



Lessons from Bible Guys:

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Lessons from Bible Guys: Matthew

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Matthew 9:9_12

We all have things that we need to walk away from. Things that keep us from getting closer to God. Things that are harmful to the other relationships in our lives. You can call them "pet sins." They're things God has told us aren't good for us - but things that have become such a part of our lives that they aren't easy to give up.

Cheating and lying fit that description for Matthew. His job as tax collector encouraged those things. But what did he do when Jesus came and said, "Follow me"? He simply left behind the "pet sins" (and all the money they brought in) and followed Jesus.

First, answer this question: What "pet sin" is keeping me from getting closer to God? Keeping me locked up behind bars of guilt?"

Lent is traditionally a time to "give something up." Ask God right now for his help to follow Matthew's example and walk away from that "pet sin."

Lessons from Bible Guys: Jesus

Love - not because they deserve it, but because they need it.

Do you find it hard to love some of the people you are "supposed" to love? People like a spouse, a child, a parent? Maybe a co-worker or classmate, neighbor or friend?

All of us do. We tend to base our giving of love on "whether or not I feel like it." But Jesus sets the example of loving "when I don't feel like it."

I'm sure Jesus didn't "feel like" loving us when he had his arms stretched out wide on the cross and was suffering not just physical pain but the pains of hell. He was suffering for us. He was suffering because of us.

Did we deserve the love that he displayed in taking the punishment for our sin? Absolutely not. So, if he didn't "feel like" loving us and if we didn't "deserve" his love, why did he love us?

Jesus loved us simply because it was what we needed him to do.

One thing you can count on, the people in your life are going to do things that will make you not "feel like" loving them. It's at those times that you will need to ask Jesus for the power to follow his example and show love - not because they deserve it - but simply because they need it.

If Jesus could do it for you, you can be sure he has the power you need to do it for the people you have committed to loving.

Lessons from Bible Guys: Thomas

Thomas doesn't often get lifted up as an example. But he should.

There are some examples Thomas (and all the other disciples) set that shouldn't be followed. Like the fact that he had separated himself from the group on the night Jesus rose from the dead.

As Shawn reminded us last week, whenever you separate yourself from the gathering of believers, you miss Jesus when he comes to be with us in the special way he does whenever two or three are gathered.

But the most famous example is the one where Thomas questioned the disciples' claim that they had seen Jesus. In reality, Thomas was no different than the other disciples who had not believed the report of the women who told them they'd seen Jesus alive. BUT Thomas sets us a good example in the fact that *he sought the truth*. He was back with the group the next week. And Jesus came to show Thomas the truth. (It's important to note that Jesus doesn't chew Thomas out for questioning. He simply comes to him to answer his question).

All of us have questions. There are things about God that we don't understand. This is normal - after all, he's God and we aren't. So, there are going to be things he does that don't seem to fit with our human experience. God said in Isaiah 55 that we could expect this. But when you have questions, the key is to follow Thomas' example: Seek the truth.

And when God reveals his truth (as he promises to do for everyone who seeks him), Thomas set another good example: He quit questioning and simply believed. "My Lord and my God!"

If you have questions, do like Thomas. Seek the truth. Ask God to reveal the truth to you. Ask him to open your eyes to see the truth that he does reveal. And when he does, be like Thomas again: "stop doubting and believe."

Lessons from Bible Guys: Joshua

Joshua is one of the few guys in the Bible, outside of Jesus, who consistently sets a lot of good examples. Here's a great example he set the day before he led the Israelites in their first battle for the Promised Land.

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

"Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13_15)

Joshua was "Commander-in-Chief" of the Israelites, God's Chosen People. But before he could lead God's people to victory, God needed Joshua to surrender. Surrender not to the enemy, but to God himself. God needed Joshua to surrender to the truth that *God*, and not Joshua, was the real "Commander-in-Chief."

In order to be a true leader of God's people, Joshua needed to surrender his claim to leadership and let God be the real leader. Joshua needed to surrender his plans to God's plans. It was very important that Joshua surrender and let God be in charge, because God's plans sometimes don't make sense to us humans. Without the commitment to trust God as Commander-in-Chief, it would be easy not to follow plans we don't understand. (Read Joshua chapter 6 for a great example of a battle plan that didn't make sense to humans - one Joshua never would have learned in military training school.) But God's plans *always* are the best and result in victory.

You have plans for your life and your family and your work and your church. Follow Joshua's example and be willing to surrender to God and seek *His* plans for your life, family, work and church. Sometimes God's plans will be hard to understand, but they will *always* be the best and result in victory. In God's Kingdom, to surrender is to win!

Lessons from Bible Guys: Nehemiah

What comes to mind when you hear the name "Nehemiah"?

Chances are good that what came to mind is something like what's inside the parentheses in the previous line. He's not exactly a "household word" like Moses or Peter or Paul. If you thought, "Sounds like a guy from the Bible," you'd be right.

