

Following Jesus *in* Everyday Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 11:37–54; 12:4–21, 35–53; Amos 6:1; Luke 8:4–15; 22:24–27.*

Memory Text: “And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith’ ” (*Luke 17:5, NKJV*).

Though a great teacher, Jesus did not establish a school of theology or philosophy. His purpose was “to seek and to save that which was lost” (*Luke 19:10*). He came to reveal the character of God, a revelation that culminated in the Cross, where He not only showed humanity and unfallen worlds what God was really like, but He also paid the penalty for sin so that human beings, despite their fallen nature, could be redeemed.

In doing this, He also created a redeemed community, a community of those who, having been saved by His death, have chosen to model His life and teachings.

The call to be part of this redeemed community is a call, not to a preferred status in life but to an absolute allegiance to the One who calls, to Christ Himself. What He says becomes the disciple's law of life. What He desires becomes the disciple's sole purpose in life. No amount of outward goodness or doctrinal perfection can take the place of total allegiance to Christ and His will.

Discipleship, which we owe exclusively to the indwelling Christ, makes certain imperative requirements. No competition and no substitute are permitted.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 6.

Flee Pharisaism

Of the more than 80 references to Pharisees in the Gospels, approximately 25 percent of them are found in Luke. Pharisees were noted for their doctrinal conservatism, as opposed to Sadducees, who were known for their liberal ideas. Pharisees were often legalists who, while professing to believe in grace, taught salvation by the keeping of the law.

Read Luke 11:37–54. What is Jesus warning about, and how is this same principle manifested today? How can we make sure that we, in our own ways, don't reflect some of the things that Jesus warned against?

A review of the woes (*Luke 11:42–54*) pronounced on the Pharisees and the scribes shows how much the call to true religion crosses every generation, including our own.

For example, while tithing is a joyful acknowledgment of God's provision, it can never be a substitute for the basic demands of love and justice in human relations (*vs. 42*).

These same ones who “neglect justice and the love of God” love, instead, the “most important seats in the synagogues” (*vs. 42, 43, NIV*). Talk about missing the point of true faith!

Jesus warned, too, that those who equate true religion with outward rituals alone are really unclean, somewhat like those who come in contact with the dead (*Luke 11:44; see also Num. 19:16*). How easy to confuse what's trivial with what's sacred in the eyes of God.

Also, Jesus pronounced a woe on the experts in the law who used their education and experience to place intolerable religious burdens on others while they themselves “do not touch the burdens with one of [their] fingers” (*Luke 11:46, NKJV*).

Meanwhile, the Pharisees honored the prophets no longer alive but worked against the living ones. Even as Jesus spoke, some were plotting to kill the Son of God. What is important is not the honoring of prophets but the heeding of their prophetic message of love, mercy, and judgment.

The last woe is a terrible one. Some who had been entrusted with the key to God's kingdom had failed in their trusteeship. Instead of using the key wisely and letting God's people come into the kingdom, they had locked them out and thrown away the key.

Fear God

“ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*) is the first of the three angels’ messages, so central to Seventh-day Adventists’ life and faith. Fearing God is not being afraid, as it is often thought to be. It is realizing just who God is and what His claims on us are. It is an act of faith that involves total allegiance to Him. God becomes the sole definer and arbiter of our life—our thoughts, actions, relationships, and destiny. Discipleship based on that kind of “fear” stands on unshakable ground.

Read Luke 12:4–12. What is Jesus saying to us here about fear?

The passage shows us whom to fear and whom not to fear. We need not fear forces that can affect only our body in the present world. Instead, we must fear and obey God because in His hands is our eternal destiny. But our God—whose eyes are on the sparrow (*Luke 12:6*) and who has numbered the hairs on our heads (*vs. 7*)—is loving and caring; hence, each one of us is infinitely precious in His sight. If we truly believed that, how many earthly fears would vanish?

Read Luke 12:13–21. What is Jesus warning us about here?

While Jesus refuses to intervene between two brothers quarreling over the division of property, He does emphasize the relevance of the tenth commandment (*Exod. 20:17*) against the evil of covetousness and points out a significant truth for all time: life is not made up of things (*Luke 12:15*). The rich foolish man lived in a little world restricted to himself. Nothing else mattered to him. How careful we need to be not to fall into this same trap; this is especially crucial for those who have been blessed with an abundance of material goods.

