



Christian Ambassadors, Inc.

# My Brother's Keeper

Volume 22, Number 2, Second Quarter, 2017

## GROWING on the WORD

A scripture study

The Word of God is the source of light, truth and power, for those who seek its meaning and apply it to their life. Jesus Christ is the word made flesh, and we seek to follow him.

**John 8:12 (NIV)** – *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

**John 12:46 (NIV)** – *“...No one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

Each issue of “My Brother’s Keeper” features a WORD study. This issue’s Word Study comes to us from Sharon K. Griffiee, Co-founder of Christian Ambassadors, Inc.

### Who Will Follow Jesus?

By: Sharon K. Griffiee

#### Jesus at a Pharisee’s House

In the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Luke we find Jesus invited to the house of a prominent Pharisee for a Sabbath dinner. Even though the other guests at the dinner were orthodox Jews who considered Jesus to be a lawbreaker, Jesus graciously accepted their invitation, knowing he would be under their watchful

eyes. While others would have lost their nerve, Jesus met the situation with calmness. Why? He was not willing to pass up this important opportunity to teach about the kingdom of God.

It so happened there was a man at the Pharisee’s house who was suffering from the dropsy. Dropsy (Edema) is a condition of excess fluid in the tissues of the body. This man could have been invited there to test Jesus to see what he would do. Jesus kept his cool and challenged them by asking the host and other guests if it was lawful to heal the man on the Sabbath. Keep in mind – to the Orthodox Jew, to heal on the Sabbath was the same as *working* on the Sabbath, therefore it would be breaking the law.

Jesus’ question must have caught them off guard, because they all remained silent. So, Jesus took hold of the man and healed him and sent him on his way. Then Jesus asked them,

**Luke 14:5-6 (NIV)** – *“If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” And they had nothing to say.*

While Jesus was teaching those sitting at the table about the kingdom of God, one man spoke up and said, *“Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”* (Luke 14:15) It is interesting to note that the religious leaders present at this Sabbath dinner, were self-assured that they had reserved places in God’s kingdom. Why their confidence? The average orthodox Jew believed that *only* Jews would be present at the great feast of God. They never conceived that gentiles and sinners would find a place at the table. Their

belief was so off-base, Jesus utilized this man's statement to teach the truth through a parable.

### The Parable of the Great Supper

**Luke 14:16-24 (NKJV)** – Then He [Jesus] said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ **But they all with one accord began to make excuses.**

*The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’*

*So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. **For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.**’” [Bold emphasis added is mine]*

In this parable, the master of the house represents God, and the *originally* invited guests to the supper represents the orthodox Jews. They had initially been offered a share of the kingdom, but after all the preparations had been made, they tragically rejected the invitation to participate. Yet, because of God's loving, generous nature to pour out his blessings upon those *willing* to accept his invitation, he determined his table would not be empty. His invitation must urgently go out to the people in the streets and lanes of the city, to the poor and maimed, the lame and the blind. His invitation would go out to the tax collectors and sinners, to those Jews who welcomed and treated Jesus better than the religious folks did.

The servant did as he was told, then reported back to the master that there was still room for more at the table, so the master extended his invitation to go out into the highways and hedges. His invitation to those on the outskirts of the city opened up the *calling* to the Gentiles (the non-Jews) to share in the great supper, to fill up God's house.

### Excuses, Excuses, Excuses!

In the parable the *originally* invited guests, “*all with one accord*”, made their various excuses. Our excuses today do not differ that much.

The first man said he had bought a field. He allowed the claims of business to take priority over God's invitation. Worldly ventures and speculations divert attention away from God.

The second man said he had bought five yoke of oxen and was going to try them out. He allowed his new possessions to crowd out God. In today's world, a new game or a new hobby might be the excuse.

The third man said he had just married a wife and could not come. There was an Old Testament law (See: Deuteronomy 24:5) that said, when a man is newly married he must not be sent to war or have any other obligation laid on him, for a period of one year. He was to be free at home to be happy with his wife. So, he conveniently said *no* to Jesus. The man was actually saying to Jesus, ‘Your timing is off’!

### Excuses for why folks do not follow Jesus.

**Luke 9:59-60 (NIV)** – He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Often times people will read this statement from Jesus and think, how insensitive. We are not supposed to even bury our own kin folk first? Think about what Jesus was asking here. He was literally putting the offer of God's kingdom on the line. Work in God's kingdom requires total devotion and absolute attention. Jesus knew full well

the customs of the times, and what he was asking of this man. It was a legitimate appeal from Jesus. Besides, there was no indication in this verse of scripture that the man's father was already dead.

