

The background is a colorful, abstract painting depicting a church service. In the upper left, a pastor in a blue suit is shown from the chest up, holding a microphone and gesturing towards the congregation. The rest of the image is filled with a dense crowd of people, their forms rendered in a painterly, expressive style with a palette of blues, oranges, yellows, and purples. The overall atmosphere is one of dynamic energy and spiritual fervor.

COUNTER CULTURAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS

INVERSE

COUNTER CULTURAL

THE **LIFT** TOUR



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Historically, Jesus, the Messiah, was one of the most interesting and intriguing people to ever live, not just because of His divinity but also because of how He lived and what He said. Whether or not you are a Christian, you must admit that His life was captivating. The words He spoke, the stories He told, and His polarizing effect on culture and people made Him one of the most fascinating people to ever live. Most notably, throughout His ministry, ***Jesus made some shocking claims that were challenging, controversial, and counter-cultural.*** That's what made ***His teachings so inverted*** from the teachings of the day ... they were ***contrary to the cultural norms.*** When talking about Jesus, we often focus on the grace and the love that Jesus showed others; however, that's only one side of Jesus. Jesus also said many things that shocked people and caught them off guard. So much so, that even Jesus' disciples, in ***John 6:60 (CSB)***, struggled with some of Jesus' teachings: ***"Therefore, when many of His disciples heard this, they said, 'This teaching is hard. Who can accept it?'"*** And, if we are honest, this question is still being considered today ... Who can or will accept Jesus' teachings?

The theme for ***The LIFT Tour 2024 is I N V E R S E. Inverse simply means, "something that is the opposite or reverse of something else."*** When Jesus spoke, His teachings were the inverse of what culture was and is saying. It was the opposite of what we would assume to be true. ***This year we will explore some of the most challenging and controversial teachings of Jesus.*** One of the most common truths that have regularly been applied to the person of Jesus is the fact that ***He comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable.*** Yes, Jesus said and demonstrated the most loving, accepting, and grace-filled practices. However, He also taught complicated truths that even perplexed the people who knew Him best. Why? Because ***Jesus taught both grace AND truth!*** So, if we want to have the power to truly change our lives and this world, learning how to navigate the tensions between Jesus' teachings on grace and truth is essential. Therefore, during ***The LIFT Tour 2024***, we will highlight four counter-cultural claims made by Jesus.

1

UNITY

SESSION ONE

*DIVISION
GIVES BIRTH TO
TOGETHERNESS*

(Luke 12:49-53)

2

LOVE

SESSION TWO

*DISMISS THE
"EYE FOR AN EYE"
IDEOLOGY*

(Luke 6:27-36)

3

COMPASSION

SESSION THREE

*DEMONSTRATE
COMPASSION OVER
POLARIZATION*

(Matthew 7:1-6)

4

SUBMIT

SESSION FOUR

*DECIDE TO
FOLLOW JESUS...
IT'S THE BEST OPTION*

(Matthew 16:24-28)

W E L C O M E

T O T H E



Lifeway students



Luke 12:49-53 (CSB)

49 “I came to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already set ablaze! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how it consumes me until it is finished! 51 Do you think that I came here to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52 From now on, five in one household will be divided: three against two, and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

This story teaches us that there is:

1. A FIRE that gives TRANSFORMATION

John 3:20-21 (CSB)

20 “For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. 21 But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”

2. A TRANSFORMATION that brings DIVISION

Luke 14:26 (CSB)

26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”

3. A DIVISION that establishes TOGETHERNESS

Romans 5:1 (CSB)

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

NOTES

Session 1



SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

SESSION ONE

1. What are a few things that stuck out to you most from this first session?
2. Which of the statements Jesus made in this text caught you off guard the most? Why?
3. After listening to this counter-cultural teaching from Jesus, in your opinion, what did Jesus mean when he said, “I came to bring fire on the earth”?
4. In vs. 51, Jesus said “he did not come to bring peace, but rather division.” In context of this passage, how is Jesus the great divider?
5. What are some areas in culture, society, or the church that lack unity? What (if anything) can you (we) do about it?

Luke 6:27-36 (CSB)

27 *“But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If anyone hits you on the cheek, offer the other also. And if anyone takes away your coat, don’t hold back your shirt either. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and from someone who takes your things, don’t ask for them back. 31 Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do what is 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 to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”*

Jesus’ counter-cultural teaching on love demonstrates:

1. A PRACTICE of OBEDIENCE (vv. 27 – 28)

Matthew 5:16 (CSB)

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

1 Timothy 2:1-4 (CSB)

1 “First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, 2 for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

2. A PRINCIPLE to APPLY (vv. 29 – 31)

Romans 12:17-18 (CSB)

17 “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

Matthew 7:12 (CSB)

“Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them...”

