

Di121 Effective Communication

Lesson Di121-12 Method: Using Common Cycles of Life

Have you noticed that life events often follow a cycle? These events continue to happen at regular intervals throughout our lives. Some events occur every week or month, others yearly. Religious festivals, celebrations of marriages and births, and other milestones recur. We experience these ourselves and also see them in others' lives. For instance, farming cultures have times for planting and times to harvest. This lesson discusses how Jesus used a story of a harvest event to communicate to his disciples. The story concerned having a correct attitude and motivation for serving God. The spiritual truths he taught about faithfulness and eternal rewards for believers still apply to us today.

The disciples had heard Jesus telling a rich young ruler to sell what he had and give to the poor to have treasure in heaven. Comparing themselves to this ruler, the Twelve posed a question to Christ: "We left everything and followed you. What do we get out of it?" Jesus wanted them to trust God and not themselves. God's values are very different from the world's values. So he told them this story to teach them about God's justice.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner. He went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went."

The landowner agreed to pay the people working all day the standard daily wage. To those who worked only part of the day, he promised to pay a fair wage. He planned not to cheat anyone, and as we will see, he didn't.

"He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon, he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

'Because no one has hired us,' they answered.

He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'"

Those hired late in the day received no promise concerning wages. They went to the field believing they would be treated fairly.

"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. When

those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.”

The workers who labored less than a full day still received a full day’s pay. The problem came when the people working a full day saw this happen and responded with an attitude of ungratefulness, accusing the landowner of unfairness.

“These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’” (Matt 20:1-15).

The landowner in the parable was asking a powerful question. In this story he represents God and his attitude of generosity to all his children. Those unhappy with his generosity are those in his kingdom who are concerned with position and rewards. God’s question is, “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own rewards?” His question should make believers consider their motives and their attitudes towards others. How do we view those who give less time to God’s service than we do? How do we view those less educated, or with physical or mental weaknesses? Do we value people as God values them? His view is based not on their works, but on their faithful obedience to his will.

In all cultures some people will devalue other people. They see themselves as better for some reason. Some devalue others because of where they live, the work they do, the language they speak, or even because of their gender. This looking down on others should not be true of people who represent God’s kingdom. All such devaluation is wrong.

Jesus shared this story after the disciples had asked about their future rewards. Notice how he communicated using a common recurring event—harvest time. From then on, each time they saw a harvest, they would remember this parable and the truth behind it.

Jesus concluded with these words, “So the last will be first and the first will be last” (Matt 20:16). This truth refers to God’s fairness. We will receive from him, not what we deserve, but what his grace bestows. The parable speaks about the attitudes believers should have here on earth. Instead of valuing ourselves too high because of what we perceive to be our good works or talents, we should focus on what God has asked us to do. As we faithfully obey the Master’s bidding, he will reward us with generous grace. If we compare ourselves with others, we get our focus off of God and onto ourselves. Satan may tempt us to complain against God about our situation.

If you rely on your good works and gifts, but look down on others, you may be surprised on the Day of Judgment. Those who think highly of themselves will receive the same eternal life as some humble, but faithful, folks. Both will be surprised.

We do not serve God for what **we** can get out of it. Instead, we obey him because of what **he** has done for us on the cross. This life may hold suffering and injustice, but our reward is eternal life with our Lord Jesus Christ, if we are faithful.

The **importance** of this story is that Jesus pointed out the wrong attitudes of the disciples, who were more concerned with their future rewards than their present obedience. They were following Christ with the wrong motives.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that we can effectively communicate God's truth by using the recurring events of life such as harvest. Jesus used such ordinary events to address the wrong attitudes of people—fallen human beings—who may be serving God and asking, "What's in it for me?"

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What did we learn about the justice of God in the story of the workers in the vineyard?
[Pause]
A. If you said that the landowner promised he would treat the workers justly, and God will treat people justly too, you answered correctly.
2. What response did the landowner give when some workers complained about their wages at the end of the day? [Pause]
A. If you answered that he said, "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my money? Are you envious because I am generous?" you are right.
3. How did Jesus communicate with the disciples the truth about the rewards they would receive? [Pause]
A. If you said Jesus told them a story about a recurring event, a harvest, to teach about their wrong motives, you are correct.

Your **assignment** consists of learning this story and telling it to someone who has not heard it before. Then discuss with them this question, "How do the values of God's kingdom differ from those of worldly people?" Especially consider the difference between earthly rewards like money and recognition and the rewards of heaven.