A FIVE-WEEK NEW YEAR SERMON PREP KIT

TURN OVER
A NEW LEAF

Five responses to the grace of God



COMMUNION • REPENTANCE • FORGIVENESS
SERVICE • WITNESS

Biblical exposition. Thoughtful preparation. Faithful response.

Designed to accompany the five-film video vignette series

AI CHURCH RESOURCES

General Series Introduction

January often arrives with the hope that a new calendar will produce a new person. We plan, resolve, reorganize, and sometimes quietly dread failing again. The Christian gospel offers a deeper starting place: God makes people alive in Christ, and His grace teaches them to walk in a new way. A changed date cannot give us a new heart. Jesus can.

“Turn Over a New Leaf” uses the image of a fresh page to explore five expressions of Christian discipleship: communion with God, repentance from sin, forgiveness, service, and witness. The governing text is Ephesians 2:8–10. Salvation comes by grace through faith, not through achievement; good works follow as the life for which God has remade us. Keep that order visible throughout the series.

The five weeks move from receiving to responding. We listen to Christ, bring our conduct into the light, extend the mercy we have received, use our gifts for neighbors, and explain our hope to others. These movements belong together. Prayer without obedience grows hollow; service without dependence becomes exhausted; witness without love becomes noise. The aim is a congregation learning to live together under the gracious lordship of Jesus.

The films are narrative doorways into Scripture. Each 85-second vignette supplies an ordinary setting and a concrete decision: a kitchen Bible, a dishonest invoice, an empty chair, a shared meal, or a conversation at work. Their characters are fictional. They illustrate biblical truths; they do not establish those truths or guarantee that every real-life situation will resolve as quickly.

The Gospel Thread

Return each week to three questions: What has God done for us in Christ? What response does this passage call for? How will the Spirit help us obey within the life of the church? Second Corinthians 5:17 places newness in union with Christ; Philippians 2:12–13 joins active obedience to God's work within us. Spiritual growth includes effort, confession, setbacks, and renewed dependence.

Pastoral Aim

Invite those who do not yet trust Christ to receive Him in repentance and faith. Invite believers to one specific next step, supported by Scripture, prayer, and Christian community. Do not make a completed habit tracker the evidence of God's love. Make the crucified and risen Savior the foundation of hope.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- What one sentence should the congregation remember after all five weeks?
- Which listeners need assurance of grace, and which need a clear call to repent?
- How will you describe growth without suggesting that faithful Christians never struggle?
- What shared practice will keep this series connected to the life of your church?

Series Arc

WEEK / LEAF	VIGNETTE	SERMON MOVEMENT
1. Put Time with God Back at the Center PDF pp. 5–9	The Unopened Book	**COMMUNION** Receive before you rush.
2. Turn Away from a Habit That Weakens Your Faith PDF pp. 10–14	The Extra Hour	**REPENTANCE** Grace brings the truth into the light.
3. Take a Step Toward Forgiveness and Peace PDF pp. 15–19	The Empty Chair	**FORGIVENESS** Take the step that depends on you.
4. Make Serving Others a Regular Commitment PDF pp. 20–24	One More Place	**SERVICE** Make room for love in your calendar.
5. Become More Intentional About Sharing Your Faith PDF pp. 25–29	The Conversation	**WITNESS** Pray faithfully. Listen carefully. Speak of Jesus.

Five Leaves, One Life in Christ

The sequence is cumulative, but each week also stands on its own. Keep returning to the same gospel foundation: we receive grace in Christ and learn to respond with faithful obedience. The changing settings in the films show that discipleship reaches kitchens, workplaces, friendships, and ordinary neighborhood life.

A Shared Visual Thread

Use a turning journal page to introduce each theme. Keep the full theme title as the weekly “leaf,” with the short movement word as a navigation aid. A fresh page can symbolize a new response, while the preaching makes clear that lasting newness comes from Christ.

Follow the Response beyond Sunday

Begin each week with a brief, voluntary reflection on the previous practice. Ask what listeners learned and where they need help. Let setbacks become occasions for renewed dependence rather than evidence that the series has failed.

How to Use This Kit

• Begin with the primary passage. Read it in context several times, identify its argument, and write a one-sentence summary before watching the film or consulting an outline.

• Distinguish the text's original setting from your congregation's situation. Move to present application through the passage's theological truth, not merely through a resemblance to the video.

• Use the four-point outline as scaffolding. Each point supplies exegesis and a practical or theological implication. Select and develop material for your available preaching time; do not try to say everything.

• Place the film before the Scripture reading or after the opening question. Let a brief silence follow. Use the suggested bridge to direct attention immediately to the biblical text.

• Consult the annotated references selectively. One passage commentary and one complementary resource are a useful starting point. The links identify publishers or original hosts; the study assignments are suggestions, not claims that an author endorses this kit.

• Answer the preparation prompts before writing the manuscript. End with an achievable practice, then follow up the next week with grace and curiosity rather than public performance scoring.

A Repeatable Preparation Rhythm

Early in the week, observe the text: repeated words, commands, reasons, contrasts, and movement. Next, study its setting and difficult details. Then identify the gospel connection and draft the main claim. Build applications for at least two different life situations. Finally, read the sermon aloud, remove material that obscures the main point, and pray for the people who will hear it.

A Note on Scripture and Sources

Scripture explanations are paraphrases unless otherwise indicated. Read the full passages from your congregation's preferred Bible translation. The theological perspective is evangelical; where Christians differ on pastoral application, the kit identifies the distinction rather than treating one compressed answer as exhaustive. Bibliographic links were checked during preparation; page numbers are omitted because editions differ.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

• What should listeners understand, trust, and do by the end of each sermon?

• Which film image will clarify the text, and where might that image oversimplify it?

• Who can help the congregation practice the response during the week?

Put Time with God Back at the Center

Vignette Connection: “The Unopened Book”

Mara, a hurried nurse, repeatedly postpones reading Scripture with her daughter Ellie. After reading about Mary and Martha, she places her phone aside and begins a modest morning rhythm of Scripture and prayer. Her workload does not disappear. She learns to return to Christ within it. The film ends with the once-unopened Bible becoming a daily meeting place.

1. Introduction

The Pastoral Burden

Many believers do not consciously reject God; they simply keep promising Him the next available moment. The problem reaches beyond scheduling. Our attention reveals where we seek security and whose demands we allow to define us. Even good responsibilities can become a way of living as though everything depends on us.

Luke 10:38–42 presents a home in which Jesus is genuinely welcomed, yet His presence becomes overshadowed by the demands of hosting Him. Martha's service matters, but her distraction and anxiety interfere with receiving His word. Mary listens. Jesus protects her place as a learner and identifies the goodness of what she has chosen.

This sermon should not shame busy parents, caregivers, shift workers, or people whose capacity is limited. It should help them hear Christ's gracious invitation. The goal is not an idealized morning routine. It is a life increasingly shaped by hearing Jesus, speaking honestly to Him, and obeying His word in the circumstances one actually has.

The Gospel Connection

Jesus is not another task to complete before earning rest. He is the Savior who brings us into fellowship with the Father. John 15:1–11 expands the picture: branches bear fruit through abiding in the vine. Scripture, prayer, gathered worship, and obedience express that dependence; they do not manufacture life apart from Him.

Opening Question & Video Bridge

Ask: “What keeps receiving your first attention because it feels urgent?” After the film, say: “Mara's schedule did not suddenly become easy. She began to question what was shaping her day. Luke brings us into another busy household, where Jesus identifies what must not be crowded out.” Read Luke 10:38–42.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- What good responsibility is most likely to crowd out attentiveness to Christ here?
- How will you invite a weary listener without adding another source of condemnation?
- Where does the passage challenge your own habits before it challenges anyone else's?
- What would it mean for this congregation to receive Christ's word before rushing to perform?

Put Time with God Back at the Center

2. Biblical History & Character Description

The Narrative Setting: Learning to Follow Jesus

Luke 9:51 marks Jesus' determined movement toward Jerusalem. The episodes that follow develop the character of discipleship. The Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37 emphasizes enacted love; Mary and Martha in 10:38–42 emphasize hearing Jesus. Read them together so the sermon does not separate listening from serving. Luke 11:1–13 then turns explicitly to prayer.

