a new generation of interventions that leverage the benefits of "caregiving" systems. Neuroimaging studies will be useful to determine malleable factors that activate and inhibit caregiving neurocircuitry. If Brown's team of researchers can discover a neural signature for human caregiving, the potential impact of this work may extend well beyond health-related initiatives to include social, economic and environmental problems that depend on achieving a better understanding of how to foster cooperation and concern for the wellbeing of others.

## **A STORY OF GIVING WHEN IT COUNTS**

Ann Lamott, in her book *Bird by Bird*, tells this story:

An eight-year-old boy had a younger sister who was dying of leukemia, and he was told that without a blood transfusion she would die. His parents explained to him that his blood was probably compatible with hers, and if so, he could be the blood donor. They asked him if they could test his blood. He said sure. So they did and it was a good match. Then they asked if he would give his sister a pint of blood, that it could be her only chance of living. He said he would have to think about it overnight.

The next day he went to his parents and said he was willing to donate the blood. So they took him to the hospital where he was put on a gurney beside his six-year-old sister. Both of them were hooked up to IVs. A nurse withdrew a pint of blood from the boy, which was then put in the girl's IV. The boy lay on his gurney in silence while the blood dripped into his sister, until the doctor came over to see how he was doing. Then the boy opened his eyes and asked, "*How soon until I start to die?*"



## **F. Ideas to Incorporate the Theme Throughout the Day**

### **Perform Random Acts of Kindness**

The theme of the day is I Become Generous. Have your campers perform random acts of kindness. We all perform acts of kindness at one time or another. These acts may be large or small, and their beneficiaries may not even be aware of them. Yet, their effects can be profound – to the giver as well as the recipient.

Invite your campers to perform five acts of kindness during this day. It doesn't matter if the acts are small. The acts do not need to be for the same person and the person doesn't even need to be aware. Examples: scrape someone else's plate; help put away high ropes equipment; pick up song sheets, serve another table besides your own; in KP, do the jobs that are not everyone's favorite; buy someone a treat at pop shop.

At some point in the day, find a way to ask campers how it made them feel to perform these acts of kindness. Ask them if they could do this "down the mountain."

### **Night Prayer**

Pray this beautiful prayer each night at the end of closing worship:

Lord,  
it is night.

The night is for stillness.  
Let us be still in the presence of God.  
It is night after a long day.  
What has been done has been done;  
what has not been done has not been done;  
let it be.

The night is dark.  
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives  
rest in you.

The night is quiet.  
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,  
all dear to us,  
and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.  
Let us look expectantly to a new day,  
new joys,  
new possibilities.

In your name we pray.  
Amen.

## **G. Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, Suggestions**

### **Songs from the RTALC Songbook Expressing Generosity:**

- 86. Aye –Aye-Aye
- 91. Come Thou Font
- 92. Big House

95. You Are Mine

98. Blessings

**22 Quotes on Generosity** (compiled by Donna Sapolin at <http://www.nextavenue.org/22-inspiring-quotes-generosity/>)

1. "A fight is going on inside me," said an old man to his son. "It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf is evil. He is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other wolf is good. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The same fight is going on inside you."

The son thought about it for a minute and then asked, "Which wolf will win?"

The old man replied simply, "The one you feed."

— Wendy Mass, *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life*

2. "That's what I consider true generosity: You give your all and yet you always feel as if it costs you nothing."

— Simone de Beauvoir

3. "You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you."

— John Bunyan

4. "A kind gesture can reach a wound that only compassion can heal."

— Steve Maraboli, *Life, the Truth, and Being Free*

5. "In the end, though, maybe we must all give up trying to pay back the people in this world who sustain our lives. In the end, maybe it's wiser to surrender before the miraculous scope of human generosity and to just keep saying thank you, forever and sincerely, for as long as we have voices."

— Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia*

6. "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity."

— Simone Weil

7. "Do all the good you can,

By all the means you can,

In all the ways you can,

In all the places you can,

At all the times you can,

To all the people you can,

As long as ever you can."

— John Wesley, *Letters of John Wesley*

8. "I gave you all my secrets and you lost them all. You lost a lot of things.

But the treasure of it was in the giving, not the keeping."

— Julio-Alexi Genao, *When You Were Pixels*

9. "Generosity could be as contagious as the zombie plague as long as enough people were willing to be carriers."

— Jonathan Maberry, *Dust and Decay*

10. "Sir, I did not count your glasses of wine, why should you number up my cups of tea?"

— Samuel Johnson, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, Vol 2*

11. "If you want to call attention to your good deed then it isn't a good deed, it's a self-serving one. Why? Not only have you patted yourself on the back but you're fishing for others to do the same."

— Donna Lynn Hope

12. “You cannot do a kindness too soon because you never know how soon it will be too late.”  
— Ralph Waldo Emerson
13. “It takes generosity to discover the whole through others. If you realize you are only a violin, you can open yourself up to the world by playing your role in the concert.”  
— Jacques-Yves Cousteau
14. “Money is but one venue for generosity. Kindness is an even more valuable currency.”  
— Alan Cohen
15. “Minds, nevertheless, are not conquered by arms, but by love and generosity.”  
— Baruch Spinoza
16. “It wasn’t that he was specially ungenerous but that he put things off to give his generosity a longer and more significant route.”  
— Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*
17. “Being generous often consists of simply extending a hand. That’s hard to do if you are grasping tightly to your righteousness, your belief system, your superiority, your assumptions about others, your definition of normal.”  
— Patti Digh, *Life is a Verb: 37 Days to Wake Up, Be Mindful, and Live Intentionally*
18. “The greatest gift you ever give is your honest self.”  
— Fred Rogers
19. “Be a gift to everyone who enters your life, and to everyone whose life you enter. Be careful not to enter another’s life if you cannot be a gift. (You can always be a gift, because you always are the gift — yet sometimes you don’t let yourself know that.)”  
— Neale Donald Walsch, *Conversations With God: An Uncommon Dialogue, Vol.2*
20. “How can I give you nothing? Do you seriously expect me to buy nothing, wrap up nothing, stick a gift tag on nothing, send a card saying I really hope you like your nothing and lie awake worrying that the nothing I got you was the right color!”  
— Hilary McKay, *Caddy Ever After*
21. “Time cannot be packaged and ribboned and left under trees for Christmas morning. Time can’t be given. But it can be shared.”  
—Cecilia Ahern, *The Gift*
22. “Christmas Gift Suggestions:  
To your enemy, forgiveness.  
To an opponent, tolerance.  
To a friend, your heart.  
To a customer, service.  
To all, charity.  
To every child, a good example.  
To yourself, respect.”  
— Oren Arnold

## **H. Ideas to Adjust Study Down for Juniors**

See the Scripture Study section, shorter text, for younger campers.

## **I. Ideas to Adjust Study Up for Senior High**

See the Scripture Study section, longer text, for mature campers.

