

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 15 Jesus, Part III

By

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We have been looking together at the nature of Jesus as revealed in His “Greatest in the Kingdom” teachings. First, is that He was servant of all or slave was a better word, if you recall. Second, as we interpolated from His expression about contrasting Himself with the greatest in the gentile or world kingdom, we discovered that He did not lord it over others. So number two is not lord it over others.

As He compared Himself to the greatest in the religious kingdom He said in essence, “He that is greatest must lead by example” (cf. [Matthew 23:11](#)). He says that specifically in a certain passage which we will cover later in our series.

Then He said that he who is greatest must be humble (cf. [Matthew 23:12](#)). We discovered that that specifically means that he was absolutely honest about himself. Humility is a very accurate assessment of who you are, which can be devastating, but it is true.

Then he that is greatest must be as a child (cf. [Matthew 18:4](#)). We saw that a child was very humble. A small child is not very pretentious, we know that. A child is unable to be very deceptive. These are the kinds of principles that make our body work and they make the body of Christ work. Relationships cannot survive deception, you see.

Then another thing that we discovered is a child is very unthreatening. We are seldom afraid of a child. And no one was ever afraid of Jesus.

And then he that is greatest must be as the younger. We looked at this in terms of being always the disadvantaged people in this world. We are pilgrims passing through, having no enduring city here but looking for one whose foundation and builder and maker is God. “Being as the younger” also means traveling light or carrying very little luggage through this life so that wherever God calls us we can go. If you recall, we are not to be guarding a lot of dung.

And he that is greatest must be as the least and as the last. And that completed what He had to say in the Gospels.

Now go with me to [Philippians 2](#). You will discover that the first four verses of Philippians tie into these eight points perfectly and this is an awesome, awesome section. Listen to this:

- 1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,
- 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.
- 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit.

See, if you recall—If I may stop here for just a moment. As we were looking at the nature of Jesus, one of the key descriptions was being “others centered” which is opposite to my natural self-centered tendencies. So it says—

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Now, I just need to comment on one thing about that statement because often I will see people who get that backward and they esteem themselves worse than others. Now do you see what is going on there? That turns it into a self-centered mode when I am just looking at myself as being worse than others. That is not what it says. Others-centeredness says, “I esteem you better.” Do you see the difference? “So in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

And then we come to this awesome passage. Maybe it was a song they sang in the early church. I do not know. If it was, we really ought to put it back to music. We should figure out every way we can to sing this next passage. It is a great song. Maybe it was a creed they said. If so, it was an excellent creed. A creed does not have to express everything you believe as long as it gives you the key so that everything else that you believe is obvious. And this does. Or maybe just at that particular moment the Holy Spirit said, “Write this down, Paul.” And he wrote:

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Wow! Does your mind ever fail you and you cannot remember something? If you ever have the opportunity to trade minds with anyone, do not trade with me. You would be in trouble. But here is the opportunity to trade with Jesus. This is awesome! We can literally permit His mind to be in us. Not a bad deal. The question is: What was His mind? What was this central core of motivating being? What was the set of attitudes that were in Christ Jesus?

Fortunately He does not leave us alone but He tells us. The next verses reveal specifically what this means. And he says,

6 Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

I read that and I thought, “Huh? What does this mean?” It is rather obscure, isn’t it? Well the NIV says, “Who though He was in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” ([Philippians 2:6](#), NIV). Well, that helps a little bit. But what does it mean? Well, let’s dig in. I discovered that there were two meanings to this and we are going to let this be points nine and ten here. There are two meanings to this particular verse.

First, it means that He used no force on us, no physical force. And that He was not driven by blind ambitions. So point number ten would be “no blind ambition.”

No force. Let’s talk about that. He could have used force on us, you know. He could have because He had power! You know that He had all the power of the universe coursing through His veins. This was incredible power that formed billions of galaxies out in space. This incredible power that created this earth! And yet with all of this power He did not use force on us. It is amazing because He could have grabbed us by the throat and put a sword there and said, “Wouldn’t you like to be a Christian?” We would have said, “Oh yes. I have been thinking about it for a long time.” But He did not do that. I am amazed. He has the power to force us and He does not.

