HOW TO USE OUR MINISTRY PASS
SERMON SERIES GUIDES

WHAT THIS GUIDE IS NOT

➤ This guide isn’t a set of sermon manuscripts. While sermon manuscripts can be both useful and a powerful training tool, our sermon series guides are different. Rather than tell you what to say, our aim is for this material to spark your imagination, assist you in planning your sermon, and offer a boost to your study time.
➤ This guide isn’t ironclad. While we hope you use our material, the pieces of this document are designed to be moved, tweaked, and altered. As you study the suggested passages, and pray through your message, this guide will hopefully be a launching pad, rather than a landing net.

WHAT THIS GUIDE IS

Included in each guide is:
➤ A sermon series outline that breaks up the teaching set into a specific number of weeks.
➤ A “big idea” of the series.
➤ A passage, “big idea” of the sermon, topic list, and a number of illustrations and talking point ideas are included in each weekly section. The “Sermon Ideas and Talking Points” area is filled with observations about the text, relevant applications, creative ideas, and illustrations.
➤ A small group discussion sheet (located in a separate document in this bundle).

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

➤ Plan ahead. Our guides are best utilized in advance versus the day or night before. Read over the ideas and illustrations provided, thinking through how you can possibly utilize them in your message. We’ve purposely kept our guides simple so as to give you the best opportunity to create your own, unique message.
➤ While we give you a passage and “big idea” of the message, take time to study the text.
➤ Utilize the media contained in this bundle to promote and communicate your series message.

Note: Although we’ve worked hard to verify the accuracy of the material in this guide, we encourage all pastors to carefully review the information before sharing it with their congregation.
Overheard

**Big Idea of the Series:** This four-week series invites us to listen in on four different conversations that people had with or about Jesus in the Gospels. We will look at a moment when Jesus caused someone to make an immediate change, at someone who walked away from a gift Jesus offered, at someone restored to her rightful place in the family of God after talking with Jesus, and at someone who responded by offering his life after Jesus gently challenged his doubts.

**Week 1**

**Texts:** Proverbs 11:25; Luke 19: 1–10; Acts 16:30–34  
**Topics:** Zacchaeus, Lunch, Abide, Change of Heart  
**Big Idea of the Message:** Zacchaeus chose to follow Jesus and completely changed his lifestyle.  
**Application Point:** A conversation with Jesus can change someone’s life immediately and permanently.

**Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:**

1. Jesus invited himself over to Zacchaeus’s house for lunch the day he entered Jericho. Although hated by his community, Zacchaeus went against culturally normative behavior and ran outside of town and climbed a tree just to get a glimpse of Jesus. We don’t have record of the conversation Zacchaeus had with Jesus that day, but when his time with him had ended, Zacchaeus was a changed man. He committed to a new lifestyle and worked to restore the wrongs he had committed. “Christ passed through Jericho. This city was built under a curse, yet Christ honoured it with his presence, for the gospel takes away the curse. … Christ was now going from the other side of Jordan to Bethany near Jerusalem, to raise Lazarus to life; when he was going to do one good work he contrived to do many by the way. He did good both to the souls and to the bodies of people” (Matthew Henry, commentary on Luke 19, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Luk/Luk_019.cfm]).
2. Paul’s jailer’s household became saved because of the belief and salvation of the jailer, and so too did Zacchaeus’s household because of the tax collector’s conversion. “Paul never specifically called the keeper of the prison to repent because he was already repenting. We see the humble repentance of the jailer in that he fell down trembling, in the full idea of the word believe. … For the Philippian jailer, Paul did not direct him to counseling. He did not give him a lecture on theology. He did not discuss the spiritual terminology of the jailer. He did not talk about sacraments or even churches. He pointed this obviously repentant man to faith in Jesus Christ” (David Guzik, study guide for Acts 16, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/acts/acts-16.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/acts/acts-16.cfm)).

3. Proverbs 11:25 refers to generously giving to others, which is how Zacchaeus lives life after his lunch meeting with Jesus. Often we fear that when we share generously with others, we will be left with nothing. However, things work differently in God’s kingdom. We read that while we are refreshing others, we ourselves will also be refreshed.

