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INTRODUCTION

The Christian world is saturated by grace—sometimes by cheap grace. In the early 90s, just after I'd finished the first draft of a discipleship course called Sonship, I began to notice that some of our graduates were using grace as an excuse to do what they felt like. Grace was merely a means for feeling good about themselves. The larger secular world is also increasingly dominated by law-less grace, where grace becomes a demand. All of this leaves Christians confused. How does grace work with holiness? Are we still under obligation?

Grace Through the Eyes of Jesus Units 1 and 2 are two nine-lesson interactive Bible studies that immerse you in the world of grace. We look at seven scenes from the gospel of Luke where Jesus either tells stories about grace or models grace in his interactions with people.

The way Jesus embodies grace and receives broken sinners sometimes takes my breath away. For example, when I'm discipling men who are struggling with sexual temptation, I encourage them to repeatedly confess their sin, turning again and again for forgiveness. Most of us shut down from God with repeated sin. When a particular sin captures us, we begin to think we are hopeless. But knowing that you can't out-sin God's grace gives us the courage to keep returning to the battle, to keep picking ourselves up after a failure and set our hearts anew to holiness.

The opposite problem of *underestimating* grace is *isolating* grace from a Christian moral frame. When we isolate grace, lawlessness can creep into the church. Jesus is never merely about grace in the abstract. In the stories Luke tells about Jesus, we see a richly textured world filled with the beauty of God's character. Our universe has a *givenness* to it, an order and design, that reflects the character of God. In the past when our culture was more influenced by Christianity, we all knew the law of God. But now in a post-Christian world, we can't assume people have Judeo-Christian values. We can't teach grace in a lawless vacuum. In *Grace Through the Eyes of Jesus*, we emphasize parts of Scripture we used to presume everyone knew—the Jewish moral frame.

The style of seeJesus' interactive studies creates an experience around a Bible passage where 15 minutes into the study you are almost living in the scene. So you are overwhelmed not only with grace but with the Person of Jesus. And, as Augustine said, if you get your loves rightly ordered, then everything else works!

PART 1: A BLIND MAN

LESSON 1: CRYING FOR GRACE

Today's lesson focuses on Jesus' pure, incarnational love for this blind man.

Read Luke 18:35–43

³⁵ As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶ And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. ³⁷ They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." ³⁸ And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ³⁹ And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁰ And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, ⁴¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight." ⁴² And Jesus said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." ⁴³ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