The phrase, "*I must bury my father*" was a common figure of speech, meaning "*Let me wait until I receive my inheritance.*"

In other words, 'Let me wait until everything at home is in order', was this man's excuse. For all we know the father may have had years to live, before this man would be in a position to bury him and then obtain his inheritance. Jesus was declaring that service to the living, *proclaiming* the kingdom of God, is of more importance than burying the dead. The decision was crucial. Following Jesus requires a radical commitment.

As we continue reading in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, Jesus encounters more excuses.

**Luke 9:61-62 (NIV)** – *Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, so this man had to decide on the spot if he was sincere about following Jesus. Jesus used a clear-cut example from the farming culture to show him that the byword of the kingdom is not *backwards*, but *forward!* There is no way that a plowman can plow a straight furrow, if he is looking back over his shoulder. No one who begins the work of the Lord, then looks back with yearning to a worldly life, is fit for service in the kingdom of God. Jesus' followers must not have divided interests. Those who begin the work of the Lord must resolve to go on with it – not to draw back or to turn away from God. It takes patient endurance to continue to do God's will. Brothers and sisters, it takes living by faith.

**Hebrews 10:39 (NLT)** – *But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved.*

## Followers of Jesus take Action!

There was a man living in the town of Jericho whose name was Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector for Rome and had become very rich. Tax collectors had the reputation of cheating, of keeping money they collected for their own. They were understandably despised by the people.

As Jesus came into Jericho and passed through the town, Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector for the region, responded with unusual enthusiasm. Why? Zacchaeus was a sinner and knew it. He was not looking for an excuse to get away from Jesus. Zacchaeus was looking for an excuse to come near him! Scripture tells us,

**Luke 19:3-5 (NLT)** – *He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."*

Zacchaeus may have been short in stature, but he was definitely not shortsighted! He recognized the gospel truth when he heard it. He climbed down from the tree and with great excitement and joy took Jesus to his house and welcomed him. The radical change in his life, led Zacchaeus to stand before the Lord and say,

**Luke 19:8 (NLT)** – *I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much.*

Jesus responded, "*Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.*"

**(verses 9-10)**

That was Jesus' mission! Amen.



## Sharing the Good News

“We are therefore Christ's Ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

*II Corinthians 5:20-21*

**From: John S.  
Polk Correctional  
Butner, North Carolina**

**Dear Sharon,**

God, through you, made the impossible, possible and it blew my mind. All these years I've been praying and begging for help and Jesus led me to “My Brother's Keeper”, and that's what you are, a Brother's Keeper.

Thanks goes out to you for putting [publishing] my poem, “*I Know You Can Save*” [in “My Brother's Keeper”, First Quarter, 2017] for others to read. That's what I've wanted for years, about 20 years now. Praise the Lord, and if God don't bless me anymore, He has overflowed my cup this time with love and grace, and mercy and you. Thanks again.

Love, John

**From: Joseph M.  
Mule Creek State Prison  
Ione, California**

**Dear Christian Ambassadors,**

Would you please add me/us to your current active mailing list, so that we might receive, “My Brother's Keeper”? We have had the privilege of receiving your esteemed periodical second hand, but if it is ok, we would like to receive it directly from you. Thank you very much.

Sincerely yours, Brother Joseph

**From: Louis M.  
Otisville Correctional  
Otisville, New York**

**Dear Sharon and Alan,**

Greetings once again in the precious and Holy name of our Savior “Jesus Christ” Amen.

May these words find all those under your loving care in the best of health, and continuing strong in their faith.

Thank you always for sharing all of the thoughts, ideas, love, and messages written in by many of the readers of “My Brother's Keeper”. It is spiritually uplifting and I equally share my love to (all) who struggle to keep it together, walk the walk, and just love the Lord.

Thank you again. In Jesus Christ we are made whole.

Peace, Louis

**From: Rickey Stephens  
California Medical Facility  
Vacaville, California**

**Dear Sharon and Alan,**

In Jesus' name, I address the both of you this missive, praying that it finds you both in good health and doing the Creator's will, which I'm sure you are.

I received the newsletter “My Brother's Keeper” [first quarter, 2017] and I found myself really enjoying it. It made me realize that whatever I'm going through, Jesus is in control and that if I trust in him with all my heart, in the end it will work out for the good. That's why reading “*My Thoughts Are Not Your Thoughts*” [by Sharon K. Griffie] touched me.