## **J. Parent Devotional**

### **Scripture**

Matthew (20:9-15)

*When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'*

### **Reflection**

This is the end of a parable Jesus tells about the kingdom of heaven. If you have a Bible at home, look up the whole story (Matthew 20:1-16). Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a landowner who hires day laborers to work in his vineyard. Throughout the day, he returns to the marketplace and hires more laborers. He even hires workers when there's only one hour of work left. When the workers line up to receive their pay, he first pays those who worked the shortest amount of time. They are delighted to learn they will earn an entire day's pay! When those who started working early in the day lined up to receive their pay, they assume they will receive more, but they received the same amount: a full day's wage. This upset them and they complain to the landowner. But he reminds them that this is what they agreed upon at the start of the day. And he says that he chooses to give to the last what he gave to them. "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

### **Activity**

In your family, discuss your reactions to this story. Don't be afraid to express whatever feelings arise in you. Consider how the various characters may have felt.

Here's an activity for your family. In the summertime, pick a hot day and plan to refresh others who need refreshing. Some ideas include giving out (instead of selling) lemonade at a lemonade stand, or going to a park and taking a box of frozen treats to share with others. Maybe take a slushy drink to someone you know who is at work on a hot day and can't get away to buy one for themselves.

Reflect on these questions:

- How do you think they felt when we gave them the drink/treat/slushy?
- How did you feel when you saw how happy/surprised they were when we gave them something refreshing?
- Who do you think felt happier: the recipient or us?

### **Prayer**

Loving God, you are generous and good to everyone, quite apart from our deserving your goodness. In fact, deserving it doesn't seem to even matter. You just give because you are good. This changes us and it can change everyone. Help us to be generous as you are generous. Amen.



## 2018 BIBLE STUDY – *THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING!* DAY 5 - “GRACE-FUELED TO BE THE CHANGE”

### A. Introduction to the Theme

\* **THEME:** God’s Grace in Christ changes everything; even, and especially you and me. We become humility, mercy, and generosity. Having been changed and filled with power from on high, grace-fueled, we become the change the world is so desperately needing; the change God needs us to be. Through a powerful community of Christian people, the body of Christ, the church, the world can be shaped for God’s sake. In love we are mercy, humility and generosity. In love, we continue to become merciful, humble and generous children of God.

\* **INTRO:** I recently read about the top five, weirdest, alternative, energy resources being developed. Imagine our world someday fueled by Space Lasers/solar panels shot into orbit that harness the sun’s energy 24/7 and transmit it back to earth. Or, malls all over America, like the Mall of America in Minneapolis, Minnesota heating their facilities by recycling shoppers’ body heat through a system of pipes, water and pumps. Think about this; Scottish distilleries partnering with electricity companies to convert the natural waste created during the distilling process into usable electricity? How about this alternative energy being developed and utilized is in Washington, D.C.; The conversion of human waste? Oh yeah...in Washington D.C. they convert people’s “poopie,” which contains methane, into usable energy. And finally, you’ll love this one: texting. Some metals can build up an electric charge under pressure. It’s called piezoelectricity, and this effect can be used to generate energy on surfaces like roads, floors and even cell phone screens. The world consumes so much energy that scientists and entrepreneurs are constantly searching for new ways to fuel our lives. Almost everything we do each day requires some energy; from charging our phones to driving our cars to flushing a toilet. Fuel, energy, makes our lives possible. Without fuel of some kind, we cannot live.

From the beginning of the week until today we have been talking about a different kind of fuel. No, not a crazy, weird energy source but an alternative energy source that changes us to be the people God hopes we will be. We have spent time studying the Sacred Scriptures to understand that the gift of Grace God gives us in Jesus Christ makes us a new creation. Whatever we were before we encountered God in Christ has passed away. By Grace we are no longer that old pride-filled, merciless, or selfish person. And because we have become and continue to grow into humility, mercy and generosity, we can be the change that the world so desperately needs. We are grace-fueled to be that change.

Of course, we cannot do this on our own or by our own power. Everything we become is a great gift from God. And while most gifts are yours to keep, this gift God gives us is not. The gifts of humility, mercy and generosity grow as we live them out in community and relationships day by day. If we are willing to be humility, mercy and generosity, we really can make a difference in the world. God can use us, turn us around and we become more than we ever imagined possible.

When I think about one of the most profound “about faces” in Scripture, I think about the Apostle Paul. His story, before his conversion, is clearly a story of a life being fueled by power, prestige, arrogance, pride and selfishness. He was a persecutor of Christians and anything but a blessing in God’s world. It wasn’t until he encountered Christ that he changed and became humility, mercy and generosity. God’s gracious power is greater than any power in the world; greater than the darkness of sin and death. By the grace of God in Christ, Saul becomes an agent of change in the world.

Matt Redman sings a song that encapsulates what our week and specifically this day should be about. As Christians, we must constantly look to becoming more of what God intends us to be. Redman sings: Could we live like your grace is stronger than all our faults and failures? Could we live like your love is deeper than our hearts could fathom? Could we live like this? Could we live like Your Name is higher than every other power? Could we live like Your ways are wiser than our understanding? Yes. Our God is all (He) God says (He) God is. Jesus, in Your name we could change the world.

Wow! Change the world? Are you kidding me? Actually, I’m not. Changing the world IS possible if we remember that every little thing we do; every time we are mercy or humility, a little corner of God’s world morphs into something different, something more tender, loving and kind. Some people have the energy and creativity to do great things and change a lot about God’s world. And some of us are simply not wired that way. But the point is, the more we practice humility; the more we practice mercy;

the more we practice generosity, we become what we live. If you live resentfully...you will be a resentful person. If you live selfishly, you will be a selfish person. But if you live mercifully...you will become mercy. If you live generously...you will become generosity. We become what we live and what we live eventually is so much a part of who we are, that we don't even have to think about how to react because we react out of our DNA; a DNA of mercy, humility and generosity.

To be sure, changing the world is an ominous prospect so our job is to help our campers understand that every small or monumental time they are humility, mercy and generosity, a life in their world will be affected and life by life, touched by grace, the world will change.

## **B. Objectives for this Day of the Study**

\* By studying the Apostle Paul's story, campers will learn of a solid example of how God's grace changed a life.

\* Help campers understand that their lives of mercy, humility and generosity can change the world

\* Teach campers to live into the grace of God and foster in them the courage to be the change the world so desperately needs

## **YOUR GOAL FOR EACH WEEK:**

\* Model humility, mercy and generosity; model grace every week and be the change you wish the kids to be

## **C. Morning Watch**

### **WELCOME**

Welcome to this day. May this time each morning be a blessing to you and the community you are a part of this week. May you experience here the grace of God that changes everything, even you.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Grace-fueled - Be the change you want to see in the world – Not to remind you that you will be going home tomorrow but...this is your last full day at camp. You've learned so much about what it means to live a gracious life. You've learned that you are called to be humility, mercy and generosity in a world that's a pretty tough place; that really needs God's unconditional love.

