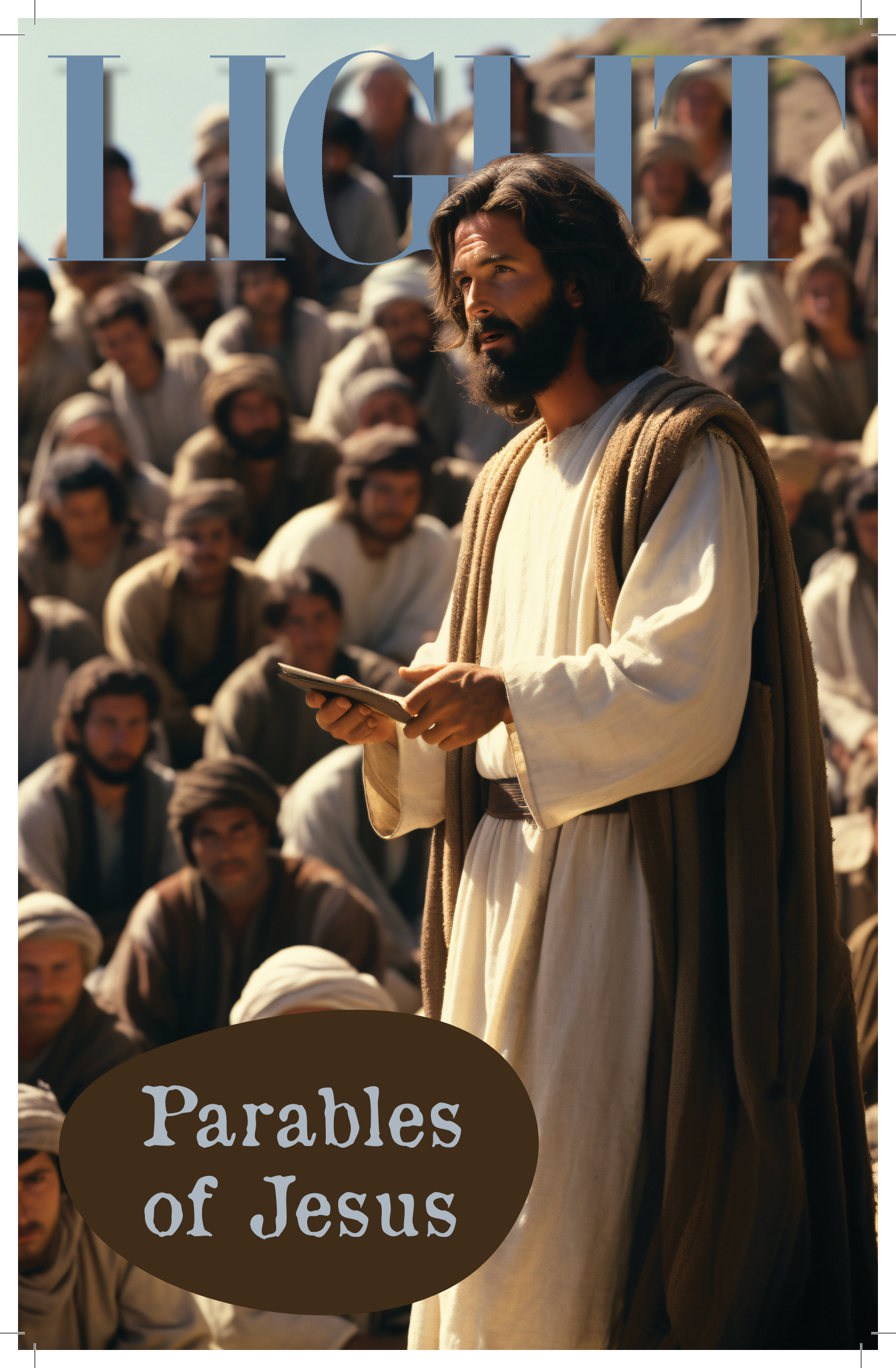


LIGHT

A full-page background image depicting Jesus with long brown hair and a beard, wearing a white robe with a brown sash and a brown cloak draped over his shoulders. He is holding a small, dark, rectangular object in his hands and looking off to the side. Behind him is a large, dense crowd of people, mostly men, wearing traditional Middle Eastern clothing like head coverings and robes. The scene is set outdoors under bright, warm sunlight.

Parables
of Jesus

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CHRISTIAN RECORD
— SERVICES FOR THE BLIND —



Editorial:

A Seat at the Table

by Jeri Lyn Rogge

It feels good to be included. Perhaps you understand the awkwardness of entering a room, not being recognized and invited to join a group, and feeling uncomfortable asking to sit among strangers. I am always relieved

upon recognizing a familiar face, especially if they also motion to me to join them or accompany me to where they're seated.

Recently, my uncle, one of my mother's younger brothers, passed away suddenly. At his memorial, extended family members we had not connected with in decades were in attendance. The little country church filled quickly. As friends, family, and acquaintances arrived, each was welcomed warmly and invited to an open seat. Saying goodbye to my uncle was more beautiful and meaningful because of the thoughtfulness of those who came and paid their respects and support to my aunt and cousins.

Following the memorial service, several relatives stopped by my aunt's house for the afternoon, and the stories that flowed sparked bittersweet memories, belly laughs, and tears. We honored a life well-lived and held each other close as we remembered and celebrated my uncle.

Receiving invitations to parties and other special events can be exciting. Celebrations provide an opportunity to spend time with family or friends or commemorate once-in-a-lifetime events, such as significant milestone anniversaries or birthdays. Breaking the everyday routine generates excitement and a list of questions: What should I wear? Which gift is the most appropriate for the occasion? Is

it acceptable to bring a friend? God designed us for community and connection; these opportunities can be socially, mentally, and spiritually refreshing.

Inviting and welcoming guests feels good as a party host, especially when guests RSVP. A host can then plan meal and beverage preferences, activities, and other ideas to create a fun, memorable event.

Just as it feels good to be included and invited, it's frustrating when a party guest is a "no-show," meaning they intended to come but didn't and failed to inform the host, who is left wondering why. Are they OK? Did they forget? Did they not want to come? Maybe we're not friends after all. It's not a great feeling.

In the parable of the great banquet, recorded in Luke 14:15-24, Jesus is at the house of a well-known Pharisee to eat a Sabbath meal. The mood throughout the chapter is tense; the Pharisees are looking for ways to trap Jesus, and Jesus is looking for ways to admonish these leaders for their cold, selfish, and destructive ways. While the lessons may not have landed with the immediate audience because of their hard hearts, these and many parables, some highlighted in this edition, remain to instruct future generations, including us. If you've never read the parable of the great banquet, I encourage you to take a few minutes to do so.

Here is a modernized version:

A wealthy man planned a lavish party for many friends and acquaintances. He designed this extravagant event to impress his city and its privileged invitees. It would be an honor to attend the party of the year at this man's home. The house's staff and catering teams worked tirelessly, preparing appetizers, beverages, a multicourse meal, and a showstopping dessert. No shortcuts were permitted. Only the best would do!

Finally, everything was ready. All the party needed to begin was the guests! However, instead of guests, the host received weird text messages. One couldn't come because he needed to look at a new investment property. Another bought a new tractor and immediately insisted on trying it in his field. Another said he'd just gotten married. Chances are, the host knew this and had attended the wedding, but the newlyweds weren't coming to his party.

Furious at the invitees' petty excuses and concerned his feast would soon be ruined, the wealthy man acted quickly. He urged his staff to invite and transport those who have never been to his house, including people in financial distress and those who are blind or have other physical disabilities. Once these new guests were welcomed and seated, the host discovered more open seats in his great banquet hall. He

sent his staff to the suburbs and countryside to urgently bring more guests and fill every seat at the massive banqueting table.

Because of the original guests' actions, the host declared they could not change their minds. Further, he prohibited them from ever enjoying the meal. There would be no leftovers or second chances. The people who declined would now be the ones left out.

WELCOME TO THE TABLE

In the biblical telling of this Luke 14 parable, Jesus wasn't playing with kid gloves, nor should He here. Eternity is at stake. These esteemed leaders assumed their position and power would transfer to their eternal lives, and Jesus wasn't shy about saying that wasn't how it would be, unless they changed. They needed a heart transplant. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Isaiah 36:26, NIV). Absent this transformation, they too would be exempted from the heavenly banqueting table.

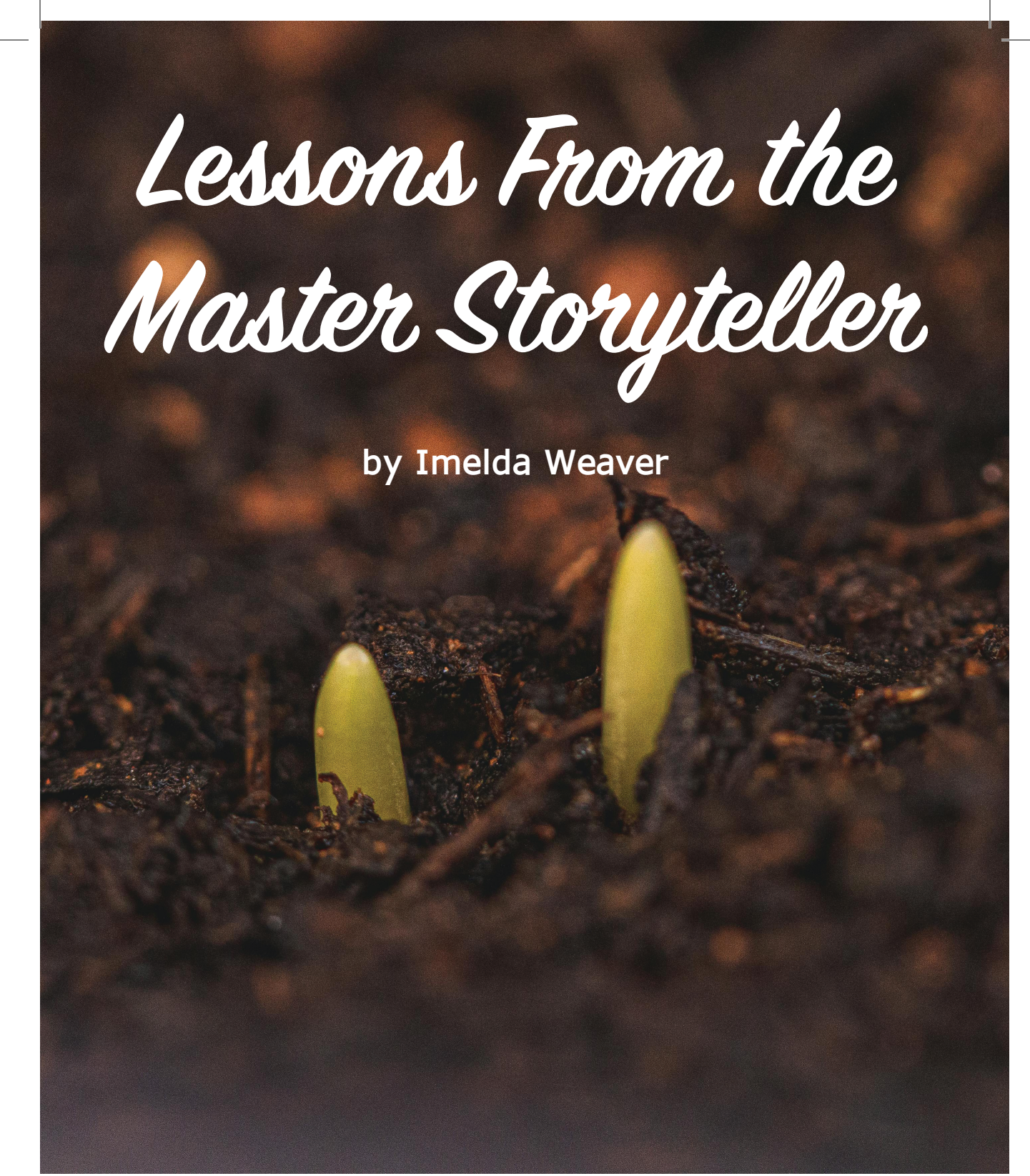
This parable highlights that the kingdom of God invites, welcomes, and includes people the world often ignores or disdains, expanding the community of faith from one nation to all. This story is a clarion call to believers to open their hearts, minds, and purposes to include

individuals frequently relegated to the pew — if welcomed at all.

If you've attended a church that didn't flex to remove barriers to ministry access, even when requested politely, you know what I'm talking about. If the church bulletin's type is difficult to read, the layout of the building is challenging to navigate, or the worship experience isn't welcoming to people who want to minister, not just warm a pew, you know what I'm talking about. Everyone deserves open access to an environment to explore their spiritual gifts. Everyone deserves the right to use their talents to serve and minister. Everyone deserves a seat at the table, in life, community, and ministry.

The Lord also calls us to be welcoming and model what we may not have experienced with our families, churches, and communities. A simple but powerful way to respectfully begin an accessibility conversation is to say, "Would you consider?" Opening the door, offering suggestions, and moving forward in ministry may feel like a heavy burden, but with the Lord's leading, you will plant essential seeds of accessibility that will bless future generations. Thank you for leading the way and modeling the example that others may follow.

Jeri Lyn Rogge is the editorial and outreach ministries director at Christian Record Services in Lincoln, Nebraska.



Lessons From the Master Storyteller

by Imelda Weaver

Why did Jesus teach in parables? That is a question I and many others would like to know. Even the disciples asked this question (Matthew 13:10). Jesus' answer wasn't what I expected.

Before we get to the answer, we should know what a parable is. It comes from the Greek word "parabole," which means "to place alongside" something else. A parable is a relatable story placed alongside a spiritual truth to illustrate that truth. My husband Scott likes to say, "A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

According to Matthew 13:11, Jesus told the disciples they were given the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but others were not. Jesus spoke in parables so those who were not disciples could see but not see, hear and not hear, nor understand (verse 13). Heavenly secrets are available to everyone, but understanding them is not for everyone; it is only for those searching for spiritual truth.

Jesus said that He spoke in parables to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, quoting Isaiah 6:9-10: "Listen carefully, but do not understand. Watch closely, but learn nothing. Harden the hearts of these people. Plug their ears and shut their eyes. That way, they will not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts and turn to Me for healing" (NLT).

In Matthew 13:35, we discover that Jesus' use of parables also fulfilled a prophecy in Psalm 78: "I will speak to you in a parable. I will teach you hidden lessons from our

past.” Jesus taught using palatable, relatable stories for those unprepared for solid spiritual truths and those hungry for deeper lessons. They highlighted lessons from the synagogue readings and oral tradition, placing these in practical situations. I would have thought He taught in parables because vivid stories about familiar things are easier to grasp and remember.

Mark 4:34 tells us Jesus didn’t speak to the crowd without a parable. Privately, He explained everything to His disciples. Before unpacking the meaning of the parable of the sower, Jesus asked the disciples, upon seeing their confusion, “If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables?” (Mark 4:13). This was a gentle challenge for His disciples to dig deep, learning this vital lesson so they could comprehend other spiritual truths.

The parable of the sower is in three of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is a story the crowd could picture in their minds. A farmer scattered seed on four types of soil. The first soil was packed hard because it was a path, so the birds came to eat the seed that lay on it. The second was rocky; the seed sprouted quickly with no roots because the soil was shallow. When the sun rose, the plants withered. The third soil was thorny, so the seed grew with the barbs but couldn’t produce grain

because the thorns choked the plants. The fourth soil was good, and the seed grew strong and produced up to a hundred times what was sown (Matthew 13:3-8, Mark 4:3-8, and Luke 8:5-8).

This is one of the few parables where Jesus' explanation is recorded for us to read (Matthew 13:18-23, Mark 4:14-20, and Luke 8:11-15). The parable of the sower illustrates the four different responses to the Word of God, which is represented by the seed. When the seed is sown on the path, the hearer does not understand. The devil comes, snatching the seed from the hearer's heart, so he will not believe and be saved. The rocky soil hearer receives the Word joyfully, but it doesn't take root. When trouble or persecution comes, he quickly falls away. The seed sown among thorns represents those who hear the Word, but worldly cares, wealth, and other pleasures or distractions choke the Word, so no fruit is produced. The good soil is where the Word is heard, understood, and received. Over time, the hearer bears fruit up to a hundred times as much as was planted.

This story reminds me of the time Scott asked me to scatter grass seed on the bare spots of our front lawn. He told me to grab a handful of seed from the bag and toss it wherever I saw grass missing. One area was near our driveway, so when I threw the handful

of seed, some fell on the driveway instead of the soil. Other spots didn't have rocks; instead, there was a layer of clay and, of course, some weeds grew with the grass. Scott prepared the clay soil by loosening it and adding compost so the seed would grow better.

If I hadn't experienced planting grass seed, I would have thought the farmer in the story was careless and lazy. In Jesus' day, the parable would entertain those not ready to understand God's Word. For those who were ready, the story vividly illustrated the different responses one would get when sharing the Good News of the kingdom of God.

Like the disciples, we should dig deep to understand this important parable. We can reflect on how good our soil is. God's Word, the seed, is potent. How do we make sure we have good soil? We keep our hearts receptive and remove rocks and thorns. We let the Word of God grow deep roots in our hearts, so we don't abandon our faith when trouble or persecution comes our way. We don't let career demands, financial pressures, and other priorities choke God's Word so that we don't produce fruit.

We can see from the parable that we should be generous sowers of God's Word because we can't know how people will respond. We should not fear sharing our faith because we now understand some people will be on the well-worn path, so

their hard hearts reject the Good News, not us. We realize there is a spiritual battle, with the enemy causing people to doubt and be lost. From studying the Bible, we also understand that the enemy is defeated because of Jesus' sacrifice (Colossians 2:15) and what He will do in the future (Revelation 20:10).

Even though the explanations for every parable Jesus taught are not recorded, He sent the Holy Spirit to help us understand (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:12). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and He will guide us in all truth (John 16:13). With His help, we can be fruitful with "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit also empowers us to share the Good News to the ends of the world (Acts 1:8) so that the kingdom of God is expanded. So, let's continue to be good soil with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was a master storyteller, using parables to entertain the crowd and provide solid spiritual truths to those ready to learn from Him. Please join me in prayerfully studying these extraordinary stories.

Imelda Weaver is a freelance writer who enjoys reading and studying parables in Franklin, Tennessee.

What Matters Most?

by Tammy Darling



If everything matters, then nothing does. When I received this revelation, it changed my life. Up to this point, I had been dabbling in this and that. Whenever my daughter would ask what I was doing on a particular day, "This and that" was my answer. I felt lost, unsure of my true north; my internal compass spun wildly with no set direction. My life reflected that chaos, and I was stressed, weary, and emotional. This season taught me that temporary highs only lead to longer-lasting lows. Filling in the gaps with things that don't truly matter only leads to more despondency. Let me add that retail therapy is not the answer.

Knowing something and living it are not the same. One brings knowledge; the other brings life. While my life, and perhaps yours, may resemble a shipwreck, we don't have to go down with the ship. We have a choice: Remain on the sinking ship, hoping for the best, or proactively address the reason for the sinking and do something about it.

Maybe the first question we need to answer is whether we interpret our value the way God does. If not, we'll endlessly pursue the world's idea of success and worth, wondering why we're unfulfilled. That's when we begin filling the "holes" with things that don't matter: Netflix binges, shopping, food, social media, addictions ... the list is endless.

I've learned that it all boils down to our worth. Whether or not we realize it, what we think about our value determines our subsequent choices.

Christ was willing to give up everything — even His life — to purchase and redeem us.

Jesus thinks we're priceless. He not only believes it, but He also proved it. In the parable of the pearl of great price, we learn that the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. "When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:46, NIV). We are that pearl of great price.

This parable emphasizes what matters most to God. Christ was willing to give up everything — even His life — to purchase and redeem us. Jesus valued us so much that He went to the cross in our place.

The parable reveals how much we mean to God and how valuable we are to Him. And what matters to Jesus should matter to us. When our perspective about success and our worth changes, so does what matters. We know what matters most to Christ — it's us! We gain our value from the price He paid for us. In essence, we are priceless!

Now that we know how much we mean to

God and how valuable we are, we can analyze what matters most and whether it reflects Christ's character.

BEING THERE OR BEING PRESENT?

I discovered at an early age that being there and being present are two very different concepts. My father operated his business at our homeplace; most of the time, he was "there" but not "present." While my father was physically at home, he wasn't present in the sense of being an involved father.

Don't get me wrong — being there for someone is essential. I'm talking about the difference between a mere physical presence and an engaged presence. An involved presence can be silent and still engaged.

Experientially, I learned that presence matters most. This is true for our relationships with one another and with God. I shudder to think where we'd be without God's constant, engaged presence — if He were merely "there" and not actively involved in our everyday lives.

THE PAST OR THIS MOMENT?

I have a history I wouldn't wish on anyone, mostly the things done to me. However, that doesn't negate the pain or shame. That said,

I've spent a lot of time in the past. But there came a point when I had to decide if I was going to continue living in the past and allow it to affect everything I do and say now, or if I was going to deal with my past so I could move forward, free to live in the present moment without the pain and shame.

No matter what you've done or what's been done to you, what matters most is this moment. What you do, think, and say from this moment on will determine the rest of your life. It is in this moment that God meets with us.

BEING RIGHT OR PRESERVING THE RELATIONSHIP?

It's pride that always wants to be right. I get that now. I've always needed to defend myself because I didn't know my true worth, so being right was always important. The result was damaged relationships. I'm experiencing some of the unfortunate consequences of being right.

Because we were created for connection with God and one another, relationship is one thing that matters most. Honoring others honors God. Loving others is loving God. "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40). Relationship demonstrates worth.

FACEBOOK OR FACE-TO-FACE?

Social media is great for keeping in touch with friends and relatives we don't see often, if at all. But let's be real. That's not how we spend most of our time on social media.

Time after time, scientific studies show the importance of being with others. Mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, we need that one-on-one contact. Again, because God created us for relationships, face-to-face time matters most. It's how genuine life takes place and shows how valuable people truly are.

ADDING VALUE TO YOUR PORTFOLIO OR OTHERS' LIVES?

It's understandable to be concerned about our financial situation in an uncertain economy. It's wise to take proactive measures. The problem comes when finances become more important than people. Working endless hours, not being generous, and not prioritizing relationships all affect more than just you; those decisions have a ripple effect.

Adding value to the lives of others matters most because people matter most to God. When we seek first the kingdom of God, the finances will be taken care of (see Matthew 6:33).

WORDS OR ACTIONS?

"If you can't back it up, don't say it" has become my philosophy. Too often, people say something, but their actions don't match their words. I have done the same to others. It hurts.

Actions matter, too, because words are so powerful. What if God didn't follow through with what He spoke in Scripture? Yeah. Words are powerful, so subsequent action is crucial.

BEGINNINGS OR ENDINGS?

Without a beginning, there can be no ending; even so, that beginning isn't nearly as important as how we finish. We can run a marathon, which is our Christian walk, and fall at the beginning, but the ending, how we finish, is what matters most.

While we embrace every beginning and traverse the uncertain middle moments, let's determine to persevere and end well. The finish line is where the prize winners are announced, and 1 Corinthians 9:24 instructs us to "run in such a way as to get the prize."

THIS LIFE OR ETERNITY?

I love life. As hard as it is sometimes, it's still good. While I've been through many

difficult circumstances, I have myriad memories of awesome vacations, family events, accomplishments, and numerous things I still want to do and see.

Even so, this life is not all there is. Because it's not, eternity matters most. According to Ecclesiastes 3:11, God has set eternity in the human heart; it's our true north. This is a beautiful reminder that God's work involving us is not material or earthly in nature but is a spiritual, eternal purpose.

Knowing we are the pearl of great price is life-changing. As we become more selective about what really matters, our choices will noticeably shift. When we discover what matters most and live from that, we genuinely know the pearl of great price and that nothing is worth more than the treasure of becoming more Christ-like as our deep, abiding relationship with the Lord grows and matures.

Tammy Darling is a frequent contributor to Light. She writes from her home in rural Pennsylvania.

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God's Comfort for the Disadvantaged

by Ray McAllister



Could a mysterious parable from Jesus offer comfort to people with disabilities, who are often taken advantage of in this world? What is God's reaction to the mistreatment of these individuals? In the following paragraphs, we will explore an unusual story and see how it provides insight into these issues. We will cover the proper use of wealth and how God offers comfort for those who suffer at the hands of others.

A TALE OF TWO OUTCOMES

Let's turn to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It appears in Luke 16:19-31, and what follows is a modern version:

Once upon a time, there lived a rich man who had more money than we'd know what to do with. He lived in a fancy house, wore elegant purple and fine linen, and was pampered by so many servants he couldn't keep their names straight. There was also a poor, disabled beggar named Lazarus. He wore rags, and his body was covered with sores, which the neighborhood dogs often licked. He begged at the gate of the wealthy man, who wouldn't stoop to permit Lazarus to eat of the crumbs that fell from his table.

One day, Lazarus died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's bosom — to enjoy bliss more than any earthly man of affluence would know.

The rich man also died; he was transported to eternal suffering in Hades, where, now, his cries were ignored.

The rich man called to Abraham, "Send Lazarus to me with a drop of water to soothe my fire-singed tongue."

"Look," Abraham replied, "I won't remove Lazarus from his reward. Anyway, there's an impassible chasm between us." Abraham knew how the wealthy man treated Lazarus when they were alive and refused to allow him to continue taking advantage of Lazarus.

"Then send Lazarus to my family, as I have five brothers," the rich man replied. "Maybe he can warn them so they don't end up here with me." This once-wealthy fool aimed to exploit people after death, just as he had before his death.

Abraham shouted, "Your family has Moses and the prophets."

"No," the rich man cried. "If someone comes back from the dead, surely my brothers will listen." Suffering and judgment weren't keeping the rich man from trying to take Lazarus from his reward.

Abraham was resolute, "If they won't listen to the prophets, someone coming back from the dead won't make any difference." The once-affluent man remained in his punishment

in Hades, and Lazarus continued in his eternal bliss. Lazarus lived happily ever after.

LET'S MAKE SENSE OF THIS

So what's the point of this story, and why did I choose to tell it like a fairy tale? This section focuses on the answer to these and other relevant questions.

This parable is not good material to be used to make any case concerning what happens after death, except that there is a judgment at some point. This story contains too many ideas that are problematic to reason that the soul goes to heaven or hell after death.

It must first be noted that, as the tale I told says, the rich man did not go to hell. The Greek word in Luke 16:23 is Hades, not the Greek word used when describing actual hellfire. Hades was a place of torment discussed in Greek mythology, which we often think of as the underworld. The Hebrew word "Sheol," or the "pit," is entirely different.

Next, the idea that a drop of water could be carried such a distance, into a flaming inferno, to provide relief for just the tongue of a burning, disembodied soul is ridiculous, to say the least. Finally, what heavenly joy is there in being by Abraham's side when we can look over an immense chasm and watch others suffer?

In reality, the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus was a well-known folk legend in Jesus' day, and no one would have believed Jesus was reporting historical facts. Where else does this type of storytelling happen in the Bible? Ezekiel 23 is the story of two women whom God raised out of captivity in Egypt, who ended up falling into an adulterous lifestyle. While there weren't necessarily literal women with those names whom God rescued, He says that the women represent Jerusalem and Samaria (Ezekiel 23:4). The telling of the Rich Man and Lazarus would be like a pastor illustrating a sermon with the story of the Three Little Pigs, which no one believes is historically accurate; however, there may still be some moral lesson.

The meaning of this parable, then, is found in the context. In Luke 16:10-14, Jesus notes how many rich people did not behave righteously with their wealth. Those who enjoy a lavish, selfish life now might suffer later in the judgment. Jesus isn't giving a theology of what happens after death. Instead, He provides a theology of what happens to the less fortunate and those who are unkind to these individuals. The greedy, oppressors, and uncompassionate will one day suffer in the judgment. The vulnerable who suffer now will be honored. This should come as good news to all who have disabilities and have been bullied in school, taken advantage of in the world,

I may be disabled, but that doesn't mean I'm powerless to help my neighbors.

and passed by in the employment scene.

But is this the only message Jesus has here? It may be easy to say and believe

something like this: We, disabled people, are to be rewarded, and all stingy, cruel, non-disabled people will pay for their sins as we rejoice. However, it's not that simple, and here's why.

I may be disabled, but that doesn't mean I'm powerless to help my neighbors. In today's world, I might even be able to help those in need with financial support. Anyone, regardless of ability status, can pray for and encourage others.

Now, I may not have as much to give in the physical realm as a "rich man," and nowhere does the Bible support giving in a way that would just put me in debt. That being said, God does expect that I use my talents, whatever they are, as best I can, for His glory and the aid of a suffering world. If I don't, I am no better than the wealthy man in Jesus' parable who never seemed to get it right, even in the afterlife. The good news is that giving one's talents to help others is a joyful experience, a taste of heaven, right here on Earth.

I'm totally blind, but I was able to help someone else with a disability a few years

ago. Before taking the bread and juice for Communion, my denomination follows Jesus' example of washing one another's feet, spoken of in John 13:1-14. There was a man in a wheelchair in our church, and he never got to participate fully. One day, I decided to change this. I worked with him just outside because I couldn't get his chair to fit into the room where the footwashing was happening. I took off his shoes and socks and washed his feet. Then, I handed him some paper towels and held my feet over his lap so he could sponge-bathe them. I noted that John 13 doesn't exactly say how Jesus washed His disciples' feet. I heard people saying in the background how they'd thought about wanting to do that for this man before, but I was the one who did it, and we each gained a blessing from the experience.

Here are two invitations for you: To all who have suffered, take comfort knowing that God will eventually make everything right. He knows our sorrows and trials. My second invitation encourages you to look for opportunities to make a difference in someone else's life. The little things we do often mean the most to those experiencing difficulties. Those we aid may be inspired to spread the blessing and help others around them. In so doing, we live the life of those who find the greatest reward in heaven.