Though we all enjoy material things, think how little ultimate satisfaction they can really give you, especially in light of eternity. Why, then, is it still so easy to make the mistake that Jesus warned about in Luke 12:16–21?

Be Prepared and Watchful

“Vigilance and fidelity have been required of Christ’s followers in every age; but now that we are standing upon the very verge of the eternal world, holding the truths we do, having so great light, so important a work, we must double our diligence.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 460, 461.

Read Luke 12:35–53 and summarize what these texts mean specifically to you, especially if you have been waiting a long time for the second coming of Jesus.

Christians cannot afford to be lax or lethargic. The context of His sure return, and the unknown hour thereof, should drive us to have our robes girded and our lamps trimmed and burning. The eschatological hope must be the driving force of our life and work, our readiness and faithfulness. It is this faithfulness to do His will on earth and readiness to meet Him in peace that distinguish between good and evil servants.

Any neglect of faithfulness on the pretext that “ ‘My master is delaying his coming’ ” (*Luke 12:45, NKJV*) is placing oneself under the severest form of God’s judgment (*vs. 45–48*). The more the privilege, the greater the responsibility, and hence, from those who are given much, much will be expected (*vs. 48*).

The ancient prophet’s judgment “Woe to you who are at ease in Zion” (*Amos 6:1, NKJV*) seems reflected in Christ’s warning that Christian discipleship is not a state of ease. Paul explains the Christian life as one of spiritual warfare (*Eph. 6:12*). The focal point is that every Christian is involved in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, and the Cross draws a clear line between the two. Only by continual faith in the Christ of the cross can one win the final victory.

“ ‘For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more’ ” (*Luke 12:48, NKJV*). What should this text mean to us as Seventh-day Adventists?

Be a Fruitful Witness

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in their eternal council “before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4*), laid the plan of salvation. That is, even before the first human was created and, of course, before the first humans sinned, God had a plan in place to rescue the world. The plan is rooted in the cross, and the good news of the cross must be told to everyone in the world. The responsibility of that witness is placed on every Christian.

“ ‘You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*). The final charge of Jesus underscores the importance the Lord placed on the witnessing role of His followers.

What lessons must those in Christian witness learn from the parable of the sower and the soil? *Luke 8:4–15*.

What and when is the reward of the one who witnesses? *Luke 18:24–30*.

What does the parable of the minas (*Luke 19:11–27*) teach about faithfulness and responsibility in witnessing?

In each of these texts, and others, the dangers, the responsibilities, and the rewards of witnessing and faith are revealed. We have been charged with a solemn responsibility; but considering what we have been given, how little is really asked of us?

Be a Servant Leader

Read Luke 22:24–27. Even as the disciples were preparing for the Last Supper, they were arguing about who among them would be the greatest in the kingdom. How does Jesus respond to their foolishness, and what is so revolutionary about His reply?

Jesus' answer is unique in the history of leadership. Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and Genghis Khan all saw leadership in terms of power and authority over others. That's pretty much how the world has always worked in regard to power.

“ ‘But not so among you; on the contrary,’ ” said Jesus, “ ‘he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves’ ” (*Luke 22:26, NKJV*). In so saying, the Lord of the universe reversed the definition of leadership: “ ‘Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ ” (*Matt. 20:26–28, NIV*).

In so defining servanthood and self-denial as the core principles of His way and His leadership, Jesus introduced a new dynamic to human relations: fulfillment comes not from power but from service; leadership derives its authority not from position but from servanthood; transformation begins not with the throne but with the cross. To live is to die (*John 12:24*).

In Luke 9:46–48 something similar arose among Jesus' disciples about who would be the greatest. The principles of the world were still firmly entrenched in His disciples' minds.

The Master's answer gets to the heart of the problem and poses one of the most difficult challenges in life in general and in the Christian life in particular. Jesus' words, especially the part about being the “ ‘least among you’ ” (*vs. 48, NKJV*), show how completely backward the world's priorities are.

With the principles of the world so utterly opposite of what Jesus taught here, how are we to survive if we implement His principles in our own lives?