So...now what? Here's the challenge...take with you what you've learned. On this last day, try to understand that the most essential fuel for your life is the Grace of God and it grows in you as mercy, generosity and humility. Think about how you can continue to live the good stuff you have learned at camp when you go home.

### **WHY WAS THIS PASSAGE CHOSEN?**

Ephesians 3:7 "By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

### **SONG**

***Only Grace*** by Matthew West -

There is no guilt here, There is no shame, No pointing fingers, There is no blame  
What happened yesterday, Has disappeared, The dirt has washed away, And now it's clear

Chorus:

There's only grace, There's only love, There's only mercy, And believe me it's enough  
Your sins are gone, Without a trace, There's nothing left now, There's only grace

You're starting over now, Under the sun, You're stepping forward now, A new life has begun, Your new life has begun

Chorus:

And if you should fall again, Get back up, get back up, Reach out and take my hand,  
Get back up, Get back up, Get back up again

## QUESTIONS FOR GOD TIME

- You are gifted...knowing that, how will you live like it and change the world?
- What would a changed life look like in your home, your school, in your friendships and family?
- God loves you so much. How does knowing that help you feel and be more loving toward yourself?
- If you cannot earn grace or lose it because God is so good, how can you live into God's grace with courage and make changes in your life and world that will leave a lasting impression on others?
- What does it mean to you to be humility, mercy and generosity. How would your relationships with others be blessed because you choose to continue living that way when you go down the mountain and head home?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, you have blessed us with your grace to make this world different. Give me the courage to step out, even when it is scary, and change my part of the world that I can influence. Thanks for the promise that you will always walk with me every day. AMEN

## D. Scripture Study

### OPENING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: (The two questions in bold are extremely important!)

1. **What do we mean when we say...if you live resentment...your DNA will be resentful? Or, if you live hatred...you will be hated?**
2. **Conversely, what do we mean when we say...if you are mercy...you will live mercifully? Or, if are humility...you will live humbly all your days? If you live generosity...you will live generously?**
3. Do you know how often you must repeat an action before it becomes habitual?  
On average, it takes more than 2 months before a **new** behavior becomes automatic — 66 days to be exact.
4. How does that apply to being humility, mercy and generosity?

It is important to help campers understand that creating DNA rich in humility, mercy and generosity is going to take some time. They may make headway and then fail. Help them know that's a whole lot what grace is meant to be; it picks us up, dusts us off and sends us back on a path to living the way God wants us to.

Grace is God's gift of unconditional love, which, you'll remember, is unearned and cannot be lost. When we lose our way or fall into old patterns of selfishness, pride and judgment, we can always start over no questions asked.

## ON TO SAUL:

### **Who is Saul and Who is Paul? And why is his name changing from Saul to Paul less important than his change of his heart? How does the world know that Saul is different?**

In early conversations during our Bible Study Writer's Retreat I thought that making a big deal out of Saul's name changing to Paul was important. I always equated Saul's name change with his change in lifestyle; his conversion. Thanks to one of our other Bible Study Writers, I got straightened out. Below you will find a complete explanation of the name change and why it changed. But what I am finding joy in, is that while Saul eventually was called Paul, he more importantly had a change of heart that was manifested in how he lived not in what he was called. Your campers will go home with the same name but hopefully they will not go home the same people. What we hope for is a change of heart and a desire to live differently and be humility, mercy and generosity.

"An often thought of "name changes" in the Bible is that of *Saul* to *Paul*. The change is commonly linked to Saul's conversion on the Damascus Road, when Jesus commissioned him to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-19). However, at the time of Saul's conversion, Jesus still addressed him as "Saul." Later, Jesus told Ananias to find "Saul" in Damascus and restore his sight. Acts 9 goes on to describe "Saul" as



increasing in spiritual strength and understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. So, it was not Jesus who changed his name on the road to Damascus. If it wasn't Jesus' doing, how did the change from *Saul* to *Paul* happen, and when? The answer is that Saul's name was also *Paul*. The custom of dual names was common in those days. Acts 13:9 describes the apostle as "Saul, who was also called Paul." From that verse on, Saul is always referred to in Scripture as "Paul."

Paul was a Jew, born in the Roman city of Tarsus. He was proud of his Jewish heritage, as he describes in Philippians 3:5: "Circumcised on the eighth day of the race of Israel, or the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee." He was so zealous and devout, that persecuting Christians was the natural way for him to show his devotion. He chose to use his Hebrew name, *Saul*, until sometime after he began to believe in and preach Christ. After that time, as "the apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13), he used his Roman name, *Paul*. It would make sense for Paul to use his Roman name as he travelled farther and farther into the Gentile world.

It is interesting that Paul began using his Roman name on Cyprus when the Roman proconsul on that island was converted (Acts 13:12). This was during Paul's first missionary journey and involved a high-ranking, idolatrous Gentile coming to faith in Christ. The fact that the proconsul's name was Sergius Paulus has led some to think that Saul took the name *Paulus/Paul* as a reminder of this event, but it was most likely a coincidence.

Using his Roman name was fitting for the man who proclaimed that he would become "all things to all people," a Jew to the Jews in order to win the Jews, weak to the weak in order to win the weak, etc., all for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19–23). Adopting his Roman name would allow Paul to approach the Gentiles to whom he was sent and speak to them in their own language, becoming as one of them and setting them at ease. It is also possible that Paul gave up the use of his Hebrew name, *Saul*, with its regal connotation and chose to use his Roman name, *Paul*, meaning "little" or "small," because he desired to become smaller in order to present Christ as greater (cf. John 3:30). (*got Questions.org*)

The Apostle Paul was the most prolific writer in the New Testament. The list of books or letters (epistles) he wrote are as follows: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Some attribute the book of Hebrews to Paul as well. But others believe that Luke, Priscilla, or maybe even Barnabas could have written it. In any case, every book Paul wrote, Hebrews included, was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

## **HERE IS A TIMELINE OF SAUL/PAUL'S LIFE:**

### **His Birth & Education**

- c. **A.D. 6** Born a Roman citizen to Jewish parents in Tarsus (in modern eastern Turkey)
- c. **20–30** Studies Torah in Jerusalem with Gamaliel; becomes a Pharisee
- c. **30–33** Persecutes followers of Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem and Judea

### **His Conversion**

- c. **33–36** Converted on the way to Damascus; spends three years in Arabia; returns to Damascus to preach Jesus as Messiah
- c. **36** Flees Damascus because of persecution; visits Jerusalem and meets with the apostles
- 36–44** Preaches in Tarsus and surrounding region
- 44–46** Invited by Barnabas to teach in Antioch
- 46** With Barnabas visits Jerusalem to bring a famine relief offering

### **His Missionary Journeys**

- 47–48** First missionary journey with Barnabas, to Cyprus and Galatia
- 49** At the Council of Jerusalem, Paul argues successfully that Gentile Christians need not follow Jewish law; to Antioch; confronts Peter over question of Jewish law
- 49–52** Second missionary journey with Silas, through Asia Minor and Greece; settles in Corinth; writes letters to Thessalonians
- 52** Visits Jerusalem and Antioch briefly; begins third missionary journey
- 52–55** Stays in Ephesus; writes the letters to Galatians and Corinthians
- 55–57** Travels through Greece and possibly Illyricum (modern Yugoslavia); writes letter to Romans

