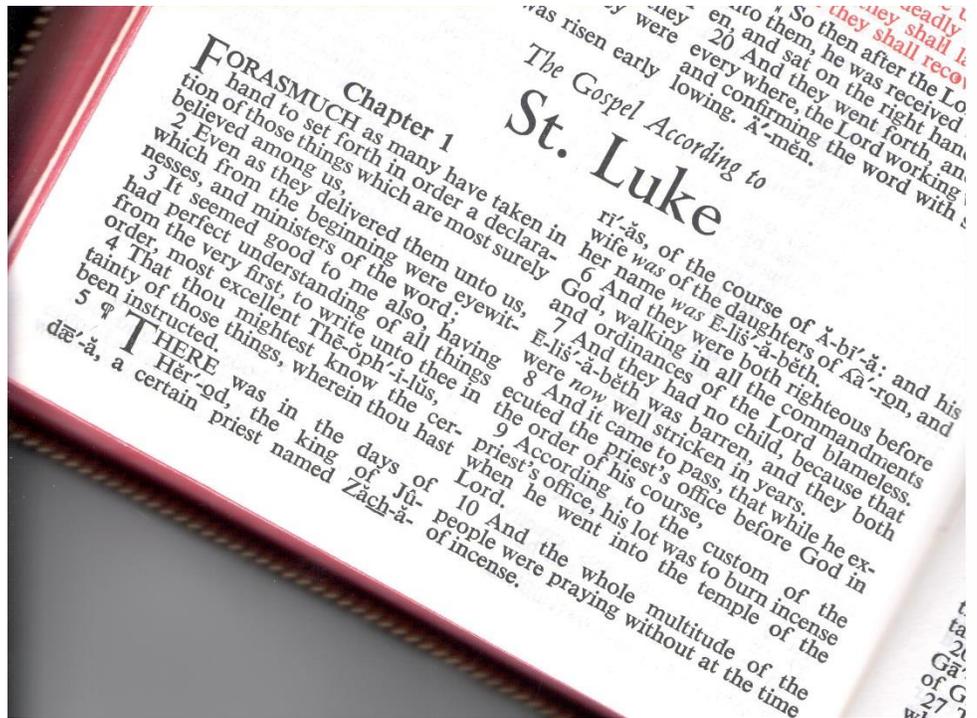


LUKE

THE DIFFICULT LESSONS



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Luke 10:21-11:23 – The difficult lessons

Jesus' teaching now gets complicated. He's challenging his disciples to understand and follow difficult commands, while still keeping some things secret. Everyone He interacts with gets their mind stretched.

DEEP (Daily Engagement Emphasizing Prayer) began as a daily devotional at a local PCA church. It grew and evolved over many years into what you see today.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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We are a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

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1 Luke 10:21-24 (ESV)

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Have you ever been at a significant event where you could claim, “I was there! I saw it!”? I was at the highest scoring game in NFL history, when the Washington Redskins beat the NY Giants 72-41. I was also at Cal Ripkin’s 2,130th consecutive game – the one that tied Lou Gehrig’s record. Impressive, right?

Not!

What would it have been like to be one of the people who actually got to see the incarnate son of God? Wouldn’t you give anything to watch the power of God infused into a band of no-names?

Jesus is declaring that this is the moment all of history has been waiting for. *Many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.* It’s the ultimate “I was there” event. *Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!*

But the disciples don’t realize it. Sure, they’re excited, but they can’t see the full meaning. So, Jesus tells them plainly, “*All things have been handed over to me by my Father.*”

BC is turning into AD.

Do you ever wish you had been one of the apostles? Would you trade your life for that of an apostle? Remember, it’s a package deal that includes great suffering, probably even martyrdom.

We live with incredibly many blessings. Modern medicine makes life much more comfortable, and longer too. We can travel distances that people in the first century couldn’t have even imagined. Our food supply is much more varied than theirs and our recipes reflect that.

Their favorite foods would taste bland to us. Their water would make us sick. We live in a free, democratic republic, instead of under the boot of a Roman Emperor.

The apostles had none of our blessings. All they had was the thrill and the significance of being an eyewitness to the incarnation.

Would you make the trade?

2 Luke 10:25-37 (ESV)

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

The word “lawyer” here means an expert in the Mosaic Law – a bible scholar. Although his attitude could use some adjusting, he lets Jesus answer a question with a question, and then answers Jesus’ question. A modern lawyer would never fall for that.

Now he’s on the defensive and tries to justify himself with a follow-up question – “*And who is my neighbor?*”

After telling this famous parable, Jesus again answers with a question – which redirects the lawyer’s one. Now it’s, “*Who proved to be a neighbor?*” Jesus has turned a question of identity into one of character. That’s more to the point anyway, since the original issue was how to inherit eternal life.

Thus doth our Lord go nuclear with the command to love thy neighbor. This is one of the cornerstones of Christian living. We’re not just to love folks we like; we’re to love everyone.

This even includes our enemies.