Martha: A Welcoming but Distracted Host

Martha receives Jesus into her home and becomes absorbed in much service. Luke does not say hospitality is sinful. The difficulty emerges in her distraction, anxiety, and demand that Jesus make Mary conform to her priorities. Her complaint also interprets His apparent inaction as lack of concern. Jesus answers with personal tenderness and a searching correction.

Avoid turning Martha into a caricature of every organized or hardworking woman. She is a recognizable disciple whose good work has become anxious and comparative. Ask what she is trying to accomplish and what she is no longer able to receive.

Mary: A Disciple Listening at Jesus' Feet

Mary sits at the Lord's feet and listens to His teaching. The emphasis is her posture as a learner. Jesus affirms her choice and refuses to remove it from her. This is not a universal command to abandon household responsibilities, nor a claim that only a naturally quiet personality can be spiritual. Attentive learning belongs to all disciples.

Jesus: The Lord Who Gives the Necessary Word

The scene's authority rests with Jesus. He names the competing pressures and identifies the good portion. Some translations reflect different ancient readings in verse 42 concerning “few things” or “one thing”; the central contrast remains between anxious distraction and the good of receiving His teaching. Do not build a detailed theory about meal size on that variation.

John 15: Dependence That Bears Fruit

In Jesus' farewell teaching, the vine and branches describe the disciples' dependence on Him. His words, prayer, obedience, love, and joy belong together in verses 7–11. “Abiding” should not be reduced to private spiritual feelings. It includes continuing in His word and love and bearing the fruit of life with Him.

Interpretive Guardrail

Ten minutes is the film's practical starting point, not a biblical quota. Do not promise that a quiet time prevents suffering, secures a trouble-free day, or proves superior faith. The passage invites receptive discipleship, which also takes communal forms such as hearing Scripture in worship and praying with others.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- What does Luke actually criticize: service, distraction, comparison, or all three?
- How will Luke's surrounding passages keep listening and action together?
- Which detail from John 15 deepens the sermon without displacing the primary text?

Put Time with God Back at the Center

3. Suggested Sermon Outline

Proposed Sermon Title: The One Thing We Keep Postponing

Primary Text: Luke 10:38–42

Supporting Texts: John 15:1–11; Psalm 119:105; Luke 11:1–13

Big Idea: A fruitful life begins with receiving Christ's word and continuing in dependence on Him.

I. Welcome Jesus Beyond the Doorway — Luke 10:38

Exegesis: Martha welcomes Jesus into her home. The story begins with sincere hospitality, not hostility. Yet proximity to Jesus and activity around Him do not automatically mean attention to His teaching. The scene asks what happens after the welcome.

Practical / Theological Implication: Church attendance, ministry work, and Christian vocabulary can coexist with an unexamined inner life. Ask listeners where Jesus is genuinely welcomed but rarely allowed to interrupt their priorities. Begin with your own example rather than accusing the congregation of insincerity.

II. Notice What Is Dividing Your Attention — Luke 10:40–41

Exegesis: Martha is distracted by much service, then anxious and troubled about many things. Her frustration moves outward toward Mary and upward toward Jesus. Her question implies that His care should take the form of enforcing her preferred solution.

Practical / Theological Implication: Invite listeners to notice the sentences they repeat: “Everything depends on me”; “No one helps”; “God must not care.” Some burdens require practical help, not merely a better attitude. A church shaped by this passage can both offer respite and call people away from anxious self-reliance.

III. Receive the Word You Cannot Give Yourself — Luke 10:39, 42

Exegesis: Mary listens to the Lord, and Jesus calls her choice good. He does not offer another efficiency technique. He defends her opportunity to receive what He alone can teach. His word has priority over the pressure to manage appearances.

Practical / Theological Implication: Demonstrate a simple way to read: What does this passage reveal about God? What response does it call for? What should I pray? Use a short passage in context. Teach listeners to seek its meaning before hunting for a personalized message detached from the text.

IV. Carry Dependence into the Rest of the Day — John 15:4–5, 9–12

Exegesis: Jesus connects fruitfulness to remaining in Him. Love and obedience are expressions of that relationship. A branch cannot generate its own life, but living branches really do bear fruit.

Practical / Theological Implication: End with one sustainable appointment with Scripture and prayer, then one act of obedience arising from it. Mara's work shift remains demanding; she enters it remembering whose life sustains her. The sermon should send people back into responsibilities with renewed dependence, not contempt for ordinary work.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Can you state the difference between spiritual discipline and earning God's approval?
- Which point needs a concrete example from a life unlike your own?
- What will listeners do when their planned time is interrupted tomorrow?

Put Time with God Back at the Center

4. Comprehensive External Study References

Joel B. Green · *The Gospel of Luke*. NICNT; Eerdmans. Publisher / source ↗
Passage study: Read the treatment of Luke 10:38–42 alongside the preceding Samaritan story. Ask how Luke holds receptive discipleship and active love together.

Bruce Milne · *The Message of John*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Supporting exposition: Consult John 15:1–17. Trace the connections among remaining, Jesus' words, prayer, obedience, love, and fruit.

Craig S. Keener · *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Second edition; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Historical context: Consult Luke 10 and John 15. Use relevant background to illuminate the scenes; avoid turning general cultural patterns into details the text never states.

Dane Ortlund · *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*. Crossway. Publisher / source ↗
Pastoral complement: Consider how Christ's welcome can shape your tone toward tired or ashamed believers. Keep Luke's specific teaching, rather than a secondary book, central.

John Stott · *The Message of Ephesians*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Gospel framework: Study Ephesians 2:1–10 to clarify why practices flow from grace. This is especially useful for the series introduction and invitation.

5. Suggested Call to Action

This Week: Make One Protected Appointment

Invite each listener to choose a realistic time and place to read Luke 10:38–42 on the first day, then John 15:1–11 across the next several days. Begin with five to ten minutes if that is sustainable. Silence one avoidable distraction. Read, identify one truth about Christ, pray in response, and name one act of obedience.

Encourage those with unpredictable schedules to choose an anchor rather than an exact hour: after a meal, during a safe break, or when a caregiver arrives. Audio Scripture, large print, and reading with another person can make the practice accessible. Private devotion should strengthen participation in the church's shared worship and life.

Grace and Follow-Through

If a day is missed, begin again at the next opportunity. Do not double the assignment as punishment. Pair with a willing friend for a brief weekly conversation: “What did you hear in the passage? How are you responding?” The purpose is encouragement and truthfulness, not surveillance.

Suggested Prayer: “Lord Jesus, quiet my competing demands long enough for me to hear Your word. Teach me to depend on You and carry what You teach me into today's responsibilities.”

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Is the practice possible for a caregiver, a night worker, and a new reader of Scripture?
- What local support would help someone create space to listen?
- How will next week's follow-up celebrate returning to Christ rather than a perfect streak?

Put Time with God Back at the Center

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Does this passage teach that serving is less spiritual than studying?

No. Luke places it after a story commanding merciful action. Martha's service is not condemned simply because it is service; her distraction and anxiety have displaced listening to Jesus. Receiving His word equips us to love well. The church needs attentive learners who also serve.

Must I read the Bible early every morning?

Scripture commends sustained attentiveness to God, but this passage does not prescribe a universal hour or duration. Choose a rhythm appropriate to your responsibilities and capacity. The important question is whether Christ's word is shaping your life, not whether your schedule resembles someone else's.

What if I read but feel nothing?

Emotional response varies. Read in context, ask for understanding, and bring honest feelings to God. Look for what the passage teaches, not a required sensation. Dryness can invite perseverance and conversation with a mature believer; it does not automatically mean God has withdrawn or that your faith is unreal.

Can an audio Bible or family devotion count?

Yes. Listening to Scripture and receiving it with others are meaningful ways to learn. The means should help you attend to the actual text. A family devotion can complement personal prayer, and both belong alongside gathered worship. Avoid judging spiritual seriousness by reading speed or format.

