

STREET LIGHTS: LETTING CHRIST SHINE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

"LIGHTING MY NEIGHBORHOOD THROUGH GRACE"

This Week's Core Competency

Humility - I choose to esteem others above myself. Philippians 2:3, 4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Pride entails thinking too much of oneself and too little of others. Romans 12:3 takes care of the too-much-of-oneself part. It says, "Don't think more of yourself than you should; instead be modest in your thinking." Christians would do well to heed Paul's warning seeing how an even slightly inflated view of oneself can easily lead to legalism or Pharisaism.

I don't think the apostle had people's physical characteristics in mind when he delivered this warning. He wasn't telling people inclined to think too much of themselves because of their intelligence, appearance, and accomplishments to stop it—although that would be wrong too. He was telling people inclined to think too much of themselves because of their spirituality, gifts, and calling to stop it. Herein lies the danger of legalism. Legalistic Christians think they're better than others because they're more spiritual than others, i.e., they do a better job of keeping the rules. They think they're better others because they have an up-front "speaking gift" rather than a behind-the-scenes "serving gift" or because they're indispensable to the church—so they think.

Philippians 2:3 takes care of the too-little-of-others part. It says, "Do nothing out of selfish

ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." Thomas Kempis writes in the classic *The Imitation of Christ*, "Be not high-minded, but rather acknowledge thine own ignorance. Why wilt thou prefer thyself before another, since there be found many more learned, and more skilful in the Law than thou art? If thou wilt know or learn any thing profitably, love to be unknown, and to be esteemed as naught. The deepest and the most profitable lesson is this, the true knowledge and *contempt of ourselves*. It is great wisdom and high perfection to *esteem nothing of ourselves*, and to think always well and highly of others" (5). You might object to the italicized phrases, but maybe that's what it will take to restore balance in our "me first" culture.

A Difficult Situation

You'd like to connect with your neighbor. You know he's not a Christian, and you'd like to get to know him well enough to feel comfortable sharing the gospel with him, but you find him offensive. It's an awful thing to say, but it's true. He's just not an attractive person—friendly enough but in an obnoxious sort of way. He's a bit out of shape, a bit of a redneck, a bit of a drinker, a bit foul mouthed, and a bit too NASCAR for the neighborhood and for your taste—no offense. And has never been accused of being a neat freak. Let's put it this way; the two of you are as different as night and day. If he would only change—just a little—be a little less obnoxious, ditch the dirty jokes, and try harder to fit in, it would make your job so much easier.

step 1

LOOK CLOSELY – observe what you are reading.

Luke 5:12-16

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.

14 Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

15 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

- Record your impression of the unnamed leper.

- Before you decide what it means, look closely at what it says.

* In the margin next to v. 12 write, "in Galilee cf. v. 1."

* Underline the verb "was covered" in v. 12.

* Bracket the phrase "with leprosy" in v. 12.

* Bracket the conditional clause "if you are willing" and underline the independent clause "you can make me clean" in v. 12.

* Highlight what Jesus said in v. 13.

* Circle the adverb "immediately" in v. 13.

* Box word "but" indicating *strong contrast* in v. 14.

* Circle the pronoun "them" in v. 14.

* Box the word "yet" indicating *contrast* in v. 15.

* Box the words "so that" indicating *result* in v. 15.

step **2** **THINK CAREFULLY** – interpret what you have read.

- **Recognizing the message of the passage**

This passage describes the healing of a man "covered in leprosy" (5:12-16). Poor unfortunates afflicted with this disease, thought to be contagious and incurable, were quarantined from society thus destined to live in hopelessness and despair. The fact that Jesus touched him as he cleansed him demonstrated his compassion for the man as well as his authority over the disease. Use of the word "immediately" in connection with the healing heightened the miracle and emphasized Jesus' power. Jesus ordered him not to tell anyone who had cured him; nevertheless, news about Jesus continued to spread placing added demands on his ministry, which he addressed through solitude and prayer.

The leper was sure Jesus could heal him if he only would. Luke tells us that news about Jesus was spreading fast throughout Galilee, and evidently this unnamed outcast believed what he had heard many say, "Jesus is the long awaited messiah here with good news of the kingdom of God." Such faith was all he needed to muster the courage to speak up when he saw Jesus. Had he been looking for him even though he was to avoid all contact with others? It's hard to say, but one thing's for sure. He wasted no words once he saw him. Jesus responded graciously to the man's request. He touched him—something no one had done for years. Then he confirmed the leper's faith by revealing he was both able and willing to heal him. Jesus spoke but two words and the leprosy left him. And the news about Jesus spread all the more.

