



Lesson Guide

Lesson 12 - Community & Involvement: God Cares, Do I?

Introduction

For this final installment of our “worldview tour” we will head southeast and gaze upon the face of God as it is revealed to us in the last of our six social spheres: the sphere of *Community and Involvement*. Here, perhaps more than in any other sphere or field of inquiry, we will have an opportunity to draw near to the Creator and learn what it is that has compelled Him to draw near to us. We will find that the God of the Scriptures is in fact the Lord of the lonely, the Savior of the outcast, the Defender of the defenseless, and the Sustainer of all who find themselves in need. Our call is to become *like* Him by discovering what it means to not only love Him, but to love our neighbor.

Themes

Involvement in this sphere – the sphere of community outreach, practical service, and active love expressed in Christian *charity* – has been the distinguishing hallmark of the Church for many centuries. For a number of reasons, says Dr. Tackett, it has fallen into neglect in our day. Not only that, but the general call for involvement in culture at large, in all of the spheres, has actually become a matter of debate in some contemporary Christian circles. And yet a careful examination of Scripture will reveal that believers have a mandate to reclaim their place in this important arena. We dare not, like Jonah, try to escape God’s call to be involved. Over and over again, the Scripture clearly presents the perplexing reality that God entrusts us with carrying out His mission and purpose with the world. We cannot deny the link and dependency God has created between His divine plan and the faithfulness with which His followers embody biblical truth in their behavior and reflect the heart of Jesus in their lives.

What *is* the heart of Jesus? This is not a difficult question to answer. In Matthew 11:28-29 Christ tells us plainly that He is *gentle* and *humble* in heart. The heart of Jesus stands radically opposed to the principle of “survival of the fittest.” It identifies closely with the plight of the weak and disenfranchised. It is a heart that compels Him to wash the feet of others and lay down His life for His friends. In doing these things, Jesus not only becomes our example – He also reveals to us the deepest concerns of His Father in heaven (John 14:9).

In the final analysis, we must realize that this is *why* Jesus sums up the entire law in two “Great Commandments”: “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-40). Here at the end of our tour we come back again to the great fountainhead and source of all truth, the divine nature itself. “God is love,” writes the apostle John, “and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). And love, in the practical sense, means *being* a good neighbor to the people around us – like the Samaritan in Christ’s famous parable.

Points to Watch For

If God cares enough to get involved with the needs of people, we need to care and get involved

as well. This is the thrust of Dr. Tackett's message. So forceful is his presentation of this concept that it is almost certain to impact participants at a deep emotional level. When it does, they will probably ask the question that has been asked so many times before: "What should I *do*?" At this point it will be important to emphasize the thought that active love is not a matter of following a "to-do checklist" or establishing a system of "rules" or "simple steps." Instead, it is a question of developing an attitude of humility, openness, sensitivity, and creative compassion. It is a matter of using our God-given gifts and talents in the service of others and pursuing the passions He has instilled in our hearts.

Discussion Questions (Pick 3 or 4 for your discussion time.)

(Make these questions your own. That is, don't just "read" them, but become familiar with them so that they don't appear as simply an item to get through. Go through them yourself before your group meets and ponder them.)

1) Opening Question: (this may be the only question you need to ask).

A. Ask your guests to list what they saw on the tour. Here are some of the key items: The greatest and second greatest commandment; loving your neighbor as yourself; the question: "who is my neighbor?"; the story of the good neighbor; a review of God's design for each of the social spheres; the different design of the sphere of community; God's heart for the lowly and needy; "Who is like you, O Lord?"; the humble heart of God; who are the needy?; the story of "Foo" or the girls not asked to dance; our responsibility for the needy; Involvement; God is a God who is involved; Jonah running from the face of God; God's heart for Nineveh; the hall of faith; world-changers who have come before us; Wilberforce; world-changers must be risk-takers; what do you do now?

B. Ask your guests to point out the ones that were particularly interesting or striking to them and why.

C. Ask if this particular area struck anyone else as well.

2) Ask if there were other items that they saw that stood out to them. (You may want to read back through the list if you need to.) In Luke 10:29 we are told that the teacher of the law who questioned Jesus about the way to inherit eternal life was driven by a desire to "justify himself." What does this mean, and how does it provide the motivation for his second question: "Who is my neighbor?" How do we seek to "justify ourselves?"

(Dr. Tackett expresses the thought that the lawyer was asking Jesus to supply him with a "checklist". More than likely, he had a deep sense of his own shortcomings in this area and hoped to assuage his feelings of guilt by reducing *love* to a simple, comprehensible, *controllable* task that he could easily claim to have fulfilled. Discuss some of the ways *we* do this same thing. Instead of "justifying ourselves," we need to be aware of and open to the daunting hugeness of Christ's call, cast ourselves upon *His* strength and sufficiency, and allow *Him* to be our justification.)