Ray McAllister is a frequent contributor to Light from Berrien Center, Michigan.

Justice Assured:

Prayer, Persistence, and the Widow's Reward

by Rhianna McGregor Hajzer



It isn't the big, dramatic stories of injustice that leave the deepest scars. Most often, it's the hundred small ones. It's the broken elevator no one bothers to fix, the sidewalk no one cares to clear, the dismissive shrug when

I ask for an accommodation. I'm drawn to the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18 because of moments like these. Across time and culture, she and I share a common truth: we are among the most vulnerable — the most in need of protection, compassion, and justice. Yet, more often than not, we are the ones dismissed, overlooked, and treated like an inconvenience.

At its heart, the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 encourages believers to remain steadfast in prayer and not to lose heart, even when faced with hardship or injustice. In the story, a widow repeatedly pleads for justice from a judge who neither fears God nor cares for people. Though indifferent to her plight, he grants her justice, if only to be rid of her. Jesus uses this image to remind us that if an unjust judge can be persuaded to act, how much more will our loving heavenly Father respond to His people when we cry out to Him?

This has been my story, too. Our world often marginalizes people with disabilities and brands itself with subtle but pervasively poisonous attitudes of obligation, pity, and indifference. It was these attitudes that drove me toward disability rights advocacy, determined to dispel myths and confront the ableism I encountered. Over time, though, I began to see the world through the lens of advocacy first and my faith second. And it wasn't just culture I filtered this way — I started viewing Scripture through the

same lens, interpreting the teachings of Jesus primarily as a guide for fighting for equality and access, rather than as an invitation to surrender my heart fully to His loving and complete authority. Scripture speaks of justice and our duty to seek it, but I found myself hesitant, unsure whether I was pursuing justice in a godly way or a worldly one.

How then do we, as disabled believers, faithfully read the parable of the persistent widow without bending its truths to fit our desires? Is it merely a call to seek earthly justice or something much greater?

It's tempting to treat this parable as a guide for social justice activism — after all, the widow exemplifies persistence, which mirrors the experiences of many disabled people today when seeking justice in a world slow to offer it. But at its core, it's a message of comfort and hope for the weary. It reminds us to persist in prayer and trust that our cries for justice are heard and will be answered at the Lord's coming. While persistence may not always bring the earthly results we long for, it leads us toward the final, perfect justice of heaven. If we reduce the widow's story to a lesson in earthly advocacy alone, we risk missing the eternal perspective — that the Lord sees every wrong, forgets nothing, and in His perfect timing and way, will act. His justice will be swift, complete, and final — and we can rest in that promise, even when earthly

justice falls short.

Even though human justice often fails us, Scripture still commands believers to seek it out and to defend the most vulnerable. The Lord commands us to “learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (Isaiah 1:17, ESV). In the same way, Paul exhorts the believers in Galatia to “not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). Pursuing justice is a godly act and a reflection of God’s own heart for His children. But Scripture also makes it clear that justice isn’t meant to be begrudging or cold or done out of self-serving motives. It’s intended to be the outflow of a heart aligned with the Lord’s — one of grace, compassion, mercy, and love. It’s in the space between action and motive that I often struggle.

Because even as I work to pursue justice and cling to the promises of God’s perfect timing, I find myself wearied by the weight of the injustice around me. It’s everywhere — persistent, relentless, and devastating. It’s a daily struggle to keep my heart softened to the Lord and tender toward those impacted by the harm when isolation and bitterness in the name of self-protection feel like safer choices.

I grow weary. Not only from the constant stream of wrongdoing and praying for justice

to be delivered, but also from the difficulty in discerning the motives of those delivering it. It's one thing to see justice done, but it's another when you're left wondering if it was offered out of genuine conviction, to quiet a complaint, or to ease a guilty conscience. And when I suspect the latter, it stirs up a bitterness in me. There's a hollow victory in receiving justice from an unwilling heart. When a wrong is finally addressed, not because it's right but because it's easier, it leaves behind an ache no ruling or apology can fully mend. It feels less like healing and more like being pacified. I've left conversations with the outcome I asked for, having made a heartfelt case for the wrong to be righted, yet carrying the heavy weight of knowing nothing truly changed — not in their hearts, not in their understanding. That kind of justice might fix a situation on paper but doesn't restore the relationship, dignity, or trust. And when that happens often enough, it can chip away at your hope and tempt you to believe that even sincere justice is out of reach in this life. And yet, like the widow, we're called to keep coming — to persist in prayer, even when earthly outcomes fall short.

In those moments, I have to remind myself that while human hearts are prone to mixed motives, God sees both the act and its intent. His justice is never insincere, never half-hearted, and never delayed. I'm learning, however

imperfectly, to release my grip on the motives of others. It's not mine to measure their hearts — that belongs to the Lord. My call is to persist in what is good, to seek justice where I can, and to trust that one day, the God of perfect justice will set all things right, once and for all.

For those who are weary from the fight, the parable of the persistent widow is a promise: God hears, God remembers, and God will act. His justice isn't transactional, but relational. It restores what's broken, upholds the dignity of the oppressed, and glorifies His name. It never comes too late, and it never misses anything. No matter how well-meaning, earthly justice will always be incomplete because human hearts are limited and flawed. But the justice of God both convicts and comforts. It convicts wrongdoers and comforts the weary by promising that no suffering is forgotten, no injustice overlooked, and no human is beyond God's justice and mercy. He alone is our hope. And so, like the widow, we press on — not because the fight is easy or because the world is just, but because we serve a God who is. We persist in prayer, never lose heart, and cling to the promise of a justice that will never fail — one already assured by the God who will, one day, make all things new.

Rhianna McGregor Hajzer is a Christian by grace, blind by design, and a writer by passion. She writes from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.

In Parables

by Richard Clark Jr.
Answers from the NIV.

Across

2. "A man had a fig tree ___ in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any" (Luke 13:6).

5. "Son, go and work today in the ___" (Matthew 21:28).

8. "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be ___ even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

12. "So if you have not been trustworthy in ___ worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" (Luke 16:11).