What does it mean to abide in Christ?

In John 15, it includes remaining in relationship with Jesus, receiving His words, praying, continuing in His love, and obeying His commands. It is ongoing dependence on the living Savior. A quiet time may support abiding, but abiding is broader than a completed devotional appointment.

What if my responsibilities really leave almost no quiet time?

The church should listen and offer practical support rather than assume laziness. Short moments of prayer, one carefully heard passage, or Scripture read by a friend may be a wise beginning. Do not romanticize exhaustion. Ask whether fellow believers can share a burden so attentive space becomes possible.

How do I know this is grace rather than another religious performance?

Ask what you believe a successful or unsuccessful morning means. If success seems to purchase God's affection, the practice has taken the wrong role. Christ is the basis of acceptance. The discipline is a way of receiving His word and responding to love already given in Him.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Which question is your congregation most likely to carry home unspoken?
- What assurance from the passage can you give without minimizing its call to listen?

Closing Refrain: Receive before you rush.

Turn Away from a Habit That Weakens Your Faith

Vignette Connection: “The Extra Hour”

Daniel, a repairman, routinely adds an unworked hour to customer invoices. Reading about Zacchaeus exposes the dishonesty he has renamed as necessity. He confesses to God, refunds a customer, and asks a trusted Christian friend to help review past bills. The final accurate invoice shows repentance becoming a new pattern, rather than remaining a moment of regret.

1. Introduction

The Pastoral Burden

Sin often survives through respectable language. We call dishonesty “rounding,” cruelty “being direct,” and gossip “sharing a concern.” Financial pressure or personal pain can help explain temptation, but neither makes wrongdoing harmless. A New Year invitation to repentance should name sin clearly while directing sinners toward the Savior who receives and changes them.

Luke 19:1–10 centers on Jesus seeking and saving the lost. Zacchaeus is neither a morality tale about trying harder nor a donor whose generosity buys divine approval. Jesus approaches him, receives him, and publicly identifies the arrival of salvation. His encounter with Christ brings money, reputation, and relationships into the open.

The sermon should help listeners move from vague shame to specific confession and action. “I need to do better” can preserve every hiding place. “I lied about the hours I worked” brings a concrete deed into the light. Genuine repentance turns toward God and away from sin, taking seriously those who were harmed.

The Gospel Connection

First John 1:8–2:2 refuses both denial and despair. Believers must not pretend they have no sin; they are invited to confess, and they have an advocate in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:20–32 describes new life through putting away old conduct and practicing its righteous replacement. Grace provides both forgiveness and a reason to change.

Opening Question & Video Bridge

Ask: “What wrong behavior becomes easier when we give it a softer name?” After the film, say: “Daniel's turning point came when he stopped defending the extra hour. In Luke 19, Jesus meets a man whose financial life becomes part of his response to grace.” Read the entire encounter before emphasizing the repayment.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Which socially acceptable sin needs clear naming without targeting a recognizable individual?
- How will you distinguish repentance from shame that hides and refuses help?
- Where must your application include repair for someone who has been harmed?
- What makes Jesus' saving initiative unmistakable in this sermon?

Turn Away from a Habit That Weakens Your Faith

2. Biblical History & Character Description

Jericho and the Journey toward Jerusalem

Luke situates the encounter in Jericho as Jesus approaches Jerusalem. Immediately before it, a blind beggar receives sight; earlier, a rich ruler struggles with Jesus' call concerning wealth (Luke 18:18–43). Zacchaeus's story belongs within Luke's concern for salvation, wealth, social exclusion, and the reversals accompanying Jesus' mission.

Zacchaeus: Wealth, Status, and a Desire to See

Luke calls him a chief tax collector and rich. Tax collection operated within systems associated with ruling power and created opportunities for exploitation. Do not assume every tax collector committed precisely the same offenses. Luke gives this man's position, the crowd's assessment, and his own statement concerning restitution. His climb into a tree reveals his determination to see Jesus, but the decisive initiative belongs to Jesus calling him.

Jesus and the Grumbling Crowd

Jesus says He must stay at Zacchaeus's house. Zacchaeus welcomes Him joyfully, while onlookers object that He has become the guest of a sinner. The scene reveals the scandal of grace: Jesus draws near to someone others regard as disqualified. His welcome is not approval of exploitation. The encounter exposes the separation between respectable appearances and saving mercy.

Restitution and the Interpretation of Verse 8

Zacchaeus speaks of giving half his goods to the poor and repaying fourfold if he has defrauded anyone. Many evangelical readings understand these as commitments flowing from his encounter with Jesus. Some interpreters take the present-tense wording as a description of existing practice. Acknowledge the discussion if needed; the passage clearly joins salvation with a serious response concerning wealth and justice.

Fourfold repayment recalls restitution language in Israel's law, but the sermon should not impose one multiplier on every modern situation. Exodus 22:1 and Numbers 5:5–7 address different circumstances. The enduring concern is truthfulness, restoration, and refusing to profit from harm.

Salvation and the Son of Man's Mission

Jesus identifies Zacchaeus as a son of Abraham and declares that salvation has come to the house. Verse 10 explains His mission to seek and save the lost. Keep that declaration as the interpretive center. Restitution is evidence of a changed relationship to possessions and neighbors; it is not the price of salvation.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- How does the encounter answer the question raised by the rich ruler in Luke 18?
- What details are stated, and what motives might you be tempted to invent?
- How can you preach restitution seriously without turning verse 8 into a universal formula?

Turn Away from a Habit That Weakens Your Faith

3. Suggested Sermon Outline

Proposed Sermon Title: When Grace Reaches the Invoice

Primary Text: Luke 19:1–10

Supporting Texts: Ephesians 4:20–32; 1 John 1:8–2:2

Big Idea: Jesus seeks and saves sinners, and His grace calls us into truthful, concrete repentance.

I. Let Jesus Interrupt Your Hiding — Luke 19:1–6

Exegesis: Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus, but Jesus stops, calls him by name, and announces His intention to stay. The movement is personal and gracious. The story's saving energy does not originate in a flawless plan of self-reform.

Practical / Theological Implication: Speak to the listener who assumes change must be completed before coming to Christ. Invite an honest response now. Grace brings us into the presence of the One who can forgive and transform; it does not ask us to become our own savior first.

II. Stop Using Respectability to Rename Sin — Luke 19:7–8; Ephesians 4:25

Exegesis: The crowd labels Zacchaeus a sinner, yet Jesus enters his home. Zacchaeus addresses his possessions and possible fraud directly. Ephesians calls believers to put away falsehood because they belong to one another. Truthfulness is relational, not merely a matter of protecting a reputation.

Practical / Theological Implication: Use the invoice to distinguish explanation from excuse. Invite a private, specific confession: the act, the person harmed, and the story used to justify it. Avoid demanding public disclosures. The aim is truth before God and appropriate truth with those affected.

III. Give Repentance a Concrete Shape — Luke 19:8; Ephesians 4:28

Exegesis: Zacchaeus's response includes generosity and restitution. Ephesians moves from theft to honest labor and then to sharing with those in need. The replacement is richer than simply stopping the old act: hands that took become hands that give.

Practical / Theological Implication: Ask, “What needs to stop? What must replace it? What repair is possible?” Examples include correcting a false report, returning money, withdrawing a slanderous statement, or establishing honest records. Where harm is serious or complex, seek wise help to make repair responsibly, not impulsively.

IV. Continue in the Grace That Tells the Truth — Luke 19:9–10; 1 John 1:9–2:2

Exegesis: Jesus names salvation and states His mission. First John directs confessing believers to God's faithfulness and Christ's advocacy. Forgiveness permits neither denial nor hopelessness. The Savior remains the ground of confidence as believers turn from sin.

Practical / Theological Implication: End with confession, one repair step, and an agreed follow-up with a mature Christian. Accountability cannot replace the Spirit's work, but it can interrupt secrecy. Daniel's next accurate invoice is not spectacular; it is a meaningful expression of the new direction.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Is Jesus the acting Savior in your outline, or merely a witness to moral improvement?
- What righteous replacement will you propose for the behavior you name?
- How will you welcome a repentant struggler while refusing to excuse repeated harm?

Turn Away from a Habit That Weakens Your Faith

4. Comprehensive External Study References

Joel B. Green · *The Gospel of Luke*. NICNT; Eerdmans. Publisher / source ↗
Primary study: Consult Luke 18:18–19:10. Examine the relationship among wealth, Jesus' initiative, Zacchaeus's statement, and salvation.

Craig S. Keener · *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Second edition; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Context: Read the notes on tax collectors and Luke 19. Use historical background to qualify assumptions rather than supply an invented biography.

John Stott · *The Message of Ephesians*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Ethical exposition: Study Ephesians 4:17–32, especially the movement from taking to working and giving in verse 28.

Dane Ortlund · *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*. Crossway. Publisher / source ↗
Pastoral complement: Use its focus on Christ's disposition toward sinners to consider how you can call for honesty without pushing ashamed listeners into concealment.

John Stott · *The Message of Galatians*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Gospel distinction: Consult Galatians 2:15–21 and 5:13–26 to distinguish acceptance by faith from the Spirit-produced obedience that follows.

5. Suggested Call to Action

This Week: Name, Turn, Repair, Continue

Invite listeners to write privately: “The behavior I need to bring into the light is ____. The excuse I use is ____. The obedient replacement is ____.” Read 1 John 1:8–2:2 and confess the sin to God without softening it. Then identify one appropriate step to repair harm.

For a manageable financial wrong, that may mean contacting the person, correcting the record, and returning what is owed. For gossip, it may mean correcting the statement with the people who heard it. An apology should name the action, acknowledge its impact, and avoid demanding immediate reassurance or forgiveness.

Build a Sustainable New Pattern

Choose a trusted, mature Christian who can ask a specific follow-up question next week. Remove an opportunity that routinely supports the sin and practice a positive alternative. Where a pattern is entrenched or destructive, seek additional pastoral and appropriate professional support. A dramatic promise is no substitute for changed access, habits, and accountability.

Do not force a public testimony or contact that would burden or endanger someone harmed. Serious wrongdoing may require consequences as well as confession. The person who repents should not control the injured person's timetable.

Suggested Prayer: “Merciful Father, help me name my sin truthfully, trust Christ's forgiveness, and take the next honest step. Teach me to repair what I can and practice the good You call me to do.”

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Is your response specific enough to begin within seven days?
- Have you made room for restitution without suggesting it earns pardon?
- What will a trustworthy follow-up conversation ask beyond ‘Did you do better?’

Turn Away from a Habit That Weakens Your Faith

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Is repentance simply feeling sorry?

Sorrow may accompany repentance, but feelings alone do not define it. Repentance turns toward God and away from sin. It includes acknowledging the truth and a willingness to obey. Second Corinthians 7:10–11 distinguishes destructive sorrow from sorrow that produces a serious response. Tears without changed direction can leave the harm intact.

Did Zacchaeus buy salvation by giving money away?

No. Luke centers the encounter on Jesus seeking and saving the lost. Zacchaeus's response displays a transformed relationship to wealth and neighbor. Read this alongside Ephesians 2:8–10: salvation is God's gift, and good works belong to the life it creates. Gifts cannot compensate God for sin.

Must every wrong be repaid fourfold?

Luke reports Zacchaeus's particular commitment; it does not issue a universal repayment schedule. Biblical restitution laws vary by circumstance. The continuing principle is to stop benefiting from harm and make honest repair where possible. Seek wise guidance when the facts, ownership, or consequences are complicated.

What if I cannot fully repair the damage?

Inability to undo everything does not make confession meaningless. Tell the truth, stop ongoing harm, and do what is reasonably possible. A repayment plan or correction of a false statement may be a beginning. Do not promise what you cannot deliver or use impossibility of complete repair as an excuse for doing nothing.

What if I confess and later fail again?

Return to Christ promptly and examine what allowed the pattern to continue. First John assumes believers still need confession and Christ's advocacy. Repeated failure calls for serious attention, support, and stronger practical changes. Neither despair nor casual acceptance is an adequate response to ongoing sin.

Do I have to confess every sin publicly?

No. Confess to God, and address the people actually affected in an appropriate way. Public wrongs may require public correction, but broad disclosure can create new harm or expose someone else's private experience. Seek pastoral wisdom about scope. Confession should serve truth and repair, not a need to unload guilt indiscriminately.

Does forgiveness remove consequences?

Not necessarily. A forgiven person may still need to repay money, rebuild trust, step away from responsibility, or accept other consequences. Such steps can be part of truthful repentance. Grace does not require injured people or institutions to pretend the wrong never happened.

> **SERMON PREP PROMPTS**
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> - Which answer most clearly prevents someone from confusing grace with permission?
> - Where will you direct a listener who wants help after the service?

Closing Refrain: Grace brings the truth into the light.

Take a Step Toward Forgiveness and Peace

Vignette Connection: “The Empty Chair”

Ruth has not spoken to her brother Paul since he left her to manage their father's funeral. When he asks to talk, she initially turns her phone over. Ephesians 4 challenges her bitterness. She prays, receives his apology, and begins a difficult conversation. The occupied chair represents a beginning; the film explicitly leaves room for trust to take time.

1. Introduction

The Pastoral Burden

Unresolved hurt can become the story through which we interpret every new interaction. We rehearse what someone deserves to hear, imagine a satisfying reversal, or protect ourselves through permanent silence. Yet a sermon on forgiveness must first recognize that wrongdoing is real. Some listeners carry ordinary conflict; others carry deep injury. They should not receive identical instructions about contact or reconciliation.

Ephesians 4:25–5:2 places forgiveness within the life of a people being made new in Christ. Paul addresses truth, anger, speech, bitterness, kindness, and love. The church is not merely a collection of people who individually feel better. It is a community learning to speak and act in ways consistent with God's mercy.

The central movement is from received forgiveness to extended forgiveness. God does not ask believers to declare evil harmless. He calls them away from vengeance, degrading speech, and the cultivation of bitterness. Romans 12:18 recognizes the limits of our control: peace involves other people, and we are responsible for the part that depends on us.

The Gospel Connection

Ephesians 4:32 grounds the command in God's forgiveness in Christ; 5:1–2 connects imitation of God to Christ's self-giving love. Preach forgiveness as a response to costly grace. Do not tell listeners that their pain is too small to matter because Jesus suffered more. His cross reveals both the gravity of sin and the depth of God's mercy.

Opening Question & Video Bridge

Ask: “What conversation have you been having in your head that you have never been able to have in peace?” After the film, say: “The empty chair did not erase the past. It marked a first step. Scripture calls us to put away bitterness while telling the truth about what has happened.” Read Ephesians 4:25–5:2.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Where do listeners need their pain acknowledged before an application can be heard?
- How will you distinguish an invitation to forgive from pressure to resume unsafe contact?
- What is within a listener's responsibility, and what depends on another person's response?
- How will Christ's mercy supply the motive for this sermon?

Take a Step Toward Forgiveness and Peace

2. Biblical History & Character Description

The New Community in Ephesians

Ephesians 1–3 unfolds God's saving work and the gathering of people into one body in Christ. Chapters 4–6 describe a life worthy of that calling. The ethical commands arise from belonging, grace, and unity; they are not an entrance examination for becoming loved by God. Read 4:1–6 before preparing the week's main passage.

Paul: Addressing the Ordinary Speech of Believers

Ephesians 4 moves through falsehood, anger, theft, harmful talk, bitterness, and malice. The variety matters. Community fractures through everyday words as well as dramatic offenses. Verse 29 asks whether speech builds up according to the hearer's need. A truthful statement can still be delivered in a needlessly destructive way.

Anger and Its Direction — Ephesians 4:26–27

The instruction about anger does not authorize revenge. It calls for urgent attention to anger so it does not become sin's opportunity. The reference to sunset presses against nursing resentment. Avoid using it as a rigid demand that two exhausted or frightened people must settle a complex conflict before sleeping. Taking a pause can be wise if it serves a responsible return to the issue.

