

## CHAPTER 17

### Overview of Luke 17

In chapter 17, Jesus' teaching abruptly changes from correction of the Pharisees to warnings and preparations for the disciples. The transition takes place during the teaching on "stumbling blocks." Jesus will instruct His disciples to be on guard against them, and when it comes to how they are to treat one another, there is no substitute for forgiveness. As Jesus is going on His way, He encounters some lepers. He heals all ten of them, but only one returns to give thanks. The leper will receive a special word from Jesus regarding his acknowledgement of Jesus' mercy and love. Soon after, the Pharisees will begin questioning Jesus about the kingdom of God. Jesus will give them a surprising answer, and then begin introducing the disciples to the concept of one Messiah, two comings. This will be followed by strict warnings on readiness and preparedness, and what disciples must always be watching for.

### What to look for in Luke 17

1. As you read each paragraph ask, "How is God speaking to me personally through His word?"
2. Look for the kind of "stumbling blocks" that Jesus' disciples can encounter, and how that relates to the church.
3. Determine how Jesus expects His disciples to respond to stumbling blocks that come from other disciples.
4. In this chapter, Jesus will heal ten lepers. Look for the irony in the response of those who are healed.
5. See if you can determine the relationship between being a leper and being ceremonially unclean?
6. Look for the critical answer Jesus gives the Pharisees regarding their question about the kingdom of God.
7. Look for the key theme in Jesus' teaching about His "second coming."

**1** He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come!"

**2** "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.

**17:1-2** Completing His admonishment of the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus now turns His attention to the disciples. Jesus begins by warning them against the teachings of the Pharisees, particularly as it pertains to the law. However, He is also preparing all of His disciples for the far future, both from persecutions and heresies to come, and from others within the future church itself. This latter principle is elaborated on by Matthew in chapter 18.

Jesus opens His teaching by warning His disciples about "stumbling blocks." The Greek word is *skandalon* from which we get our English words "scandal" and "scandalous." It is also translated "offenses," "snares," "traps," "temptations to sin," and "things that cause us to stumble" in various translations. Literally, the word refers to a rock in someone's path that cannot be seen, thus causing one to stumble or suffer injury. In the context of the New Testament, it refers to anything that impedes a Christian's spiritual growth or negatively impacts their faith. It may not *always* be temptation to sin, but could be. A stumbling block may also involve false teaching, gossip, unjust accusations, or non-Christian

attitudes or behavior. The apostle Paul warned Christians not to be stumbling blocks to the faith of other Christians (Rom.14:13; 1 Cor. 8:9). The cross became a stumbling block to Jews (1 Cor. 2:3).

The problem of becoming a stumbling block to the faith of others is that there is a price to pay spiritually. The “woe” directed toward those who cause others to stumble is no less a woe than those directed toward the Pharisees and scribes (Luke 11:42-52). Woe is synonymous with judgment. It implies discipline handed out by God Himself. The analogy Jesus gives is that of a millstone; that is, a large round stone used for grinding wheat or barley in a circular mill. The stone was heavy enough that a beast of burden was required to pull it. The picture is quite vivid: someone thrown into the ocean with a millstone around their neck is going to sink and drown. Such “descent” into deep, dark water with no hope of return is a picture of pure judgment with eternal consequences.

The “little ones” in **verse 2** does not refer just to young children, but to any of God’s children.

What would cause someone to place a stumbling block before another? The answer is quite simple: a failure to show biblical love to that person. The person who demonstrates biblical love will not place a stumbling block before one of God’s children. He will not tempt him, he will not lead him astray regarding biblical truth, and he will not offend him or sin against him. He will do that which contributes toward another Christian’s spiritual growth, and not do anything that impedes his faith. To love is to want what is best for another person in the same manner as the Father in heaven wants what is best for His children. The mature Christian will recognize this and therefore never become a stumbling block to another child of God. However, as we learn in verses 3-4, impediments to spiritual growth will inevitably come our way, whether intentional or unintentional, whether at the hands of a false teacher, a sinner, or another well-meaning Christian. Verses 3-4 teach the believer what to do about that.

