

Study Guide
Series: The Gospel of the Nobodies
“Prodigals and Prostitutes”

Monday - Luke 12:1-34

In Luke 12, tension between the *status quo* and God’s kingdom was building. Jesus did two main things: 1) warned his disciples about enemies, and 2) reminded them that God knows and cares about every part of our lives. He challenged his followers, then and now, to avoid a casual, half-hearted faith. How wholehearted is your faith? What does it look like in your life today to follow Jesus whole-heartedly and passionately? In verse 34, Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” True security and satisfaction, he taught, came from seeking God first, not from externals like food, clothing or material possessions. How does Jesus’ teaching challenge the ways you think and act about how much security and satisfaction “stuff” can bring you?

Tuesday - Luke 12:35-13:9

Jesus’ words about bringing division rather than peace (12:51-53) may strike us as odd. Isn’t Jesus “the prince of peace”? Yes—but his kingdom’s principles (including peace) were so unlike the world’s, that he knew, at times division would follow. Have family members, friends or co-workers ever misunderstood or criticized choices you’ve made based on your loyalty to God? Jesus told, what we could call “The Unfinished Parable” (13:6-9). The gardener pleaded for one more year to help the tree bear good fruit—but Jesus never said whether the tree did or didn’t bear fruit. Verse 13:5 showed what kind of “fruit-bearing” was really on his mind. So what about you--how will you finish Jesus’ unfinished parable in your life?

Wednesday - Luke 13:10-13:35

Someone asked a theoretical question: ““Lord, will only a few be saved?”” (verse 23) Jesus’ answer was completely personal. *The Message* rendered it as “Whether few or many is none of your business. Put your mind on your life with God. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires your total attention.” Are you ever tempted to let abstract religious questions distract you from a focus on your own relationship with God? What spiritual practices most help you keep things personal with God? Still making his way to Jerusalem (verse 22), he mourned over a spirit that loved rules above people. One commentary called verses 31-35 “Lament of the Rejected Lover.” Verses 33-35 were the first of four laments Jesus spoke for Jerusalem. (The others are in 19:41-44, 21:20-24 and 23:27-31.) What do Jesus’ sorrowful words about the fate of the city that was rejecting him tell you about his heart? How do you react when trouble comes to a person or group that you might consider an enemy?

Thursday - Luke 14:1-35

The Pharisees loved to talk about the end-time feast for God’s people (verse 15). The picture of a divine feast for God’s people came from Isaiah 25:6-10. Isaiah said this banquet would be for “all peoples,” “all nations,” “the whole earth”—but in Jesus’ day, the religious leaders wanted to limit it just to their own group of Israelites. What does Jesus’ picture of inviting people from “the city’s streets, the busy ones and the side streets,” “the highways and back alleys,” tell you about the wideness of God’s mercy, and about the church Jesus was creating? Jesus at times used extreme words to focus his hearers on priorities. “Hate” (verse 26) didn’t always mean active

malice; it could be a Middle Eastern way to describe making something less central to your life. It can be a challenging spiritual exercise to ask in prayer, “Lord, are there any things, people, or dreams I love more than you?” If you do this, make sure you’re willing to shift priorities to honor any insights you get.

Friday - Luke 15:1-32

The Pharisees labeled people “good” or “bad,” and saw “bad people” as unlikely to change. Jesus saw people much more as “lost” (like the sheep, coin or boy), and what’s lost can be found. When have you lost your way spiritually and needed finding? Jesus pictured God rejoicing each time a heart responds to God’s love. How does this help you see God as more eager to find a lost person than to punish a bad person? Like the fig tree parable (cf. Luke 13:6-9), Jesus left the older son’s story open-ended. The last we hear is the father beseeching his resentful older boy: “We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.” We know most of the “older brothers” in Jesus’ day stalked away into the night rather than welcome prodigals home. If you’ve been at the party of faith for a while, how do you respond to the Father’s appeal to welcome home the lost who are found?

Saturday - Luke 16:1-31

Jesus told of a swindler whose boss applauded him for his shrewdness in buying off “friends” to watch after him when he’d lost his job. He wasn’t endorsing financial fraud, but asking: if even a swindler can look down the road, wouldn’t you be wiser to use wealth for eternal purposes than for short-term earthly gain? Jesus again said no one can serve two masters, that it is impossible to serve both God and wealth (verse 13). Which master has your deepest allegiance? Then Luke shared another “status inversion” story. A rich man ignored a poor beggar at his very gates. But the beggar got to enjoy heaven, while the rich man begged him to warn his brothers away from his hellish fate. His second story used popular ideas about heaven and Hades to say more about values. In verses 27-31, Jesus said Moses and the prophets could show the rich man’s brothers (and the Pharisees) a better way. What influences have helped you to build your values (social, financial and spiritual) on the teachings of Moses and the prophets—and Jesus?

(Adapted from COR)