

The Calvary Challenge  
Part 2 - Church Participation  
Luke 16:1-13  
March 18, 2018

Well, good morning, and welcome to part 2 of **“The Calvary Chapel Challenge”** - We had our first of 3 Challenge Sundays back in February - That morning we challenged you to try something new, maybe for the first time:

- 1. That you spend 5 minutes each day in Bible reading and prayer!**
- 2. That you commit to come to church on Wednesday night for the next 4 weeks!**
- 3. That you build a Christian Friendship at church!**

How did you do? - I actually heard some ENCOURAGING STORIES from some of you - And I just want to say, **“Thanks for sharing”** - It has been great to hear WHAT GOD IS DOING in your life because of the commitment you have made.

Today, we are going to give you 3 more challenges - Last month's challenges were all about PERSONAL GROWTH - This month's are about CHURCH PARTICIPATION - Not necessarily about ATTENDING church - We hope BECAUSE you are here this morning, you have met THAT CHALLENGE already.

NO, today's challenges are about participating in the LIFE OF YOUR CHURCH - and doing so on a deeper, MORE COMMITTED LEVEL.

Let me begin this morning by stating an important truth - The church is NOT A BUSINESS or an ORGANIZATION - Yes, it has a BUSINESS SIDE - we have to PAY BILLS - we have EMPLOYEES - We even INCORPORATED - but all that is a REQUIREMENT OF EXISTING in this world and having THIS BUILDING to meet in!

The church is an ORGANISM - one that if EFFECTIVE, IS FULL OF LIFE - It is NOT THE BUILDING - it is not the CORPORATION - It is each one of us FUNCTIONING TOGETHER AS one body!

This body is always GROWING & CHANGING - it is REPRODUCING & MATURING - it is fighting off attacks from VIRUSES & INFECTIONS - it is at the same time BOTH AGING & SPAWNING new life.

If you think of the church as just ANOTHER ORGANIZATION or business, you are going to really MISS THE POINT (**and the blessing**) of today's challenge.

**THE CHURCH is unique** - the word "church" in the NT was the Greek word, "**ekklasea**" - The word Jesus choose to use in naming HIS BODY OF BELIEVERS simply meant "**a gathering in a public place of people called out of their homes for a reason**".

The original usage of the word was NOT AT ALL RELIGIOUS - This Greek word could be used for ANY GROUP OF PEOPLE who have been called out of their homes for a purpose - It was a very COMMON TERM.

YET, Jesus CHOOSE THIS WORD for the church because it DESCRIBED what was going to happen - A group of people (His Followers) would be CALLED OUT of their homes for a NEW, HIGHER PURPOSE! - When you stop and think about it, it is a great word to use - **For what is the church but a group of people called out by Jesus to gather together in a public place for a very specific reason!**

In Acts 2:42, that purpose was defined by 4 ACTIVITIES - Let's read the verse first - "**And they (the church) continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers**".

This group that Jesus had CALLED OUT gathered EACH SUNDAY to do 4 things: **Study the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles** - today we call that SET OF WRITINGS our Bibles - they gathered for **fellowship** - they understood the need to get to know one another and to encourage each other.

Third was the breaking of Bread - they gathered to **share communion and to worship** with each other - and fourth, they **prayed together**.

These were the 4 ACTIVITIES they came together each week to PRACTICE - and these are the SAME 4 PURSUITS we have this morning - this is OUR PURPOSE for coming together - it is simple - but it is profound!

THINK ABOUT what makes this “ekklasea” (THIS GATHERING) different from the guys gathering at the gym this morning - or the FOURSOMES gathering at the golf course - or THE TEAMS gathering at the ballpark - They are all GATHERING FOR A REASON - they have a pursuit & a purpose - it could be FUN, EXERCISE, COMPETITION, even FRIENDSHIP BUILDING.

BUT, our purpose is EVEN MORE DEFINED - We come to GROW in our understanding of GOD & to GROW CLOSER TO EACH OTHER - We are here to LOVE GOD and to love those around us - We are here to SERVE God and to SERVE THOSE sitting around us - **TO GROW - TO LOVE - TO SERVE!**

Everything that IS PROVIDED on Sundays EXIST with these purposes in mind - Everything from the COFFEE CART to the NURSERY - from the WORSHIP BAND to the USHERS - it is ALL PUT IN PLACE to provide you with an opportunity to grow, to love and to serve Jesus and one another other.

With this as OUR BACKDROP, our first challenge is this - **That you would become a more engaged worshipper** - A huge part of our purpose in gathering is to WORSHIP OUR LORD together - you need to become a MORE ENGAGED in our worship time!

Church WAS NOT DESIGNED by God to be a SPECTATOR ACTIVITY - Yes, part of our morning involves you SITTING & QUIETLY LISTENING to our Pastor’s teach you from God’s Word - but EVEN THAT is not about spectating - it is all about becoming A LISTENER who applies & acts on what he has learned.