3 “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

4 “And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

**17:3-4** The phrase “Be on your guard!” means to stand ready for an attack. Why? Because “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come.” The instruction is to be alert, be diligent, be observant and scan the horizon for attacks by the enemy. In this context, the enemy may be your friend, or more specifically, your “brother.” Once again, this instruction to the disciples will be greatly elaborated on by Matthew in which Jesus’ instruction includes a parable.

The statement “If your brother sins...” is an interesting grammatical construction in the Greek. It is a third-class condition of probable future, and

could be translated, “If your brother sins...*and he probably will...*” The implication is that even if one is a Christian, he is still human, and therefore he *will* sin. He will not only sin, but he may sin against *you*. So, how does the Christian respond? He is first to confront him with the error of his ways. The sense of the Greek word “rebuke” is not as harsh as it appears in the English. He is “to set him straight”; that is, to confront the brother in a loving way about his sin and let him know in clear and certain terms that his behavior is not acceptable. The apostle Paul’s instruction to admonish others by “speaking the truth in love” would be a good application here (Eph. 4:15).

The second part of the equation, “and if he repents, forgive him,” is also a conditional statement: “*If* he repents, *then* forgive him.” To “forgive” means “to let go,” “to let loose” and “be done with it.” That is, once the brother has repented—expressed genuine sorrow and amended his ways—then move on and get past it. Do not let the sin fester or continue to hold a grudge against the brother. Note, too, that the conditional statement implies that if the brother does *not* repent, then he is not able to receive the benefit of the forgiveness offered. Whereas a Christian should always be ready to forgive, repentance is completely up to the brother who has sinned. It is therefore a picture of God the Father: He always offers forgiveness for sins, but a person cannot receive the benefit of that forgiveness without repentance.

**Verse 4** carries the instruction one step further: *always be offering forgiveness to your brother.* “Seven times” represents the perfect number and is a symbol of infinity. Once again, Matthew will provide much more detail in chapter 18 of his gospel.

The basis for all forgiveness is love. Love dictates that the follower of Jesus Christ is a forgiving person. Forgiveness is perhaps one of the greatest expressions of biblical love. So the lesson here is clear: biblical love dictates that a follower of Jesus Christ must live in a constant state of forgiving others. Why? Because the follower of Jesus Christ lives in a constant state of having been forgiven himself by God. As we have been completely forgiven of all our sins, so we are to completely forgive all those who sin against us. And, as Matthew will inform us in chapter 18, there are serious consequences for the Christian who refuses to do so.

**5** The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

**6** And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.

**17:5-10** The apostles’ request to “Increase our faith!” is in response to the preceding verse. The rabbis taught that a person only had to forgive someone three times; that is, three strikes, you’re out! Once you had forgiven someone three times, you didn’t have to forgive them any more no matter how sorry or repentant they were. But Jesus is instructing His

7 “Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’?”

8 “But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink’?”

9 “He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?”

10 “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.’ ”

disciples to be *always* forgiving which, to the apostles, seems like an impossible task. Therefore, the outburst to increase their ability to believe.

In **verses 6-10**, Jesus gently corrects the apostles’ request. He is saying, “It’s not a matter of faith...it’s a matter of obedience.” Faith, therefore, is not the issue. A mustard seed doesn’t request more faith to do what it does...it just does it because of what it is. The apostles are to do it (forgive) because of who they are. Just as the mustard seed has all the right DNA to grow into a great plant, the apostles have all the spiritual DNA they need to be constantly forgiving of others. Jesus then takes the analogy a step further. If they had that kind of faith, they could say to a tree, “Be uprooted and be planted in the sea, and it would obey you.” The key word here is “obey.” The mulberry tree would “obey” because of the one giving the order. The apostles should obey because of the One giving the order.