SECTION 1: Jericho

10 mins



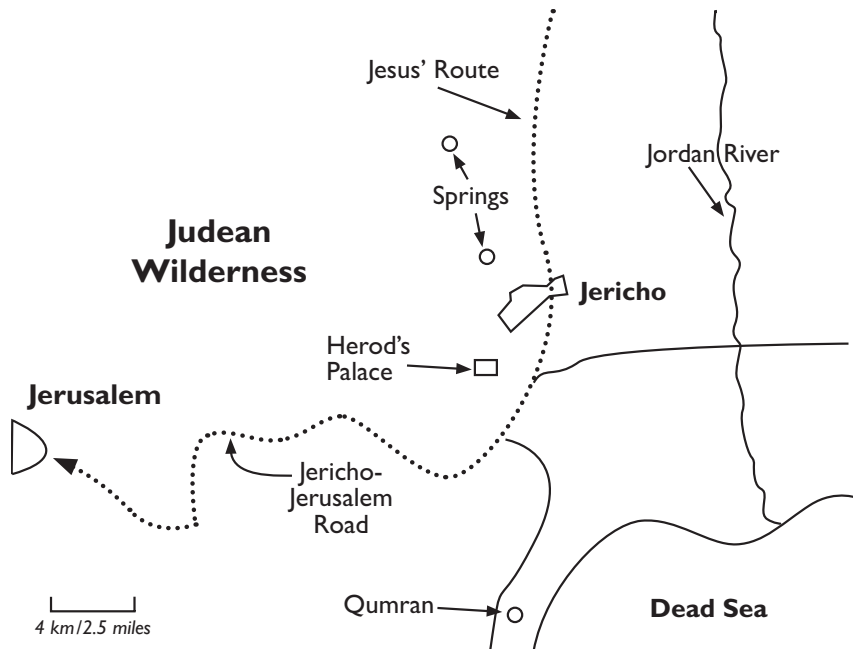
Historical Background: Jericho

- Jericho is the world's oldest, continuously inhabited city dating to 9500 BC.
- It is also the world's lowest city in elevation.
- It is a strategic location because it guards the main pass that goes up to Jerusalem and Judea from the Jordan River valley. The wilderness of Judea, one of the most barren places in the world, separates Jericho from the Jerusalem highlands. To enter the Promised Land, Joshua had to take this city. So it would be a strategic city for a beggar and a tax collector.
- Josephus tells us that Jericho was 17 miles from Jerusalem.¹
- It is the largest city outside of Jerusalem that we have a record of Jesus visiting.
- Jericho was also the first big "Roman city" that we have record of him entering. Roman style buildings would have been everywhere: public baths, the arena, and theater. Herod the Great, who was thoroughly "Romanized," kept a beautiful and extensive palace there, which would have been ideal to come to during the winter months when Jerusalem was colder.
- The Maccabees (Jewish rulers of Israel from about 165 BC) had cultivated balsam plantations in the Jericho area watered by the springs just north of Jericho. This was a thriving community.

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume II:9:51–24:53: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1994), 1029.

Ω Literary Background: Jesus' Jerusalem Journey

- Luke 9:5–19:44 is a travel narrative where much of the material is unique to Luke. It is Jesus' final journey from Galilee up to Jerusalem. By mentioning Jericho, Luke is signaling that Jesus is headed up to Jerusalem for the Passover and his Passion. Jericho is Jesus' last stop.
- We know from the two parallel accounts that the blind man's name was Bartimaeus² (Mark 10:46–52), and there were actually two blind men (Matthew 20:29–34).³



SECTION 2: The Blind Man's Cry

10 mins

1. What is the difference between what the crowd and the blind man call Jesus?

² Bartimaeus either means “son of honor” or “son of filth.” <http://christhum.wordpress.com/2009/10/26/the-name-fame-and-shame-of-bartimaeus/>.

³ Matthew and Mark have this scene on Jesus' way out of Jericho while Luke has it on the entrance to Jericho. Darrell Bock summarizes the speculation in *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1502-1504. We simply don't know enough to solve this puzzle. Calvin suggested there could be two separate healings of blind men that Matthew has merged, one happened as Jesus went into the city and one happened as he went out. Or it could be as simple as Jesus was going out of the city, stopped for Zacchaeus, and then returned back to the city to have dinner with him. Jesus' healing of Bartimaeus might have been when he was returning to Jericho with Zacchaeus. So it could be an event inside another event. That would mean that it happened in the context of Jesus leaving the city (Matthew and Mark) but Jesus was physically returning to the city when it happened (Luke). In general, life is complex.

2. What is the blind man doing by calling Jesus “Son of David”?

Don't read the Theological Background yet!

Theological Background: Son of David

- Bartimaeus is honoring Jesus, calling him by a messianic title. The Messiah would be a “Son of David,” a warrior-king in the line of David who would bring God’s physical kingdom to earth. He recognizes Jesus’ royalty.
- The only other person to call Jesus “Son of David” was the Syrophenician woman who begged Jesus to free her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus gave her his “great faith” award (Matthew 15:21–28).

3. So what is the difference between what the blind man sees and what the crowd sees?

4. Why do you think Bartimaeus called Jesus by a messianic title? What kind of connection is he making?

Theological Background: The Blind See

The blind man must have known the book of Isaiah, which repeatedly speaks about the blind seeing in the end times (see Isaiah 35:5; 42:7, 16, 18).

Read Isaiah 29:18–19

- ¹⁸ In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book,
and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.
- ¹⁹ The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,
and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