## Paul's Arrest & Death

**57–59** Returns to Jerusalem and arrested; imprisoned at Caesarea

**59–60** Appears before Festus and appeals to Caesar; voyage to Rome

**60–62** Under house arrest at Rome; writes letters to Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon

**62–64** Released; journeys to Spain; writes letters to Timothy and Titus

**64** Returns to Rome; martyred during perse

### \* Portions of Acts 8 and 9

While Saul thought he was doing what God wanted him to by keeping the Jews in line, he was really living an arrogant, prideful and selfish life. In the last verses of chapter 7 of the book of Acts we see Saul standing by at the stoning of Stephen. The stoning of Stephen ignited the first mass persecution of Christian Jews (8:1). Also, it is possible that Stephen's death was somehow used by God to influence Saul. There is a link between Stephen's death and Saul's conversion. Saul, the greatest missionary of all time, the one who arguably influenced the world more than anyone else, was watching. Nobody handled stoning before like Stephen. Saul never forgot Stephen's death (Acts 22:20). Augustine said, "If Stephen had not prayed, the church would not have had Paul." Ironically, before Saul's (Paul's) conversion he was one of the most ardent persecutors of the Christian Church movement. Beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts, we hear of Saul's vicious treatment of those who followed Christ. And in Chapter 9 we read of God's conversion of Saul's life. Saul struggled to understand God's grace. He spent his whole life trying to earn God's favor by obeying the law. Touched by the love and grace of Jesus, Saul becomes, in ensuing days, what we have studied this week. Saul becomes humility, mercy and generosity on Jesus' behalf. It is amazing how God can change a life...Saul's...yours...and mine.

Read Acts 8:1-3

***Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.***

1. What do we see happening right after Stephen's death (v. 1)?

The execution of Stephen incited the first major episode of persecution—persecution of Christian Jews by unbelieving Jews. There was a Jewish civil war going on in Jerusalem.

2. What does it say in verse 1 and 3 about what happened to believing Jews (new converts to the Christian faith)? What was the result of the persecution?

Jewish Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. They were forced out of their comfort zones and used to plant churches in all Judea as well as in Samaria. We see here the initiation of God's plan to spread the gospel. Otherwise the New Testament church becomes a Jerusalem church and doesn't include Gentiles. The church expanded both geographically and culturally.

3. Why were the twelve apostles not scattered like the others?

Persecution centered mainly on Greek Jews like Stephen. Hebraic Jews, who were Jerusalem natives/locals, were not as threatening.

4. What do we see Saul doing (v. 3)?

That dude was on a self-appointed mission—ravaging the church. Apparently watching the execution of Stephen drove Saul's loathing of the Christian community to new heights as he now embarked on a campaign to arrest as many Christians as possible.

5. What do you think the scattered Jewish Christians did (v. 4)?

I'm guessing they carried on the work of the church by preaching the word, sharing the gospel and performing miracles.

Then read Chapter 9:1-31

*Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So, he went to the high priest. <sup>2</sup>He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. <sup>3</sup>As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" <sup>5</sup>"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! <sup>6</sup>Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

*<sup>7</sup>The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! <sup>8</sup>Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So, his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. <sup>9</sup>He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.*

*<sup>10</sup>Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. <sup>11</sup>The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. <sup>12</sup>I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him, so he can see again." <sup>13</sup>"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! <sup>14</sup>And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." <sup>15</sup>But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup>And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."*

*<sup>17</sup>So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup>Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. <sup>19</sup>Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.*

*Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. <sup>20</sup>And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!" <sup>21</sup>All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?"*

*<sup>22</sup>Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. <sup>23</sup>After a while some of the Jews plotted together to kill him. <sup>24</sup>They were watching for him day and night at the city gate, so they could murder him, but Saul was told about their plot. <sup>25</sup>So during the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.*

*<sup>26</sup>When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! <sup>27</sup>Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.*

*<sup>28</sup>So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. <sup>29</sup>He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. <sup>30</sup>When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.*

*<sup>31</sup>The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.*

1. How would you describe Saul at this point (v. 1-2)?

Fanatical, radical, passionate, a self-appointed man on a mission to stamp out this "revolution." An angry, violent man unquestionably convinced of his own self-righteousness, knowing with absolute certainty that he was doing God's work. He was addicted to obeying the law to earn God's favor. But he was really, spiritually blind; maybe even dead.

2. Why would Saul choose Damascus?

Located over 100 miles from Jerusalem, Damascus was of strategic importance; a hub of commerce from which trade caravans reached into Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia and Arabia. Christianity could quickly spread from Damascus if not contained.

3. What did Saul learn? What did God reveal to him?

Saul realized the error of his ways—his whole way of dealing with God was wrong. His entire concept of God was wrong. He had been zealously wasting his life. This was a real wake up call for Saul. Saul sincerely thought that he was serving God in viciously attacking Christians, but now he discovered that he had been fighting against God. Paul was passionate but wrong! Note that Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting Him—not His followers. Jesus did not condemn, rebuke, or judge Saul but he instructed him to go to Damascus and await further guidance.

4. Why do you think Saul obeyed and went to Damascus? What convicted him that he was wrong? Paul's heart was touched so deeply that he could "not" obey. The Holy Spirit of God stirred him to do the right thing.

5. What was ironic about the way Saul entered Damascus (v. 8)? He was led like a child by the hand—the very antithesis of the way he anticipated he would take Damascus by storm. He had been spiritually blind but now he was physically blind. On the road to Damascus, the light went on for Paul—and he was never the same.

6. Why do you suppose God chose Saul? What was it about Saul that God wanted on God's side? God chose Saul and chased him down like a lost sheep and grabbed ahold of Saul's heart in God's time. Saul was powerful; fervent in his love of God. Only he wasn't living God's Gospel but the Letter of the Law. But he was strong and passionate, and God knew, if God could change Saul's heart, that Saul would be an amazing witness to the Gospel of love in Jesus.

7. Do you think God can use you to be humility, mercy and generosity? By whose power?

8. What do we know about Ananias (v. 10)? Ananias was an ordinary man, a follower of Jesus but not an apostle, nor a prophet, a pastor, an evangelist, nor an elder. God used him because he was an ordinary man. If an apostle or a prominent person had ministered to Saul, people might say Saul received his gospel from a man instead of Jesus.

9. How did Ananias react to the vision from God (v. 13-14)? He was fearful, a skeptic.

10. What was the Lord's great plan for Paul that He revealed to Ananias (v. 15-16)? Paul would become God's primary instrument in taking the gospel to the Gentile world. He was designated to be the apostle to the Gentiles (v. 15).

11. What else would the mission include? Intense suffering.

12. What would/does your life include as a Christian if you choose to live your faith in a world that sometimes dishonors God? If you choose to live mercy, humility and generosity, how will that affect your life? More importantly, how will that affect others?