There is one other interesting twist to Jesus’ analogy. The mulberry tree referred to here is the sycamine, or black mulberry tree. Related to the fig tree, it is known for its delicious fruit. The “sea” almost always refers to the nations; that is, the Gentiles. By using this analogy, Jesus is instructing His disciples that their faith will bring spiritual fruit even to the Gentiles. It is far too early in the apostles’ development for them to comprehend the magnitude of Jesus’ teaching, but one day they will. The gospel of the cross is a gospel of forgiveness, God’s forgiveness of man’s sins, and Christians’ forgiveness of others.

One last note on verse 6. It goes without saying that there is no record that the apostles ever actually tried to uproot a tree and cast it into the sea. They clearly understood that Jesus’ statement was an illustration on obedience, not faith.

**Verses 7-10** takes the instruction on forgiveness a step further. Followers of Jesus Christ should not expect special consideration or thanks for simply doing what they are instructed to do. There is no special reward in heaven for being a forgiving person. The reward has already been received...*God’s* forgiveness. Therefore, followers of Jesus Christ forgive *because they have been forgiven*. Forgiving others does not make one more spiritual; forgiving others is what Christians do because of who they are.

So, follow the key words in these verses to see the relationship to forgiving others: “obey” (v. 6); “prepare” (imperative mood, a command; v. 8); “commanded” (vv. 9 & 10); “that which we ought to have done” (v. 10).

Lastly, note how the slaves refer to themselves—“unworthy.” The beauty of being forgiven is that it is *not deserved*. The Christian does not deserve, and has not earned the right, to be

**11** While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee.

**12** As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him;

**13** and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

**14** When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed.

**15** Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice,

**16** and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.

**17** Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they?”

**18** “Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?”

**19** And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”

forgiven by God the Father for all the sins that have been committed against Him. Therefore, Christians should not expect special consideration by forgiving others, for they, too, may not deserve to be forgiven. The follower of Jesus Christ forgives anyway.

**17:11-19** This is the third and last occasion when Luke states that Jesus is on a mission toward Jerusalem (see 9:51 and 13:22). His journey takes Him out of the region of Galilee and close to the region of Samaria. He and His disciples could very well have been in the Jordan Valley where there is plenty of water, although this is not certain. On His way, He enters an unnamed village where He encounters ten lepers. This incident, recorded by Luke in this particular place in the text, will point to the benefits of obedience.

There are ten lepers waiting for Jesus to arrive. By law, they were required to remain at a distance from others because they were ceremonially and physically unclean, a law described in Leviticus 14. Leprosy is, in fact, not actually that contagious, being transmitted through water droplets. By Jewish law, lepers were required to shout “Unclean!” whenever they were near people, as a way of warning others to stay away. Being unclean, they were prohibited from entering synagogues or the temple in Jerusalem. Lepers were cast out of communities and required to live in colonies outside the village, having no contact with anyone other than other lepers. In Jewish culture, leprosy was equated with sin and, based on Miriam’s experience in her murmuring against Moses (Num. 12:10), lepers were considered under God’s judgment. From a Jewish perspective, lepers were isolated from God Himself.

In biblical times, the pure form of leprosy (aka Hansen’s Disease) was the result of a specific bacterial infection (*Mycobacterium leprae*). Leprosy is a progressive disease that does not heal on its own. Lepers often lose fingers or toes because the bacteria affect peripheral nerves, thereby robbing the extremities of sensation, even pain. Therefore, a leper may not know that he is stepping on a burning coal or grabbing a hot cooking utensil. Interestingly enough, 95% of the world’s population has a natural immunity to leprosy.

But looking under a microscope for rod shaped, acid-fast bacterium was not an option in biblical times. Therefore, other skin diseases, such as psoriasis, neurofibromatosis, and granulomatosis were placed in the same category as leprosy. Some of these disease experienced spontaneous remission and therefore someone could show themselves to the priest and be declared clean.

Seeing Jesus, the lepers “raised their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’” The

theology of the moment cannot be overlooked. Those infected with “sin” call out to Jesus asking for mercy. This is a beautiful picture of salvation. It is through Christ alone that sins are forgiven and the soul is cleansed. However, there is a caveat to this scene. Jesus doesn’t immediately heal the lepers! Instead, He gives them a *command*. Jesus instructs the lepers to obey Levitical law and present themselves to the priests to be *pronounced* clean. By doing so, Jesus is validating Mosaic law and putting the lepers in a position where they can officially be recognized as acceptable for temple worship. “*And as they were going, they were cleansed.*” Note, too, that Luke interchanges the use of the words “cleansed” (v. 14) with “healed” (v. 15).

As pointed out above, notice that the cleansing did not occur until the lepers obeyed Jesus’ command. This scene fits in perfectly with the command to forgive in verses 5-11. The clear implication is that those who fail to forgive are no better off than a leper, and their sins remain unforgiven (cf. 11:4). This is not to say that in order for God to forgive us our sins, we must first forgive others. The lesson is that because our sins have been forgiven, God expects His children to forgive others as well, and the consequences for not doing so are as grave as leprosy.

The final irony of this event takes place in **verses 15-19**. All ten lepers realized they had been cleansed, but only one of them, a Samaritan, turned around, glorified God, fell on his face at the feet of Jesus, and gave Him thanks. The implication is that the other nine lepers were Jews, but the Samaritan had no Jewish priest to go to...he only had Jesus. This is a picture of Israel accepting God’s blessings but failing to fall “at His feet” and worship Jesus as the Messiah. Who did? The lowest of the lowest—a Samaritan leper.

Jesus’ response to the Samaritan leper focuses on his faith: “...your faith has made you well.” The word for “well” is *sozo* in the Greek, meaning “saved.” The tense of the verb “has made” is the perfect tense, meaning that the faith the leper demonstrated not only healed and cleansed him, but his faith carried over into the present and the future. In other words, whereas the other nine lepers had a healing that would last a lifetime, the Samaritan leper had a healing that would last an eternity...he was saved through faith.

The love lesson in this event is this: God offers His love to everyone. Many people are more than happy to receive His blessings, but only a few return His love by falling at the feet of Jesus. As the apostle John wrote, “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as

**20** Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed;

21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here *it is!*’ or, ‘There *it is!*’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God...” (Jn. 1:11-12).

**17:20-21** What appears to be an abrupt change of subject by Luke is actually a segue between the healing of the Samaritan leper and the kingdom of God. This subject change is prompted by a question that the Pharisees had asked Jesus: “When is the kingdom of God coming?” To understand their question and Jesus’ response, the reader must understand what the Pharisees were envisioning when they asked the question.

The Pharisees envisioned the kingdom of God to be the sovereign rule of God over the world, similar to the way King Solomon was ruler of the world. The kingdom of God would be the antithesis to the kingdom of Rome. The Messiah would literally be king, the monarch, and all the world, His subjects. Jews, of course, would exist closest to the king, and all Gentiles would be subject to the king as proselytes. The urgency of the Pharisees’ question stemmed from the Jews being under Roman domination. Therefore, foremost on the minds of the Pharisees was that the Messiah would come in power and glory, overthrow the Roman Empire, and set up Jerusalem as the capitol of the world. The Jews, of course, would be the ruling class.

Jesus responds to the Pharisees’ question by declaring that “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed....” What is interesting about the Pharisees’ question and Jesus’ response is that *none of the dialogue is directed toward the future*. Except for “having been questioned,” all verbs are present tense. Here is what the Pharisees are actually asking: “If you are the Messiah, then where’s your kingdom? Show us a sign.” More simply, “Okay, if you’re the Messiah, when do you plan on setting up your kingdom?” Jesus’ response is also directed toward the present, and could be rendered, “The kingdom of God is coming right now! It is already here! But it is not coming with signs that you can observe. It is not a place you can walk to, nor is it a earthly object you can observe.” He then finishes His answer with, “Look! The kingdom of God is in your very midst!” meaning, “It’s happening right in front of you...can’t you see it?”