Gospel Connection: The Lens of Faith

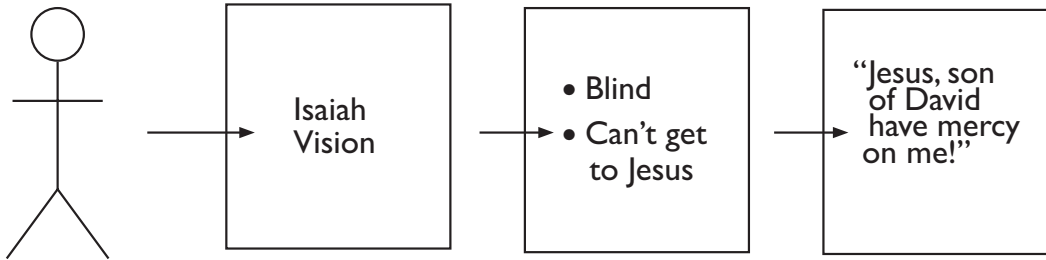
Bartimaeus’ faith is shaped by the Isaiah vision of what the Messiah will do. Others see a mere person, Jesus of Nazareth, but Bartimaeus sees the Messiah, the person who will give the blind their sight back. His faith isn’t a blind faith; it is informed and shaped by the Word of God. Faith grows when it saturates itself with the Word of God.

Bartimaeus

Faith Lens:

Problems:

Behavior:



SECTION 3: The Blind Man's Problem

10 mins

5. When “the poor” are talked about in our public culture or on TV, how are they usually portrayed?

Cultural Background: Impact of Jesus

- Notice that most of your images or thoughts encourage compassion for the poor. Your responses come from Jesus of Nazareth and his impact on culture through the church. In the late 4th century, the church created, in the words of scholar Peter Brown, “an imaginative revolution” that transferred the poor from “other” to “brother.”⁴
- We think “that poor blind man” and a first century person would think “that disgusting, bothersome, poor blind man.”



Historical Background: Giving to the Poor

In the Roman world the idea of giving to the poor was anathema because the poor couldn't give anything in return. They couldn't even honor someone because they were worthless and thus incapable of giving honor.

Peter Brown writes,

It was considered bad luck to dream that one gave money to a beggar. The dreamforetold death: “For Death is like a beggar, who takes and gives nothing in return.”⁵

The Torah (the Law, the first five books of Moses) exhorted Jews to give to the poor among them, but likely the Greek and Roman mindset, which is all too human, crept in.

⁴ Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2012), 77-79.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

6. What are the blind man's obstacles to getting to Jesus?

7. Why might the crowd tell him to shut up?

SECTION 4: The Blind Man's Solution

10 mins

8. What is the one thing that Bartimaeus has been doing for forty years?

9. He is completely alone, without any helpers, and a narrow window of time – Jesus is passing by. And he doesn't even know when Jesus is passing by! What is his only asset?

10. When the crowd tells him to shut up, what does he do?

11. What are we seeing? What do we call what Bartimaeus is doing?

12. What are the two parts of faith that we are seeing in Bartimaeus?

13. What is the difference between how Bartimaeus cries before and after the crowd yells at him?

14. Why would he drop Jesus' personal name and just focus on his messianic title "Son of David"? Wouldn't that weaken his case? What's the blind man doing?



Historical Background: The Jesus Prayer

The early church modified the cry of Bartimaeus and created what is called "The Jesus Prayer": "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The Orthodox Church still uses this prayer as part of their worship and meditation. It is a perfect summary of our faith applied to the heart.



Personal Illustration: Needing Jesus (Misuse of Power) – Paul Miller

In a staff meeting I asked a staff member to get information on purchasing a large quantity of ISBNs (numbers assigned to printed material). Neither of us was listening well to the other person. She was a bit obtuse and I was rushing. I finally told her, "I'm the boss, and I want you to purchase higher quantities on the Internet." I pulled rank unnecessarily. She pointed me to where we could purchase higher quantities on the website she'd been showing me. I apologized to her. Instead of "pulling rank," I should have gone to prayer like the blind man, and asked the Spirit to help me understand my co-worker and slow down my heart. I needed to have a quiet cry for grace instead of a loud cry for power. Bottom line, I wasn't desperate, realizing that I needed Jesus.