3) Did Jesus answer the lawyer's question? If so, how?

(Not exactly. The man asked Jesus to give him a strict and narrow definition of the term "neighbor" – a definition which he would have been able to use to "let himself off the hook." Jesus knew that this was not what he needed. What He gave him instead [by way of the "Parable of the Good Samaritan"] was a challenge to think creatively about the

unexpected ways in which he might begin to show practical love to the most unlikely people. The man wanted to know, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus turned around and asked *him*, “How do you think *you* can *be* a neighbor to those in need?”)

4) How does the sphere of Community differ in structure from the other social spheres we’ve examined? How does this difference constitute a special challenge for us as God’s people?

(If we try to graph this sphere according to the “Trinitarian” model we’ve encountered in other areas, we find that it is unique in one very important detail: it lacks a *human* authority figure [analogous, for example, to the *father* in the family, the *shepherd* in the church, or the *king* or *magistrate* in the state]. The structure of this sphere includes Christ at the head; the *neighbor* [*i.e.*, the believer] in submission to Him; and the *needy* person who both stands under God’s protection and depends upon our compassion and charity. Because of this lack of human authority, we must learn to be *self-starters* if we are to remain faithful to Christ’s call and serve Him effectively in this area.)

5) Name some of the ways in which Christianity has *changed the world* (according to author Alvin Schmidt). What has motivated believers to become agents of change in these areas? How do their actions differ in tone and spirit from the works of pragmatic philanthropy?

(In this connection, Dr. Tackett points out that *individual transformation* through the power of Christ – the transformation of people like Afra of Augsburg or William Wilberforce – necessarily has a transforming effect upon culture. Historical examples of the social expression of Christian transformation include: the founding of hospitals and health care facilities; the elevation of sexual morality; greater regard for the rights and dignity of women; advances in education, labor, and science; a growing understanding of human rights and their connection with the *Imago Dei* in man, expressed in the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement, and other expressions of concern for liberty and justice; and the powerful impact of the Christian faith and worldview upon art, music, and literature in western culture. Christian charity, says Father Sirico, differs in motivation from philanthropy in that it is driven by a recognition of and concern for the eternal personhood of the needy, and even more specifically by the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40 – “As you have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me.”

6) “You can be a risk-taker without being a world-changer,” says Dr. Tackett, “but you cannot be a world-changer without being a risk-taker.” How is this principle illustrated in the life of William Wilberforce? How can you and I step out and take greater risks for the advancement of God’s kingdom in our own cultural context? How can we engage in the battle in a more active way?

(Wilberforce had the tenacity to stay true to the “two great objects” God had placed before him – the abolition of the slave trade and “the reformation of manners” in England – for forty-six years in spite of opposition, defamation, disappointment, and tremendous costs in terms of his political career. He was willing to identify himself with his cause and remain true to it through thick and thin. In our own time there are a number of causes – the sanctity of human life, the plight of the poor, child abuse, the breakdown of the family, the need for

decency and morality in arts and entertainment, etc. – that need champions of Wilberforce’s character and determination. There are also marginalized, outcast, neglected individuals in our own communities and neighborhoods who require our attention and care, some of whom [like “Flash”] are not particularly friendly to the church or open to Christian influence. Discuss ways that we can overcome some of the obstacles that hold us back [worldliness, selfishness, apathy, fear] and reach across the barriers to those who desperately need to know Christ’s love.)

Since this is our final tour, do you have any closing comments about our twelve weeks together and the ground we have covered? Has the Lord begun any transformational work in your life since we began together? If so, how?

Recommended Reading

Lesson 12 – Community & Involvement: God Cares, Do I?

Please note that not everything in these suggested resources should be considered endorsed by Focus on the Family. Nevertheless, Dr. Tackett has found this material helpful. Scripture should be your first and primary resource.

- Briner, B. 1993. *Roaring Lambs: A Gentle Plan to Radically Change your World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Minnery, Tom. (2001). *Why You Can't Stay Silent: A Biblical Mandate to Shape our Culture*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- Pollock, J. 1996. *William Wilberforce: A Man who Changed His Times*. McLean, VA: Trinity Forum.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. 1981. *A Christian Manifesto*. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books.
- Schmidt, Alvin. J. 2001. *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Scott, Otto. 1994. *The Great Christian Revolution: How Christianity Transformed the World*. Windsor, NY: The Reformer Library.