4. One simple conversation, meal, or interaction is all it takes for someone to be ready to accept Jesus as their Savior when their hearts are ready. Jesus’s conversation with Zacchaeus was over the course of a meal, perhaps even an overnight stay. But it wasn’t a weekend retreat or years of theological discourse. When someone’s heart is ready to receive Jesus, it only takes a moment, and then their life is changed forever.

5. “Food is more than survival. With it we make friends, court lovers, and count our blessings. … ‘To break bread together,’ a phrase as old as the Bible, captures the power of a meal to forge relationships, bury anger, provoke laughter. Children make mud pies, have tea parties, trade snacks to make friends, and mimic the rituals of adults. They celebrate with sweets from the time of their first birthday, and the association of food with love will continue throughout life—and in some belief systems, into the afterlife. Consider the cultures that leave delicacies graveside to let the departed know they are not forgotten. And even when times are tough, the urge to celebrate endures” (Victoria Pope, “The Joy of Food,” National Geographic, accessed November 16, 2023, [https://www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/joy-of-food/](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/joy-of-food/)). When we sit down to a meal together, we can learn from those seated around us and grow from the experience, just as Zacchaeus learned and grew from his meal with Jesus.

6. Consider reasons why people in your church and community might have needed to make an immediate change. These reasons could be difficult, such as a sudden death in the family, a car accident, a significant job loss, natural disaster, loss of home due to fire, flood, or the like. Alternatively, the reason for immediate change could be for good reasons such as the birth of a baby, a marriage, new employment, or some outside factor such as new laws or statutes in the vicinity which has positive effects on the residents or church members. Together, brainstorm a list of reasons why people make sudden changes in their lives. Ask the students if anything on the list pertains to them.

7. William Carey is an example of someone who make a career change to full-time ministry. This is not to say that all believers must be in full-time vocational
ministry but as an example of someone who had training in other skills and deciding to go a different route to follow God. William Carey was training as a shoemaker in the middle of England. He was converted to Anglicanism and enthusiastically began studying Greek so he could study the New Testament in the original language. He became passionate about seeing all Christians working to fulfill the Great Commission and eventually organized a missionary society. More about Carey can be read at http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/131christians/missionaries/carey.html?start=2.

Week 2
Texts: Proverbs 11:28; Mark 10:17–31
Topics: Rich Young Ruler, Refusal of Gifts, Sacrifice
Big Idea of the Message: The rich young ruler chose to trust in his wealth and status rather than give them up to follow Jesus.
Application Point: A conversation with Jesus is not complete without an invitation to give up all our possessions in exchange for an unpredictable life following him.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. This young man’s conversation with Jesus probably did not go the way he was expecting. The young man was good at keeping the laws and the commandments, but that wasn’t enough to get to heaven. “Jesus was filled with loving compassion for this man because his life was so empty. He had climbed to the top of the ladder of success, only to find his ladder leaned against the wrong building. … He also did not choose to love God more than his wealth, even though Jesus specifically promised him treasure in heaven. The man was more interested in the earthly treasure of men than in God’s heavenly treasures. The man was essentially an idolater. Wealth was his god instead of the true God of the Bible. He put money first” (David Guzik, study guide for Mark 10, https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/mark/mark-10.cfm).
2. After his conversation, Jesus turns to his disciples to continue the discourse, comparing the ease of forcing a camel through a needle to entering the kingdom of God. The disciples seem a little worried because if that guy who follows all the law can’t get into God’s kingdom, how would they get there? Jesus clarifies his message to ease their worries in verse 27, saying that if it were up to them, it wouldn’t be possible, but with God, it is all possible.
3. Proverbs 11:28 reminds us that trusting in our own riches will not lead to life, in fact it almost guarantees our demise. Instead, we are to trust in God; then we will flourish. The green leaf, as mentioned in the verse, is green because it has all the resources it needs: the sun, the rain, and the nutrients of the soil. It depends on its creator for everything.
4. We overhear a conversation with this young ruler in which Jesus offers him true happiness and eternal life if he would only give up his riches. This young man
understood his wealth. He likely had control over it and felt comfortable and at least a small sense of power. He was independent, not needing anyone’s help. Jesus asked him to walk away from it, and he couldn’t. A life following Jesus is unpredictable, humble, quiet, and even sometimes wild. It’s scary to give up what we know or that with which we are familiar.