Further Study: “Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Of whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are Christ’s, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 58.

“In our life here, earthly, sin-restricted though it is, the greatest joy and the highest education are in service. And in the future state, untrammelled by the limitations of sinful humanity, it is in service that our greatest joy and our highest education will be found—witnessing, and ever as we witness learning anew ‘the riches of the glory of this mystery;’ ‘which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.’ Colossians 1:27.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 309.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Jesus called the rich and successful farmer a fool (*Luke 12:20*). One may not be rich or successful, but what makes one a fool in the sight of God?
- 2 In some of our churches, we see two groups: first, the professionals, business executives, church and community leaders, and the influential, all who get respect, notice, and regard; second, the silent and the insignificant ones who just come and go without anyone taking note of them. What can you do to make the latter feel just as important as the first group?
- 3 Though it’s easy today to deride the Pharisees for the way that they perverted the faith, how can we be sure that we, who are zealous for the faith, are not in danger of making the same mistakes? How do we stand firm for what is right without becoming a Pharisee? Or, even more important, how do we determine what is right and what is worth fighting for, as opposed to “straining at gnats”?
- 4 How do we maintain an attitude of vigilance and readiness for the return of Jesus when, with each passing year, it gets easier and easier to become less vigilant?

Searching for Peace: Part 2

TAN, CHINA

Tan didn't plan to stay long; but because no one sent him home, he stayed and studied. As he and the elderly pastor studied the Bible, Tan learned new truths about God. He had heard about the Sabbath but had thought that Sunday was the Sabbath. Other Christians worshiped on Sunday; why did this group worship on Saturday? Patiently Pastor Xo studied and prayed with Tan. Tan prayed, too, asking God to show him His truths. Little by little, God opened Tan's mind to truth, and he accepted it.

Tan stayed and studied with Pastor Xo for seven months. During this time, he was baptized and dedicated himself to work full time for God. Pastor Xo assigned Tan to work in a village nearby, where there was a small congregation of believers.

One day Tan answered a knock at his door and found Tao standing there. "I had to find you," Tao said. "I want to know your God." Surprised, Tan invited him in and learned that three days after he had left town, Tao and his friends got into a fight with a man who was the leader of a powerful gang. The young man managed to escape, but the next day someone told him that the gang leader was searching for him to kill him. His mother, distraught over her son's evil ways, begged him to leave town.

While packing to go, Tao found the Bible Tan had given him. He picked it up, and it opened to Matthew 6. Tao began to read, "'Do not worry about your life. . . . But seek first [God's] kingdom. . . . Do not worry about tomorrow. . . . Each day has enough trouble of its own'" (*Matt. 6:25, 33, 34, NIV*). Tao remembered Tan's peace and wished he knew God as Tan did, so he decided to buy a one-way ticket to find his Christian friend.

Tan introduced Tao to Pastor Xo. Pastor Xo helped Tao find work, and in the evenings, they studied the Bible together. Tao absorbed the truths and accepted Christ as his Savior and was baptized. Now a new desire burned in Tao's heart—he wanted to become a Bible worker.

He decided to return home and share his new faith with the people there. His first convert was his mother, who saw the deep change in her son's life. But few others were interested enough to listen. Tao's mother feared that if he remained in the village, he might fall back into his old ways. She urged him to return to the city and continue studying, but Tao explained to her that Jesus changes lives forever.

Tao did return to the city to receive more training. He knows that it is by God's grace that he is alive, and by God's grace, he wants to live for Him. Both Tan and Tao are grateful for how God has led in their lives, and they continue to share their faith with others as lay pastors in southern China.

Adapted from a story by Charlotte Ishkanian.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Luke 17:15*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Realize what following Jesus means.

Feel: Understand the need and the cost of following Jesus.

Do: Take steps to follow Jesus daily.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: What Following Jesus Means

A What did the disciples want when they asked Jesus to increase their faith in Him? Why is faith in Him necessary in order to be like Him? How do you move from doctrinal correctness to relational living?

B Why did Jesus criticize the faith and lifestyle of the Pharisees? How can we guard against pharisaism and follow Christ truthfully?

C How is faith in God related to the fear of God? What does it mean to fear God?