(Note: There are two ways to translate the Greek words “in your midst”: “in your midst” (NASB) or “within you” (NKJV). The more literal rendering is “within you,” meaning that the kingdom of God is not an external realm, but a spiritual state of being that exists within your heart. Many modern translators prefer “in your midst” with the idea that (1) Jesus Himself is the personification of the kingdom of God and is standing right in front of them, or (2) the kingdom of God is happening in your midst, through

**22** And He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.

**23** “They will say to you, ‘Look there! Look here!’ Do not go away, and do not run after *them*.

**24** “For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day.

such things as miracles and the healing of lepers. The reader can enjoy either translation and interpretation, and still appreciate the irony of the question, which only points out the blindness of Israel’s spiritual leaders.)

Lastly, **verse 21** sums up “the kingdom of God” as Luke wants the reader to understand it: the kingdom of God is not a realm...it is the new relationship to God through Christ that brings redemption and eternal life. Up to this verse, Luke has used the phrase “kingdom of God” 25 times, and he will use it another 17 times before the end of his gospel. His placement of the Pharisees’ question here points out the irony: Jesus just brought the kingdom of God into the life of a Samaritan leper; He healed him physically and saved him spiritually. *That* is the kingdom of God that the blind Pharisees just can’t grasp.

**17:22-37** The remainder of chapter 17 directs the reader specifically toward the end times, and this is why the preceding verses can be confusing. Luke’s thought here is, “Since you asked....” Notice that Jesus’ description of the end times is not directed toward the Pharisees (it is not even certain they were present, based on the Greek phrasing of verse 20), but toward the disciples.

But here is the main point: the kingdom of God *is not the same* as the appearance of the Son of Man. They are not even two separate events, for the kingdom of God is what abides within the heart of a person, made possible only through Jesus Christ. The appearance of the Son of Man to set up His kingdom on earth *is* an event that will only happen sometime in the future, and only after another event—the crucifixion of the Messiah—has taken place.

The study of eschatological events (the end times) has very little to say about love, yet it has everything to do with love. The events described in verses 22-37 represent a transition between the time when “most people’s love will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12), and the time “They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.... Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war” (Isa. 2:4).

**Verse 22** serves as the introduction to the appearance of the Son of Man in glory, clearly delineated by use of the future tense: “The days will come....” Jesus now transitions from the true meaning of the kingdom of God to the future kingdom when He will indeed reign upon the earth. But the description is not something the disciples are excited to hear: the days before He establishes His kingdom will be horrible, as Matthew describes in vivid detail in chapters 24 and 25. Things will be so bad on the earth that disciples of Jesus will long for

25 “But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

26 “And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:

27 they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

28 “It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building;

29 but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

30 “It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

31 “On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and

His physical presence, but they will not find Him. Deceived by false hope and baseless expectations, many false prophets and false teachers will mislead the masses. Jesus’ warning to His disciples is clear: don’t believe it for a minute. The coming of the Son of Man will not be a prolonged event that gives people time to prepare and seek Him out. His coming will be as swift and unpredictable as a flash of lightning, and when it strikes, it will be thunderous and it will light up the entire earth.

Before that happens, however, something else must take place: the Son of Man must suffer (**verse 25**). Here is the point that the Jewish nation has never understood: there will be one Messiah, but two “comings.” Based on the Father’s love, the second coming could only occur if the first coming has taken place. Whereas the second coming would fulfill Jewish hopes and expectations for a reigning Messiah, the first coming brings hope *to the world*. The Jews were and have been unable to grasp this because their primary concern is for themselves, not the *world*. But “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” at the first coming so that, through the Messiah, “the world might be saved.” Knowing the suffering the cross would bring, the first coming was the supreme act of love both by the Father and by the Son. The Jewish nation was unable to recognize this because they failed to love Gentiles and they failed to love sinners. And because of this—their failure to recognize God’s act of love when it was presented—they remain blinded with hardened hearts to this day (John 12:40; Rom 11:25).

Beginning in **verse 26**, Jesus now goes into detail about His second coming. That this section refers to the second coming is designated by the phrase “the days of the Son of Man,” which is essentially equivalent to “the day of the Lord” found many times in the Old Testament prophets.