5. Most of us have a line we won’t cross, whether we admit it or not. We applaud people when they decide to go on the mission field, yet we are secretly happy it isn’t our child (or even us) going. We are thankful God asks someone else to do the really hard stuff. We are okay with God asking us to give a portion of our money to him and perhaps even our stuff and our time. But what about our life? What about our reputation? What about the goals and dreams we have for adulthood? What about our child’s future?

6. When a Thai soccer team went cave exploring in 2018, they never imagined they would face the brink of death. The world watched as scientists, medics, Navy SEALs, and diving experts linked arms to attempt to save the boys and their coaches. To make the safe passage, the boys and coaches had to fully trust the doctors and divers. They were entirely unable to save themselves. By leaning in and fully depending on the experts, the team was dramatically saved. Just as the divers brought the boys to safety through extreme circumstances, so Jesus offers us safe passage—entirely impossible on our own—to the kingdom of God. More details about the event can be found at [https://www.cbsnews.com/live-news/thai-cave-rescue-soccer-team-all-out-of-cave-in-thailand-2018-07-10-live-updates/](https://www.cbsnews.com/live-news/thai-cave-rescue-soccer-team-all-out-of-cave-in-thailand-2018-07-10-live-updates/).
Week 3


Topics: Sick Woman, Healed, Restored Relationship, Jesus, Power

Big Idea of the Message: The woman who had been sick for twelve years found restoration both in her body and in her place in the community after a conversation with Jesus.

Application Point: A conversation with Jesus brings healing and wholeness to those seeking him.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. Jesus paused his trip through a tightly packed crowd because he felt power leave his body when someone touched him. This woman spent all she had to get well yet nothing worked. So, she risked shame and harassment to touch Jesus. Coming within close proximity wasn’t acceptable in her condition; touching someone was entirely out of the question. “She took this opportunity of coming to Christ in a crowd; and the more people were present the more likely she thought it was that she should be concealed. Her faith was very strong; for she doubted not but that by the touch of the hem of his garment she should derive from him healing virtue sufficient for her relief, looking upon him to be such a full fountain of mercies that she should steal a cure and he not miss it. Thus many a poor soul is healed, and helped, and saved, by Christ, that is lost in a crowd, and that nobody takes notice of. The woman found an immediate change for the better in herself, and that he disease was cured” (Matthew Henry, commentary on Luke 8, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Luk/Luk_008.cfm).

2. As mentioned in Psalm 147:3, God “heals the brokenhearted” but also “binds up their wounds.” He values inner healing and healing to our physical bodies. He also knows the stars—and his children—by name and supports the humble. This woman knew something of the healing nature of Jesus through conversations with him or overhearing others speak about him. She had faith that he could make her well.

3. We can wonder whether she believed Jesus knew her name (Psalm 147:4). It’s likely she did because of her willingness to push her way through a crowd to touch him. At the very least, she knew he had the power to heal. We know, from reading the Bible, that God knows our name and the struggles we face. We can ask ourselves a faith test: Do we believe that Jesus knows our name and is aware of our circumstances or not? Then we can also pray for more faith to believe in those things.

4. Imagine pushing your way through a crowd to reach the best musician. You’d have to first buy the most expensive tickets because they sit you closest to the stage, perhaps even a backstage pass. Depending on the artist, this could likely cost more than you have. Then, you must hope the moment occurs where the musician is close enough to touch. In most cases, it is unlikely to get close enough without a specific invitation in today’s society because of security agents and fences. We see in other accounts that the disciples occasionally served as gatekeepers, trying to keep certain individuals at a distance, yet the woman
risked everything to creep through the crowd and touch him. Would you risk the same in her situation?

5. Reentry into the woman’s cultural community was probably scary and difficult. Consider the people who might see this woman for the first time, yet hadn’t heard of her healing. Were they willing to associate with her? How much had changed in the twelve years she had been away? Would she ever catch up? Her experience of reentering her society was probably similar to how our military members reenter their communities after serving around the world for so long. “Over a million children and their families have now experienced the stress of the deployment of a family member during the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whereas there is an extensive clinical literature about the developmental challenges facing children and issues of family adjustment, there is a lack of systemic research. … Some veterans develop posttraumatic stress disorder as a consequence of their experiences. This condition drives many of the adverse changes in the families of returning veterans through the effects of intimacy and nurturance in their families of withdrawal” (Alexander McFarlane, “Military Deployment: The Impact on Children and Family Adjustment and the Need for Care,” abstract, Current Opinion in Psychiatry, July 22, 2009, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19424067/).

