

Luke 16:14-18 Small Group Discussion Questions

The Focus of Faithfulness

Opening discussion: talk about the most difficult test you ever took. What was the subject matter? What was the test for? What were the results?

- Life is filled with tests: educational tests, medical tests, license tests, lie detector tests, fuel efficiency tests, radon tests, etc. One time in college I even had a test on how to administer tests! Illustration: the ornithology student.
- The Bible also gives us tests, spiritual tests for the purpose of evaluating where we are. How often do you take time to test yourself? How often do you ask yourself sincere questions about motive or dedication? It should happen often.
- This passage is an evaluation test to establish if a believer is being faithful in focus on God or hypocritical in focus on self.

Discussion Question: Without the Bible, how would you evaluate or “test” your own faithfulness to God? Would that testing look strictly like the law or also teach you the Gospel?

- **In Luke 16:1-13 - Jesus gave a theology of faithfulness.**
 - **You can only focus in one direction therefore you can not be fully focused on yourself and fully focused on God at the Same time.**
- Jesus now wanted to make some statements that would challenge or test whether the religious leaders were faithful to God or themselves, and he used a legal argument to do just that!
- **Jesus showed that legalism is a theology of convenience because it abuses the spirit of the law.**

Discussion Question: In your own words, why is legalism “convenient”?

- **14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. 15 And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. 16 “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone**

forces his way into it. 17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

- Jesus knew that the hearts of the pharisees were after the wealth that came with their legalism. (vs 14-15)
 - Legalism is an abuse of law. The law was given to point us to our need for God. The law was a grace, and the grace upon that grace was the giving of Jesus to fulfill the law and pay the penalty of the law.¹
 - The religious leaders interpreted the law always with an advantage of control over the people, which allowed them to then use the law for position and even financial perks like overcharging for animals used for sacrifice.
- Jesus contrasted the law and prophets with his new message of the kingdom in verse 16. Put simply, “you have been preparing for the king and his kingdom through law all the way up to John. Now the king is here, and you want to control the kingdom by interpreting the law to your own advantage.”²
- Jesus mentioned that to get into the kingdom would take some effort in verse 16. This is another instance where being present with Jesus when he made this statement would have given more clarity, so we look at the possibilities for interpretation.
 - Option 1: It takes a zealous pursuit to follow after God.
 - Option 2: There was a hostile fight against God’s kingdom.
 - I would echo Matthew Henry in his assessment that both interpretations work together to tell us Jesus is saying that if you want to be in the kingdom, you are going to have to walk towards the open gate against a crowd going in the opposite direction.³
 - Illustration of walking through King’s Cross Station.
- Jesus wanted them to understand that every letter, and even every tiny mark of the law is important! (vs 17). Jesus decided to pick on a very prevalent hypocritical abuse of the law through the topic of divorce!

¹ John 1:16

² Summation based on Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament: Luke Volume 2*, (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 1996), 1351

³ Matthew Henry, *Commentary Matthew-John*. (Hendrickson Publishers, 2003) 610-611

Why is the law still important for us today? (Hint: think about Jame's illustration of a mirror. Also: the concept of grace upon grace and Christ's role of active and passive obedience that Pastor Rob often mentions.)

- **Jesus masterfully used the Pharisaical compromise of divorce as an illustration of how they were divorcing the true heart of the law.**
- **18 “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.**
 - This much should be obvious because the teaching on divorce itself does not fit the context.
 - One need only reference Jesus’ other teachings on divorce with the Pharisees to see that this was a recurring issue of compromise with the Pharisees.
 - See Matthew 5 and 19. Paul also discusses it in 1 Cor. 7. Both of these passages do offer grounds for divorce in certain circumstances, but not with the flippant disregard with which the pharisees were approaching divorce.
 - Geldenhuys, in the New International Commentary states: “These words are especially directed against those Pharisees who allowed divorce to the husbands on various kinds of trifling matters, but violated the right of the wife in such a manner that no right of divorce was granted her if she was unjustly or cruelly treated by her husband.”⁴
 - Morris, in the Tyndale New Testament Commentary, explains: “the Pharisees were very permissive, allowing men divorce on the most trivial grounds. Thus Hillel thought it enough if a wife spoiled her husband’s dinner and Akiba went so far as to permit divorce if the man found someone prettier than his wife.”⁵
 - The prophet Malachi had spoken very directly against a flippant attitude about divorce when he said in **Malachi 2: [13] And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. [14] But you say, “Why does he not?” Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. [15] Did he not make**