The Holy Spirit and Our Shared Life — Ephesians 4:30

The warning against grieving the Spirit appears amid instructions about speech and conduct. Believers are sealed for redemption; their treatment of others should reflect that identity. The text gives relational ethics theological weight. A biting remark is not merely a personality trait when it tears down people Christ has joined to us.

Kindness, Compassion, and Forgiveness — Ephesians 4:31–5:2

Paul names destructive attitudes to put away and corresponding qualities to practice. The model is God's forgiveness in Christ and Christ's sacrificial love. Forgiveness is not forgetfulness, moral indifference, or an agreement to suppress the truth. It relinquishes personal vengeance and moves toward the other's good under God's judgment and wisdom.

Peace Within Human Limits — Romans 12:17–21

Romans calls believers to refuse repayment of evil with evil, pursue peace where possible, leave vengeance with God, and answer an enemy's need with good. “As far as it depends on you” acknowledges that another person may refuse peace. Lawful accountability and protection are not the same as personal retaliation.

Fictional Characters and Biblical Application

Ruth and her brother are an illustration of ordinary estrangement in which an apology and renewed contact are possible. Their outcome is not a promise that every offender will repent. The biblical command must be applied with attention to the actual relationship.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Which repeated relational commands keep this from becoming a sermon about feelings alone?
- How do Romans 12:18 and 12:19 protect against both passivity and revenge?

Take a Step Toward Forgiveness and Peace

3. Suggested Sermon Outline

Proposed Sermon Title: A Place at the Table Again

Primary Text: Ephesians 4:25–5:2

Supporting Texts: Romans 12:17–21; Colossians 3:12–15

Big Idea: Because God has forgiven us in Christ, we can tell the truth, release vengeance, and pursue the peace within our reach.

I. Bring the Hurt into the Light — Ephesians 4:25–27

Exegesis: Paul commands truthfulness and addresses anger directly. The passage does not create a community in which people must deny offense or pretend all is well. It calls believers to deal with what can otherwise grow into destructive conduct.

Practical / Theological Implication: Help listeners distinguish “I was hurt” from “Therefore I may hurt you back.” Encourage an accurate account without exaggerating motives. Someone who needs to repent should name their own behavior. Someone harmed may need a trustworthy listener before attempting any conversation with the offender.

II. Refuse to Keep Feeding the Injury — Ephesians 4:29–31

Exegesis: Bitterness, rage, slander, and malice belong to the old pattern Paul commands believers to put away. Speech is to serve the hearer's need. Grieving the Spirit is linked to the way the community treats one another.

Practical / Theological Implication: Identify a concrete practice that perpetuates resentment: rehearsing a retaliatory speech, recruiting allies through gossip, or reading every event as proof of another's evil. Refusing these practices does not mean suppressing memory. Replace them with lament, truthful counsel, prayer, and appropriate boundaries.

III. Receive the Mercy You Are Called to Extend — Ephesians 4:32–5:2

Exegesis: The reason for forgiveness is God's prior forgiveness in Christ. The movement into 5:1–2 places believers in the position of beloved children learning the love displayed by Jesus. Grace establishes the identity from which obedience grows.

Practical / Theological Implication: Slow down here. Explain that the cross does not minimize sin; it reveals what reconciliation with God cost. Invite listeners to bring both their guilt and their wounds to Christ. They do not generate mercy from unlimited personal resources; they respond to mercy received.

IV. Take the Step That Belongs to You — Romans 12:18–21

Exegesis: Peace is to be pursued where possible, personal vengeance refused, and good offered in response to evil. The qualification about what depends on us prevents a promise that every relationship will be restored on demand.

Practical / Theological Implication: For one person the step is an apology; for another, a mediated conversation; for another, relinquishing revenge while maintaining distance. Ruth's second cup is one possible expression, not a rule for every wound. End with a responsible next step rather than a demand for an emotional breakthrough.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Have you made forgiveness, reconciliation, and restored trust distinguishable?
- Which application might pressure an injured person, and how will you correct it?
- What does your sermon ask of the person who caused the harm?

Take a Step Toward Forgiveness and Peace

4. Comprehensive External Study References

John Stott · *The Message of Ephesians*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Primary exposition: Read Ephesians 4:25–5:2 in relation to the unity of 4:1–16. Trace how belonging to Christ shapes speech and forgiveness.

Dick Lucas · *The Message of Colossians & Philemon*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Parallel passage: Consult Colossians 3:12–17. Compare the movement from God's chosen and loved people to compassion, patience, forgiveness, and peace.

Timothy Keller · *Tim Keller on How to Forgive*. The Good Book Company; online article. Publisher / source ↗
Accessible reflection: Use this short author article to consider the relationship between receiving God's forgiveness and extending it. It is supplementary pastoral reading, not a complete guide for every serious conflict.

Edmund P. Clowney · *The Message of 1 Peter*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Supporting study: Read the exposition of 1 Peter 2:21–25 and 3:8–12. Consider Christ's refusal of retaliation without erasing His suffering or the reality of injustice.

Dane Ortlund · *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*. Crossway. Publisher / source ↗
Pastoral tone: Reflect on Christ's care for sinners and sufferers as you prepare to address both people who have wronged others and people who have been wronged.

5. Suggested Call to Action

This Week: One Truthful Step toward Peace

Ask listeners privately to name one relationship before God. Have them separate three questions: What happened? What response of mine needs repentance? What action is wise and within my responsibility now? Do not require anyone to identify the relationship publicly.

Where the listener caused harm, suggest a clear apology: “I did ____. It harmed you by ____. I was wrong. I am taking ____ steps to change.” Remove the word “but,” and do not demand reassurance. Where a conversation is appropriate, request it respectfully and accept that the other person may need time or a mediator.

When Contact Is Not Wise

For ongoing abuse, threats, or coercion, the next step may be seeking protection and trusted support while refusing personal vengeance. Forgiveness must not be used to silence an injured person or restore an offender's access. Reconciliation and trust require truth and a credible basis for safety and change.

Invite everyone to read Ephesians 4:31–5:2 throughout the week, naming resentment honestly and asking for help to respond in Christlike ways. Follow up through a trusted pastor or mature believer rather than demanding a dramatic public reconciliation.

Suggested Prayer: “Father, You know the truth of this hurt and the ways I have sinned in response. Help me receive Your mercy, release vengeance, speak truthfully, and take the step toward peace that belongs to me.”

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Can your call to action serve both the repentant offender and the injured listener?
- What support is available when a direct conversation would be unwise?
- How will you honor slow growth without making bitterness seem harmless?

Take a Step Toward Forgiveness and Peace

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Does forgiving mean saying the offense was acceptable?

No. Forgiveness concerns a real wrong. It does not rename the act as good, erase its consequences, or require a false account of the past. The gospel itself takes sin seriously. We can refuse revenge while telling the truth and seeking appropriate accountability.

Are forgiveness and reconciliation the same thing?

They are closely related but distinguishable. Forgiveness involves releasing personal vengeance and responding to God's mercy. Reconciliation involves the restoration of a relationship and requires the participation of others. Trust may need evidence and time. Romans 12:18 recognizes that peace is not controlled by one person's effort alone.

What if the other person never apologizes?

Christians differ on how they describe the completion of interpersonal forgiveness when repentance is absent. Scripture clearly calls believers to reject revenge, pray for enemies, and remain ready to forgive; it also takes repentance seriously (Luke 17:3–4). You need not pretend reconciliation has occurred. Bring resentment to God and pursue what is faithful within your responsibility.

Must I forget what happened?

No. Scripture does not command memory loss. Remembering may be necessary for wisdom, protection, or honest accountability. The question is whether the memory becomes fuel for vengeance or is increasingly entrusted to God's care and judgment. Persistent grief does not automatically prove a refusal to forgive.

Does forgiveness require renewed contact with an unsafe person?