If you came HOPING TO BE ENTERTAINED by me this morning, I am afraid you are going to be SORELY DISAPPOINTED! - My goal is to teach you & and to challenge you - Not Entertain you! - But I do hope to teach you WITHOUT BORING YOU to death!

BUT THE OTHER HALF of the morning involves you as the KEY PARTICIPANT - Our worship time is NOT A CONCERT - It was never intended to be a PASSIVE TIME for our church.

I will agree with you that our worship team is really good - I COULD SIT & LISTEN to them for hours - I enjoy the music - and there is an ELEMENT OF ENTERTAINMENT in what they do! - They don't want to BORE YOU EITHER!

Thus, THEY PRACTICE - they strive to be the best they can be - so usually they SOUND PRETTY GOOD - and therefore THE TEMPTATION is for you to become a spectator at a concert - and that is NOT GOOD!

Someone might suggest then that **we ought to be less talented and less prepared; people would then sing along out of pity for the team!** - Trust me, this is NOT THE ANSWER! - There is nothing MORE DISTRACTING than a group playing disjointed, out of tune music - I know - I used to be the worship leader - back in darker days here at CCSM! - QUALITY is not our enemy to worship!

Let me address a COUPLE OF ISSUES that might cause you to SIT AND LISTEN rather than JOINING IN - First, I believe many of today's worship bands & worship songs are hard to sing with - WHY?

(1) Most worship leaders (at least the guys) are tenors - they SING REALLY HIGH - Many of the songs our guys do are NOT IN KEYS that I can sing in - My Solution is that I have just learned to sing AN OCTAVE LOWER - they sing WAY UP HERE - I sing WAY DOWN HERE!

I must admit, THE KEYS THAT ALLI SINGS in as an alto are better for me - but I have LEARNED TO ADAPT to either.

(2) The songs are often VERY WORDY - This requires me to LOOK AT THE SCREEN a good portion of the time - especially when a SONG IS NEW - I have come to accept these LENGTHIER SONGS as part of what the YOUNGER GENERATION likes and writes.

You see, I grew up singing hymns - You talk about HARD TO SING! - When the simple praise music of the 60's and 70's came out, it was SO LIBERATING for me - they were simple songs that YOU COULD MEMORIZE in a few minutes - suddenly our worship was easy & unhindered - I was SET FREE from my hymn book!

But, EVERY NEW GENERATION writes songs the EXPRESS THEIR HEARTS - For my children's generation who did not grow up on hymns, they seem to desire MEATIER SONGS - Songs with MORE DEPTH - Well, at least MORE WORDS!

If the songs we sing bring the younger generation to a place of worship, **I will adapt!** - AT LEAST SIX times in the Psalms, we are told to SING A NEW SONG to the Lord - I want my relationship with God to be FRESH & NEW - I say BRING ON THE NEW SONGS!

If you are OVER AGE 50, you need to adapt as well - Yes, I love it from time to time when we SING AN OLDER, SIMPLER SONG - but I don't want to live there - Not if it is going to turn off my children and grandchildren - NO, I WILL ADAPT! - I will sing a NEW SONG to the Lord!

So, how do you become a MORE ENGAGED WORSHIPPER? - Let me give you a FEW SIMPLE SUGGESTIONS that I think will help you.

First, **stop making excuses for not engaging because you can't sing!** - How many of you sing REALLY BAD - You can't hold a tune in the shower! - Let me tell you some GOOD NEWS - we play the music LOUD ENOUGH where even the person sitting right next to you CAN'T HEAR YOU!

How about this excuse, **"I don't like to sing!"** - I really DON'T BELIEVE most people when they tell me that - Trust me if I put on THE RIGHT SONG, you would be singing along!

Hey, for me, it is THE GROUP Chicago - any song by them from 1968 - 1978, I know every word - and you can count on me singing at the top of my lungs! - 25 or 6 to 4 - Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is - the number 1 requests karaoke song is this: **Play A Sweet Caroline**

I mean how could you not want to sing along! - Roll down the windows in the car and SING AS LOUD as you can!

**What is my point?** - We all like to sing songs that MEAN SOMETHING to us - When I was in High School, these were the songs that were playing while I was DEVELOPING MEMORIES - Some of these songs remind me of **football games** - or **Homecoming Dances** - or hanging out with friends on HOT SUMMER afternoons at the pool - they are all connected to FUN MEMORIES!

The problem many of you have is that THE SONGS WE SING are new to you - they DON'T YET HAVE MEANING in your life - No song will have meaning until it is ASSOCIATED WITH SOME KIND OF experience.

Songs take on meaning when I EXPERIENCE GOD SPEAKING to me or MINISTERING TO ME as I sing them - This is what often happens in worship - I come in with a HEAVY HEART - I begin singing a song to the Lord and He meets me here - Suddenly that song TAKES ON MEANING.