14. "They sat down and collected the good fish in ___" (Matthew 13:48).

16. "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ___ has been done, but there is still room'" (Luke 14:21).

18. "All by itself the soil ___ grain — first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head" (Mark 4:28).

19. "Every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his ___ new treasures as well as old" (Matthew 13:52).

20. "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the ___!'" (Matthew 25:6).

Down

1. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure ___ in a field" (Matthew 13:44).

3. "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the ___ come from?" (Matthew 13:27).

4. "No one tears a piece out of a new ___ to patch an old one" (Luke 5:36).

6. "If a kingdom is ___ against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:24).

7. "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle ___ with his servants" (Matthew 18:23).

9. "When the chief priests and the ___ heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them" (Matthew 21:45).

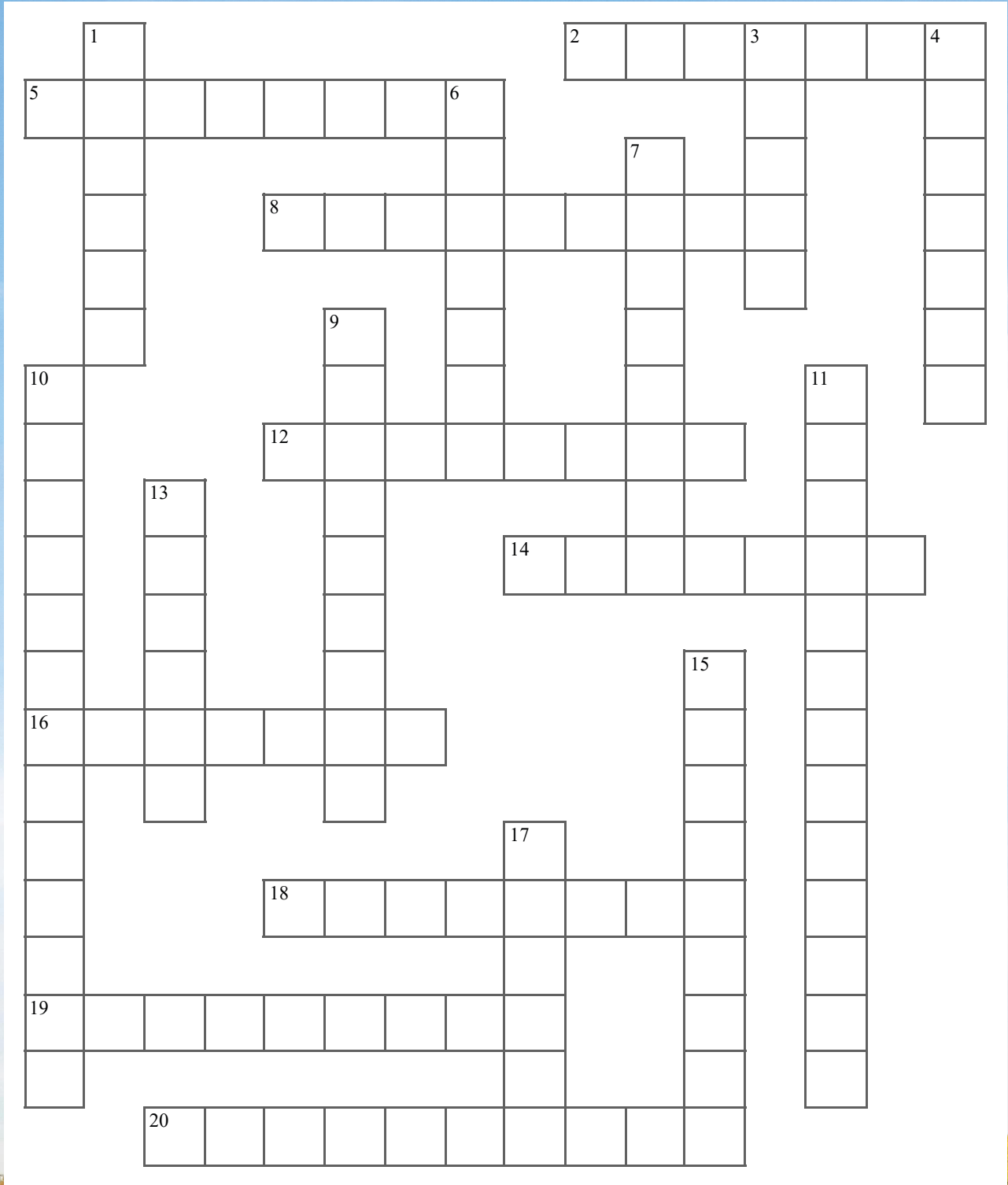
10. "To some who were confident of their own ___ and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable" (Luke 18:9).

11. "Do not take the place of honor, for a person more ___ than you may have been invited" (Luke 14:8).

13. "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 60 ___ of flour" (Matthew 13:33).

15. "He was near ___ and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once" (Luke 19:11).

17. "As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that ___ is near" (Matthew 24:32).



Harvest

by Richard Clark Jr.



As the end of summer blends into the start of fall, shortening days and cooling temperatures forecast the culmination of the year's harvest cycle here in Nebraska. Fields of maturing corn and soybeans beckon waiting combines, which will soon begin combing the fields, emptying load after load into trucks headed for the grain elevators.

Harvest has a sense of urgency, calling for endurance, for extra energy. Unless the crop is brought in at the proper time and under appropriate conditions, it could be lost. The window for harvesting may only be short, and unexpected catastrophes can happen at any time. Flood, fire, hail, tornadoes — the list goes on of potential destruction.

Tornadoes usually hit in the spring in Nebraska, during the tug of war between summer's advancing heat and humidity and the retreating cooler and drier weather patterns. It is a relief when tornado season, which typically peaks in June, is past. In the spring of 2013, the Lincoln area was spared tornadoes. But then in the fall, two touched down southeast of the city. I rode with my family to see the damage a few days later. My brother drove and scouted for evidence of the tornadoes. Once found, we followed the path of destruction as it tracked to the northeast. It was harvest season, and combines were giving the soybean and corn fields their stubbly winter haircuts.

