

Who Needs It?

In Christ's vineyard, in contrast to every other vineyard we know, our degrees and seniority, our years of distinguished service, our titles - vice president, chairperson, dean, doctor, professor, honorable, reverend, whatever - are irrelevant to the overriding question: Are you immersed in and compelled by love?

Matthew 20:1-16

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

For Personal Study

God's definition of grace is unmerited favor on our behalf. We cannot earn grace simply by decent behavior, extra money placed in the offering plate, or good deeds done for others. God's grace is only offered as a free gift. Since God's grace cannot be earned, most of us misunderstand this gift.

The amazing news is that through Jesus, the free gift of God's grace offers us eternal life and hope. All of God's best for our life is offered to us even when we know we are not worthy of it. God's grace reaches out and assures you of God's love even when you are amazed that God will have anything to do with you.

What can work and wages, welfare and the unemployed tell us about the kingdom of God? In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard we see the extraordinary generosity and compassion of God. There is great tragedy in

unemployment. In Jesus' time, laborers had to wait each day in the marketplace until someone hired them for a day's work. No job that day usually meant no food on the family table.

The laborers who worked all day and received their payment complain that the master pays the late afternoon laborers the same wage. The master, undoubtedly, hired them in the late afternoon so they wouldn't go home payless and hungry. God is generous in opening the doors of his kingdom to all who will enter, both those who have labored a life-time for him and those who come at the last hour.

While the reward is the same, the motive for one's labor can make all the difference. Some work only for reward. They will only put as much effort in as they think they will get out. Others labor out of love and joy for the opportunity to work. The Lord calls his disciples to serve God and their neighbor with generosity and joy.

Readings & Questions

Monday, September 18

What does this parable say to you about God and his kingdom? Matthew 20:1-16

Tuesday, September 19

What do we as believers receive through the grace of Jesus? How can the reassurance found in these verses impact your actions, decisions, and attitudes today? Ephesians 1:3-10

Wednesday, September 20

Paul wrote that God's grace was sufficient, even in his weaknesses. Describe a time you have experienced the sufficiency of God's grace through your own weaknesses. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Romans 8:28-39

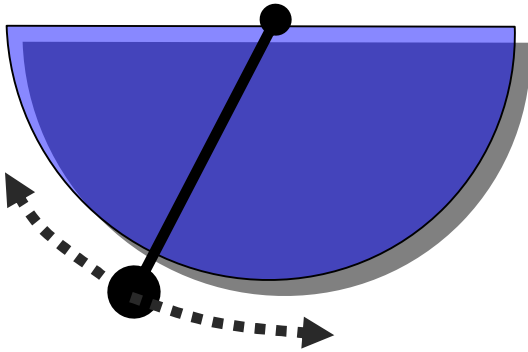
Thursday, September 21

According to these verses, God's grace is released through our generosity. When have you been blessed by another person's generosity towards you? How could you bless someone else this week? 2 Cor. 9:6-11

Friday, September 22

In Luke 15, the father offered his wayward son complete love, forgiveness, and grace. When and how in your relationship with God have you been like the prodigal son? Luke 15:11-32

“The Balanced Life”



6-Week Small Group Series BEGINS NEXT WEEK

How to find a small group:

- Form a group other parents in your child’s Sunday School or confirmation group.
- Start a group with friends, neighbors or co-workers. Audio sermons & reflection handouts for small group questions are on the website each week.
- Join one of the groups listed below.
- Set aside time as a family to discuss some of the age appropriate questions or carve out a date night to delve deeper into the Word with your spouse.

Leaders with open groups:

Sunday

Karen Heist 8:45—10 AM room 20

Bill Thomas 10:15—11:10 AM St. John Office House

Wednesday

Steve Chalfin (men) St. John Office House 7-8:30 AM

Paula Brault (women) St. John Office House 7-8:30 PM

Mike West (men) St. John Office House 7-8:30 PM

Pr. Mike McQuaid (confirmation parents) Fellowship Hall
during confirmation small groups

Friday

Jean James (women) 10-11:30 AM room 20

Still to be scheduled:

Louise Thornton

Pr. Brian Hughes

Need help? Contact the office or email smallgroups@stjohnmd.org.