In fact what amazes me is how much the Scripture speaks of His gentleness. Now, there is a good reason for this. You see when we feel that we have been forced into something, we are going to do everything we can to sabotage the situation.

This year my wife and I celebrate our thirty-fifth anniversary together. But I can remember thirty-six years ago when I was a scared boy. I remember it. I held a ring in my hand and I said to Aida Brown, “Wiiilll yooooou maarrrry me?” She said, “Eh, might as well.” Not quite. Now I could have held a ring in one hand and a pistol in the other. And I could have said, “You are going to marry me for your own good?” And if she had married me under those circumstances, I would have fed some of every meal she fixed for me to the dog first in order to make sure he stayed alive.

When we feel that we have been forced, we are going to do everything we can to sabotage the situation. Have you ever heard anyone make this statement or ask this question? “Can I do this and still be a Christian?” Have you ever heard that question? Now that is coming from a heart that feels forced, you see, and so it is trying to press against the edges. That would be as foolish as if my wife were to say to me, “Honey, you are going to be gone for about a week. Is it okay if I go out with some other men in the neighborhood and still be called your wife?” Of course it is not okay!

Now when you love someone you want to enhance the relationship. You want to improve it, you see. But the only way you can make a genuine decision is if you are not forced. So Jesus comes in a way that frees us to make a genuine decision about Him. All the evidence in the world is there.

[Revelation 3:20](#) you may know by heart. “Behold I stand at the door and knock.” He is a gentleman and He knocks. If it were me, I would have said, “Behold I stand at the door and I am going to huff and puff and blow your house down.” But Jesus is a gentleman. He knocks. “And if any man hears His voice and then opens the door, then He will come in and sup with them” (cf. [Revelation 3:20](#)). Jesus is a gentleman.

There are places in His ministry that I am fascinated by. One was in the third year of His ministry which is often called “the year of opposition.” The first year is referred to as the year of obscurity; the second is “the year of popularity;” and the third year is

“opposition.” This was when everyone had abandoned Him. It appears that the only people still hanging around were the apostles and they must have been a little bit discomfited. There must have been some looking around on their part. See, they had been so busy arguing over who was the greatest that they had not noticed the crowds were gone. And they may have said, “Oh-oh. I bet we are going to have some apostolic lay-offs now.” And so Jesus must have seen their discomfort and He said something to them that amazes me. I would not have said it. I would have looked at them in their discomfort and said, “All right, you fellas. Three steps in the wrong direction and you are vapor!” See that is what I would have said. But do you know what Jesus said to them? He said, “Will you leave Me also?” Isn’t that amazing? He never violated their ability to choose. This is awesome.

And then [Matthew 12:20](#) quotes from [Isaiah 42:3](#) these words: “A bruised reed He would not break and smoking flax He would not quench.” What does that mean? We do not use those words today either. Well, for a bruised reed He would not break, that is sort of like saying, “He would not kick a man when he was down.” That is when we like to kick them because they cannot kick back! And some of you, when Jesus found you, you were down. And the world was kicking you like crazy. And Jesus did not come along and say, “You have never been kicked until you have had a divine kick!” No, He picks you up and He begins to put you together.

I was just thinking about this yesterday looking at the people who were here and realizing how much of an incredible set of stories there are. What would happen if we began to share all the ways Jesus has put you back together and healed and restored you. How long would it take? We do not have that much time, do we? That is one reason I look forward to heaven. We will get to hear the whole story.

A bruised reed He would not break and smoking flax He would not quench. Wow. What does that mean? Well, in modern terms that means He would take the slightest spark of hope in someone and try to fan it into a flame.

I was a Boy Scout once until I got old enough to be Girl Scout. But that is beside the point. Sometimes we would have competition of skills among other troops of scouts. One of the competitions was starting fires without matches. And I can remember thirty or forty Boy Scouts lined up with a handful of what they called tinder, which was something that would burn readily like cotton or something of that nature. And when they would blow the whistle, the flints would begin to strike against it. And the sparks would fly and soon there would be a little wisp of smoke come up. Never once did I see any one of those fellas look at that and say, “Just one wisp of smoke? Is that the best you can do with all the sparks I have made? Just one little wisp of smoke?” Oh no. That is all they wanted. They would pick it up and blow on it saying, “Hang in there! We are going to make it.” And it would burst into flame.