3. A PROMISE that’s GIVEN (vv. 32 – 36)

James 4:10 (CSB)

“Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them...”

Romans 5:6-8 (CSB)

6 “For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. 8 But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

NOTES

Session 2



SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

SESSION TWO

1. What point did you connect with most in session two? Why?
2. Why is it so hard to love your enemies?
3. What is the benefit of loving your enemies? (Hint: Read Luke 6:35 and James 4:10)
4. Is there someone in your life that you need to either forgive or extend grace to?
5. Read Romans 12:14-21. What is the common theme between this passage and Luke 6:27-36?

Matthew 7:1-6 (CSB)

1 “Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged. 2 For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use. 3 Why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye but don’t notice the beam of wood in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ and look, there’s a beam of wood in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye. 6 Don’t give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them under their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.”

In the midst of a polarized culture, we are called to:

1. SET the STANDARD (vv. 1 – 2):

Beware of judgement that is harsh and unmerciful

Proverbs 18:13 (CSB)

“The one who gives an answer before he listens — this is foolishness and disgrace for him.”

2. LIVE with INTEGRITY (vv. 3 – 5):

Beware of judgement that is hypocritical and deceitful.

Matthew 6:22-23 (CSB)

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So, if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness!”

3. PROTECT our PEARLS (v. 6).

Beware of insensitive and undiscerning judgement.

Philippians 3:2 (CSB)

“Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh.”

NOTES

Session 3



SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

SESSION THREE

1. What were some of the most challenging parts of Jesus' teaching for you? Why?
2. What are some of the ways that you have found yourself judging others unfairly?
3. What is the difference between making a judgement and being judgmental? How can you discern this difference in your own life?
4. What is Jesus talking about in v. 6 when he says, "Do not give dogs what is holy...do not throw pearls to pigs..."
5. What are some ways you can cultivate compassion and empathy rather than judgement when you encounter someone whose actions or choices are different from yours?

Matthew 16:24-28 (CSB)

24 "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it. 26 For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each according to what he has done. 28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

3 Questions for those who want to live counter-cultural:

1. Are you willing to LAY SOMETHING DOWN? (v. 24a)
2. Are you willing to LIFT SOMETHING UP? (v. 24b)
3. Are you willing to LIVE SOMETHING OUT? (vv. 25-26)

BOTTOMLINE:

Living for self will get you nothing. However, living for Christ will get you everything! That's living in the INVERSE!

"We are all servants. The only question is whom we will serve." - R. C. Sproul

Galatians 2:20 (CSB)

"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

NOTES

Session 4



SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

SESSION FOUR

1. What connected with you most in this session? Do you believe that you have been called out by Jesus?
2. What are some practical ways you need to deny yourself?
3. What does it mean to take up your cross? (Hint: Look at verses 25-26 and Galatians 2:20).
4. What would it look like if you were able to live completely by Matthew 16:24-28?
5. How would your church/youth group be different if everyone was willing to live by Matthew 16:24-28?

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DEVOTIONALS

Loving God Deeply

from Charles Spurgeon's sermon, "Love's Logic"

To feel love to God we must tread along the 'road of faith'. Truly, this is not a hard or perilous way, but one prepared by infinite wisdom. It is a road suitable for sinners, and indeed saints must come that way also.

If you would love God, do not look within you to see whether this grace or that be as it ought to be, but look to your God, and read his eternal love, his boundless love, his costly love, which gave Christ for you; then shall your love drink in fresh life and vigor.

Beloved, there are few of us who know much of the depths of the love of God; our love is shallow; ah, how shallow! Love to God is like a great mountain—

The majority of travelers view it from afar, or traverse the valley at its base: a few climb to a halting place on one of its elevated spurs, whence they see a portion of its sublimities: here and there an adventurous traveler climbs a minor peak, and views glacier and alp at closer range; fewest of all are those who scale the topmost pinnacle and tread the virgin snow.

So it is in the Church of God—

Every Christian abides under the shadow of divine love: a few enjoy and return that love to a remarkable degree: but there are few, in this age sadly few, who reach to seraphic love, who ascent into the hill of the Lord, to stand where the eagle's eye has not seen, and walk the path which the lion's whelp has never trodden, the high places of complete consecration and ardent self-consuming love.