⁴ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*. (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

⁵ Leon Morris — *Luke* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 1988). 246-247

them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. [16] “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.” (ESV)

- Wayne Grudem states that this is an indictment on the faithlessness involved in flippant divorce and that this verse is “speaking to God’s hatred of the destructiveness and pain that is always involved with divorce.”⁶
- In using the law in this way, Jesus was not avoiding the issue of divorce, but He was showing the heart of the relationship struggle between God and man.
 - To faithfully stick to the context, I will not be doing a sermon on divorce and remarriage this morning except to say that divorce is a revealer of the brokenness of humanity.
 - The symbol of marriage however is important to the Gospel. Marriage was given to be a picture of our relationship with God, specifically the relationship of Christ to the Church.
 - **Ephesians 5:25–27 [25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, [26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (ESV)**
 - **Ephesians 5:29–32 [29] For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, [30] because we are members of his body. [31] “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” [32] This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (ESV)**
- Jesus’ had an important work to do in “cherishing” his bride the church. The word “cherish” in the greek communicates the idea of keeping warm and cared

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *What The Bible Says About Divorce And Remarriage*. (Crossway, Wheaton. 2021) 92-93.

for.⁷ Jesus died for his bride to redeem her, he now keeps her warm and safe through the love of His Holy Spirit! Marriage helps us understand the relationship we have with our Heavenly Husband, Jesus Christ!

- Satan always seeks to discredit God's goodness and divide God from his people. That was the very deception in the garden with Eve. Satan's goal in marriage is to denigrate and desecrate the holy metaphor of marriage. If he can separate husbands from wives, he diminishes the testimony of the church as well.
- The religious leaders didn't see marriage as sacred, but rather as convenient and necessary...until it wasn't. Then they discarded marriage as disposable and manipulated the law to make themselves happy. That is an excellent illustration of how hypocrites view the law!

Discussion Questions: What are some ways that marriage reminds you of the Gospel? What are some ways that marriage seems to fall short of the Gospel in it's representation of Christ and the Church? Why is it so important for Satan to attack Christian marriage in our culture today?

- A hypocritical approach to God's law is by definition a legalistic approach.
 - **Vs 15: Legalism is more concerned with man's assessment over God's assessment.**
 - **Vs 16: Legalism follows the easy path of louder and "more respected" voices.**
 - **Vs 17: Legalism dismisses the little things.**

Discussion Question: How can these three approaches of legalism hinder either the preaching of a pure Gospel or a distraction to the pure "voice" of the Gospel in a believers life?

- **I'd like to wrap up with an encouraging word to mothers today who may be struggling with social legalism about mothering.**
 - Moms face so much pressure to do things certain ways, and when our kids don't "measure up" to what people expect, especially from church kids, you can feel defeated, judged and like a failure.

⁷ thalpō (θάλπω Strong's G2282) to warm, keep warm, to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care

Sunday, May 10, 2026

- Your job *is not* to raise kids that will make you feel good or look good. Your job as a mom is to be the hands and feet, the very reflection of Christ in your love. That is actually a more difficult job than just being legalistic and controlling. It requires more patience, more prayer, more pursuit and a constant preaching of Gospel indicatives and imperatives.
 - This is so difficult in a culture that is so critical, especially on Social Media, of moms. “Do this not that” and “Be this not that” and “If you are this, than you don’t love Jesus” and “If you’re not this you are hypocritical and don’t want you best for your child”, etc. I don’t know how you do it.
 - I dread mothers day because no matter what I say today to our wonderful women, I’m going to get it wrong in some way. I expressed this to my wife recently and she said “This can give you empathy for how moms, and women in general, feel all the time in our critical and opinionated culture.”⁸
- This means you need the Gospel first and foremost for you if you are going to give the Gospel to your kids. The Gospel has to be your identity before your kids are going to make it their identity.