When Jesus found some of you, you were one stinky little wisp of smoke. And the world was looking at you saying, “Is that the best you can do with all the opportunity you have had? All the potential you have got? Just one little wisp of smoke.” But Jesus did not do

that. He picked you up and began to blow the great breath of God on you saying, “Hang in there, we are going to make it.” And here you are, you see.

“A bruised reed He would not break, and smoking flax He would not quench.” He used no force on us because He wanted us to make a genuine decision about Him.

And He was not driven by blind ambition. You have heard the old philosophical question: Does the end justify the means? You have heard that. Blind ambition says, “Yes, it does. If the end is good enough, then lie, cheat, steal, whatever you have to do to achieve your goal.” But Jesus was not driven by blind ambition.

In fact, Satan tempted Him on that very point. He took Him up on a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world with their splendor. Oh, can you see it in your mind? Can you hear Satan tempting:

“Ha, ha, ha. Looks good, doesn’t it, Jesus?”

“Yes, it does.”

“Ha, ha, ha. I thought so. You really want it, don’t You?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I thought so. You came for this, didn’t You?”

“Yes, I did.”

“I thought so. Well, I can get it for You wholesale. All You have to do is bow down and worship me. Come on, You can do it. You can have it real cheap!”

But at that point Jesus made an eternal decision. “No, it is written: ‘Thou shalt worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve’” (cf. [Matthew 4:10](#)). Jesus decided at that point that a heavenly goal can only be achieved by heavenly means.

Now we may think this does not really apply to us. I do not have that kind of problem. But you know it happens so often. It does. Maybe you work in a place where your employer has asked you to do something that you know is unethical. And you feel, “I cannot do this.” Then you realize your job is on the line and good jobs are hard to come by. You have a mortgage to payoff, a car to pay for, a family to feed, and you end up caving in so often. It is really quite common. God help us, it even happens in the church.

Have you ever gotten a letter from some “ministry” that said, “Dear brother or sister so-and-so, God woke me up at 3:00 in the morning and your name was on my mind. God gave me a word for you and if you will send me an offering to help keep me on the air, I will be glad to tell you what God said.” And you think, “Great day! They do not know me. This is a computer letter, why would they do this?” Well, it may have started well. And it may have been an act of faith that caused them to enlarge things and then there came a cash crunch. Have you ever heard of that?

And then they discuss: “What are we going to do? We are going to lose some of our ministry!” Someone says, “Well, I know how to raise money.”

“Well, I am not sure that is the right way to”—

“Well, you want to lose your ministry?”

“No.”

“Well then give me a chance.”

“Okay.” And then you start getting letters like that. This is blind ambition.

Jesus was not driven by blind ambition. There never seemed to be a panic in His life.

Let's move on to the next verse, which is a rather scary one for me. It is not my favorite verse in the Scripture. It says, “He made Himself of no reputation”—or no image, or He emptied Himself and made Himself nothing. This is not my favorite verse because I am kind of into reputation. I like it. I want people to know who I am, to know my name, to know how to spell it, to know that I am a guy. But [Philippians 2:7](#) says that Jesus made Himself of no reputation, no image. Why would He do that?

The thing about reputation and image is that it separates you from people. It really does. I live over in the desert and there is a town right near me where there seems to be more Rolls Royces per square foot than any place I have ever seen. Now why do you drive a Rolls Royce? It is not because you are desperate for transportation but image, you know. But it really separates you from people.

You have probably heard of Johnny Cash. I interviewed him once when I was editing a youth magazine. He had made a public profession of faith. His pastor was a friend of mine—and said that he would get me an interview. I said, “Wonderful!” I will never forget that day. I was sitting in his plush office, waiting for Mr. Cash to arrive. I had memorized my questions and for days I had practiced being cool. And then he walked in and said, “Hi, I'm Johnny Cash.” I did not realize he was that big! I lost it. I said, “Hi, Johnny. Can I have your autograph? It is for my son.” When that was over, I thought, “I don't believe this. He puts his shoes on one foot at a time just like I do. Why was I so intimidated?”
Fame. Fortune.

