

LUKE—WEEK 6

PRIORITIES



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is The Miraculous Draught of Fishes
by Raphael (1483–1520) on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London*

Jesus won't let demons tell everyone who He is. He prioritizes preaching and recruiting disciples over healing, while keeping part of His mission a secret. His personal touch when healing is unique.

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 patterned after the Celtic Revival. 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.

Luke 4:38–5:14 — *Priorities*
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1 Luke 4:38–41 (ESV)

And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.

Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.

Jesus has so much power over the demons that He can keep them from telling people that He is the Christ—the Son of God. But why doesn't He let them? He just declared that He is the anointed one of Isaiah 61. He's been publicly calling himself the Christ; why must the demons be silenced on this issue?

Because they know what kind of Christ He is. They know that He isn't the Christ everyone expects. They know about incarnation. But, still, why must that be kept secret?

Well, fast forward to Jesus' trial. The Sanhedrin wants Jesus crucified for the blasphemy of claiming to be the son of God. But suppose that at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, a bunch of demons had been blabbing all over the place that Jesus is the son of God. If that had happened, it just might have dawned on the Sanhedrin that it's true. As it is, that possibility never occurs to them, and so He's "obviously" guilty the moment He makes the claim.

Then they all said, "Are You then the Son of God?" And he said to them, "You rightly say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." — Luke 22:70–71 (NKJV)

It's just mind-boggling to think how intricate His plan was to get to the cross. It's like Mission Impossible where the goal is to get crucified.

How can we do anything but worship love like that?

The problem is that we think we deserve that love. Oh sure, we recite over and over that we don't, but do we really believe it?

The typical image of someone arriving in Hell is them saying something like, "There must be some mistake. I'm in the wrong place." This reaction is even recorded in scripture.

On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" — Matthew 7:22 (ESV)

The truth is that we should have a reaction more like that upon arriving in Heaven. Groucho Marx famously said, "I don't want to belong to any club that would have me as a member." The problem with letting people like us into Heaven is that then it will be full of people like us. How can that be paradise?

Answer — We will, at last, be sanctified.

2 Luke 4:42–44 (ESV)

And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Jesus’ healing draws big crowds. People seek Him out even when He retreats *into a desolate place*. This is not surprising. In an era with nothing that we would call real medicine, Jesus is curing major afflictions. If the world would beat a path to your door for a better mousetrap, what would it do for this?

Then comes the surprise; Jesus announces that the healing isn’t the main event. He was sent for a purpose and He must do that—*preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns*.

We normally think of the other purpose He was sent for—to die—but He’s keeping that a secret for now. The purpose of His ministry is to *preach the good news of the kingdom of God*. But what does that mean?

He was sent to tell everyone that there’s another kingdom coming (to our way of thinking, another world). It’s the kingdom of God. Everything is about to change.

The people need to be prepared for what’s coming. The *purpose* of His ministry is to get the word out.

This purpose remains. It’s our purpose too.

But now that the kingdom has arrived, it’s a dual-purpose. We don’t just tell people about the kingdom of God; we show it to them. The kingdom isn’t something that’s coming soon. They can see it now.

That’s what lifestyle evangelism is all about. Actions speak louder than words. Seeing the kingdom is more convincing than just hearing about it.

This is where charity fits in. God’s kingdom isn’t just great to be in; it’s great to be near. You can see the kingdom from the outside because kingdom values spill out all over the place.

And the key value is love—caring about others. The secret sauce in charity isn’t how much you help folks; it’s how you act around them. It’s essential to know them, to listen to them, to touch them, to care about the things they care about. Charity should never be rushed. You can’t hurry love.

God’s kingdom is different from this world’s kingdoms. This world is all about efficiently completing tasks; the kingdom of God isn’t. Even when the task is a holy one, powering through it misses something.

That something is the Lordship of Christ. We’re not the boss, and the success or failure of our charity doesn’t hinge on us. We need to be always mindful of this as we serve Him.

He’s the king.

3 Luke 5:1–11 (ESV)

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

This is a pretty typical Jesus miracle story until Simon suddenly changes the subject with the words, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*"

Simon knows fish, and he knows that this didn't just happen. He had time to think while he was wrestling with the nets, and he figured out that the power of God is in the house.

Every encounter with holiness that is recorded in the Bible shows people afraid. Imagine being at a prayer meeting at church and suddenly the Lord (or an angel) pops into the room. We'd all run away, right?

Well, not exactly. While holiness is always fearsome, no one ever runs away. Notice that Simon asks Jesus to leave, rather than running (or swimming) away himself. Why?

Encounters with holiness produce some interesting effects. First off, they cause people to see their sin. After a lifetime of denial and averting their eyes, suddenly they recognize sin for what it is. The incompatibility of sin and holiness is somehow obvious (maybe literally painfully obvious) and this clarifies their vision. That incompatibility is a problem—a life-threatening one in Isaiah 6.