13. What was Paul's pattern whenever he entered a city? He went to the synagogue first to preach to the local Jews and try to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah: I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel (Romans 9:2-4, New International Version). Paul had a great heart for his Jewish brothers and sisters.

14. What did Saul do as soon as the scales fell from his eyes (vv. 18-19)? The first thing he did was to identify with Christ and the disciples of Christ by water baptism. He did this even before breaking his fast of three days.

15. What happened once Saul's sight was restored, and he gained some strength (v. 20)?

He began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God (vv. 22, 29). It is easy to see the genuineness of Saul's conversion by witnessing the radical change it made in him. He was a totally different person.

16. How did the Jewish community in Damascus react to Saul and his preaching (vv. 20-23)? They were baffled by his preaching; preaching that consistently tried to prove that Jesus was the Christ. They conspired to kill him just like Stephen.

17. How did the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem react to Saul (v. 26)? With great fear.

18. How would you react to someone who had been hateful and unkind to you, and now, all of a sudden, they turned nicey, nicey?

19. Why were they afraid?

His pre-conversion reputation had preceded him. Saul needed time to establish credibility with the Christians he had persecuted so vigorously.

20. What did Saul do in Jerusalem (vv. 28-29)?

While Saul was in Jerusalem, he resumed Stephen's work of debating the Hellenistic Jews. He was himself a Hellenist, as Stephen was, having been born and reared in Tarsus.

21. Why did the church enjoy a time of peace (v. 30-31)?

Saul was no longer persecuting the Christians. He left Jerusalem and was no longer a source of conflict. The effect of scattering (8:1) diluted the concentrated presence of Christians in Jerusalem. Peace came through the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:**

1. Before you read that Saul converted to faith in Jesus and stopped persecuting the Christian Church, what did you feel about Saul?
2. What is so powerful/profound about Saul's conversion?
3. Have you had a friend/family member who was adamant about something they believed and thought was the absolute and *only truth*, change their minds?
4. By whose power did Saul become humble, merciful and generous?
5. What does it mean to live humility, mercy and generosity?
6. How might you use humility, mercy and generosity to be an agent of change in the world?

#### **ABOUT NICODEMUS:**

Nicodemus' about face was not nearly as dramatic as Saul's but nonetheless, just as much a witness to the power of God in Christ. What we know of Nicodemus we find in three places in the Gospel of John. In John 3:1, he is described as a Pharisee like Saul. Pharisees were a group of Jews who were fastidious in keeping the letter of the Law and often opposed Jesus throughout His ministry. Jesus often strongly denounced them for their legalism (see Matthew 23). Saul of Tarsus (who became the apostle Paul) was also a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5).

John 3:1 also describes Nicodemus as a leader of the Jews. According to John 7:50-51, Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, which was the ruling body of the Jews. Each city could have a Sanhedrin, which functioned as the "lower courts." Under Roman authority in the time of Christ, the Jewish nation was allowed a measure of self-rule, and the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was the final court of appeals for matters regarding Jewish law and religion. This was the body that ultimately condemned Jesus, yet they had to get Pilate to approve their sentence since the death penalty was beyond their jurisdiction under Roman law. It appears that Nicodemus was part of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

John reports that Nicodemus came to speak with Jesus at night. Many have speculated that Nicodemus was afraid or ashamed to visit Jesus in broad daylight, so he made a nighttime visit. This may very well be the case, but the text does not give a reason for the timing of the visit. A number of other reasons are also possible. Nicodemus questioned Jesus. As a member of the Jewish ruling council, it would have been his responsibility to find out about any teachers or other public figures who might lead the people astray.

In their conversation, Jesus immediately confronts Nicodemus with the truth that he “must be born again” (John 3:3). When Nicodemus seems incredulous, Jesus reprimands him (perhaps gently) that, since he is a leader of the Jews, he should already know this (John 3:10). Jesus goes on to give a further explanation of this new birth, and it is in this context that we understand John 3:16, which is one of the most well-known and beloved verses in the Bible.

The next time we encounter Nicodemus in the Bible, he is functioning in his official capacity as a member of the Sanhedrin as they consider what to do about Jesus. In John 7, some Pharisees and priests (presumably with authority to do so) sent some of the temple guard to arrest Jesus, but they return, unable to bring themselves to do it (see John 7:32-47). The guards are upbraided by the Pharisees in authority, but Nicodemus presents the opinion that Jesus should not be dismissed or condemned until they have heard from Him personally: “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” (John 7:51). However, the rest of the Council rudely dismisses Nicodemus’s suggestion out of hand—they appear to have already made up their minds about Jesus.

The final mention of Nicodemus in the Bible is in John 19 after Jesus’ crucifixion. We find Nicodemus assisting Joseph of Arimathea in Jesus’ burial. Joseph is described in John as a rich man and in Mark 15:43 as a member of the Council. He is also described in John 19:38 as a disciple of Jesus, albeit a secret one because he was afraid of the Jews. Joseph asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of spices for use in preparing the body for burial and then assisted Joseph in wrapping the body and placing it in the tomb. The sheer amount of burial spices would seem to indicate that Nicodemus was a rich man and that he had great respect for Jesus.

The limited account in John’s Gospel leaves many questions unanswered. about our buddy Nicodemus Was he a true believer? What did he do after the resurrection? The Bible is silent on these questions, and there are no reliable extra-biblical resources that give answers. It would appear that Nicodemus may have been similar to Joseph of Arimathea in that perhaps he, too, was a disciple of Jesus but had not yet mustered the courage to declare his faith openly. Perhaps Nicodemus’s final recorded act was his declaration of faith—although we are not told how public it was. His presentation in the Gospel of John is generally favorable, which suggests that his faith was indeed genuine.

Nicodemus’ admiration and confession of Jesus did not come in one sitting. Nic at night’s faith in Jesus matured in his brief time with the holy Son of God. His grew from seeking Jesus out at night in secret to bringing costly perfume and oils for Jesus’ burial. His witness grew to a public profession of his faith and he participated in one of the holiest acts recorded in the Gospel of John; Jesus’ entombment.

Nicodemus, one whose obedience to the law was more important than anything in his life, became a person of humility, mercy and generosity by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Nicodemus’ confession of faith is truly a tribute to the immense power and persuasion of Jesus. In allowing himself to be touched by Jesus Christ, his life was changed dramatically, and he became all the things that he admired in the Son of God.