Discussion Questions: Why can Mother’s Day tend to cause some people heartache rather than honor? Why should we still celebrate the role of mothers, and women in general within the church culture? How can we do better?

- In his book, *Eat, Drink and be Merry*, Ray Ortlund states: “Every summons to self-help is law, not gospel...Let’s give ourselves permission to believe, just flat-out *believe*, this good news: ‘The gospel of salvation by grace means that grace *gives* before it *requires*.’”^{9 10}
- **1. Be more concerned with the process of heart surrender in your kids than external standards of obedience.**
 - Remember: Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.
 - Remember: the prodigal story isn’t a 10 minute life journey of a struggling son. It could have taken years for the prodigal’s return!

⁸ Annie said this to me with a spirit of care, not accusation or correction.

⁹ Ray Ortlund, *Eat, Drink and be Merry* (Crossway, Wheaton. 2026), 19-20. Italics original

¹⁰ Ray quotes W. H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1956), 201, italics original

- **2. There will always be people telling you what you can be doing better as you seek to love and lead your kids. Elevate the still small voice of the Holy Spirit above other voices and trust the Savior's love for you and for your kids.**
 - Timothy Keller wisely said that there are four kinds of criticism:¹¹
 - 1. Criticism that is mainly right, so admit it and change.
 - 2. Criticism that is partially right, so tweak what you can change.
 - 3. Criticism that is wrong but a sincere misunderstanding, so explain your heart better and engage.
 - 4. Criticism that is wrong and a deliberate twisting of words or a deliberate ignoring of context that is often said not in good faith. It is generally best to ignore this criticism.

- **3. When it comes to character formation, care about the little things if you want to see success in the big things.**
 - Paul David Tripp, in his book *Parenting*, emphasizes that character formation in children is a long-term, gospel-driven process aimed at heart transformation rather than mere behavior control. True character change comes from addressing the thoughts, desires, and motives (the heart) driving a child's actions.¹²
 - This is so important when our kids lash out because out of the abundance or overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.¹³
 - These are high maintenance moments that require more than a statement like “Don’t speak to me that way” or “you need a nap” or “you should have eaten a more nutritious lunch”. These are Gospel moments that need shepherding with questions like:
 - Do you feel anger? Why? Where do you think that anger is coming from? Am I making you angry? What do you think is going on in your heart right now?

¹¹ <https://timothykeller.com/blog/2009/12/16/how-do-you-take-criticism-of-your-views>

¹² Paul David Tripp, *Parenting*

¹³ Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45

Sunday, May 10, 2026

- Let's be honest about something this morning as we wrap up. What I just encouraged moms (and by inference dads) to do with their children, is exactly what we should be doing with our own hearts!
 - **1. Be more concerned about your heart condition than your reputation! What is really going on on the inside? That is what God cares about.**
 - **2. Elevate the voice of the Holy Spirit rather than the internal voices of emotion and comparison or the external voices of expectation.**
 - **3. Care about the little compromises in your sanctification. They will lead to chaos in your life down the line.**
 - Ask your self the hard questions of why you are doing what you are doing, thinking what you are thinking, avoiding what you are avoiding, or lying about what you are lying about. Remember, integrity is what you really are when no one else looking.
- The Gospel conclusion: let's rest here. God knows everything about you. Your biggest failings, you hardest struggles, your deepest and darkest secrets. He loves you still. He wants you still. He pursues you still. You are loved and cherished. You will never be more loved than you are right now.

Closing Discussion Questions: How can we put these three imperatives into practice in our daily lives as we practice and test faithfulness to God? How can we practice the indicative Gospel in our lives as we do this?