6. What does it cost to have a chronic illness? “90% of the nation’s $4.1 trillion in annual health care expenditures are for people with chronic and mental health conditions. Chronic diseases have significant health and economic costs in the United States” (“Health and Economic Costs of Chronic Disease,” CDC, accessed September 17, 2023, https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/costs/index.htm#print). In coming to Christ, we may not always receive the complete physical healing we hope for, but a conversation with Jesus brings spiritual healing and wholeness to those seeking him.
Week 4
Topics: Thomas, Doubts, Responses, Jesus, Challenge
Big Idea of the Message: Thomas’s doubts about Jesus’s validity were calmed after a conversation with Jesus.
Application Point: A conversation with Jesus deepens our faith, answers questions we often don’t know we are asking, and changes our life forever.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. The conversation recorded in John 20 between Thomas, the other disciples, and Jesus allows us to see the grace and patience Jesus has for Thomas. Thomas earned his nickname (“Doubting Thomas”) because he doubted the other disciples had actually seen the resurrected Jesus. Then we move to the moment, eight days later, when Jesus appears with a greeting of peace. He welcomed Thomas to explore his wounds to prove that Jesus was who he claimed. Immediately, Thomas believed, and Jesus called him blessed, but Jesus said that those who believe without seeing will also be blessed. “Probably the disciples met here for some religious exercise, to pray together; or, perhaps, they met to compare notes, and consider whether they had sufficient evidence of their Master’s resurrection, and to consult what was now to be done, whether they should keep together or scatter; they met to know one another’s minds, strengthen one another’s hands, and concert proper measures to be taken in the present critical juncture. … By his absence he missed the satisfaction of seeing his Master risen, and of sharing with the disciples in their joy upon that occasion. … He did not pay a just deference to the testimony of his fellow-disciples, who were men of wisdom and integrity, and ought to have been credited” (Matthew Henry, commentary on John 20, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Jhn/Jhn_020.cfm).

2. James, when writing to the twelve scattered groups of believers, reminded his readers to ask God for more faith and wisdom. At times, our faith might waiver, but God is faithful to give more. Also, it’s important to remember that, according to Jesus’s words in Matthew 17:20–21, we only need a tiny amount of faith. We don’t need to have buckets filled with faith.

3. Jesus knew Thomas doubted that the disciples had seen his post-resurrected body, and he brought the very thing Thomas needed to ease his doubts: his body. However, there are times when we need something from God, but we are unable to put it into words. In those moments, God knows what we need, similar to the way a loved one can sense when we’re struggling to come to terms with something but are not talking about it, or when a loved one recognizes we need a meal or a break without asking us how they can help ease our discomfort.

4. There is plenty in life which we disbelieve, such as the narwhal. “A surprising number of people don’t believe narwhals exist, or believe narwhals are extinct … almost 15,000 people per month search ‘are narwhals real’ on Google” (Megan Denny, “Narwhals – Fact vs. Fiction,” PADI, accessed September 17, 2023, https://blog.padi.com/narwhals-fact-vs-fiction/).
5. Sometimes things in life are so grand that your mind cannot comprehend their magnitude—such things like the scope of the Grand Canyon, the distance between Earth and its moon or the Sun, the size of the galaxy, how northern lights dance in the sky, or even the smoothness of a baby’s skin. “The grand canyon challenges (defeats) your ability to comprehend the scales involved” (“The Grand Canyon Rules, Pt 1,” Science Minus Details, March 16, 2010, http://www.scienceminusdetails.com/2010/03/grand-canyon-rules-pt-1.html).

6. Seeing to believe is not always such a bad thing, but there are times when something is present which we cannot see, such as the wind, bravery, wisdom, love, faith, and even evil. Thomas wanted proof that what he saw was the real thing. Jesus lovingly agreed. Make a list of other things which are real but cannot be seen. If you struggle to make a list, consult this list of abstract nouns for ideas: https://education.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/learning/english/english-a-to-z-support-pages/Abstract-nouns.

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