The tornado's path, marked by knocked-down corn and ripped-off metal roofing pieces in the soybean fields, reminded me of the seriousness of harvesttime. When the crops are ready, farmers work in full force to get the beans and corn safely into the elevators. And the harvest is not in until it's all in.

Several of the parables Jesus told include the theme of harvest: the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23), the wheat and the tares (verses 24-30 and 36-43), and the growing seed (Mark 4:26-29). Another of Jesus' harvest parables is in Matthew 20 — the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

A landowner hired laborers early in the morning to harvest his grape crop. He agreed with them on a price, and they started working. A few hours later, he was back at the marketplace, where day laborers gathered to seek employment. He saw more people standing around. He hired them, too, telling them he'd pay them what was right. He went back to the market three more times and hired more laborers. The last group started work just one hour before quitting time.

Similarly, God continually calls for more people to work for Him in His fields. He will make that call until the close of Earth's harvesttime. Jesus' promise is sure: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all

the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14, NKJV). This will be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit, who enables God’s people to be witnesses to Jesus “to the end of the earth” (Zechariah 4:6; Acts 1:8).

The Joshua Project measures the progress of sharing Jesus with “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6). It keeps track of people groups who have yet to hear about the Savior who loves them. The Joshua Project reports that 7,200 people groups are unreached by the gospel — 481 of these have over one million people each. The majority of unreached people groups live in an area of the world dubbed the 10/40 window. This region, between 10 degrees and 40 degrees north latitude, stretches from North Africa eastward to Southeast Asia. It is home to nearly two-thirds of the world’s population (Learn more at JoshuaProject.net).

In God’s providence, many individuals from unreached people groups, including those from parts of the world where it is forbidden to share the gospel, come to countries with religious liberty. For example, the Joshua Project lists 98 unreached people groups in the U.S. and 63 in Canada. Only nine other countries have more unreached people groups than the U.S., and only 17 countries have more than Canada! Christians in countries with religious freedom

have valuable opportunities to befriend their neighbors from unreached people groups. This way, the gospel can take root and spread back to their families and friends across oceans and continents.

The Joshua Project pictures only a part of the harvest Jesus has sent His church to work in. As a teacher of mine used to say, every heart with Christ is a missionary and every heart without Christ is a mission field. Jesus said the harvest is abundant — the fields are already ripe, yet the laborers are few (see Luke 10:2 and John 4:35).

At the end of the day, the landowner in Jesus' parable ordered his steward to call the laborers in to be paid. The steward started by paying the latecomers and ended with the crew that began the earliest. In a surprise move by the landowner, he gave each laborer equal pay — a whole day's wages!

The first crew complained about their wages, supposing they would receive more than those who worked fewer hours. But the landowner said to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. ... I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?" (Mathew 20:13-15).

From the parable, we learn that the call to work in God's harvest is open to anyone who

will heed it. More and more people came to the market looking for work, and the landowner kept hiring. This invitation to become laborers with God is a privilege and reason to rejoice. We also learn that the reward for service is not to be the primary concern for the Christian. The reward is the same for everyone who has accepted God's generous call to work in His harvest and faithfully completes their task. And thirdly, we learn that the reward for service is not — is never — based on the laborers' deficient works but on God's all-sufficient, abounding grace. This is cause to rejoice all the more.

Daniel the prophet lived a long, faithful life in service to God, which is recorded in a Bible book of the same name. In contrast, the thief on the cross was converted shortly before his death. His only recorded part in the harvest was to remonstrate with his fellow crucified criminal and testify to Jesus' righteousness (Luke 23:40-41). And yet, Daniel and the repentant thief receive the same assurance of reward. The very last verse of the book of Daniel says, "But you [Daniel], go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days" (Daniel 12:13). And to the converted criminal, Jesus declared, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The apostle Paul affirms that, like himself, "all

who have loved His [Jesus'] appearing" will receive a crown of righteousness "on that Day" (2 Timothy 4:8).

HARVESTS NOW AND TO COME

As reflected in cultural celebrations worldwide, harvest is a joyful season. The Bible pictures a beautiful harvesttime festival, too. The last of the yearly feasts God instituted as part of the Jewish sanctuary service was a harvest feast. Following the most solemn Day of Atonement, it was called the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. This occurred after the grape harvest, "when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress" (Deuteronomy 16:13). "And you shall rejoice in your feast," God's people were instructed (verse 14). This festival extended to servants and even "the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates" (verse 14).

This feast symbolizes when the harvest of the Earth is complete. As the Feast of Tabernacles came at the end of the yearly feasts, we, too, look forward to the ultimate harvest celebration at the end of time when Jesus returns, gathers His redeemed people (His harvest), and brings them to their heavenly home.

How this year's corn and soybean crop will turn out here in Nebraska is uncertain. But

I know that God's harvest will be bountiful — a great multitude no one can number "of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" (Revelation 7:9).

God is still calling laborers to work in His vast harvest. If you haven't yet, will you respond to His invitation today?

Richard Clark Jr. is the assistant editor and Bible school coordinator at Christian Record Services in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Join the Harvest: Pray. Give. Go!

- "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2).
- Provide prayer support for harvesters in difficult fields (2 Thessalonians 3:1; Colossians 4:2-4).
- "Adopt" an unreached people group and pray for them daily.
- Give to support the work of harvesters among the unreached. The Joshua Project reports that for every dollar of Christian resources, less than one penny is directed at reaching the unreached.

Puzzle Answers

Across: 2. Growing; 5. Vineyard; 8. Convinced;
12. Handling; 14. Baskets; 16. Ordered;
18. Produces; 19. Storeroom; 20. Bridegroom

Down: 1. Hidden; 3. Weeds; 4. Garment;
6. Divided; 7. Accounts; 9. Pharisees;
10. Righteousness; 11. Distinguished;
13. Pounds; 15. Jerusalem; 17. Summer

- Share your testimony on PhoneFaith to bless and encourage others.
- Pass along *Light* when you are finished with it for others to enjoy.
- Invite your neighbor families with children to vacation Bible school.
- Volunteer in children's ministries, prison ministries, English as a second language (ESL) ministries — wherever God is calling you to serve.

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