

Back to School with Jesus

Luke 17:1–6 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: Chapter 16 concluded last week with a stark gaze into the pits of the damned. If you were not with us last week, I strongly encourage you to go back and listen to that sermon online. Jesus spoke far more about Hell than any other teacher in Scripture, and He spoke of it more than Heaven.

CONTEXT: This week, we come to Chapter 17. Opinions are divided as to what Luke is doing in Chapter 17. Some suggest that this is a catch-all chapter where Luke places random teachings that didn't fit in other parts of the narrative. I am not convinced.

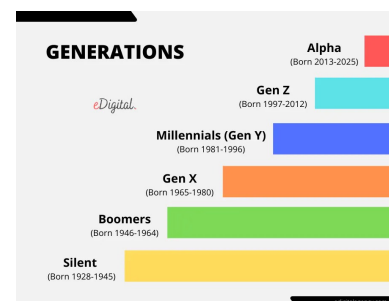
I believe, instead, that Chapter 17 is to be understood in light of Chapter 16. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus was directed to the Pharisees. We see in verse one of Chapter 17 that His attention turns to the disciples now.

It appears that as He has contemplated the immanence of Hell for some. His heart was moved to speak to his disciples about what they would soon be facing.

- How would they survive in a world filled with enemies, traps, and snares?
- How would they resist when facing unimaginable temptations?
- How would they navigate the complications of relationships with people who sin?

If you think about it, it's a lot like going back to school. When we think of back to school, some of us think about Norman Rockwell's vision of America...young men with crew cuts and rolled-up jeans, young ladies in bobby socks and pigtails. My school was nothing like that...my high school was more like a scene out of *Dazed and Confused*. But even my experience is Mayberry compared to what this generation is facing.

Gen Z (born 1997-2012) and **Alpha** (2013-2025) are in many ways radically different than their parents and grandparents.



A. Politically Different -

A recent study found that 26% of those between the ages of 18 and 39 had a favorable view of Socialism, compared to only 15% over the age of 65. Making Gen Z the most open generation in the history of our nation toward socialism. It is believed that this is because they were born into an economic world marked by chaos, uncertainty, volatility, and complexity.

B. They are Digital Natives -

As millennials, we have had to learn and adapt to technology, and there is generally an inherent suspicion of new technology. Not so with Gen Z and Alpha - they were born at the peak of the technological revolution.

I remember my first computer. I was told about this device called the modem that could dial into the Library of Congress and access 1000s of books. Today, practically every book ever written, every movie ever produced, and every song ever recorded can be accessed from their pocket.

- Today, teens spend approximately 9 hours a day absorbing media.
- 91% go to bed with their devices.
- On average, teens spend around 2 to 3 hours per day on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and others.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) is radically changing the online experience.

ILLUSTRATION: I recently attended a conference where one of the speakers was a Christian futurist who studies the trends and effects of new technology. An emerging issue parents and student pastors are facing is when young men develop a crush on their AI girlfriends.

C. They are Socially Sensitive -

They are likely to be more aware of and sensitive to issues such as gender, social justice, equality, and mental health than previous generations. They also take such things much more personally than previous generations.

If you are over 30, you tend to have an opinion on these various social issues, but if another person has a different opinion, you don't necessarily take personal offense. Perhaps you will try to sway their opinion, but the issue is outside of yourself, it's not a part of who you are.

It is different for Gen Z and Alpha. Never before has a generation so deeply identified with a particular position. It is very dangerous if it leads them to being closed off from new data.

ILLUSTRATION: Many of you have observed or experienced that when we take a stand on an issue like Pride month, we don't simply lose a few followers; these days, we gain a TON of haters. Why? They take these things personally, even if they themselves do not identify with the categories addressed.

D. They are Sexually Curious-

Now, every generation has been sexually curious and somewhat confused during their formative years. The difference between Gen Z and Alpha is that suddenly, there are all

these new categories. Seventh and 8th graders are beginning to describe themselves as straight, homosexual or bisexual, transgender or gender fluid.

- A number of them struggle with legitimate gender dysphoria.
- Many simply explore to discover which form of expression gets the most attention from others.

Nevertheless, many of their peers and, sadly, even some teachers will urge even the youngest to take more and more drastic steps to explore their sexuality, many of which are irreversible and have lifelong consequences. Add to this unfiltered access to the most vile forms of pornography.