Jesus makes Himself of no reputation so everyone in the world—“whosoever will”—can come boldly before Him and be comfortable. Wow! In fact He did such a good job of it. I want to show you some ways that He made Himself of no reputation here. This is an awesome thing to me. Imagine for a moment that you are God. Just give me one day, huh? And there is this ball of mud out in the middle of space called earth and little critters running around on it called people and you loved them. And you want to tell them that but they do not even speak your language. And then you think: “I know what I will do. I will send my Son. I will make Him just like them and just like Me.” Now you have a problem—a premier, an introduction.

Now if God would have checked with me, since I have had some experience in public relations, I could have helped Him. I would have said, “I know how premiers go. I live near Hollywood so turn it over to me. Every searchlight in the world will be there. Everybody who is somebody will be there.” And then God says, “Well, no Erwin. I don't think I will do it that way. I think I will have My Son born like other people.”

And then I offer my advice: “Oh, okay. Not a bad idea actually. What you need to do, God, is you need to snap your fingers and create a five thousand story hospital, gleaming and bright on the outside with a giant diamond on the top that would catch the rays of the sun and cast them over the countryside. And only have one person ever born there—Your Son. We can organize tours to go see it.”

God says, “No thanks, Erwin. I have got a different idea. I am going to have Him born in a barn.” I respond, “Born in a barn? Do you realize how funny this is? That is no place for a baby to be born. I was born on a farm. I am an old farm boy. I know what barns are like. Not places for babies to be born, lest they go ‘Moo’ afterwards.” We have sanitized this manger, folks. We really have. We think that the angels were just waiting and thinking, “Oh no, they are going to have to sleep out here. Oh my. Quick! Sweep and shovel! Do whatever we have to do to get it clean.” It is hard for us to realize because of our traditions that they probably had to watch their step in there.

I love Christmas and I especially love nativity scenes. But they are not quite accurate most of the time. They do not smell right. It looks like somebody has said, “Everybody get over here. We are going to take a picture.” I have pondered this because I am fascinated by this particular moment. You realize, of course, that Bethlehem was sort of the old hometown. So, why didn’t Joseph and Mary have a place to stay? Have you ever thought about this? Why didn’t they have a place to stay in their old hometown?

When I go back to the farm area where I was born, there are plenty of places to sleep. We have family and friends that come to stay with us. Why didn’t Mary and Joseph have a place to stay? Well, I have a couple of ideas. Mary was pregnant, you know. And this kind of happened before they were married, you know and the baby was not Joseph’s, you know. And it was a lot worse in that day than it tends to be in ours. And I have just an idea that maybe their family said, “Look, we don’t know what is going on here, but we do not approve of it. And if you stay with us people will think we do. So maybe you should stay somewhere else.”

So if you have ever found yourself on the wrong side of family approval, Jesus has been there. He knows where you are at.

But there is another thing. Have you ever heard the statement: “Money talks”? Have you heard that? It talks to me. It says, “Goodbye!” You know that if Joseph had had enough of the coins, the innkeeper would have said, “Why don’t you stay in my apartment? I will sleep in the barn.” So obviously they did not have money.

So if you have ever found yourself at the wrong end of the financial ladder, Jesus has been there too. He knows where you are at.

But if this was not enough, He could never brag about this. You understand this. He could never say, “I was born in a barn. Where were you born?” My mother used to say that to me. “Erwin, Gayle Erwin, were you born in a barn?” And it was not a compliment ever.

But if this was not enough, He had, as I have indicated, questionable parents. You see we believe in the virgin birth today. They did not necessarily believe in it as we do back then, any more than if the sweetest young lady of your youth group suddenly showed up pregnant and everyone is going, “Oh no, where did we go wrong?” And finally someone gets the courage to ask her, “Who did it?” And she smiles sweetly and says, “The Holy Spirit.” “Sure.” Do you understand the stigma under which Jesus grew up? What they might have called Him?