II. Feel: The Need to Follow Jesus

A Peter, Thomas, Judas—they all claimed to follow Jesus, and yet no two were alike. What is the deficiency in each, and how can those defects be overcome?

B How does pharisaism affect your faith and your relationship to God and your fellow humans? How can we guard against the temptation of seeking outward correctness without seeking the transforming power of Christ?

C What is the difference between believing in Jesus and having faith in Him? How does following Jesus affect your business, ethics, social, and family lives?

III. Do: Take Steps to Follow Jesus.

A What does one do to reveal his or her faith in Jesus? Why?

B If you want to follow Jesus fully, what changes do you have to make in life—spiritually, socially, physically, mentally?

► **Summary:** To be a Christian means to live like Christ. Following Jesus and obeying His requirements in everyday life are not optional. Either we belong to Him fully, or we don't.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Luke 12:16–21*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: How is life to be defined? More so, how is it to be lived? The parable in Luke 12:16–21 provides one way that is too often the world’s preferred choice.

A rich man’s farm yielded bountifully, but he had a problem with what to do with that abundance, even though all around him was want and poverty. His mind was so dominated by self that he set out his plan in a monologue that, in Greek, is about sixty words long—one-fifth of which consists of “I,” “me,” and “my.” Pulling down old barns, building new ones, and storing the wealth were the things he could do to ease the pain of riches. The poor did not matter. God was not in the picture. “I” was all that counted. But as he went to bed, saying to his soul, “Eat, drink, and be merry,” Mr. Success found that night to be his last, with the Creator’s judgment, “You fool.”

Life “‘does not consist in the abundance of . . . things’ ” (*Luke 12:15, NKJV*) but in love to God and humans.

Just for Teachers: The parable of the rich fool gives a good starting point to initiate this week’s lesson study. Following Jesus’ example, daily life must begin with prayerful self-reflection: How will I spend today doing the will and the way of Jesus? Will I be like the rich man given to self and its achievements? Or will I be truly rich in love, faith, and service, using all that I have toward that end? How shall I live today in the light of eternity?

Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ Why did Jesus call the rich man a fool? What were this man’s fatal shortcomings?
- ❷ Compare this rich man with another in Luke 18:18–23. Do riches always get in the way of following Jesus?
- ❸ Why is it that in the Lord’s Prayer the first person singular never occurs but always the plural?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: To follow Jesus daily is a challenge. Nevertheless, the call of Jesus remains eternally the same: “ ‘If anyone desires to

come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me' ” (Luke 9:23, NKJV). The command raises three questions: What should we give up? What should we do? How should we be fruitful witnesses?

Bible Commentary

I. Following Jesus: What Should We Give Up? (Review Luke 9:23, 11:37–54 with your class.)

There are two things we must give up in order to follow Jesus:

A. Give up self (Luke 9:23). We are to continually surrender self—not just at the door of discipleship. As Paul states, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31, NKJV). To give up self means to undergo a radical reorientation in life’s priorities so that from then on, self submits to the priorities of God, and the cross of Jesus becomes life’s compelling directive.

B. Give up pharisaism (Luke 11:37–54). No aspect of religious practice came under the denunciation of Jesus as much as that of pharisaism: a life based on externalism, legalism, ostentatious lifestyle, and hypocrisy, while paying little or no attention to love, mercy, and justice.

Pharisaism (vss. 42–54) is a cancerous cell that slowly kills the life of discipleship. Wearing an outward religious cloak, it destroys the inner commitment to the principles of God’s kingdom—love, joy, peace, obedience, and justice. Hence, Jesus warned, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy’ ” (Luke 12:1, NKJV). Examine yourself: Am I a pharisee?

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read Luke 11:37–41. How does Jesus contrast the spiritual reality of His kingdom with religious formalism?
- ❷ What is the implication of the outside-versus-inside argument for the life of discipleship today?
- ❸ How often do you argue over unimportant details of church life and forget the great urgencies of Christian ministry?

II. Following Jesus: What Should We Do? (Review Luke 12:4–12, 22–34 with your class.)

What does the Lord ask us to do in answer to His call to follow Him?