#### READ JOHN 3:1-17

*There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. <sup>2</sup>After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” <sup>3</sup>Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup>“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” <sup>5</sup>Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. <sup>7</sup>So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”*

*<sup>9</sup>“How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked. <sup>10</sup>Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? <sup>11</sup>I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. <sup>12</sup>But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup>No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. <sup>14</sup>And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. <sup>16</sup>“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who*

*believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.*

READ JOHN 7:37-52

*<sup>37</sup> On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! <sup>38</sup> Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’” <sup>39</sup> (When he said: “living water,” he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.) <sup>40</sup> When the crowds heard him say this, some of them declared, “Surely this man is the Prophet we’ve been expecting.” <sup>41</sup> Others said, “He is the Messiah.” Still others said, “But he can’t be! Will the Messiah come from Galilee? <sup>42</sup> For the Scriptures clearly state that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the village where King David was born.” <sup>43</sup> So the crowd was divided about him. <sup>44</sup> Some even wanted him arrested, but no one laid a hand on him.*

*<sup>45</sup> When the Temple guards returned without having arrested Jesus, the leading priests and Pharisees demanded, “Why didn’t you bring him in?” <sup>46</sup> “We have never heard anyone speak like this!” the guards responded. <sup>47</sup> “Have you been led astray, too?” the Pharisees mocked. <sup>48</sup> “Is there a single one of us rulers or Pharisees who believes in him? <sup>49</sup> This foolish crowd follows him, but they are ignorant of the law. God’s curse is on them!” <sup>50</sup> Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. <sup>51</sup> “Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?” he asked. <sup>52</sup> They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Search the Scriptures and see for yourself—no prophet ever comes from Galilee!”*

READ JOHN 19:38-42

*<sup>38</sup> Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus’ body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away. <sup>39</sup> With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought about seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes. <sup>40</sup> Following Jewish burial custom they wrapped Jesus’ body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth. <sup>41</sup> The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before. <sup>42</sup> And so, because it was the day of preparation for the Jewish Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.*

1. Who was this Nicodemus? What do we know about him?

Impeccable credentials! He was a Jew, a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin (the highest legal, legislative, and judicial body of the Jews), and a highly respected teacher of the Old Testament Scriptures.

2. How did Nicodemus respond when Jesus told him that, all Nic at night had done up to meeting Jesus was not enough, to get him into the kingdom of God?

He was shocked! But that’s exactly what Jesus tells Nicodemus. Nicodemus must have wondered, if he is not good enough for the kingdom of God, then who is? Nicodemus is a Pharisee at the top of his field. Not only is he a member of the Sanhedrin, he is the most renowned Bible teacher of his day—the “Billy Graham” of first century Jerusalem. Yet when he hears Jesus teach, he hears the answers to questions that have bothered him for years. He watches the crowds as they listen to Jesus, and he knows he has never held the attention of an audience like Jesus does. Jesus speaks in simple terms, but His message has great power. Nicodemus observes the miracles Jesus performs, knowing he has never performed even one miracle. The reason why John records Nicodemus’s conversation with Jesus, is that in spite of his achievements, in spite of his prominence in education, politics, culture, and religion, Nicodemus had a great need. He needed to know God.

3. Why did Nicodemus come to visit Jesus after dark? Why at night?

Scripture doesn’t tell us. Perhaps Nicodemus feared retribution, losing status, or embarrassment. Some think Nic had everything to lose.

4. What do you think might have been on his mind/purpose?

He probably wondered if Jesus could be the Messiah he’d been waiting for. The one thing about Jesus that impressed the crowds, irritated the Jewish leaders, and caught Nicodemus’ attention was that Jesus taught and

acted with authority. The basic issue for a Pharisee like Nicodemus was the authority issue. Who gave you the right to.....do, say, etc. Jesus was usurping the Pharisees' authority.

5. When Nicodemus makes an introductory comment, how does Jesus respond?

Jesus got right to the bottom line! You're on the pathway to hell, Nicodemus! If you want to get to heaven, you must be born again. What does it mean to be born again? Spiritually awakening to the truth of who Jesus is. We had a physical birth. Now we need to have a spiritual birth.

6. How does someone become born again? By recognizing that, in God's eyes, you are a sinner.

By placing your faith in Jesus alone for the forgiveness of your sins and trusting in Him alone to get to heaven. Entering into a right relationship with God. Surrendering your life and everything else to the control of Jesus. Allowing Him to make you into the person He wants you to be.

7. In John chapter 7 Nicodemus stands up for Jesus. How is he pushing the edge? How do you think the other Pharisees and religious authorities felt about Nicodemus standing up for Jesus?

8. What do you think Nicodemus is becoming?

A person of truth, humility, mercy maybe even generosity based on his encounter with Jesus. Nicodemus' life is changing. That's what grace does.

9. Finally, in chapter 19 we see Nicodemus do something pretty profound. Where do we find him and what is he doing? How important is this in terms of Nicodemus confession his faith in Jesus?

Nicodemus' life has changed. He goes from being apprehensive when visiting Jesus at night to, we presume, becoming a man of great faith and unwavering witness to his love for Jesus. Jesus' love and grace have this kind of effect on people.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. When you return home, how hard do you think it will be to live Jesus' way?
2. If humility, mercy and generosity are your DNA, how will that change how you live every day?
3. How will it change how you will treat your friends, family and even people you can't stand or don't want to be friends with?
4. What will you need when you go home to continue living the things you learned at camp?

#### **A STORY ABOUT GRACE...LITERALLY...A WOMAN NAMED GRACE KARERALIFE**

**Home Country:** Rwanda + **Occupation:** Medical student, studying to be a pediatric oncologist

**Life Goal:** "My passion is really just to serve people in need. I also want to be an inspiration to girls in my country...that they can be whatever they dream of."

*As a little girl, Grace suffered tremendous loss. But from the ashes of the Rwandan genocide grew a young woman determined to make the world a better place – determined to not just survive, but to thrive.*

#### **A Story of Healing and Survival**

When Grace walks the halls of University Central Hospital in Kigali, she barely notices the chaos around her. The sounds, the smells, the sights, none of them disturb her. She is at peace there. It's impossible to know for sure, but perhaps that peace comes from surviving a childhood filled with more chaos than any emergency room can hold.

**Grace was an infant when the Rwandan genocide claimed her home, her village and her parents.**

**Her grandmother, Verena, escaped with her surviving grandchildren.** "When my grandmother tells me the story of our survival, it sounds like a scene from a horror movie," says Grace. "She says that after my parents were killed, she sought refuge at a church in Ntarama Bugesera District. While she was hiding in the church, the militia came and set it on fire. But by God's grace, my grandmother was able to run with me and my young brother, and we hid in a nearby swamp for days." After the genocide, Verena struggled to provide for her grandchildren. There were few jobs in the war-torn country, and many days she could not even feed Grace and her brother.



When Grace was 7, a Compassion center opened at an Anglican church in her community. Her grandmother enrolled her, and for the first time since the war, Verena finally felt a sense of relief. After years of carrying the burden of her grandchildren's survival, Verena finally had a partner in Grace's sponsor. "Her sponsors have taken care of her more than I would have; they have paid her school fees and medical bills and always wrote her letters of encouragement," says Verena.

**"As an orphan, the correspondence with her sponsors gave her a purpose in life.** I always tell her that with the kind of love and affection she has received from me and the sponsors, she should always be exemplary to her peers and also offer the same kind of love to vulnerable people."