No. Boundaries and protection can remain necessary. Do not use the story's shared table as a command for every relationship. Seek trusted help where abuse or coercion is present. A church should protect vulnerable people and address wrongdoing rather than require exposure as evidence of spiritual maturity.

What if the anger returns after I thought I had forgiven?

Pain can return through reminders or new discoveries. Bring it honestly to God and resist turning it into retaliation. Repeated prayer, support, and renewed choices may be needed. Distinguish recurring emotion from a settled intention to punish. Healing and rebuilt trust often move more slowly than one decision.

How should I respond if I am the one who caused the harm?

Confess specifically, stop the behavior, make appropriate repair, and accept consequences. Do not use the command to forgive as a way to hurry someone past their pain. Demonstrate changed conduct without making renewed closeness the price of your repentance. The other person does not owe you a quick restoration of trust.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Which of these distinctions needs to be said from the pulpit rather than saved for counseling?
- How can you invite forgiveness in a tone that resembles Christ's truth and compassion?

Closing Refrain: Take the step that depends on you.

Make Serving Others a Regular Commitment

Vignette Connection: “One More Place”

Linda, a retired widow, wonders what God still wants her to do. Seeing her neighbor Ben struggle with groceries after surgery reminds her of the Good Samaritan. She carries a bag and offers supper. A shared meal becomes a Thursday commitment. As Ben recovers, he contributes bread, allowing the relationship to grow beyond a permanent division between helper and helped.

1. Introduction

The Pastoral Burden

Some Christians associate usefulness with a formal position, a visible talent, or a season of greater strength. Others serve so frequently that they have forgotten how to receive care. This week invites the whole congregation to see service as the expression of love through the gifts and opportunities God actually provides.

The Good Samaritan interrupts the desire to place a manageable boundary around responsibility. A legal expert asks Jesus about eternal life, then seeks to justify himself by asking who qualifies as his neighbor. Jesus tells a story that turns attention toward becoming a neighbor through mercy. The key question shifts from identifying the people we must include to responding lovingly to the person in need.

The sermon must preserve the human dignity of those served. A neighbor is not a prop in our story of usefulness. Listen, ask what would help, and receive the contributions they can make. Linda's kitchen becomes a setting for mutual human fellowship, not an opportunity to display her goodness.

The Gospel Connection

Ephesians 2:8–10 keeps service in its proper place: believers are saved by grace and created for good works. Galatians 5:13 teaches that Christian freedom expresses itself through serving in love. First Peter 4:10–11 names believers stewards of God's varied grace and directs glory to God through Jesus Christ. Gifts are entrusted to us for others, not awarded as proof of superior worth.

Opening Question & Video Bridge

Ask: “What ordinary resource do you already have that someone near you may need?” After the film, say: “Linda did not receive a new title or a larger budget. She noticed, came close, and made room again next Thursday. Jesus tells a story that presses us toward that kind of practical mercy.” Read Luke 10:25–37.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Who assumes their season of usefulness has passed?
- Who needs permission to receive help rather than volunteer for one more task?
- Where might church activity be substituting for attention to actual neighbors?
- How can you honor those receiving care as participants, not projects?

Make Serving Others a Regular Commitment

2. Biblical History & Character Description

The Legal Expert's Question — Luke 10:25–29

An expert in the law tests Jesus by asking about inheriting eternal life. Jesus directs him back to Scripture. Love for God and neighbor draws on Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. The man's next question, Luke says, seeks self-justification. The sermon should expose our desire to manage the demand of love without turning the entire exchange into an abstract debate.

The Injured Traveler and the Road

The man travels from Jerusalem toward Jericho, is attacked, and is left half dead. Jesus does not supply his name or a detailed identity. His vulnerability is central. Avoid inventing a backstory in which his choices make him more or less deserving. His need confronts the passersby before any account of his merit is available.

Priest and Levite: Seeing but Passing By

Both encounter the injured man and pass on the other side. The story does not identify their motives. Do not assert fear of ritual impurity, lateness, or cowardice as though Jesus states those reasons. Whatever explanatory possibilities are discussed, the narrative contrasts their passing by with the Samaritan's coming near.

The Samaritan: An Unexpected Neighbor

Jewish-Samaritan relations included substantial religious and communal tension. Jesus makes a Samaritan the example of mercy, challenging an easy association between religious category and obedient love. Avoid a blanket claim that every person in either community had an identical attitude. The force of the story lies in the unexpected person's concrete response.

Mercy with a Cost and a Continuation

The Samaritan sees, has compassion, approaches, treats wounds, provides transport, takes the man to an inn, and pays for care. He also promises follow-through. The sequence gives love a practical shape. He does not personally perform every stage of recovery; he enlists the innkeeper. Shared care can be part of faithful service.

Jesus Reframes the Question

Jesus asks which person became a neighbor to the injured man. The answer identifies the one who showed mercy. The final command calls for corresponding action. Avoid making each object in the parable stand for a hidden theological symbol; its stated moral direction is clear.

Gifts and Dependence — 1 Peter 4:7–11

Peter addresses believers whose prayer, love, hospitality, speaking, and service belong together. Gifts are entrusted for the benefit of others, and service draws on strength God supplies. The goal is God's glory through Jesus Christ. The passage supports sustainable shared ministry rather than the myth of the indispensable volunteer.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- What motives does the parable leave unstated?
- How does the final question expose the limits we place around neighbor-love?

Make Serving Others a Regular Commitment

3. Suggested Sermon Outline

Proposed Sermon Title: Love Has a Place on the Calendar

Primary Text: Luke 10:25–37

Supporting Texts: 1 Peter 4:7–11; Galatians 5:13–14; Ephesians 2:8–10

Big Idea: God's grace frees us to become neighbors through practical, sustained love.

I. Let Scripture Challenge the Limits of Your Love — Luke 10:25–29

Exegesis: The legal expert knows the command to love, yet seeks to justify himself through defining the neighbor. His knowledge has not ended his attempt to limit the command's reach. Jesus answers through a story that makes the question personal.

Practical / Theological Implication: Ask where listeners instinctively draw a line: inconvenience, unfamiliarity, age, social background, or lack of recognition. Do not demand that any one person meet every need. Challenge the desire to use limits as a reason never to move toward anyone.

II. Turn Seeing into Coming Near — Luke 10:30–34

Exegesis: All three travelers see the wounded man, but the Samaritan's compassion leads to approach and care. The decisive difference is not access to information. It is a merciful response to what has been seen.

Practical / Theological Implication: Give ordinary examples: a ride, a meal, an accessible church entrance, help with forms, or companionship. Teach the first respectful question: “What would be helpful?” Compassion should learn from the neighbor rather than assume the helper already knows everything.

III. Give Mercy a Next Step — Luke 10:34–35

Exegesis: The Samaritan provides immediate help and arranges continuing care. His money, travel plans, and relationship with an innkeeper become part of the response. The text gives love duration without claiming the Samaritan alone must carry every future responsibility.

Practical / Theological Implication: Move beyond a moment of inspiration to one defined commitment. Linda's Thursday meal is memorable because it returns. Encourage clarity about time, capacity, and shared help. Faithful service can include referring someone to a better-equipped person or team.

IV. Serve as a Steward of Grace — 1 Peter 4:10–11; Galatians 5:13

Exegesis: Believers receive varied gifts and use them for one another. Peter places service under dependence on God's supplied strength and directs its outcome toward His glory. Paul presents loving service as the expression of freedom in Christ.

Practical / Theological Implication: Challenge both pride and despair: your gift is entrusted, and your small contribution matters. Invite those receiving help to offer what they can without pressure to repay. Close with the gospel order: Christ's grace gives life, and that life becomes available in love to others.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Does your application reach beyond recruiting workers for existing church programs?
- Where will you name limits and shared responsibility without encouraging indifference?
- What recurring action could begin this week and remain realistic next month?

Make Serving Others a Regular Commitment

4. Comprehensive External Study References

Joel B. Green · *The Gospel of Luke*. NICNT; Eerdmans. Publisher / source ↗
Primary passage: Read Luke 10:25–37 and the surrounding discipleship material. Follow Jesus' change from defining a neighbor to becoming one.