The key thought in **verses 26 through 30** is that everyday life will be going on as usual. The Second Coming will occur at a time that no one expects and no one is watching for it. The references to Noah and to Lot indicate that it will be a day of judgment upon a corrupt and sinful world (cf. Gen. 6:5-11; 18:20). Unlike the first coming that offered God’s love to the world, the second coming will only offer God’s wrath on all unrighteousness. Both good and bad people will be caught up in the judgment upon the world. The nature of the judgment will be utter destruction.

**Verses 31-36** become problematic in interpretation. In terms of timing and who exactly Jesus is referring to, the interpretation depends on one’s view of the events surrounding the second coming. Some believe that the phrase “one will be taken” refers to those who will be judged and destroyed, while others take the view that the phrase

likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back.

32 “Remember Lot’s wife.

33 “Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it.

34 “I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left.

35 “There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left.

36 [“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.”]

37 And answering they said to Him, “Where, Lord?” And He said to them, “Where the body *is*, there also the vultures will be gathered.”

refers to those who are “raptured.” Still others do not believe this passage refers to the second coming at all, but to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. This author prefers not to take a position but to rely simply upon the principle lesson of the passage: at all times, even on ordinary, non-eventful days, be ready. The lesson this passage is teaching is one of preparation and readiness. A good analogy is found in those who live in earthquake zones. In spite of all the efforts of scientists, no one can accurately predict when the next earthquake is coming. Therefore, those who live in earthquake country must always be prepared so that when the earth starts shaking, it comes as no great surprise or threat.

Yet, there is an important question for the disciple of Jesus Christ: just how does one prepare? The answer is found in **verse 33**. Those who are busy taking care of their own interests, wrapped up in their own pleasures, enamored by the things of the world and adopting its values, will not be prepared. This verse harkens right back to passages like Luke 12:21, 14:33, and 16:13. (The reader of this commentary is highly encouraged to refresh one’s memory by looking these passages up!) The point is this: at all times, the disciple of Jesus Christ must be focused on the kingdom of God, and the main way to do that is by showing biblical love to all others. To be ready means to “love your neighbor as yourself.” To be ready means to “love one another” just as Jesus has loved us. To be ready means to be always forgiving, always offering grace, always giving of oneself to help “the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.” To be ready means to be “rich toward God” and not store up treasures for oneself. To be ready means to be involved in the ongoing work of the Spirit, in whatever form that might take, be it in the family, in the church, in missions, or in the workplace. To be ready means to walk in the Spirit, be led by the Spirit and to always be manifesting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-23). The disciple who is ready is the disciple who loves with the same love as God who so loved the world (John 3:16). The disciple who is ready is the disciple who denies himself, takes up his cross daily and follows Jesus (Luke 9:23).

Finally, it is interesting to note in **verse 37** that the disciples do not ask Jesus “When, Lord?” as the Pharisees had done in verse 20. The question, “Where, Lord?” refers back to Jesus’ answer in verse 21: “the kingdom of God is in your midst” (or, “within you”). This writer believes that Jesus’ answer in verse 37 has nothing to do with the end times. It has everything to do with Jesus and the disciples. This is easy to understand if we interpret the “vultures” to be the Pharisees. Vultures are scavengers and they prey, not only on dead things, but on helpless things. The sense here is that the Pharisees are gathering,

looking for a weakness, looking for an opening to devour Jesus and His followers. This interpretation fits whether one translates verse 21 as “in your midst” or “within you,” for either one refers to the kingdom of God that, in effect, the Pharisees are bent on destroying. Therefore, verse 37 could be interpreted to read, “Where the kingdom of God resides, the Pharisees are gathering to destroy.” And, because the kingdom of God is based on God’s love, those who are incapable of love will do anything they can to devour it.