As Grace grew, that kindness she learned from her grandmother, sponsor and the Compassion staff began to shape her life, and soon she decided that she wanted to become a doctor. But in Rwanda, science and medicine are fields dominated by men. But Grace had not survived only to give up. With the help of Compassion, she enrolled in medical school. "In a class of more than 100 students, we are only 15 girls and we have to work hard to prove that we are capable," says Grace.

"Society needs to know that educating the female child is very important for any kind of development. A girl will one day become a mother, and a mother is the pillar of the family, so when you educate a girl, you are developing families and society." Grace is now just months away from finishing her residency. She plans to one day be a pediatric oncologist, and she hopes to work with some of the most vulnerable children in Rwanda. To help heal them. To show them what survival looks like.

"To some people a hospital is a scary place, but to me, it's a life-changing sanctuary," says Grace. "It's hard to put into words the joy I feel when a patient who came through these emergency doors in a critical condition goes back home when he or she is healthy."

#### **QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:**

1. Grace speaks of the kindness of others shaping her life. How is Grace's story like our story; a story of God's people becoming the very thing they live?
2. She has become what she has practiced for a long time. She has become kindness, healing and love. How is her story similar to what we want you to learn; that we become something by practicing it day in and day out?
3. Grace is probably in her early to mid-twenties. Is it possible for you to do what Grace did...become what is practiced...live your DNA of humility, mercy and generosity?

#### **A STORY ABOUT SURVIVAL AND SUCCESS**

##### **Malala Yousafzai Is Youngest Nobel Peace Prize Winner at Age 17**

##### **Awarded Two Years After Shooting**

**By Esther Lee October 10, 2014**

Shining at 17! **Malala Yousafzai** was announced Friday, Oct. 10, as the youngest recipient in history to be awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize. The honor comes nearly two years after the Pakistani activist was shot in the head in 2012, catapulting the teen into the international spotlight.

Yousafzai was a 15-year-old blogger who championed education for girls in Pakistan when the assassination attempt took place. In 2009, she penned her first-person account under a pseudonym for the BBC, writing about the harsh realities of living under Taliban occupation. She was publicly identified in December 2009 by her father. One year later, the New York Times filmed a documentary about Yousafzai's life, bringing even more awareness to the young activist's campaign to educate girls.

On Oct. 9, 2012, masked and armed Taliban men boarded Yousafzai's school bus and shot her in the head. After a botched operation in her native country, Yousafzai was airlifted to the U.K. to recover, while the Taliban threatened to kill her and her father.

By then, the world had rushed to support and defend her. Nine months later, Yousafzai delivered a powerful speech before the U.N. on her 16th birthday. "They thought that the bullets would silence us. But they failed," she said. "Out of that silence came thousands of voices... Strength, power and courage was born." Yousafzai co-authored *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* and established the Malala Fund, which seeks to protect girls' rights to education.

Celebrities have rushed to support the teen activist in the last two years, including America Ferrera and Reese Witherspoon, who was introduced to Yousafzai's story by her 15-year-old daughter **Ava**. "My daughter brought her book to me and said, 'Mom, you've got to hear this woman's story,'" Witherspoon

told *Variety* in a recent interview. "She's an incredible speaker, she has such humor, and she's doing incredible things in the world. And she's only just begun."

Pakistan's Prime Minister **Nawaz Sharif** released a statement (via *CNN*) congratulating the teen for her accomplishments on Friday. "She is (the) pride of Pakistan, she has made her countrymen proud," he said. "Her achievement is unparalleled and unequaled... Girls and boys of the world should take lead from her struggle and commitment."

### **QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:**

1. Malala fought for equal rights for women especially for young girls and the privilege to be educated. She is what she has practiced for a long time; she is courage and peace. How is her story similar to what we want you to learn; that we become something by practicing it day in and day out?
2. Malala is probably in her mid-twenties. Is it possible for you to do what Malala did...did she become the change she wanted to be? Can you? Can you become what you practice...live your DNA of grace, love, humility, mercy, courage and generosity?
3. She has made huge impacts on the world. Even if you don't make such profound changes in the world, can you try to be the change the world needs...little by little...corner by corner of God's world?
4. What will it take for you to be the change?

### **Blessing Bags**

You will be receiving blessing bags at closing worship tomorrow. You are grace-fueled to the change. These bags will give you the opportunity to bless the life of someone outside of your family that may really need it. Be bold and courageous to step out of your comfort zone and be a sign of grace in the lives of others.

**Close your study with prayer.** This would be a great chance for everyone to pray about going home and continuing to be humility, mercy, and generosity in their world away from camp.

### **E. Additional Study Ideas**

#### **ACTION IDEAS, SUPPORTING GAMES, ROLE PLAY IDEAS**

\* The Marble Game

\* Role Play Fueling Up Machinery...focusing on fueling up...what happens when a machine runs on empty...how are we fueled up to be mercy, humility or generosity.

1000 Uses

You need: random items, 3x5 cards, writing utensils

Gather any number of items...random things, anything from a paper clip to a basket to a tennis shoe, to whatever! Hand each person a 3x5 card and something to write with. Then bring one of the objects out in front of the group and have them write down a possible use for the item...NOT what it's normally used for. After they are finished writing have them turn in the cards to one person. Have all the uses read out loud. As they are read you can:

- See if people in the group can pick out who wrote which use...OR

- Vote on the best new use for the item...OR

- Both!

You could do this game and then talk about how we can be really creative in the ways we are mercy, humility, generosity and grace down the mountain. Brainstorm then with campers ways they could be any of these things...have each camper pick one thing they'll do – and then let you (or someone at home) know how it goes.

Ha-ha- ha

You need: nothing

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Have one person lie down on the floor/ground on his/her back. One by one the rest of the group lies down with their head on the stomach of the person before them. After everyone is down, the first person says, "Ha", the next person then says, "Ha Ha", while the third goes next and says "Ha Ha Ha" and so on. The goal is to get

through the whole line without anyone laughing. If someone laughs the whole group has to start over! After playing you could talk about how one action causes a chain reaction – if one person starts laughing – usually everyone ends up laughing. Talk about how what we do has chain reactions...so if we're kind to someone, that could then be kind to someone else, etc. We don't always know how our actions impact others...but they do far more than we know sometimes!!

#### Back to Back

This is a game where you start with two people sitting back to back and they have to stand straight up without using their hands. Add one person each time they stand up successfully, until your whole group is involved. After playing you could talk about how it's not always easy "going down the mountain"...because we don't have the same kind of community we have at camp. But have campers think about who could be or are the people "in their back to back circle" that could help them live out what they've learned at camp this week and support them as they do it?

\* Brainstorm ways kids can be mercy, generosity, humility, and grace at home. Have them be specific.

Think real people and real situations. Once they have lists, have them pick 2-3 they are willing to try. And then have them identify people from home who could walk with them, or support them (often kids have people who could support them, they just don't 'remember them' until asked to identify. This identification of people can also help campers remember they aren't alone at home and that what happens at camp can happen at home as well).