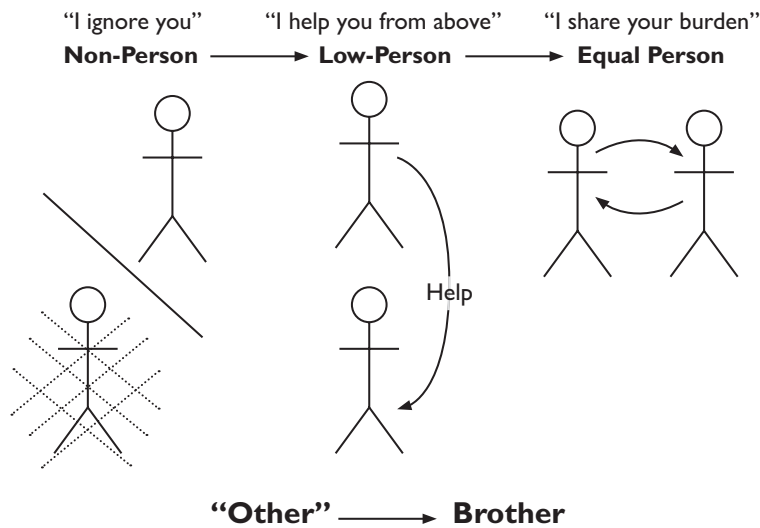
15. So how has Jesus transformed the crowd?**Insight: Gospel of Mark**

The Gospel of Mark (Mark 10:50) tells us how Bartimaeus responded, “And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.”

16. What is strange about Jesus asking Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?”**17. What is the difference between asking, “What do you want me to do for you?” and just healing him?****18. How is Jesus treating the blind man, i.e. as his equal or like someone below him?****Historical Background: Treating the Poor as Equals**

- Jesus’ treatment of Bartimaeus is a radical departure from how the poor were treated in the ancient world. It is the beginning of a new culture called Western Civilization that will keep Jesus’ DNA in it. But it will take 400 years to penetrate the Roman culture. The result? In the West, we care for the poor.
- Scholar Peter Brown describes how the church captured the Roman mind in the late 4th century by creating communities (the church) where rich and poor faced one another as equals: “Top and bottom – the very rich and the very poor – faced each other in a one-to-one relationship.”⁷

⁷ Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, 78.



Insight: Compassion

- Though Bartimaeus is blind, that is not who he is as a person. He is much more than his blindness. Jesus does not presume that he knows what Bartimaeus wants.
- Bartimaeus is at the center of the miracle, not his blindness. He is not a blind man who needs to be healed, but a person who needs to be loved.
- Compassion gives people space to be themselves. It does not decide beforehand what people need. It does not treat others like pieces of machinery that need to be fixed. It is person-to-person, and not healer-to-disabled.



Insight: Paternalism, The Opposite of Incarnation

- Incarnation tries to go inside of someone to find out what their needs are, as opposed to standing on the outside and helping the person. When I incarnate with you, I slow down and think about your world. No one can help me think more about your world than you.
- Paternalism Definitions:
 - ◊ Help from above.
 - ◊ Help without questions.
 - ◊ Help that ignores you, the person.
- Paternalism is confusing to the recipient, because on the one hand, someone helps you, but on the other hand, you feel run over.



Insight: The Jesus Question

- Asking someone the “Jesus Question” – “What can I do for you?” – is a bit of an adventure. People will often surprise us with what they want. It is usually not as overwhelming as we think.
- Sometimes we need to ask the question two or three times for someone who is overwhelmed or weary. Weary people get so used to people saying insincere things that they may not take you seriously when you say that you are willing to help.
- The Jesus Question is a simple description of love.

SECTION 6: Sight Restored

10 mins

Read Matthew 20:34

And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

Matthew’s account of this story indicates that there were two blind men and tells us *how* Jesus was feeling when he healed Bartimaeus and his friend. It is a typical pattern of Jesus to first look, then feel compassion, and then act.

19. How has his faith saved him?

Scholar Darrell Bock

“The healing pictures the presence of a deeper reality beyond the restoration of his sight. His faith has saved him. Light exists where darkness previously had resided.”⁸



Theological Background: Justification by faith

It is a picture of justification by faith. His faith, his crying out for grace, was the means for his healing. Like the sinful woman, the prodigal son, and the tax collector in the temple, Bartimaeus cries out shamelessly for grace.

20. What would blind Bartimaeus say to you if you said that you didn’t have enough faith? How would he counsel you?

⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1511.



Gospel Connection: Faith Is Good News

In Romans 1:16–17, Paul says that faith is part of the “good news.” Faith is “good news” because we don’t have to bring anything to the table to receive God’s grace except our inability! So the lower you are, the easier it is to receive grace!