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## Questions for Your Personal or Group Reflection

1. In this chapter, Jesus provides teaching on “stumbling blocks.” What are stumbling blocks? From where do stumbling blocks come? How is the Christian to handle stumbling blocks that come from other Christians? How often are Christians supposed to forgive one another?
2. How does Jesus respond to the disciples’ request to “Increase our faith”? Why do you suppose the disciples made that request in the first place? Regarding the mulberry tree illustration, was there ever a time in Scripture when a disciple tried to send one into the sea? Therefore, what was the point of the illustration?
3. Recount the incident of the ten lepers. Why were lepers considered unclean, and how were they to behave around others? At what time in their encounter with Jesus did they experience healing? What does that tell you about obeying Jesus?
4. Of the lepers that were healed, how many of them turned back to give thanks to Jesus? What was unusual about the one who turned back, and why did he receive a special blessing? Is there a difference between healing and being saved?
5. In this chapter, Jesus gives a specific answer the Pharisees’ question about when to expect the kingdom of God to come. What was Jesus’ response, and how does His response apply to *you*? Can you define the kingdom of God? Is the kingdom of God in you, or in your midst?
6. What is the main theme in Jesus teachings about His second coming? Ask yourself, “Am I ready?”
7. Can you see the kingdom of God? (The answer is “Yes!”) How do you see it, and what does it look like? Give at least 3 illustrations that you’ve seen in other people, and then give three experiences in which you have manifested the kingdom of God to others.

**The Disciplex's Commentary**  
Fill-in Outline for the Disciple  
Luke 17

Chapter 17 covers various teachings by Jesus while “on the way to Jerusalem” (v. 11). This is the third and final time Luke mentions Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. Though there are many illustrations in chapter 17, there are no parables. The transition from the end of chapter 16 to the beginning of chapter 17 is based on relationships; that is, how we treat others. In chapter 16, relationships focused on how we treat the poor. In chapter 17, relationships focus on how we treat \_\_\_\_\_ .

17:1-2 – Jesus’ teaching on \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson: Temptations to sin or be led astray are \_\_\_\_\_

17:3-4 – Jesus’ teaching on \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson: One of the ways we Christians are identified is by our willingness to \_\_\_\_\_

17:5-10 – Jesus’ teaching on \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson: One of the characteristics of Christians is that living by faith is \_\_\_\_\_

17:11-19 – Jesus’ encounter with the \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson: There is a difference between being healed and being \_\_\_\_\_

17:20-21 – Jesus’ teaching on \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson: Don’t go looking for the kingdom of God in any other place than \_\_\_\_\_

17:22-36 – Jesus’ teaching on \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson: The key to determining when the second coming will occur is \_\_\_\_\_

17:37 – Jesus’ warning about \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson: Wherever the people of the kingdom gather, expect there will be \_\_\_\_\_

**The Discipler's Commentary**  
Answer Outline for the Discipler  
Luke 17

Chapter 17 covers various teachings by Jesus while “on the way to Jerusalem” (v. 11). This is the third and final time Luke mentions Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. Though there are many illustrations in chapter 17, there are no parables. The transition from the end of chapter 16 to the beginning of chapter 17 is based on relationships; that is, how we treat others. In chapter 16, relationships focused on how we treat the poor. In chapter 17, relationships focus on how we treat one another.

17:1-2 – Jesus’ teaching on stumbling blocks.

- *The discipler will want to explain to the disciple the meaning of the words “stumbling blocks” and “millstones.”*
- *Explain that stumbling blocks can come in many forms: temptation to sin, false teachings, enticement by the world, et cetera, and can come from many directions, even other Christians.*
- *Ensure that the judgment in verse 1 (“woe”) is directed, not toward those who fall due to stumbling blocks, but those who create the stumbling blocks in whatever form they may take.*

Lesson: Temptations to sin or be led astray are inevitable.

- *Explain to the disciple that running into stumbling blocks is inevitable and unavoidable.*
- *Explain that stumbling blocks can even come through well-meaning or misled Christians.*

17:3-4 – Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness.