A. Fear God (Luke 12:4–12). The Bible uses fear with reference to God some three hundred times. The use reveals that fear of God is a positive, instead of a negative thrust, and is essential for a robust spiritual life. For example, “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10),

and to “fear the LORD” is to “depart from evil” (*Prov. 3:7*). To fear God, therefore, does not mean to live in terror or dread, but rather to know Him fully, trust Him absolutely, and do His will unreservedly. Fearing God, in this sense, is indeed a good thing, as it frees us from all anxiety (*Luke 12:4–6*), places us in the security of One who has numbered our hairs (*vs. 7*), and fortifies us with the assurance of the Holy Spirit (*vs. 12*).

B. Live without worry (*vss. 22–34*). Worry is sin’s gift to humanity. While claiming to work hard to meet human wants, worry, in fact, plots to take away trust in God and kills joy in life. So Jesus commands us not to worry. Rather, believe that “‘with God all things are possible’ ” (*Mark 10:27, NKJV; see also Luke 18:27*). Jesus further draws our attention to the lilies of the field and the birds of the sky: they neither worry nor fret, but are arrayed in all glory and beauty. If God cares for the universe and upholds all that is in it, would He not care for us, created in His image and redeemed for His eternal fellowship?

C. Live with a discernment of time (*Luke 12:54–58*). While humans in their pursuit of life and its varied activities may or may not take into account the times in which they live, Christ warns His followers that it is absolutely necessary that they live with a sense of time in the context of eternity, soon to break upon them. It is wiser to make peace with God while it is still day. For the night of judgment comes, when, alas, it will be too late.

Consider This: One of our worst sins is to exist without any fear of God (*see Rom. 3:18*). When John Knox was laid to rest, someone said of him, “Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man.” Why, indeed, is the fear of God the antidote to every other fear?

III. Following Jesus—Be a Fruitful Witness (*Read Luke 9:49, 50 with your class.*)

A pastor once told a story that when Jesus ascended to heaven, all the heavenly hosts welcomed Him with joy and praise. A group of angels surrounded Jesus, wanting to hear more about His redemptive mission. They wanted to know how His perfect forehead, palms, and feet became so marred. Jesus told them the cost of redemption—the agony of the cross, the crown of thorns, and the nail prints, scars He would carry forever as signs of God’s love toward sinful humanity.

The angels wondered at God’s amazing love, and one angel asked Jesus, “You have borne much, suffered a great deal, and won the great victory over Satan. What have You done to ensure that future generations of humanity will come to know about God’s great sacrifice?”

Jesus replied, “I have selected a few men and women—John, Peter, James, Mary, Martha, and a few others—and told them to witness to others, and they to others, and so on.”

“What if these men and women fail to witness?”

“Well, I have no other plan. I am depending on them,” the Lord said.

Discussion Question: How does a witness face what may be considered as competition (*Luke 9:49, 50*), rejection (*vss. 51–56*), and distraction (*Luke 10:38–42*)?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The question “Who shall be the greatest?” has been a constant concern with the disciples then (*Luke 9:46–48, 22:24*) and with us today. To go after the “big” is part of human nature. We are surrounded by the tyranny of bigness—we must have the biggest house; watch the best-ever football game; strive for the highest position; work toward making our children the best doctors, lawyers, or computer wizards; preach the best sermon; and baptize the most people. Amid such warped definitions of priorities for greatness, Jesus expects us not to be great but to be like children—trusting, innocent, and confiding (*Luke 18:15–17*).

Thought Question: How does wanting to be the first or the greatest play into the hands of the evil one in light of the great controversy?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: According to an old story, Satan convened a conference on how best to divert the attention of some strong believers from their daily commitment to Christ. One devil suggested that he would convince those believers that there is no God. “That won’t do,” Satan said. “Even atheists, when they are cornered, turn to God.” Another devil said, “I will convince them that there is no hell.” “No good,” said Satan. “Lots of people are already living in conditions that are hellish.” Finally, a junior devil volunteered to convince everyone that there is plenty of time and no need to hurry about God. “Go,” said Satan. “You should be able to do it.”

Thought Questions:

- ① The rich fool forgot that his time was limited. How do you live, conscious that today could be the last day of your life?
- ② Create a seven-day working calendar, listing your plans for each day. How much time have you allotted to God?