Loving your neighbor typically takes the form of an organized charity. This is good because trying to do charity without competent training can easily do more harm than good. Unfortunately, many churches do this almost as an afterthought. If that’s true with your church, try to get them plugged into a good program.

A church should have dramatic impact on its neighborhood. People who’ve been away for many years should be struck by all the changes they see and ask, “What happened?” In the first century, Christianity transformed the Roman Empire. Later, Saint Patrick’s ministry transformed Ireland, and that transformation spread to Europe. The Reformation transformed the world.

Transformation like that is what the kingdom of God is supposed to look like.

3 Luke 10:38-42 (ESV)

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

What Martha was doing is important. If everyone only did what Mary did, and no one did Martha's job, no one would get served. Making sure people got served is the reason the deaconate was instituted. So why does the Lord take Mary's side in this?

Notice that Martha doesn't criticize Mary; she criticizes Jesus. "*Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.*"

Martha *is* doing something important, but that's not the issue. Martha's problem is she's *anxious and troubled about many things*. Up until the moment when she lights into Jesus, everything is just fine. Martha is busy serving and Mary is busy listening to Jesus' teaching. Martha was the one who *welcomed him into her house*. She's the head hostess. Furthermore, Mary is performing a normal and useful hostess role.

Actually, it's much more than a useful hostess role. When Jesus says, "*One thing is necessary*," he's referring to His teaching.

Martha has it exactly backwards. She thinks that her serving is necessary and that Mary's listening to Jesus' teaching isn't. Jesus is saying that listening to His teaching is the necessary thing.

It's why He's there.

Jesus' teaching is still the necessary thing. Most churchgoing adults get all their learning from the sermon on Sunday. That's not enough for someone to grow.

So, how can you help? How can you get people to take up more learning?

The primary way is Sunday School (or other Christian education programs). Make these programs excellent and people will come. A little nudge now and then doesn't hurt though. Tools like these devotionals are also useful. They are a good next step for folks who are already attending Sunday School.

And please pray for the people who teach and/or administrate these things (including me). Please lift up all those who are part of your learning. There's a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to make everything at Church run properly.

This can be stressful for the people who carry the responsibility.

4 Luke 11:1-13 (ESV)

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” And he said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.’”

And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Jesus answers the question two ways. First, He gives a model prayer. While similar to the Lord’s Prayer given in the Sermon on the Mount, this is a different situation and seems to be separate. Then Jesus gives a lesson on persistence in prayer that provides essential context for the famous memory verse that’s right in the middle. *And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

Take this verse out of context and it sounds like our requests are always granted in a jiffy. But the context gives it almost the opposite meaning. We need to pray a long time. The verbs, “ask,” “seek,” and “knock,” are in the present imperative and imply durative action. The parable about the friend asking for loaves of bread is all about persistence.

This might be one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. In our culture of instant gratification, we want quick answers to prayer. We’d love it if this verse said that.

But it doesn’t.

There are two types of long term prayer. One is a long prayer session. After a half hour or so, prayers change. The Holy Spirit gets a foothold in our hearts and we connect. This often changes the topic.

The other type is a long term request that God has yet to grant. This can be painful, if our desire (and our disappointment) is great, but the result is similar. When God holds out, we grow.

Both types lead to a better connection with the Holy Spirit. Time causes us to let go of the usual wish-list prayer format and start inquiring of the Lord. A strong desire for something is a good start, but it’s not the only thing. Prayer isn’t just about getting what we want.

It’s about changing our hearts.

5 Luke 11:14-20 (ESV)

Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

They're accusing Jesus of witchcraft – using the power of Satan to perform a miracle. This is an outrageous accusation and Jesus could have really lit into them for making it.

But instead He converts this into a teachable moment. Casting out demons by the power of Satan is ridiculous. Why would the prince of demons fight against his own demons? It's like accusing Eisenhower of winning the battle of the bulge by colluding with Hitler. Why would Hitler fight against his own army? That would be nuts.

Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?

Then comes a stunning twist. *And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.*

Some of their sons are disciples!* No wonder they were making such desperate arguments. There's a contentious back-story behind their actions.

So, Jesus takes the argument to its logical conclusion. *But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

The kingdom of God has arrived.

Jesus' clever apologetic is a lesson for us all. It's hard to resist the temptation to strike back when insulted, especially when the insult is ridiculous. Jesus handles this amazingly.

But how should we react if things turn ugly? Of course, responding in love and humility are a given. If only we had the self-control to do it!

The key isn't great technique; it's prayer. Always ask for help.

*Some believe that their sons were just using Old Testament exorcism techniques, but the Old Testament has no record of anything like that.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Are you willing to make any such trades? Have you ever felt the tug of a call to greater service (and sacrifice) for Christ?
2. What methods or programs for loving your neighbor are notable for NOT working? Which ones work best? What's the reason for the difference?
3. Are you a Mary or a Martha? How should we balance these two responsibilities?
4. Is it hard to pray for more than a half-hour in one stretch? What helps? Ever pray for more than an hour?
5. Do demons exist today? Do they ever need to be cast out? Are Christians immune to demons?

Items for prayer: