Called to Service
Luke 14:7-14
SS Lesson for 03/03/2019

Devotional Scripture: John 12:20-26

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
Key Verse: Luke 14:11
Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

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  - Seeking honor because of pride never makes sense (Isa 10:15-16)
  - Seeking honor makes one think more highly of himself than he ought (Rom 12:3)
  - Seeking honor keeps one from seeking God (Ps 10:4)
  - Seeking honor makes one a fool (Prov 26:12)

The reward of seeking humility (10-11)
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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Some drivers hate to make turns against heavy traffic. Faced with the need to turn at an intersection across several busy lanes, they will drive out of their way to avoid the turn. In countries where people drive on the right side of the road, they will make three right turns to avoid one left turn. For them, the way left is right, and right, and right again. Jesus expressed a similar idea throughout his teaching. He taught that under God’s reign, the way up, the way of honor and exaltation, is actually down, in lowly, self-giving service to others. Those who seek prestige, power, wealth, and status will be brought low. But those who lower themselves, who seek nothing
for themselves and instead minister to others in humility, God will exalt. Jesus, the divine Lord who gave himself in death for undeserving sinners, taught and demonstrated that humility is the way to exaltation. This is the theme of today’s text.

Today’s text is part of the account of Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem; the account extends from Luke 9:51 to 19:28. Jesus was approaching Israel’s sacred city, having warned his disciples before the trip began that there he would be handed over to his enemies. They would put him to death, but he would be raised again to life by God the Father (Luke 9:22). Although Jesus stressed, “Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you,” they didn’t (9:44). The immediate backdrop of our lesson is an occasion on which Jesus was invited to a Sabbath day meal at the home of a powerful religious leader. At this grand meal “was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body” (Luke 14:1, 2; the 1984 NIV has “dropsy,” which is an older word for “edema”). Jesus confronted the other guests about their objections to his healing the afflicted man on the Sabbath. Receiving only silence as a response, Jesus proceeded to heal the man, pointing out their hypocrisy in the process (14:3–6). Our text is divided into two parts: advice given to guests at a banquet and advice given to the host.

Key Verse: Luke 14:11

For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

This section continues the thought of 13:22-35 but explains it from another angle. Rather than the excluded ones being the main subject, the ones included in the kingdom are now discussed. Contrary to His hearers’ expectations, Jewish outcasts and Gentiles will make up a large portion of the kingdom’s population.

14:1-6. Jesus had been invited to eat on the Sabbath at the house of a prominent Pharisee where there was also a man who was suffering from dropsy. Dropsy is a condition of excess fluid in the tissues of the body, caused perhaps by a type of cancer or possibly liver or kidney problems. The man was probably invited to the Pharisee’s house in order to see what Jesus would do. Jesus immediately took the initiative in the situation and asked the host and other guests whether it would be lawful to heal the man on the Sabbath. Apparently Jesus’ question disarmed the crowd, for all of them remained silent. Jesus went ahead and healed the man. He said that the guests would help a son or an ox in distress on the Sabbath, so it was totally appropriate to heal this poor individual. Jesus was setting the stage for the discussion to follow concerning those who were considered ceremonially unclean and therefore unable to enter the kingdom.

14:7-11. Looking around, Jesus noticed how the guests picked the places of honor. The closer a person was to the host, the greater was that guest’s position of honor. As people entered the room in the Pharisee’s house where the table was spread, they must have scrambled for seats at the head of the table. The parable Jesus then told was designed to get them to think about spiritual realities in relation to the kingdom message He had been preaching. Verse 11 records the point of Jesus’ parable: Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. This recalls Jesus’ earlier statement that those who are last will be first and those who are first will be last (13:30). The Pharisees, assuming they would have important positions in the kingdom, would be humiliated if they were pushed aside for someone else (14:9). However, if they would humble themselves, then they would perhaps be honored (v. 10).

14:12-14. Then Jesus spoke to His host, telling him that if he would invite the outcasts of society (the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind)—people who could never repay him for his generosity—this would show that he was ministering to them for the Lord’s sake and not his own (cf. Matt. 6:1-18; James 1:26-27). He would be laying up for himself treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20) and would be becoming rich toward God (Luke 12:21). Inviting the outcasts would not make the man righteous; it would testify that he was in a righteous standing before God. This is shown by Jesus’ statement that the repayment would not come at the present time but at the resurrection of the righteous.

14:15-24 (Matt. 22:1-10). Jesus then told a parable about a great banquet. One of the diners expressed a blessing on everyone who would eat... in the kingdom. This person was assuming that he and the other people present would all be present in the kingdom. Jesus took the opportunity to use the feast motif to explain that many of the people there would not be present in God’s kingdom. In their places would be many outcasts and Gentiles. The host in the parable invited many guests. However all those invited began to give excuses for not going. The excuses were supposedly valid—the need to see about a recently
purchased field, or to try out recently purchased oxen, or to be with one’s recently married bride (Luke 14:18-20). The host became angry and commanded that people in the streets and alleys of the town— the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame—be invited. Jesus was referring to those members of the Jewish community who were considered inferior and ceremonially unclean as was the man with dropsy He had just healed (vv. 2-4). When the host learned that there was still room for more, he commanded that others be invited from the roads and country lanes (v. 23). These people outside the city were probably Gentiles, those outside the covenant community. The host then stated that none of the originally invited guests would get a taste of his banquet. This parable at a banquet about another banquet reinforced His previous teaching that He would abandon Jerusalem (13:34-35). The people who originally had been offered a share of the kingdom had rejected it, so now the message was going out to others including Gentiles. The excuses seemed good to those who gave them, but they were inadequate for refusing Jesus’ kingdom offer. Nothing was so important as accepting His offer of the kingdom, for one’s entire destiny rests on his response to that offer.

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*  
*(Note: Lesson points and cross-references copied from previous lesson dated 01/19/2014)*

**Serve with Humility through Choice (Luke 14:7-11)**

7 So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them:  
8 "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;  
9 "and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.  
10 "But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.  
11 "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

**The folly in seeking honor (7-9)**

Seeking honor makes one have a haughty spirit and that leads to destruction (Prov 16:18)  
18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

Seeking honor because of pride never makes sense (Isa 10:15-16)  
15 Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, Or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood! 16 Therefore the Lord, the Lord of hosts, Will send leanness among his fat ones; And under his glory He will kindle a burning Like the burning of a fire.

Seeking honor makes one think more highly of himself than he ought (Rom 12:3)  
3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Seeking honor keeps one from seeking God (Ps 10:4)  
4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.

Seeking honor makes one a fool (Prov 26:12)  
12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

**The reward of seeking humility (10-11)**

The reward of seeking humility comes from submitting to God and others (Eph 5:21)  
Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
The reward of seeking humility comes from walking humbly with God (Mic 6:8)
He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Seeking humility rewards by knowing that in our weakness God's strength makes us strong (2 Cor 12:9-10)
9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Seeking humility rewards by knowing that God uses the lowly people and things (1 Cor 1:26-31)
26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Seeking humility rewards by knowing that everything is a loss compared to knowing Jesus (Phil 3:8-9)
8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Serve with Humility not Seeking Repayment (Luke 14:12-14)
12 Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. 13 "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Service that does not seek rewards on earth (12)
Seeking rewards on earth is behaving like unbelievers (Luke 6:32-35)
32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Seeking rewards on earth is seeking to be honored by men not God (Matt 6:1-4)
6:1 "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Seek the kingdom of God versus seeking rewards on earth (Matt 6:31-34)
31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
Service not seeking rewards on earth result in praises and thanks to God (2 Cor 9:12-13)

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Service that does not seek rewards on earth seeks God's commendation versus man's (2 Cor 10:18)

18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Service that seeks rewards at the resurrection (13-14)

Rewards at the resurrection through being seated with Jesus in heavenly places (Eph 2:5-7)

5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Rewards at the resurrection through being raised with Christ because it is the goal of our faith (Col 2:12)

12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Rewards at the resurrection proving that our faith was not futile (1 Cor 15:12-19)

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

Rewards at the resurrection when we attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:9-11)

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Rewards at the resurrection that fulfills the living hope about the future (1 Peter 1:3)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Delayed Compensation (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Frank Capra’s 1946 film It’s a Wonderful Life is a classic, often seen on TV during the Christmas season. It tells the story of George Bailey, who has given up his dreams in order to run the family-owned lending institution. When thousands of dollars are misplaced and his business is about to be shut down, George considers suicide because his life apparently has been so worthless. Then Clarence, George’s guardian angel, intervenes. Clarence shows him how the entire town would have been different in George’s absence. Rather than being worthless, George’s life has been a blessing to the town. One thing leads to another, and many friends give him money. Even the crusty bank examiner, moved by the town’s love for George, puts his own money into the hat. The fictional George Bailey was a selfless “giver.” In the end he experienced a reward that he could not have imagined. Our heavenly Father is willing and able to reward us in the end. Any blessings we have been denied on earth will be compensated in ways that we surely cannot now imagine!
Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Pecking Order and Position: A Parable and a Paradox (14:7-11)

7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

In Israel, the meal table played a very important role, not only in the family, but in society as well. When an Israelite provided a meal for a guest, even a stranger, it assured him not only of the host’s hospitality, but of his protection. Lot, you will recall (Genesis 19), invited the angels of God into his home and provided them with a meal. When the men of Sodom wanted to do these guests harm, Lot offered his daughters to the men to sexually abuse, in an attempt to prevent harm from coming to his guests. This is shocking to us, but it tells us the meaning of a meal.

Also in Israel (as elsewhere), the meal table was closely tied to one’s social standing. “Pecking order” was reflected in the position one held at the table. Places at the table were something like “chairs” in a band—they all have rank. In my high school band, as in virtually all others, there was a “first chair” trumpet position, and then “second chair,” “third chair,” and so forth. We all eagerly sought to win “first chair.” Some believe that at the “last supper” Judas may have been seated in the chair of honor.

The Pharisees who attended this meal (not to mention many others) seemed to think that one’s table position not only reflected one’s position, but may indeed create it. Thus, people jockeyed for position at meal time, so that they could end up in a seat of honor. It was like musical chairs, except there was no music.

Where I grew up, unlimited hydroplane racing was a very popular sport. The Gold Cup races often took place on Lake Washington. How well I can remember boats like Slo Mo IV and Slo Mo V. The boats could cross the starting line at the sound of the starting gun. They were allowed to have a “flying start,” which meant that they would all mill about the lake, a good distance away, and then begin to charge the starting line at about 160 miles per hour. The first boat across the starting line (sometimes their timing was off and they crossed too soon and were disqualified) had the distinct advantage. For one thing, it could leave the rest of the boats not only in its wake, but also under its rooster tail of water, which made visibility difficult, and sometimes drowned out engines.

I like to think of the meal scene where Jesus was present as something like the jockeying for position that took place in the Gold Cup races. Can you imagine the humorous antics which Jesus must have observed as all the guests tried their own techniques at getting to sit in the best seats? It was nearly time to eat. The guests would soon be seated. Everyone began milling about, just happening to be standing beside a chair of honor. How subtle it was all supposed to be. Jesus saw it all, and spoke to it.

As I have thought more about this incident at the table, it occurred to me to wonder where Jesus ended up sitting. Here He was, Israel’s Messiah, sitting at a table. What a perfect prototype of the kingdom of God. But was Jesus sitting at the seat of highest honor? Was He sitting in the seat of the host? I hardly think so. It would appear that while the others jockeyed for position, Jesus sat back, watching. When He finally arrived at the table, there would only have been one place left—the seat of lowest honor. Here is the King of Israel, sitting, very likely in the place of the lowest person. How tragic, in one sense, and yet how appropriate, given His calling (cf. Philippians 2:4ff.).

Jesus did not deal directly with the position-seeking, but only responded on the basis of it. Instead, He told a parable. They all knew, of course, what He referred to. He told them that they should avoid seeking the place of honor, for in so doing they actually set themselves up for humiliation. Suppose that a more important person came, after they had seated themselves in that individual’s chair. The host would have to ask them to sit elsewhere, and the only place left would be (thanks to the other self-seekers) the place of lowest position. How humiliating it would be, in front of all the rest, to be unseated in such fashion! As our kids would put it, this would be a real “put-down.”
On the other hand, if one were to take the lowest place, then the only way to move would be up. The host might then come to you and move you up higher, in front of all. What a blessing this would be, to be honored publicly before all.

In verse 11, Jesus moved from the parable to a principle which underlies His teaching:

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Here is a paradox indeed. The way up is down. To try to “work up” is to risk being “put down.” Those who wish to be honored must be humble and seek the lowly place. Those who strive to attain the place of honor will be humiliated. The ways of our Lord and His kingdom are not man’s ways.

**Guidelines for the Guest List (14:12-14)**

12 Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Our Lord’s words in verses 7-11 were directed towards the guests, who were jockeying for position at the table. The host, however, had no need of doing this, for his chair was guaranteed. He had the only reserved seat. But there is much evil to be exposed on the part of the host, for those he invites are those who promote his standing. The same spirit is seen in the host, but in a different way, and thus Jesus deals with this, too. He is going to leave no one’s sins unveiled.

It is not just where one sits at the table that gives one status, but also whom one is sitting with at that table. I remember someone saying that status would be to be sitting in the Oval Office with the President of the United States, to have the red phone ring, and for the President to hand it to you, saying, “It’s for you.”