Also, listening to the letters of the brothers in the same position as me, made me pick up my Bible and start reading it, because I had stop reading it.

I was reading over “My Brother's Keeper” and “*Unconditional Love*” [by Ellis A. Chen] really caught my attention. It made me question myself

about my relationship with Jesus and am I doing God's will. I'm a baby in Christ and there is so much I need to learn, because I find myself struggling carnally and holding on to my worldly ways. I'll be paroling in the next eight months and I don't want to come back.

Sharon, you and Alan have what I want, and that is Jesus Christ. I pray the work he has done with you and Alan, I want him to do that same work with me. When I pray to Jesus, I ask him to come into my heart and life and change me.

Well, let me bring this letter to a close, sending you and Alan my best wishes and that God continues to bless you and Alan.

Your brother in Christ, Rickey

---

**From: Alexander G.  
TDCJ, Gib Lewis Unit  
Woodville, Texas**

**Dear Sharon,**

Hi, how are you doing? As always, I hope and pray this letter finds you in very good health, in Jesus name. The same goes for everyone there at Christian Ambassadors. As for me, well, I'm doing just fine thanks to God.

Just writing to thank you for sending me the [March] Spiritual Growth Lesson, *Christ's Sacrifice*. I enjoyed the lesson as also did my Bible Study group. We are all thankful for what Christ Jesus did on the cross.

In your letter, you said, "A person who would follow Jesus must deny himself, his own ambitions, to truly find the awesome life Jesus offers." When I was out in the world, I went to mass on Sundays. I did my daily prayers. But the lure of having a fast car and money got me to stop all of that. The devil had a stronghold on me. It wasn't until I came to prison that I started praying again. I know God has forgiven me of my sins.

I would like to thank you Sharon and your ministry. Without your help, I would still be lost

out in the world. May God bless you and your ministry. Keep up the good work you are doing in Jesus' name.

Your student, Alexander

---

**From: Steven H.  
Ross Correctional  
Chillicothe, Ohio**

**Dear Christian Ambassadors,**

I can sincerely say that over the last three and one half decades, in which I've spent in prison, the good Lord has greatly blessed and cared for me, and has met all my needs! Notice, I did not say anything about my wants. In all honesty, the vast majority of my wants more than likely would not line up with God's perfect will for me.

What has kept me going all these years is a good and healthy diet of the Word of God daily, in my personal relationship with God the Father. This can only come with the reading and studying of the Holy Scriptures daily!

*II Timothy 2:15* – "Study to show thyself approved unto God [not man], a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

One cannot know the Word of God, without studying the Word of God. Also, one must meditate on the Word of God, to receive its richer and fuller meaning down into the depths of your heart.

*Psalms 1:2* – "In his law doth he meditate day and night."

The Word of God is the keeper of your soul.

*Psalms 119:11* – "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

The Word is our light in dark places.

*Psalms 119:105* – "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

The believer needs the Word inside themselves.

**Colossians 3:16** – “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

The Word of the Lord has never ending power to sustain joy.

**I Peter 1:25** – “But the Word of the Lord endureth forever.”

Try out the spiritual food of God the Father, which is mighty in power, full of grace, mercy, and even sanctification. Amen.

Brother Steven



### ***Crumbs of Wisdom Along Legacy's Road***

By: Larry A. Thompson  
Buena Vista Correctional Facility,  
Buena Vista, Colorado

Oh, so long ago, when Christ fed 5000 hungry souls with just “five loaves and two fishes”, what became of the crumbs that were left over? And again, He fed another 4000 with “seven loaves and a few little fishes”, prior to which He said,

**Matthew 15:32 (KJV)** – “I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.” (See: Matthew 14:15-21 and 15:32-38).

What became of those leftovers? Scripture records that none of those crumbs were casually cast away and wasted, nor were they left on the ground to be devoured by the birds – they in fact became *Crumbs of Wisdom* which are still being shared along *Legacy's Road*.

The miracle of the loaves reminds me quite clearly of what my responsibility in this life is. While it's true that one's legacy isn't widely recognized until they've passed on, a very important part of our mission while living, is to build towards what we hope will be a lasting and meaningful legacy.

I am not a great philosopher, a highly-exalted teacher, or a well-known preacher; I'm just a man who faces the truth of his mortality on a daily basis – a simple-minded, poor black country boy, who wants to live a meaningful life and do some good before the end. A man who has been nourished by the loaves and the fishes, who even now is sharing the leftover fragments. I am a man who has eaten of the “*Bread of Life*”, who now desires to feed others.