So far, this is not helping His reputation, is it? But if this was not enough, He had a very common name. By now you are aware that His name was not actually Jesus. That is the way we sort of push it through the Greek to our language today. More accurately His name was actually Joshua or Yeshua, which was a good name. It means “God is salvation.” But it was a very common name. There were Yeshuas running all over the place. If God would have just checked with me, I would have recommended that He give His Son a name that stands out from all other names, so that everyone would know when they heard it—that must be God. But Yeshua?

And if that was not enough, He had what kind of birth announcement? Well, I am going to make a judgment about it and I am going to call it a weak announcement. Now you may be saying, “Wait a minute, Erwin. They did not have angels singing when I was born; so, how can you call the heralding angels a weak announcement?” Well, think with me for a second. First of all, if He had checked with me—since I have had some experience in public relations—I would have recommended that He get up on the moon with about a five thousand dollar microphone and hang two billion-watt speakers out in space. And He walks up to the microphone to say, “Hello world. This is God!” And then everyone says, “Yes—what?” But He says, “No thanks, Erwin, I have another idea. I think I am going to use a choir.” “Okay, okay. Choirs are all right. But don’t you think you should follow somebody’s chain of command and have them sing for the Sanhedrin first? Well, at least have them sing in the marketplace that way we get our best coverage per singing angel. You want them to sing where?”

Have you ever thought about this? Imagine that you are one of these angels and for two hundred years you have been practicing. “Mi, mi, mi. Everything is in order.” For a hundred years they have been building risers in the sky for the gig of the centuries. And the moment arises and whoever is in charge says, “Okay fellas. He has been born! Hit it!” And they pull the curtains and you get ready to sing. And then you see the crowd. Six shepherds? “All right. Who was in charge of posters?”

Folks, shepherds were the wrong bunch to bring the message to. We have also sanitized the shepherd. We tend to believe that every Jewish boy just grew up dreaming of being a shepherd. Really in that day shepherds were sort of bad news. They were kind of like your friendly local burglars. When they went through town things tended to disappear. The shepherds’ attitude would have been, “All of this commotion, for what?”

But if that was not enough, have you noticed that the Lord always seems to be bringing the message to the wrong people? Like us. I hate to tell you this but I think you are mature enough to handle it. He was not handsome. Now you may be saying, “That is it, Erwin. I was with you till now. But I have got His picture on my wall. And He is the most beautiful red-headed Irishman I have ever seen.” No [Isaiah 53:2](#) tells us the truth about Him. And I cannot believe how we missed this. “He had no form or comeliness.” Now we do not use that word “comeliness” very much. But it means handsomeness, good looks—“that we should desire Him.” Amazing! But I like that because I know how I feel around ridiculously handsome men. Jealous. But Jesus does not even throw this into the equation. I have pondered this, you know. I know there are some reasons why it might not be true. But you realize the gospels are His biography. Have you ever wondered why they did not actually describe Him physically? Usually they do describe the person in a biography. And it is possible that maybe they thought of it and then said, “Nah. Give Him a break.”

But if that wasn't enough, He grew up in a very bad neighborhood. If you ever go to London be sure to go to the Tower of London. It is history condensed. They have the crown jewels of England at the Tower of London. I know of no place else in the world where anything of this nature is on display. You go deep beneath the earth in this totally secure room. And as you walk around the outside, you look in the middle and you have never seen jewelry like that. You do not need one of those eye pieces to see any of the gems. After you visit this display, whenever you walk by a jewelry store you will not be impressed. They have jewels in the Tower of London as big as your fist. And I looked at that and I thought, “What would I do with one of those if I owned it? I don't have a place to keep it. Would I carry it in my pocket? And say to my friends, ‘Look what I have.’” They would say, “Look what you had.”

Now I tell you this because I want you to think for a moment. Imagine that you are Mary or Joseph and born to you is the greatest jewel ever to grace this earth. What are you going to do with Him? Have you ever thought of that? Where are you going to go live? What neighborhood do you want to raise the Son of God in? They took Him to Nazareth.

Now if you ever go to Israel, the chances are good that you will go to Nazareth. And if you react to Nazareth like I did, I could not wait to get out of that town! What are we doing in this dirty, no good town? They say it always has been dirty. I said, “What are we doing here?”

“Well, Jesus grew up here.”

“Okay, fine. Let's go.”

Even Nathaniel said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

But I like this, because it tells me that you do not have to grow up in Beverly Hills to be somebody.

But if this was not enough, He owned nothing. He said, “Birds have nests; foxes have holes; I don't even have a place to lay My head” (cf. [Matthew 8:20](#)). Now that is not very impressive in our day. Not impressive at all.

There are a couple of problems with owning things. First, when you purchase something you have to maintain it. It takes time and energy. You have to protect it. It takes time and energy. You can own just enough things that all your time and energy goes into maintaining and protecting your things. And Jesus, who came to redeem people, was not going to be fooled by things.

There is another problem. If you are rich, do not tell me because if I think you are rich, I get real friendly. Isn't that amazing how wealth messes with our minds? And Jesus comes in a way that says, "If you follow Me, it will be for the right reasons, not for greedy ones." I am amazed of the various theologies that arise and feed off of greed. What can you get? Jesus did not found that principle.

But if that was not enough, He had what I can only describe as a rather strange advance man. See, if I were forming the Gayle Erwin Evangelistic Crusade today, I would want to send someone ahead of me who had some dignity. I would choose somebody who could just really put things together and organize them. John the Baptist was the original hippie. He lived out in the desert wearing funny clothes, eating organic foods and yelling at people, "Repent!" And when they do, he dunked them in water.

But if that was not enough, He also had what I can only describe as a motley crew. I could have helped God so much if He would have let me advise Him. I would have recommended that He first go to the theological seminaries and get three or four professors who understand the ramifications of the theological questions that arise. Then I would recommend that He go to Hollywood and get someone with charisma who can command the attention of the crowd and explain to them what it was you meant when you said "such and such." Then I would recommend that He go to Wall Street and get three or four millionaires. They are nice to have on the team. Then I would recommend that He go to Muscle Beach and get about six bodyguards, because they will crucify you around here if you do not watch out. That is the way I would have put it together.

But Jesus did not do that. He went to the streets and got the strangest bunch. If you had been walking fifty feet behind Him you would have said "I smell fish." He had a zealot and a tax collector with Him. What can I say? It is kind of like having Saddam Hussein and George Bush on the same ticket. And some of those fellas had the worst accents you have ever heard in your whole life. And with that crew He proposed to turn the world upside down. Amazing!

But I like it because if He can work with them He can work with me and you.

But if that wasn't enough, He died a very bad death. Now we believe that but we do not really believe it.

I was reading in 1 Corinthians where Paul says, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness" (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:18](#)). And I thought, "No, no! It is not foolishness. The cross, I see it everywhere. It is on lapels. It is on necklaces. It is on

bracelets. It is behind altars, beautifully polished wood or burnished silver. It is on the top of steeples everywhere. Sometimes it is even neon-lighted and revolving.” And the Lord spoke to my heart and said, “Erwin, you do not understand the cross because people do not die on crosses today.” “Oh yeah,” I thought. And I realized that if we were to bring it into modern terminology, if Jesus were to have come today for the first time—now I know the Bible has prophecies about this—let’s just think about it for a moment. If He were to have come today for the first time, we would treat Him a lot better. We would electrocute Him, or gas Him, or hang Him.

Now that would change some things. It would change our evangelism. Can you see me saying, “Friend, have I got good news for you. My best friend just died in the electric chair for you. And if you will believe that and take up your electric chair and follow Him, you will be saved.” You would be saying, “Take him away. Take him away.”

Our songs would change to: “At the electric chair, at the electric chair, where I first saw the light. There’s room in the gas chamber for you.”

Now you see as we laugh at this, we who are from a Greek mental descent, see why it says, “To the Greek it is foolishness and to the Jew a stumbling block, but it is the power of God unto salvation” ([1 Corinthians 1:23-24](#)). Well, you look at this and can you decide that Jesus did a pretty good job of making Himself of no reputation.