\* Commission Campers: in the Bible, anointing was often used to set people apart for something holy or special. They would pour oil over people's heads, literally. And while you might not want to pour oil over your campers heads...you can anoint them with oil, with water – by making sign of cross on their foreheads or on the back of their hands...saying something like: Child of God, beloved One, you are set apart to be grace, to be mercy, to be humility to be generosity in your world at home. Know we go with you, but know even more God is with you and has chosen to put you in this time and place for a reason. Be holy – set apart for God's purpose and plans. Amen. (If you use water...you could anoint by pouring water over their heads at the creek or out of a bowl of water or using a bottle of water.)

Any unique angles or twists on the topic that might help a staff if they see that things aren't going well with the study.

#### **F. Ideas to Incorporate the Theme Throughout the Day**

\* Be the change...jingle all day

- decorate jars for kids to take home – title the jars..."change the world"...ask family members to deposit all their coinage in the jars. At the end of 66 days (what some experts say is the amount of time it takes to form a new habit) dedicate the coinage to a non-profit like ELCA World Hunger

- all camp evening activities

**Use this prayer at the end of every worship...as a sending prayer or blessing:**

Lord, it is night. The night is for stillness. Let us be still in the presence of God. It is night after a long day. What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done; let it be.

The night is dark. Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you. The night is quiet. Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all dear to us, and all who have no peace. The night heralds the dawn. Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, new possibilities. In your name we pray. Amen.

#### **G. Other Songs, Stories, Thoughts, Questions, Suggestions**

\* Grace Like Rain, They Will Know We Are Christians, I'll Do My Best, Here I am Lord, Psalm 25, Humble Thyself, Step by Step, Love Round, Messiah, In the Secret, History Maker, Every Move I Make, Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying, You Are Mine, Wounded Soldier, Amazing Grace, ELW Hymnal...or Camp Song Book...Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, ...ELW Be Thou My Vision, Turn My Heart, O God, Go My Children With My Blessing

\* Additional scriptures – The Gerasene Demoniac...Mark 5

*So they arrived at the other side of the lake, in the region of the Gerasenes.<sup>2</sup> When Jesus climbed out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil<sup>3</sup> spirit came out from the tombs to meet him. <sup>3</sup>This man lived in the burial caves and could no longer be restrained, even with a chain. <sup>4</sup>Whenever he was put into chains and shackles—as he often was—he snapped the chains from his wrists and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. <sup>5</sup>Day and night he wandered among the burial caves and in the hills, howling and cutting himself with sharp stones.*

*<sup>6</sup>When Jesus was still some distance away, the man saw him, ran to meet him, and bowed low before him. <sup>7</sup>With a shriek, he screamed, “Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the Most, High God? In the name of God, I beg you, don’t torture me!” <sup>8</sup>For Jesus had already said to the spirit, “Come out of the man, you evil spirit. <sup>9</sup>Then Jesus demanded, “What is your name?” And he replied, “My name is Legion, because there are many of us inside this man.” <sup>10</sup>Then the evil spirits begged him again and again not to send them to some distant place.*

*<sup>11</sup>There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby.<sup>12</sup> “Send us into those pigs,” the spirits begged. “Let us enter them.” <sup>13</sup>So Jesus gave them permission. The evil spirits came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the entire herd of about 2,000 pigs plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water.*

*<sup>14</sup>The herdsmen fled to the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, spreading the news as they ran. People rushed out to see what had happened.<sup>15</sup> A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons. He was sitting there fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid. <sup>16</sup>Then those who had seen what happened told the others about the demon-possessed man and the pigs. <sup>17</sup>And the crowd began pleading with Jesus to go away and leave them alone.*

*<sup>18</sup>As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him. <sup>19</sup>But Jesus said, “No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been.” <sup>20</sup>So the man started off to visit the Ten Towns of that region and began to proclaim the great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed at what he told them.*

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Why didn't Jesus allow the demon possessed guy to go with him?
2. What's the importance of living in our communities as changed people of God?
3. How easy would it have been for the demon possessed guy to hang out with Jesus for the rest of his days? How hard was it for him to be on his own?

#### H. Ideas to Adjust Study Down for Juniors

\* Unpack this with your juniors:

\* There's an old Pastor, like the writer of this Study, who created THE LOVE PROJECT

One of the principles of the Love Project is: “**Be the change you want to see happen instead of trying to change everyone else.**” I think even 8, 9 10 and 11-year olds can understand the importance of being more merciful and loving, generous and humble at school and at home. Talk with them about this quote and ask them if they understand. Also ask them what they might change about themselves that might be more of a blessing to their friends, family and community. Can they be less selfish and more generous? Can they be more merciful and less cruel? Can they care more about others and be less self-centered? Can they be more loving and less hateful? If they are more generous, merciful, and loving, will their world change? Will the people around them respond in love, mercy and generosity?

## I. Ideas to Adjust Study Up for Senior High

\* Think about this and discuss it with your seniors... In 1913, Mohandas Gandhi said:  
*“We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. **If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him.** This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do.”*

### **FOR REFLECTION:**

- I think Gandhi’s quote is so powerful especially the bold print. **“If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would change also.”** As Christians, we know that WE can’t change anything about us; at least not on our own. That’s the wonderful power of Grace. The Holy Spirit’s power and the Grace of God changes us; as we change and become humility, mercy and generosity, the world around us changes also. Gandhi was on to something. So was Jesus. Be the change you wish to see in the world. Allow Grace to infuse love, humility, mercy and generosity into your soul; let it pulse through your veins and you WILL INDEED, change the world around you. Talk about this powerful quote and concept.

## J. Parent Devotional

### Scripture

Ephesians 3:7 “By God’s grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

### Reflection

This happens to be the last full day your child will be at camp. What they have experienced this week has been a powerful lesson in what it means to be humility, mercy and generosity. They have also learned that being these things only happens by the power of the Holy Spirit and by God’s amazing and abundant Grace. Today they will discover that learning these things is not enough. It is only by incorporating them into their very being, breathing Grace every day, living Grace in every relationship will their lives begin to change; will they begin to become all God intends them to be.

### Activity

Decide before you pray what you believe God intends you to be...not as a family but personally. Perhaps God intends you to become a more loving mother. Or, maybe God wants you to be a more patient father. God certainly wants all of us to become less judgmental and more merciful; showing kindness more often and criticism less frequently. Once you decide what God wants more of from you...every family member should pray a brief prayer asking God to help you become...love, mercy, generosity, humility or peace. Please remember that you become a new creation not for your own benefit, but for the sake and change of the world. Perhaps you might say:

### Prayer

*Thank you God for your Grace. I ask this day that you make me: ..... Help me to be love to all people and then, grace-fueled, may I bring powerful change to our lives and to your world; the desperate change the world is longing for. In Jesus’ holy name I pray. Amen.*

Then, after you pray, write what you prayed for, i.e. patience, mercy, grace, love or generosity on a piece of paper. Tape that paper to your fridge so that every day you can be reminded of what characteristic might help you be the “change God calls you to be” in our troubled world.