**John 6:35 (KJV)** – And Jesus said unto them, *I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 7:11-12, it is written,

*Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.*

In this life, we are all responsible for what we'll leave when we are gone. We are equally responsible for the gifts that we give today, and for the lessons that we'll teach, which will establish what our legacies will be.

Wisdom, sweet precious wisdom, that's the gift that I'd like to share with the world before I'm gone. If throughout the remainder of my life I can leave a few *Crumbs of Wisdom* along *Legacy's Road*, then I can lay down to rest, knowing that I, too, have fed a few.

Copyright: 12-3-2013, Larry A. Thompson



## *Amazed*

By: Merissa Lee Kelley

Lots of things are quite amazing...mere words cannot convey  
When delightful moments happen, that take your breath away  
So spare me from a jaded mind, that's weary, drab and small  
With vision so entrenched in stone...it just won't see at all

I don't want to lose the joy that keeps my spirit strong  
I don't want to lose the wonder that gives my soul it's song  
I don't want to lose the spark that sets my heart ablaze  
I don't want to lose the peace that surrounds me as I praise

I just want to stand amazed and worship at Your throne  
For in Your presence, I'm refreshed and never feel alone  
Awe-struck by Your power and glory...I'm humbled by Your grace  
That searched for me and pulled me close in a tender, warm embrace

Captivated by the truth, that before my life began  
I was part of Your design and crafted by Your hand  
So amazed...so intrigued...overwhelmed because I know  
I am held in arms of love that will never let me go

I just want to stand amazed and drink Your mercy in  
Then kneel before the Risen Lamb...who died to cleanse my sin  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit...You cover me so sweet  
With sheltering wings that bring me hope and make my life complete

I'm amazed...I'm swept away, by the fact You know my name  
And in Your eyes, my worth is greater than worldly wealth or fame  
I'm amazed...I'm fascinated...that every single time  
Out of all the prayers that reach Your ears...You know which one is mine

So, as I journey on through life, please help me to remain  
Steadfast in my faith and trust, through sunshine and through rain  
I may not walk the smoothest road or get through life unfazed  
But if I keep my eyes on You...I'll always stand amazed

Merissa Lee Kelley

June 28, 2008

“And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.” Luke 9:43

### *Living Epistles*

By: Ronald McClary, Maury Correctional  
Maury, North Carolina

Unbelievers are not so much attentive as to what we say,  
but observing to see if we are walking in the way.

Some may give an excellent sermon or interesting talk,  
equally important and paramount is our Christian walk.

Of course, we do not live for other's approval,  
hope our letter gets an unbiased fair perusal.

We are children of the Kingdom and Jesus we reflect,  
conforming to the Son's image is what the Father expects.

Gracious seasoned words and letting your life shine,  
looking at your life, what shall the lost find?

Trying to win souls by a convincing testimony,  
and not come across as a hypocrite or a phony.

Walk and talk must be consistent lockstep,  
though all of the commandments can never be kept.

Yet a reputation of having integrity, honest and just,  
these characteristics are essential for a Christian, a must.

Can be instrumental in leading your neighbor,  
to Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior.

## **My Brother's Keeper**

Vol. 22, No. 2, Second Quarter, 2017

**Sharon K. Griffee**, Senior Editor

**Alan W. Griffee**, Production Manager

**My Brother's Keeper** is published by Christian Ambassadors, Inc., a nonprofit, tax-exempt, ministry.

© 1996-2017, all rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part, except for personal or group study, without written permission is prohibited. The CA logo, with dove and cross, is a registered service mark of Christian Ambassadors, Inc. Printing and distribution costs are paid for by donations. To have your name added to our distribution list please write to:

Christian Ambassadors, Inc., PO Box 62876, Colorado Springs, CO 80962-2876

Inspirational articles and poems, especially from current or former prison inmates, are invited and will be prayerfully considered for publication. **Please request a copy of the publication guidelines before submitting an article for consideration.**

**Vision Statement** – Christian Ambassadors exists to bring the ministry of Jesus Christ into the lives of people, demonstrating how the gospel teachings can help a person live a more abundant life, filled with joy, hope, and purpose.

If you, a member of your family, or a friend, are imprisoned, wanting to find new hope, purpose and direction in life, please contact us at Christian Ambassadors. Our website can be visited at:

<http://www.christian-ambassadors.org>