But I have a problem because Jesus said something that disturbs me. Really He said a lot of things that disturb me. One thing He said is: “As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you” (cf. [John 20:21](#)). Oh-oh! We have a problem, don’t we? See, I cannot go back and be born in a barn. I was born on a farm, but it was a nice farmhouse. I cannot go back and have questionable parents. They had been married for two years before I was born—so there. What about a common name? How many guys do you know named Gayle? Weak announcement? I probably made my own announcement and with my voice it would not have been weak. You can count on that. I happen to have grown up in a bad neighborhood but that does not make any difference to you. There was a time I owned nothing, but the bank and I are cooperating on a house. If I had an advance man he would have to be a little strange to accept the job. I am a one man motley crew. If I died a bad death you would just say, “He deserved it.” So I cannot necessarily repeat this and it would not, if I did, be of much value to you. But I do believe that I will have my own list of those ways that God moves on me to make me approachable by those He has chosen for me to serve. I have no reputation.

Let me for just a second talk about us preacher types. We are into reputation, you know. I can introduce myself and say, “Hello. I am the Reverend Mr. Gayle D. Erwin.” And I have got you. I want to impress you. Dust the furniture, the preacher is here. Well, if I do not get to do that, I can wear a black suit and white shirt and a black tie and immediately you know I am an umpire, an undertaker, or a preacher. But if I don’t do that I have another method. I can speak with the sanctuary tone. “Dearly beloved, it is so good to see you today. It is the end of your search for a friendly church.” And immediately you know that I must be a preacher because people do not talk that way.

The truth of what this means came screaming home to me one day. I was flying to Dallas and the plane was full. I had to sit in the middle seat. The man seated by the window was a well-dressed, distinguished looking young man, just outstanding. And he was reading a Bible. Now you do not often see people reading Bibles on airplanes and when you do, your first thought is: “He knows something about the plane that I don’t know.” But after a few moments I cleared my throat and said, “Is that a Bible you are reading, sir?”

And he said, “Uh-huh.”

I said, “Well, I do that too. Why are you reading it?”

And he said, “Well, to be honest with you, sir, I am a wealthy man. I own a manufacturing company. I have a big house in an exclusive neighborhood, a beautiful wife, and lovely children. And I have everything that I ever dreamed of in life. I have achieved it all. And I am only thirty-two years old. To be honest with you, I am miserable. There are some other people in my neighborhood just as miserable as me. But there are some others in my neighborhood who are, well, happy.” He said, “So I decided to see if I could find out why. And I have done some investigating and I do not know all the reasons, but I found out that they all read the Bible. So I bought one to see if I can figure out what is going on.”

There he was, right next to me. I could see his scalp already hanging from my belt. I nearly had the man on his knees in this plane. And at one point he looked at me and said, “By the way, what do you do?” I wanted to say, “I represent the Big Three.” But I told him, “I am a preacher.” Now you can finish this story, can’t you? I was the first preacher he had ever talked to in his life. The wheels began to spin in his mind. “What have I said to this man of the cloth?” And the conversation became very proper. Someone who was seated on the other side of me who had been overhearing the whole conversation said, “Oh, you’re a preacher, huh? Well, I have been wanting to talk to a preacher for a long time. I have some questions I want to ask.”

They were great questions like: How many angels can stand on the head of a pin? The answer is five, in case you want to know. And the Lord just spoke to my heart and said, “Gayle, you loved your reputation, didn’t you? You squeezed everything out of it you could, didn’t you, Gayle? You loved it.” “Yes, yes.” “Now do you see all of the stereotypes that you have helped build and how it separates?” “Yes.”

And Jesus made Himself of no reputation so anyone could come.

And if you have not come to Him, there is nothing that should hold you back. He has come to you. And you know, we have three more principles to go but we will have to finish those in the next lesson. As I look at the ones we have covered, I am so overwhelmed with this man Jesus, that again my heart says, “I will follow You the rest of my days. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Amen.