But if you take a little time to read the book that bears his name (you'll find it right before the book of Esther - not too far in front of the Psalms) you'll quickly discover that Nehemiah was a great example of

leadership among the lay people. And the greatest example he set was one of prayer. Nehemiah was constantly talking to God. On behalf of his people, on behalf of himself. He sought God's wisdom for the decisions he had to make. He sought God's strength to carry through what God in his wisdom showed him he must do.

We have a major decision to make this month - how to vote on the proposal to form a new congregation by merging Shepherd of the Hills and New Life. Like the decisions Nehemiah faced, this decision calls for God's wisdom. The key question to ask is "What do you want us to do here, God?" Follow Nehemiah's example. Pray. Ask for God's wisdom for this decision. And however God answers, pray for His strength to do his will.

Lessons from Bible Guys: King David

The obvious lesson from David's life is the courage he displayed in taking on Goliath. But another lesson jumped out at me while reading David's prayer from 1 Chronicles 29 in one of our Tuesday Bible Study sessions...

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.

Wealth and honor come from you;
you are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power
to exalt and give strength to all.

Now, our God, we give you thanks,
and praise your glorious name.

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

The king of the then-powerful nation of Israel - the king who had accumulated so much wealth that he could donate 110 tons of gold for the building of the temple - giving all credit to God. He humbly acknowledges that God is the Real King, and that he, the King of Israel, is merely a servant in the Real Kingdom. He reminds all the people of Israel that everything they have - everything he has - is a gift from God. God gets all the credit.

David gives us the example of humility. Humility is not putting yourself down or thinking of yourself less. It is thinking less of yourself and thinking more of God. Humbly acknowledging that God deserves credit for all we have and do is a great witness to family, friends and is the foundation of good stewardship. Seek to follow king David's example in your life this month.

King David Part II

Last month David set us a great example of humility. Even though he was king and had great power and wealth, he acknowledged that he wasn't deserving of such great favor and that God is the one who deserved all the credit.

David sets us an example of humility in another way: He humbly admitted that he sinned when confronted by the prophet Nathan. Most kings would have had Nathan banished or killed for calling the

king an adulterer and murderer. But David admitted that is just what he had done. Our human tendency is to try to ignore our sin or try to cover it up (David tried that too). Another very common reaction is to try to blame the wrong things we do on someone else. The problem is that none of these things gets rid of sin. You still carry the burden of guilt around when you ignore your sin, try to cover it up, or try to blame it on your wife, kids, parents, friends, neighbors - whoever!. The only thing that gets rid of sin is confessing it and having God wipe it away through forgiveness. This month at home, work or wherever, try following David's example. Admit when you've done wrong. It's the only thing that gets rid of the guilt.

King David Part III

David has set us an example of humility and of admitting his sin when confronted with it. This time we look at the well-known incident with Goliath for another example. The example of courage is obvious. None of the military leaders or troops had the guts to take on Goliath, but David went out to face the 9' giant without so much as the protection of armor. That is courage. (I'm sure most thought it was craziness at the time.)

But the courage David displayed is simply the result of a deeper quality: Trust in God. David had the courage to take on Goliath because he trusted in God - absolutely. He knew that God was stronger than this enemy.

"The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." 1 Samuel 17:37

What is the "Goliath" in your life - the giant that causes you problems and fears and keeps you from doing God's will? Follow David's example of trust in God. Tackle that "Goliath" with courage, trusting that God will give you what it takes to defeat whatever it is.

King David Part IV

In David, we've seen examples of courage, humility and obedience. We also see the example of loyalty. Take a moment to go grab your Bible.... Open it to 2 Samuel chapter 9. Read about the loyalty David showed to his friend Jonathan - even after Jonathan was dead.

Kings in those days often did just the opposite of what David did. They would have anyone in the previous king's family killed, just to keep the previous king's family from seeking the throne again. David had taken over the throne after Saul, yet took Saul's grandson in and made him part of his own family - just because of his loyalty to his friend Jonathan.

David showed the same loyalty to God. Refusing to walk away from God even when he became wealthy and famous. Even when things got desperate.

Who is a friend who needs your loyalty right now? How can you be more loyal to God this month? God will bless you for following David's example. Ask Him for His Spirit to help you to show loyalty.

Jesus

It almost seems sacrilegious to refer to Jesus as a "guy." But, the celebration of Christmas reminds us that in addition to being fully God, Jesus was also fully human. Indeed he is the ultimate example for us

to follow.

As we approach the Christmas season and the celebration of his coming to earth, he gives us the example of the gift to give. What gift did he give us on his birthday (setting the example that as he later said, "It is more blessed to give than receive.")?

The most basic gift he gave was the gift of himself. God came to be with us as one of us.

As you are tempted this month to buy all sorts of material gifts for the people close to you, remember what they really want is your presence - not your presents. Get creative and think of ways to give your presence throughout the coming year - not just a week or so after Christmas...

Some ideas: Give your wife the promise of a "date a month"

Give your kids the promise of a special day spent with each of them each month. If they no longer live at home, promise them a visit more often than in the past.

The same thing applies with your parents and your friends. The gift they really want is your presence. It's the example that Jesus set the first Christmas.