The Message of this Passage *Show grace to those who need grace like Jesus showed* *grace to the leper covered in leprosy.*

- **Digging deeper into its meaning**

v. 12 *one of the towns*

A number of towns surrounded the lake (cf. 4:43).

v. 12 *leprosy*

The term translated here was used to refer to numerous skin diseases including psoriasis, lupus, ringworm, and favus as well as Hansen's bacillus, which explains the translation "dreaded skin-disease" (TEV). Luke is the only Gospel writer to note the extent of the man's disease. "There were different varieties of leprosy, but all were dreaded as the saddest calamity of life. The leper was required to rend his outer garment, to go bareheaded [with his hair disheveled], and to cover his mouth so as to hide his beard, as was done in lamentation for the dead. He had, further, to warn passers by away from him by the cry of 'Unclean, unclean;' not without the thought that the sound would call forth a prayer for the sufferer, and else from the fear of infection, than to prevent contact with one thus visited by God, and unclean. He could not speak to any one, or receive or return a salutation" (Cunningham Geikie, *The Life and Words of Christ*, 2:13). "To have the disease meant ostracism (Lev. 13:45-46; 2 Kings 7:3), for anyone with this condition had to announce it to others by shouting, 'Unclean! Unclean!' Having this disease led to social isolation, not unlike what some AIDS victims experience today. Jesus' ministry to a leper therefore reveals his attention to the outcasts of society, demonstrating that such people can have access to God's blessing" (Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, 156 italics added).

v. 12 *begged him*

This was a bold move on the leper's part since he was to avoid all contact with others.

step **3** **RESPOND WISELY** – apply what you have read.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Family Activity** (for those who have a family living at home)

Ask your children if big people are more important than small people? After all, big people are able to play sports like football, baseball, basketball and make a lot of money. Ask them if rich people are better than poor people? After all, rich people get to live in big houses, buy anything they want, go on big vacations and poor people don't. Ask if well people are better than people who are sick. In the scripture this week, Jesus treated the man with leprosy (someone that no one else would touch) with compassion and grace. Jesus touched him when He healed him. Talk about why God made people different. Consider as a family who you can reach out to this week, that needs your help or encouragement.

Examples: Lonely, neglected people in a Nursing home or kids at a Children's hospital - make cards and drop them off to be delivered to them or pass them out yourself (as permitted).

- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)

Read Luke 5.12-16 out loud. This week the focus of LIGHTS is on Grace. What are some of the biggest challenges of extending grace to some of our neighbors? How does Jesus' example in this passage challenge your heart toward neighbors? What are some specific ways we can begin to live out Grace to the people in the homes right around us? Spend some time praying specifically for your neighbors by name.

- **iconnect+ Focus** (for those involved in our youth iconnect+ Ministry)

When you read about a miracle that Jesus performed, do you ever just sit back and ask the question: "Why?" Why was Jesus so willing to help a stranger, a leper? Jesus didn't even know this man! What if this man had been a thief, a murderer, a liar? What if the man chose to continue sinning after Jesus helped him? Maybe he deserved what he got!

Sometimes, when we have an opportunity to help another person, we allow the "un-known" to stop us. "Will he respond gratefully? What if she doesn't ever return the favor? What is he going to spend the money on?" Maybe helping people--friends or strangers--requires more than compassion. Maybe giving help requires grace.

- **Community intentionality** (for those with a desire to reach out in their community)

Somebody in your world drives you nuts-maybe for good reason. You find yourself put off by the person's language, sense of humor, work habits, or all of the above. Since you find this person unpleasant to be around, you avoid him or her like the plague. Consider what you were like before you met Christ (Eph 2:1-3) and try a little "grace" out on the person.

“Lighting My Neighborhood Through Grace”

(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

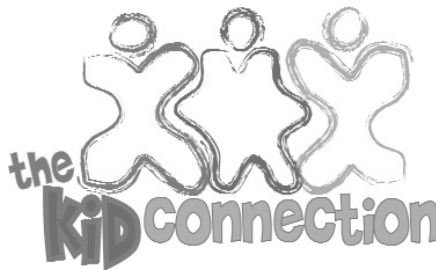
step 4 Connect the **FAMILY**.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

Read Luke 5:12-16.

Leprosy was so contagious that lepers were required to live apart from the rest of society. The disease even caused the victims to be considered spiritually unclean. Jesus didn't care about any of that. He showed grace and accepted the man just the way he was. Jesus went an extra step with his love when he touched the man as he healed him.



Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, I pray that _____ will know that You loved her so much that you gave your one and only son, so that if she believes in Him she will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NLT)

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Humanity - I believe God loves everyone and we all need Jesus as our Savior.

Memory Verse— "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Mt 5:16

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

What is leprosy?
If Jesus did not always touch people to heal them, why did he touch the man with leprosy?
Why did Jesus instruct the man not to tell anyone?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

Jesus showed even more grace to the leper by touching him as he healed him. Touch can be a powerful tool to express love to another person. As a family discuss how going out of your way to shake the neighbor's hand can be a great way to show acceptance.



Challenge

Kids preschool through sixth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.

Family completes **Experience It** _____ Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____

Family participates in **Live It** _____ Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Kids can earn extra tokens on Sunday morning by:

Bringing a friend to **The Kid Connection** _____ Completing **KIDZ Bulletin** _____

Child's name _____ Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.