One can only imagine where this might lead if left unchecked.

E. They are Spiritually Disconnected -

Each year, a number of studies are conducted to determine the percentage of Americans who are affiliated with the various religions and denominations.

- 1930's-1940's - 5% marked *NONE*, that is, they were not affiliated with any religion.
- In 1990, that number rose to only 8.1%. Nothing too significant or alarming.
- From 1990 - 2008 (18 years), the number doubled to 15%.
- In 2012, researchers began to report on the dramatic rise in the *NONES* when it shot up to 20%.
- 2015 - 23%
- 2023 - 28%, making the *NONES* the largest group in the survey - those who had no religious affiliation whatsoever.

GOOD NEWS? However, something is happening

—for the first time in many years, that trend has begun to change. In 2023, we began to see the percentage of *nones* trend down.

In the words of Mr. Beaver, from C.S. Lewis's epic work, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* - they say *Aslan is on the move; perhaps he has already landed.*

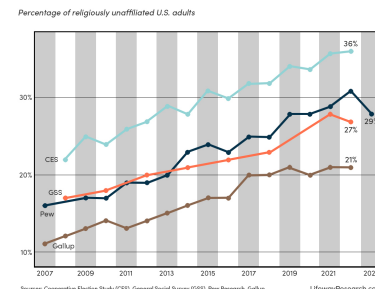
As we begin a new school year, what might Jesus say to our students and our teachers? Our parents and grandparents? I think Luke 17 gives us a clue.

First of all, notice...

1. A Word to Teachers -

TEXT: Luke 17:1–6 (ESV)

Is the rise of the nones over?



¹ “And he said to his **disciples**,”

Most commentators agree that he is likely referring to the 12. These are the ones who would one day be the Apostles of the Church.

“Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin”.

Now, every commentator I have read indicated that this admonition is directed primarily at teachers, not necessarily school teachers, but the sort of teachers these disciples would be - those who tell others how to live. Little ones made reference, not to little kids, but rather to those new to the faith, the most susceptible to error and false teaching.

This is a good reminder to all of us, but it holds unique gravitas for our teachers.

Remember the words of James 3:1, (ESV),

¹ “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

R.C. Sproul said it this way - “*Teachers are responsible for what they teach and Jesus pronounces the prophetic oracle of doom on any who cause his little ones to stumble*”.¹

- **Teachers** - It is no small thing for you to teach your students that there is no God in Heaven and that everything they see is simply the result of a random collision of chaotic particles. It may be part of your job to tell them that this is what your curriculum says, but stop vividly short of saying, “*This is the way it is.*”
- **Administrators** - Give your teachers academic freedom to clearly and fairly present various sides of an argument. Allow the students to have rigorous debates about such things. I am of the opinion that 1. It is good for the students to wrestle with a variety of concepts, 2. All things being equal the Christian faith stands on its own two feet.
- Here at FBFirst, we have found it helpful to remember the God-given role of the parent in a young person’s life. The parents are to raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord; they are to train them up.
- For those of you who are in a public school environment, please remember that you do not serve the Department of Education - you serve the public. We trust you with our kids; the state does not own them.

Then we see a word for all of us, but especially our students as they enter this new season of life...

2. A Word to Students -

¹ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 319.

Four tools for survival as you go back to school -

A. Be Self Aware

³ Pay attention to yourselves!

He is not saying, “**Be self-absorbed**,” but generally, don’t worry so much about what everyone else is doing. Pay attention to yourselves.

- Before you seek to influence others - Pay attention to yourself.
- Before you seek to get the attention of everyone else - Pay attention to yourself.
- Don’t worry whether everyone else thinks you are smart, pretty, or popular - Pay attention to yourself.

The wisest of all men said, Proverbs 4:23 (ESV),

²³ “Keep **your heart** with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

I am not responsible for anyone else’s heart but my own. I can’t even fully know your heart. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. My joy, my good attitude is not YOUR responsibility... its mine. Who is responsible for your joy? YOU!

Paul instructed Timothy - 1 Timothy 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

Did you get that? If you make sure that your LIFE is right, and your UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL is right... THEN, and ONLY THEN, YOU WILL BE BEST POSITIONED TO HELP OTHERS.

You say, “Well, what if my friends are doing something wrong or harmful?” He tells us...