Secondly, not running away means not using one's own abilities to solve the problem. When someone's vision clears up and they see their sin, their overconfidence in their own abilities clears up too.

Seeing clearly for the first time, *they left everything and followed him*. Seems pretty rash to abandon their catch and all their equipment, but they "saw" what they were doing.

The essence of sanctification is seeing our sinfulness and being horrified by it. Sin survives by clouding our vision. It's easier to stop doing something that makes you uncomfortable.

If you've got a sin that you'd love to be rid of, don't just pray to have it removed; pray to be able to see it. Ask God to open your eyes to that aspect of your sinful nature. This can be pretty powerful stuff.

And consider an accountability relationship. Others can see our sins better than we can. If you aren't in a one-on-one relationship where you can (and do) call each other out, consider getting one.

4 Luke 5:8–11 (ESV)

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

We revisit the last three verses from yesterday's devotional to highlight how quickly everyone shifts gears. Simon first asks Jesus to leave, and then, moments later, reverses course and follows Him. Jesus changes his mind with the words, "*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.*"

No questions; they just *left everything* (boats, nets, fish, everything) and followed him. And, don't forget, they'd just hit the lottery. Two boatloads of fish is a lot to just walk away from. What were they thinking?

They couldn't know exactly what "*catching men*" was referring to; that part is for future reference. The key point Jesus made is, "*Do not be afraid,*"—the same point the angels made to the shepherds when they announced His birth.

It's intriguing how effective those words are. The angels say, "Be not afraid," and the shepherds instantly relax and say, "Let's go see the child." Christ says, "*Do not be afraid,*" and Simon is ready to drop everything and follow Him.

Why is this? If I'm scared and someone says, "Be not afraid," that's not going to suddenly end my fear. What's different here?

The difference is the holiness. When a normal, sinful person tells me to not be afraid, it's comforting, but not all that comforting. They're not a perfect reference.

But coming from a holy source, the words are solid gold. And note that this is totally natural. The same sense that recognizes the holiness and made them afraid in the first place also senses that they're truthful.

At bottom, it's the truthfulness that folks are afraid of.

This is why Zechariah's backtalk to Gabriel was so outrageous, and why Gabriel gave him nine months to think about it.

And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." — Luke 1:18–20 (ESV)

He knows instinctively that Gabriel's truthful. He's really doubting God.

5 Luke 5:12–14 (ESV)

While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him. And he charged him to tell no one, but “go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

Jesus doesn’t need to touch people to heal them—and He usually doesn’t—but He touches this guy. Why?

No one touches a leper. Touching a leper instantly makes you unclean, plus you could catch leprosy. Lepers were forced to live in leper colonies to keep them away from “normal” people. While this kind of quarantine may have been good (even necessary) public health policy, it was emotionally brutal.

Leprosy made you a pariah.

But Jesus made a point of touching this man. Notice that since he had fallen *on his face*, it wasn’t an easy reach. Jesus didn’t just touch him; He *stretched out his hand and touched him*.

Jesus *was in one of the cities* when He did this, and there were many eyewitnesses. They must have cringed when Jesus touched him. It was a powerful teaching moment.

Jesus was showing them how to love. He was treating the man like a normal person. The poor guy probably hadn’t been touched by anyone in a long time.

Touch makes charity sing. It doesn’t even have to be physical; just making emotional contact and listening to people works wonders.

People can sense when they’re respected.

Everyone is created in the image of God. We teach that by how we treat people. Some of the folks we help are not easy to love, but we are called to love them. The Lord even emphasized loving difficult folks.

When done right, this kind of ministry is not for the fainthearted. Thus, it imitates Christ especially beautifully. God is glorified by real person-to-person charity—especially when it’s not easy or intuitive.

Ask Him to show you how your charity can be taken up a notch. If there’s an existing charity program you feel called to help with, that’s a great step. But think and pray about what your community’s needs are and whether they’re being met.

You may be called to start a new program, or you may just feel called to do something on your own. Or you may just feel a tug that someone or some group needs help, but you don’t know how to help them.

That would send you down a different path—training. This is where the body of Christ functions most beautifully. The best programs have the best training. Find out who does good work in the area you’re interested in and connect with them.

Getting trained in how to love people is one of the surest ways to grow in Christ.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Many of God’s most amazing works are not healing or other “normal” miracles but the amazing way He designed things in the first place. Do you ever praise God for the things we take for granted, like that we have gravity? Or that we have feelings?
2. Does doing charity change how we should present the gospel? How can we tailor the message to fit that context?
3. As you’ve grown in Christ, have you “discovered” the ugliness of a particular sin?
4. Christians are often described as “God-fearing.” What does that mean?
5. What are the greatest needs in your community? How can these needs be addressed? Do you need to start something new or can you team with an existing program?