Craig S. Keener · *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Second edition; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Contextual study: Consult the background to the Samaritan parable. Separate documented context from motives Jesus does not attribute to the priest and Levite.

Edmund P. Clowney · *The Message of 1 Peter*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Ministry theology: Study 1 Peter 4:7–11, especially hospitality, stewardship, and the strength God supplies. Connect service to prayer and love.

John Stott · *The Message of Galatians*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Freedom and love: Consult Galatians 5:1, 13–26. Consider how service grows from freedom and the Spirit rather than a bid to earn acceptance.

John Stott · *The Message of Ephesians*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Grace and good works: Use Ephesians 2:8–10 and 4:11–16 to frame both the motivation for service and the shared contribution of Christ's body.

5. Suggested Call to Action

This Week: Choose a Neighbor and a Rhythm

Ask each listener or household to identify one real need and one resource they can offer: time, transport, skill, space, a meal, or companionship. Before acting, ask what would be useful. Then agree on one manageable commitment for the coming month, such as a weekly call, two rides, or a regular shared meal.

Write three details: “I will offer ____. We have agreed on ____. I will review the arrangement on ____.” A clear commitment protects both people from assumptions. Follow the church's normal procedures when serving children or vulnerable adults, and coordinate with existing care rather than duplicating or disrupting it.

Let the Church Share the Work

Invite a ministry leader to offer a few concrete opportunities of different sizes. Include a way for people to request help. A person who is ill or exhausted may practice this week's response by accepting care, praying for others, or offering a small act suited to present capacity. Nobody needs to prove worth by overcommitting.

At the end of the month, ask what was actually helpful, what needs adjusting, and whether the relationship can continue. Celebrate the neighbor's dignity and God's provision rather than the helper's heroism.

Suggested Prayer: “God of mercy, open my eyes to the person near me. Show me what I can offer, teach me to receive help humbly, and give our church strength to love faithfully.”

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Can listeners name a person, an action, and a time rather than only an intention?
- How will the recipient help define what is useful?
- What will you say to the already-exhausted volunteer who needs a lighter load?

Make Serving Others a Regular Commitment

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Does the Good Samaritan teach that good works earn eternal life?

The exchange exposes the demand of love and the legal expert's attempt to justify himself. Jesus' command is serious, but the wider New Testament makes salvation God's gift through faith. Ephesians 2:8–10 keeps grace and good works in their proper relationship. Service is a response to salvation, not its purchase price.

Who qualifies as my neighbor?

Jesus shifts the question toward becoming a neighbor through mercy. The injured man's need matters more than whether he belongs to a preferred group. This does not mean one person can address every need everywhere. It challenges excuses that keep us from responding to the people we can reasonably help.

Do I need to discover my spiritual gift before serving?

You can begin with a clear need and an ordinary ability. Scripture's gifts serve the body; they are not a reason to postpone love until a label is settled. Seek the church's discernment as you serve. Over time, others may help identify where your contribution is especially fruitful.

What if I have very little money or strength?

Service includes attention, prayer, encouragement, knowledge, hospitality, and practical help suited to your capacity. Someone with limited energy may offer a brief call or a carefully written note. Receiving help is also part of life in Christ's body. Your worth before God does not rise and fall with productivity.

Should I say yes to every request?

No. Faithfulness includes responsibilities, limits, and wise stewardship. The Samaritan arranged further care with another person. Ask whether you can help sustainably, share the task, or connect the neighbor with appropriate support. Saying no to one task need not mean refusing love; explain honestly and help appropriately where possible.

How can helping become patronizing?

It becomes patronizing when we ignore the person's voice, assume incompetence, publicize their hardship for our image, or expect gratitude on our terms. Ask permission, listen, protect privacy, and welcome mutual contribution. Ben's bread in the film quietly reminds us that relationships are larger than a single act of assistance.

Must service always be organized through the church?

No. Neighbor-love belongs at home, at work, and in the community as well as in organized ministries. The church can equip, coordinate, and sustain it. Formal roles sometimes require training and safeguards; ordinary care may begin with a conversation and a simple agreed offer of help.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Which answer helps a hesitant listener begin without making an unrealistic promise?
- What would a culture of mutual care look like six months after this sermon?

Closing Refrain: Make room for love in your calendar.

Become More Intentional About Sharing Your Faith

Vignette Connection: “The Conversation”

Andrew writes three names in his prayer journal. When coworker Chris faces uncertainty about his wife's health, Andrew listens and brings a meal. Chris eventually asks about his hope. Andrew speaks simply about Jesus' death for sins and resurrection, then offers to read a Gospel together. The film ends with an open conversation, not a manufactured conversion scene.

1. Introduction

The Pastoral Burden

Many Christians want others to know Jesus but feel trapped between silence and a performance they cannot imagine giving. They assume faithful witness requires an expert answer to every question, an outgoing personality, or the ability to produce an immediate decision. Scripture offers a more grounded pattern: prayer, wise conduct, gracious speech, and a clear explanation of hope in Christ.

Colossians 4:2–6 brings dependence and intentionality together. Paul asks the church to pray for an open door and clarity for the message. He then calls believers to wise conduct toward outsiders and gracious, fitting speech. Prayer does not replace speaking; speaking does not replace prayer. Both belong within a life that takes people seriously.

First Peter 3:13–16 places witness in the setting of suffering and possible hostility. Believers honor Christ as Lord and stand ready to explain their hope with gentleness and respect. The passage does not promise that good behavior will always earn approval. It calls for faithful witness whose manner agrees with its message.

The Gospel Connection

Christian hope must eventually name its object. First Corinthians 15:3–4 centers the gospel on Christ's death for sins, burial, and resurrection. A personal story of comfort can open a conversation, but it should lead to who Jesus is and what He has done. Invite hearers to turn from sin and trust Him, not merely adopt a positive outlook.

Opening Question & Video Bridge

Ask: “If a friend asked why you trust Jesus, what would you say in ordinary language?” After the film, say: “Andrew did not pretend to have no fear. He explained where his hope rests. Paul asks for that kind of clarity and calls the church to speak with grace.” Read Colossians 4:2–6.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- What fear most often keeps believers here silent?
- How will you distinguish a gospel explanation from a story about personal improvement?
- Where could the congregation offer genuine friendship without treating people as targets?
- What is a faithful outcome even when no immediate decision is visible?

Become More Intentional About Sharing Your Faith

2. Biblical History & Character Description

The Larger Claim of Colossians

Colossians presents the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, including His role in creation and reconciliation (1:15–20). The commands near the letter's end grow from life in Him. Witness is not an appendix detached from theology. The Christ proclaimed in the letter is the One believers are to make known through clear words and wise lives.

Paul: An Apostle Asking for Prayer

In Colossians 4:3, Paul mentions imprisonment and asks for an open door for the word and an opportunity to declare the mystery of Christ. In verse 4, he asks for clarity. The request is striking because even an apostle relies on prayer and recognizes the need to communicate well. The emphasis is on the advance of the message amid constraint.

The Praying Congregation — Colossians 4:2

Devotion, watchfulness, and thanksgiving characterize the church's prayer. Watchfulness is not a technique for forcing a conversation; it is alert dependence. The congregation participates in mission through prayer for messengers and through its own conduct toward people beyond the believing community.

Outsiders and Wise Conduct — Colossians 4:5–6

“Outsiders” identifies those beyond the church's fellowship; it is not permission to treat them as inferior. Wisdom includes attention to the actual person and circumstance. Speech seasoned with salt is fitting and engaging, not deliberately harsh. The aim of knowing how to answer each person resists a mechanical delivery indifferent to the listener.

Peter's Readers and Hope under Pressure

First Peter addresses Christians in Asia Minor living as sojourners and facing social pressure and suffering. First Peter 3:15 belongs within an appeal not to be ruled by fear. Honoring Christ as Lord grounds readiness to explain hope. Gentleness, respect, and a good conscience belong to the witness itself, not merely to a strategy for getting a hearing.