B. Know the Value of a Loving Rebuke

3b. “If your brother sins, rebuke him.”

Notice the object of the rebuke - **YOUR BROTHER**. In other words, this is a very specific command directed to the family of faith. That is, if someone has publicly testified that they intend to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and live according to His Word, you ought to assume they meant it. Find the Christian community on campus, join FCA, attend Bible studies and prayer gatherings, be at “See You at the Pole”, and make youth group a priority.

Jesus elaborates on this concept in Matthew 18:15–17 (ESV)

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.”

That is, do this privately. Don't post it to Snapchat. Don't talk about people; talk to them. And talk to them face-to-face in private.

15b, "If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."

So this is other believers in Christ who also care about this person.

17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

At some point, you need to get church leadership involved. But only after you have been faithful in the first two steps.

ILLUSTRATION: In other parts of the world, this is just normal Christianity. When I traveled to Cuba, I heard of a young lady who was a Christian who began to develop a relationship with a non-Christian guy. Do you know what happened? The student group gathered around her and said, "You can't do this. You are called to marry a believer; what fellowship has light and darkness?"

When you guys go back to school, you are taking the reputation of the Lord Jesus Christ and this church with you. Help one another maintain that well.

ILLUSTRATION: Two nights ago, Julie and I went to dinner at a nice restaurant on the island. Our server had a strong accent, and we had never seen her before, to our knowledge. Once our meal was complete, and I had already signed the check and left a tip, she said, "I know you are the pastor at the First Baptist Church." We had a great conversation about what all we were doing in the community... but you know what hit me? It was too late to change my tip. NOW, like it or not, my tip reflected on you and it reflected on my Lord. And yes, it was very generous.

3. Always be Willing to Forgive.

^{3b}. "and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴ and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

This was likely the passage Peter remembered when he asked in **Matthew 18:21 (ESV)** 21. "Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?'"

Now, the going rate was three.

The Talmud, which was sort of a commentary on the OT, said.

"Three times, you shall forgive a person, then beat your plowshare into a sword and run

them through.” So, in offering seven times, Peter was being remarkably generous. But Peter wanted to draw the line somewhere. Peter recognized that if you say you are going to forgive people, then there is a chance that someone will take advantage of your forgiveness.

Matthew 18:22–23 (ESV)

²² “Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times’.” ²³

His point is not, 490 times, that’s it; after that, run them through. His point is that forgiveness has no limits.

I’m sure you know better than I do that in the midst of some wonderful things that are going to happen this year, there will also be a LOT of drama. Some people will feed on drama; they will stir up the drama, and they will purposely antagonize and offend. May it not be so among you.

Guard your heart, maintain your joy, and love everyone - even your enemies. That doesn’t mean that you don’t, at times, establish boundaries. There are some people you don’t need to give unfiltered access to.

Proverbs 13:20 (ESV)

²⁰ “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”

A fool is someone who is short-sighted; they only do what they feel, and they don’t consider the long-term effects of their decisions. If you surround yourself with that crowd, you will suffer. Love them, witness to them, but guard yourself.

NOW, you are being called to do school differently this year - to pay attention to your heart, to deal with sin in the lives of your fellow believers, and to be willing to completely and totally forgive people when they say they repent. Do you know what that will require?

4. Trust God.

⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

Now that is an odd way to respond it seems to me. Jesus said, “Watch yourselves, be willing to deal with sin in the family, then be willing to forgive and move on.”

It seems they would say, “Help us understand that better or increase our capacity to forgive”. But they didn’t. They said “help us to trust you more”.

⁶ “And the Lord said, ‘If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you’.”

Jesus says the size of your faith is not the issue but rather the object of your faith.

But it is also a recognition that faith is a gift... **Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)**

⁸ “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; ***it is the gift of God,*** ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

I think this is a good reminder... as you go back to school: Help one another out and hold each other accountable, but understand that if there are those who don't believe, who don't follow Jesus, you are in no way better than them. You have received a gift they have not yet received. It is your job to share the gift.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Jesus concludes with a mini-parable consisting of three rhetorical questions that are answered with a no, a yes, and a final no.

⁷ “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table?’”

Answer? No!

⁸ “Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink?’”

Answer? Yes!

⁹ “Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?”

Answer No!

¹⁰ “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; ***we have only done what was our duty.***’ ”

As you go back to school this year... do your duty to our Lord.