21. Just before this story, the Rich Young Ruler (*Luke 18:18–30*) walked away from Jesus’ call to leave his wealth. What contrast is Luke making between the Rich Young Ruler and the Blind Man? Which one is blind?

Scholar Darrell Bock

“The poor, begging man ends up with everything. Earlier the spiritually poor, but rich young man ended up with nothing from Jesus. He walked away from Jesus sad, because of his wealth. Now the blind man walks away praising God because of the joy of sight and salvation. . . . Luke says, ‘See who Jesus is, just as the blind man did.’ Sight is a matter of the heart, not just of the eyes.”⁹

22. So where does Bartimaeus go after his sight is restored?

Pattern of the Story¹⁰

Introduction: Jesus entering Jericho

Crowd: “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Beggar: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy.”

Crowd: “Be silent!”

Beggar: “Son of David, have mercy.”

Jesus: Beggar summoned.

Beggar: “Lord, give me sight!”

Jesus: Sight given. Faith and salvation.

Beggar: Sight received, following and praising God.

Conclusion: Crowd worships.

⁹ Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1512.

¹⁰ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 171.

LESSON 1 APPLICATION

1. What struck you about Jesus and how he loves in this story?

Reflecting on faith.

2. What makes faith so attractive?

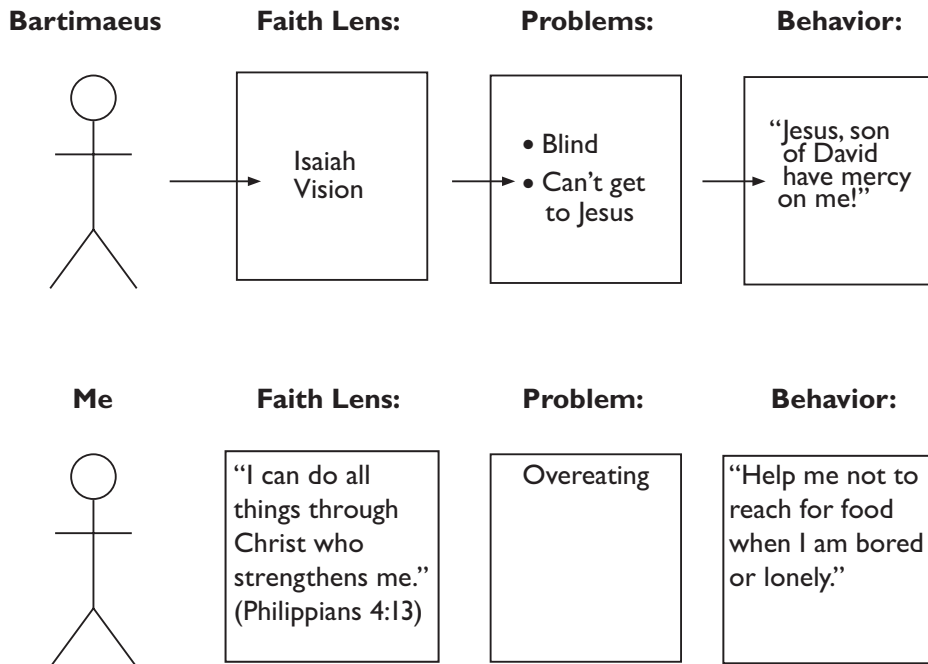
3. What would you tell someone who said, "I don't have enough faith"?

4. Why does even faith have to be a gift from God?

5. What do you think about praying simple prayers like the "Jesus Prayer" during the day? When would you pray them? Why might you hesitate praying the "Jesus Prayer"?

Reflecting on the Word.

Use the chart below, which depicts how Bartimaeus approached Jesus by faith, to guide you as you reflect upon one of your besetting problems. See second chart below for an example. Share with the group.



6. To review: How did Bartimaeus' immersion in the Word shape his behavior and his speech?

7. Can you think of one area where God has been prompting you with the Word to shape your speech or behavior? How would you cultivate that prompting?

Reflecting on love.

8. What are categories of people in your life that you might be tempted to treat like a non-person? Think particularly about people who might be lower than you.

9. What is the difference between paternalism and incarnation?

10. Have you asked anyone the Jesus Question? What were the answers?

Assignment: Ask someone the Jesus Question. Listen for the answer. Act on what they say. . . if it is wise and reasonable and you are able to. Next week we will share our stories.