The Content of the Good News

First Corinthians 15:1–8 recalls the gospel Paul delivered: Christ died for sins, was buried, was raised, and appeared to witnesses. Christian witness rests on God's action in history. Keep the invitation equally clear: turn to Christ in repentance and faith, receiving forgiveness and life through Him. His resurrection is more than a symbol of optimism.

Andrew and Chris: A Limited Illustration

Their friendship illustrates prayer, listening, and a fitting explanation. Illness creates a context for honest conversation, not leverage. Continued kindness should not depend on Chris accepting an invitation. God's work cannot be reduced to Andrew's timing or measured by the film's ending.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- What does Paul's request for clarity teach a believer who feels inadequate?
- How does Peter's suffering context challenge promises of universally positive responses?

Become More Intentional About Sharing Your Faith

3. Suggested Sermon Outline

Proposed Sermon Title: A Door, a Name, a Conversation

Primary Text: Colossians 4:2–6

Supporting Texts: 1 Peter 3:13–16; 1 Corinthians 15:1–8

Big Idea: Depend on God for opportunities, love people wisely, and explain your hope in Jesus with clarity and grace.

I. Begin with Dependence, Not a Technique — Colossians 4:2–4

Exegesis: Paul calls for persevering, watchful, thankful prayer and asks specifically for a door for the word and clarity to speak. He does not present missionary fruit as the product of self-confidence. God's action and the messenger's responsibility belong together.

Practical / Theological Implication: Invite believers to name a few people before God and pray for their good, for an opportunity, and for truthful words. Do not turn a name list into a sales list. Andrew's journal should represent love for real people with lives beyond an evangelistic goal.

II. Let Wisdom Shape Your Presence — Colossians 4:5

Exegesis: Conduct toward those outside the church matters. Making good use of opportunity requires attention to time and context. The command assumes believers have real relationships in which their behavior is visible.

Practical / Theological Implication: Ask what it means to be a trustworthy coworker, attentive neighbor, or honest family member. Listen before presuming to answer. Kindness is good in itself and should continue whether or not a spiritual conversation follows. Service does not replace verbal witness, but it should agree with it.

III. Speak Clearly about Jesus — Colossians 4:3–4; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4

Exegesis: Paul wants to declare Christ clearly. The gospel he summarizes elsewhere concerns Christ's death for sins and resurrection, not merely the speaker's religious experience. A message can sound spiritual and still leave its hearer unsure what Christians believe.

Practical / Theological Implication: Model a plain explanation: God made us for Himself; sin separates us from Him; Jesus died for our sins and rose again; He calls us to turn and trust Him for forgiveness and new life. Explain unfamiliar terms and leave room for questions. Avoid promising that faith removes illness or uncertainty.

IV. Answer with Gentleness and Leave Room to Respond — Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15–16

Exegesis: Gracious speech is fitted to each person. Peter adds gentleness, respect, and a good conscience even under pressure. Readiness is therefore both doctrinal and moral: we need a true message and a manner appropriate to Christ.

Practical / Theological Implication: Invite a simple next step, such as reading Mark together, and accept an honest refusal. You may say, “I don't know; may I look into that?” End by calling unbelieving listeners to Christ and believers to faithful witness whose outcome rests with God.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Can a visitor understand your gospel explanation without church vocabulary?
- Does your invitation allow an honest question or refusal without withdrawing care?
- How will you honor faithfulness without claiming control over another person's conversion?

Become More Intentional About Sharing Your Faith

4. Comprehensive External Study References

Dick Lucas · *The Message of Colossians & Philemon*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Primary exposition: Study Colossians 4:2–6 within the letter's presentation of Christ. Note the relationship among prayer, opportunity, clarity, conduct, and conversation.

Edmund P. Clowney · *The Message of 1 Peter*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Supporting passage: Consult 1 Peter 3:13–16 in its setting of suffering. Ask how Christ's lordship shapes both courage and gentleness.

J. Mack Stiles · *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus*. Crossway. Publisher / source ↗
Church practice: Consider the book's emphasis on a congregation that speaks of Jesus together. Use it to plan ongoing support beyond a one-week challenge.

Craig S. Keener · *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Second edition; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Cultural context: Read the relevant notes on Colossians 4 and 1 Peter 3. Let context sharpen the exposition without substituting for the passages' plain commands.

Bruce Milne · *The Message of John*. The Bible Speaks Today; IVP. Publisher / source ↗
Gospel-reading follow-up: Consult the treatment of John 20:30–31 and selected encounters with Jesus. Prepare to help a new reader ask what the Gospel reveals about His identity.

5. Suggested Call to Action

This Week: Pray for Three, Attend to One

Invite listeners to write three names privately and pray daily for those people. During the week, take one genuine relational step with one person: ask a thoughtful question, offer appropriate help, or make time for conversation. The aim is attentive love, not forcing a spiritual opening on a deadline.

Prepare a brief explanation of the gospel and a short account of why you trust Christ. Say both aloud to a Christian friend, who can ask whether Jesus' death and resurrection are clear and whether unfamiliar terms need explaining. A testimony should serve the gospel rather than replace it.

Offer a Next Conversation

When appropriate, ask permission: “Would you like to hear why my faith matters to me?” If the person is interested, offer to read a short passage from Mark or John together. Ask what they notice and what questions they have. If they decline, respect the answer and continue the friendship without pressure.

Encourage the church to provide a welcoming reading group or a mature believer available for questions. Review the practice the following week by asking what was learned, whom to keep praying for, and what support is needed. Do not rank people by reported decisions or conversations.

Suggested Prayer: “Lord Jesus, help me love the people whose names I carry. Open doors for Your word, give me clarity and courage, and make my speech gentle and truthful. I entrust the outcome to You.”

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- Can listeners explain the gospel clearly before being asked to share it?
- What practical follow-up can you offer someone who wants to explore faith?
- How will you prevent urgency from becoming pressure or friendship from becoming conditional?

Become More Intentional About Sharing Your Faith

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Must I know the answer to every question before speaking?

No. Know the central gospel and speak honestly about what you understand. It is appropriate to say, “I don't know; may I look into that?” Seek reliable help and return to the question. Pretending certainty can damage trust. Readiness includes humility as well as preparation.

Is a kind life enough without words?

Kindness matters deeply, but by itself it cannot explain who Jesus is, why He died, or what His resurrection means. Colossians includes conduct and speech. Look for an appropriate opportunity to connect your hope explicitly to Christ, while refusing to make kindness contingent on a hearing.

What if I am naturally quiet or anxious?

Faithful witness does not require becoming a different personality. A thoughtful question, a brief explanation, an invitation to read Scripture, or a written response may fit your strengths. Pray for courage and prepare with another believer. The goal is truthful, loving faithfulness, not imitation of the most outgoing person in church.

Should I use someone's crisis as the opening?

Offer care first because the person matters. If they ask about your hope or welcome a spiritual conversation, answer honestly. Ask permission rather than exploiting fear or vulnerability. Do not imply that conversion guarantees healing or a preferred outcome. Christian hope can be explained without using distress as leverage.

What if the person rejects the message?

Respect the response, remain kind, and avoid turning the exchange into a contest. Where continued conversation is unwelcome, stop pressing. Keep praying and entrust the person to God. Scripture calls for faithfulness; it does not promise that every gracious explanation will receive immediate agreement.

How much gospel content belongs in a short conversation?

Enough to identify Jesus and the good news rather than merely offer religious reassurance. Explain His death for sins and resurrection, our need for forgiveness, and His call to repentance and faith. A short conversation may begin a longer exchange. Listen for confusion and clarify rather than rushing through a formula.

How do we assess whether this week's response was fruitful?

Look for growth in prayer, love, clarity, courage, and respectful speech. Welcome professions of faith with careful follow-up and connection to the church. Do not treat a numerical report as a complete measure of God's work. Some faithful conversations bear visible fruit much later; others remain unfinished.

SERMON PREP PROMPTS

- What fear can you answer with a clear biblical encouragement rather than a success story?
- How will your church keep supporting witness after the series ends?

Closing Refrain: Pray faithfully. Listen carefully. Speak of Jesus.