- *This is a very important section of Scripture for the disciple to understand and apply personally.*
- *It may be helpful for the discipler to have the disciple read the parallel passage in Matthew 18:21-35 to help see the spiritual consequences for failure to forgive one’s brother.*
- *It may also be helpful to read the other parallel passage in Matthew 18:15-20 regarding the word “rebuke.” The disciple will need to know that the word means something slightly different in Greek than it does in English.*
- *Ask the disciple if there is ever a time that one’s brother should not or cannot be offered forgiveness. (The answer is no.)*
- *Ensure that the disciple understands the meaning of the word “to forgive” in Greek.*
- *Ask the disciple if there is anyone in his or her life that needs to be forgiven. (Note: the discipler cannot appropriately teach this lesson unless he or she has also been continually offering forgiveness to others. This point may require some personal introspection.)*

Lesson: One of the ways we Christians are identified is by our willingness to forgive.

- *Ask the disciple why the act of forgiveness is so important to God.*
- *Ask the disciple why all Christians should be identified by their willingness to forgive.*

17:5-10 – Jesus’ teaching on faith.

- *Show the disciple how this next section of Jesus’ teaching relates back to the subject of forgiveness.*
- *Ensure that the disciple understands that the faith referred to here is actually a statement on obedience to offer forgiveness.*
- *Ask the disciple if there is anywhere in the NT where an apostle tried by faith to uproot a mulberry tree and throw it into the sea! The symbolism of the tree and the sea will need to be explained.*
- *Show how Jesus’ next teaching on thanking the slave relates, not to faith, but to obedience.*
- *Make sure that the disciple understands that it is not the quantity of the faith that is the subject here, but the quality of the obedience.*

## Luke 17

Lesson: One of the characteristics of Christians is that living by faith is what we do.

- *See if the disciple can determine the relationship between the sweet fruit of the mulberry tree and the image of the sea. (I.e., the gospel going to the Gentiles.)*
- *See if the disciple can adequately describe what it means to live by faith, and how that relates to forgiveness.*

17:11-19 – Jesus’ encounter with the ten lepers.

- *The disciple may need to know that nature of the disease called leprosy and why it causes so much disfigurement.*
- *The disciple will certainly need to know how having leprosy affected a person’s spiritual life and access to the temple.*
- *See if the disciple can find the relationship between the fact that one of the lepers was a Samaritan (considered an unclean person) and being the only one who returned to Jesus to give thanks.*

Lesson: There is a difference between being healed and being saved.

- *Ask the disciple the difference between being “healed” and being “saved.”*
- *See if the disciple can find the love messages in the first 19 verses, especially the last story about the lepers. How does love play a role in the life of the true disciple, and how is that illustrated in the first 19 verses.*

17:20-21 – Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom of God.

- *The discipler will need to explain the Jewish leaders’ concept of the “kingdom of God,” as to what they were expecting, and what they were really asking Jesus.*
- *Let the disciple determine what the meaning of “in your midst” means. (Note: there are two views here.)*

Lesson: Don’t go looking for the kingdom of God in any other place than in yourself.

- *See if the disciple can come to the conclusion “where” the kingdom of God is. The disciple should walk away with the understanding that the kingdom of God today is within himself (herself).*

17:22-36 – Jesus’ teaching on the (His) Second Coming.

- *Make sure the disciple understands the concept of “one Messiah, two comings.” This can be readily seen in verse 25 with the words, “But first....”*

Lesson: The key to determining when the second coming will occur is to live like it’s happening today.

- *Make sure the disciple understands the main theme of verses 26-36 in terms of “readiness.”*
- *Ask the disciple how he or she is becoming “ready.” Make sure that the emphasis is on relationships.*

17:37 – Jesus’ warning about false teachers.

- *The disciple will want to discover the relationship between “vultures” and false teachers.*

Lesson: Wherever the people of the kingdom gather, expect there will be predators (scavengers).

- *The discipler will want to have at the ready some examples of false teachers and false prophets who are at work today. There are many, many examples that can be gleaned from Christian apologetic websites. The goal here is to ensure that the disciple does not fall prey to these “vultures.”*