I do not know this as a fact, but it occurred to me as I studied this text that the Jews of that day may not have been introduced to the “potluck dinner.” We all know that a potluck dinner is one that everyone contributes to. It has become a part of our culture, and very often when we invite someone to our table for dinner they ask what they can bring. It would seem that this thought never occurred to the person of Jesus’ day. If people ate “potluck” then there would have been no need to reciprocate, but as it was, when one person invited another to dinner, they provided the entire meal, and the guest would reciprocate by doing likewise. This seems to be the backdrop for what Jesus is saying in our text.

When planning a banquet, the temptation is to invite those who are most likely to do us some good in return. Thus, one thinks first of inviting family members or rich friends, who will reciprocate in kind. We are tempted to give in order to get. Jesus taught that this practice should not only be revised, but reversed. In this world, men invite their friends and the rich, in order to gain from their reciprocal invitations and hospitality. In God’s economy, men are gracious to the helpless and to those who cannot pay them back, so that when the kingdom of God is established on the earth (at the resurrection of the righteous), God may reward them. Thus, Jesus advocated inviting as “guests” at our next banquet the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind (verse 13). Doing so assures us of God’s blessings in heaven.

While the words of our Lord in verses 7-14 should be seriously taken and applied in a literal way, let us take note of the fact that Jesus was speaking a parable (verse 7, cf. v. 12). The parable and its principle is thus to be much more broadly applied.

(Adapted from URL: https://bible.org/seriespage/48-table-talks-luke-141-24)

**Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The twin teachings of Jesus in this lesson focus on proper behavior at a grand dinner. But we mistake his intent if we think that the two teachings are merely about such behavior. They combine to reveal that a person genuinely knows God only as he is revealed in the cross of Christ. Such knowledge of God leads to a radical reordering of one’s life, from selfish status-seeking to self-sacrificial generosity and service. The term humility is often attached to the point Jesus makes, and that term too is often misunderstood. It is more than modesty about one’s accomplishments or sensitivity about displaying one’s status. Biblical humility is the lowly spirit that puts others before oneself. As such, it combines Jesus’ counsel in these two teachings: we are to seek the lowly position first and seek always to serve others generously. As we embrace Jesus’ teaching, we take no
thought of what we think we are entitled to receive in return. Biblical humility is not just social reserve. It is following a lowly Master who willingly surrendered his life for the weak and undeserving. It is Christlike love put into action, with no thought of having earned the right to receive anything in return. It faithfully trusts God’s promise of victorious resurrection. How might Jesus offer these teachings if he were addressing them to our time and place? How might he describe the humble servant-disciple in the workplace, in the neighborhood, in the family, in the school or church? How would those stories challenge our deeply held assumptions and cherished attitudes? How can you live out stories like that in the places where you find yourself? How can you live as one who is called to serve, who understands that God’s way up is down?

**Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary**

A prominent Pharisee invited Jesus to his home for dinner. The Jewish leaders constantly sought opportunities to trap Jesus, have Him arrested, and discredit His claims to be Messiah. Jesus taught several important lessons to those who would follow Him after observing the guests and the host.

**Refuse to Exalt Yourself** - One lesson was from a parable in which He described a wedding feast. One invited guest with high community status rushed to sit down at the head table. Customarily, the seating arrangement indicated importance. However, if someone of higher status joined the occasion, the host now had to ask the guest who seated himself in a place of honor to move to a lower spot. The former guest would feel disgraced in the eyes of all the attendees. Jesus advised His followers to take a lesser seat at the table. If they did that, the host could then invite them to move up. Those who humbled themselves, God could lift up.

**Expand God's Kingdom** - Once Jesus addressed the guests concerning humility, He gave the host a similar object lesson. When the host welcomes people into his home, he should not invite only relatives and friends who can repay him. When you entertain those who will then owe you a favor, you are looking out for yourself rather than others. Instead, the host should invite those who are impoverished, homeless, sick, disabled—unable to give back. His followers should look to others first, rather than their own interests, and consider that the "least of these" are not just as important in the Kingdom as anyone else—perhaps more so.

**Show Humility** - In both of these lessons, Jesus stands firmly against the pride and self-centeredness of the Jewish leaders. However, Jesus commanded His followers to imitate His ways by doing good works without public pats on the back. They accept God's appointments while faithfully serving in either the forefront or the background. They also see those whom society ignores as equal to themselves and willingly include them in the Kingdom "party."