Now, mark you, it may be difficult to ascend so high, but there is one sure route, and only one, which the man must follow who would gain the sacred elevation. It is not the track of his works, nor the path of his own actions, but this, "We love him because he first loved us." John confessed that in this way he attained his love for God. For the highest love that ever glowed in human bosom there was no source but this — God first loved that man.

Do you not see how this is? The knowledge that God loves me casts out my tormenting dread of God: and when this is expelled, there is room for abounding love to God. As fear goes out, love comes in at the other door.

So the more faith in God the more room there is for soul-filling love. Our soul is satisfied with marrow and fatness when we know that the whole heart of God beats towards us as forcibly as if we were the only creatures he had ever made, and his whole heart were wrapped up in us. Love to God produces a desire to be with him; a desire to be like him, a longing to be with him eternally in heaven, and this breaks us away from worldliness; this keeps us from idolatry, and thus has a most blessedly sanctifying effect upon us, producing that elevated character which is now so rare, but which wherever it exists is powerful for the good of the church and for the glory of God.

AMEN

A Prayer for Unity

Max Lucado from "In the Grip of Grace"

On the last night of his life Jesus prayed a prayer that stands as a citadel for all Christians:

"I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me" (John 17:20–21 NCV).

How precious are these words. Jesus, knowing the end is near, prays one final time for his followers. Striking, isn't it, that he prayed not for their success, their safety, or their happiness.

He prayed for their unity. He prayed that they would love each other. As he prayed for them, he also prayed for "those who will believe because of their teaching." That means us! In his last prayer Jesus prayed that you and I be one.

Of all the lessons we can draw from this verse, don't miss the most important: unity matters to God. Why? Because "all people will know that you are my followers if you love each other" (John 13:35 NCV). Unity creates belief. How will the world believe that Jesus was sent by God? Not if we agree with each other. Not if we solve every controversy. Not if we are unanimous on each vote. Not if we never make a doctrinal error. But if we love one another.

Unity creates belief. Disunity fosters disbelief. Who wants to board a ship of bickering sailors? Paul Bilheimer may very well be right when he says: "The continuous and widespread fragmentation of the Church has been the scandal of the ages. It has been Satan's master strategy. The sin of disunity probably has caused more souls to be lost than all other sins combined."

Could it be that unity is the key to reaching the world for Christ? The world will be won for Christ when the church is one in Christ. If unity is the key to evangelism, shouldn't it have precedence in our prayers? Shouldn't we, as Paul said, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of

peace” (Ephesians 4:3 NIV)? Nowhere, by the way, are we told to build unity. We are told simply to keep unity. From God’s perspective there is but “one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). Unity does not need to be created; it simply needs to be protected.

Where there is faith, repentance, and a new birth, there is a Christian. When I meet a person, whose faith is in the cross and whose eyes are on the Savior, I meet a brother or a sister. Wasn’t that Paul’s approach? When he wrote the church in Corinth, he addressed a body of Christians guilty of every sin from abusing the Lord’s Supper to arguing over the Holy Spirit. But how does he address them? “I beg you, brothers and sisters” (1 Corinthians 1:10 NCV).

When the church in Rome was debating whether to eat meat offered to idols, did Paul tell them to start two churches? One for the meat-eaters and one for the non-meat-eaters? No, on the contrary, he urged, “Christ accepted you, so you should accept each other, which will bring glory to God” (Romans 15:7 NCV).

Is God asking us to do anything more than what he has already done? Hasn’t he gone a long way in accepting us? If God can tolerate my mistakes, can’t I tolerate the mistakes of others? If God allows me, with my foibles and failures, to call him Father, shouldn’t I extend the same grace to others? If God doesn’t demand perfection, should I? “They are God’s servants,”

Paul reminds us, “not yours. They are responsible to him, not to you. Let him tell them whether they are right or wrong. And God is able to make them do as they should” (Romans 14:4 TLB).

God’s ship is a grand vessel. Just as a ship has many rooms, so God’s kingdom has room for many opinions. But just as a ship has one deck, God’s kingdom has a common ground: the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

AMEN



UNITY CHALLENGE

1. Will you pray with your church, your youth group, The LIFT Tour Team, and other followers of Jesus Christ for the day when Jesus' prayer is answered?
2. Will you pray for the hearts of those who are harden to the idea of biblical unity?
3. As a facilitator and advocate for biblical unity, will you commit to refusing to allow cultural differences to interfere with God's truth?