The Words Speak what MY HEART IS FEELING - Maybe they help me express a thought or a feeling that I have had but WAS STRUGGLING to express - During these times of worship NEW SONGS BECOME MEANINGFUL - but I have to be WILLING TO ENGAGE in the worship.

Music is a POWERFUL THING - That is why it is and has always been a big part of worship - Songs and Melodies BLEND TOGETHER to enable us to express our heart to God - Stop MAKING EXCUSES - God loves to hear you sing!

Second, **Try closing your eyes during worship** - I personally find this helps me TUNE OUT THE DISTRACTIONS around me - I still have the experience of CORPORATE WORSHIP, but I minimize the distractions!

My mind EASILY WONDERS - by simply closing my eyes I can focus on the words I am singing - If I don't know all the words, sometimes I JUST LISTEN - Sometimes I PRAY & PRAISE QUIETLY to myself while the band and the congregation sing - But I try to STAY ENGAGED.

Third, **make your worship personal, not just general** - Too often we speak of worship in A VERY GENERAL SENSE - For example, GIVING AN OFFERING is an act of worship - but unless you really pause over that offering box and personalize it, you will have worshipped God WITHOUT REALLY EXPERIENCING IT!

For many of us, our worship experience is very general - We ATTEND THE SERVICE as an act of worship - We DEDICATE AN HOUR OR TWO of our time to the Lord - We truly came with a HEART OF DEVOTION to God - We came here because He is our Lord.

But, the whole experience was NOT VERY PERSONAL - We did not ENGAGE OUR EMOTIONS - We DID NOT INVOLVE OURSELVES beyond just being here - And yes, being here is very important, - but it is ONLY HALF of the experience God wants us to have.

He desires that OUR WORSHIP BECOME PERSONAL - that our songs come from our heart - that we SING & EXPRESS our heart - that we give to Him the GLORY DUE HIS NAME - Our worship experience needs to be more than just receiving.

Our worship experience is a lot like A DINNER DATE with your wife - It is important that you take her out - pay the bill - buy her flowers - and spend the time SITTING BESIDE her all evening!

But if you NEVER SAID A WORD - all you did was LISTEN AND STARE all evening - well, I think you would have accomplished only a SMALL PORTION of what you set out to achieve that evening!

The same is true for many of you on Sunday mornings - You did some important things - **You came - you gave of your time - and your money - you listened with your whole heart while the Word was being taught.**

But if you NEVER EXPRESSED your heart through songs and prayers of worship - you ONLY ACCOMPLISHED PART of what you came to do.

To be a MORE ENGAGED WORSHIPER, you have to be more than a spectator - You have to involve yourself in the experience.

Our second challenge for March is this: **That you commit to tithing 10% of your income for 6 weeks** - Not just giving an offering, but really tithing - giving 10% of your income to the Lord each week for the next 6 weeks.

Let me say from the outset, **“I believe in tithing.”** My parents TAUGHT US TO TITHE at a very early age. And more importantly, they taught us WHY WE TITHE. That is what I want to focus on this morning.

Remember, I told you up front the church is not a business. If it were a business, you could say that I am only proposing this because it will INCREASE REVENUE for the church.

If you think that is OUR MOTIVATION, you are going TO MISS THE TRUTH of this morning’s message. I believe in tithing for one very important reason: **It is one of the simplest and most practical exercises of faith that I can make each week! And if I can’t take the simplest steps of faith, I will never take the big steps of faith God desires!**

Each payday I make a statement of faith to God THAT I TRUST HIM - I give Him back 10% of what He has ENTRUSTED TO ME - I express to GOD that I know it ALL CAME FROM HIM - and more importantly, IT ALL BELONGS TO HIM!

There is an interesting and provocative parable found in Luke 16:1-13 - At first glance, it is DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND what Jesus was trying to teach His disciples - but the meaning is VERY REVEALING - in it, we find a PRACTICAL TRUTH about human behavior.

**Luke 16:1 He (Jesus) also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.**



A steward was a person who handled THE FINANCIAL AFFAIRS of another person - Usually, a very wealthy person. The most important attribute of any steward is that they BE FOUND HONEST & FAITHFUL to the person they serve.

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 4:1-2, **“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”**

One of the underlining points of this story is OUR NEED TO BE FAITHFUL with the resources God has entrusted to us! - This particular steward forgot this important truth.

**2 "So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'**

The Master got word that his trusted steward had been cheating him - so he calls for an accounting - Sure enough, he had been STEALING FROM His master.

**3 "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 'I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'**

This SWINDLING STEWARD comes up with a plan - it is a shrewd and dishonest plan - totally in line with his character.

**5 "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' 7 "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'**

His plan involves MORE CHEATING, but it is an INGENIOUS PLAN - By marking down the bills, this wicked servant ENDEARS HIMSELF to others who can later help him!

**8 "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. 9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.**

This is the DIFFICULT PART of this parable - It seems Jesus is commending the man FOR HIS DISHONESTY - That is not the case - He is commending him because of HIS RESOURCEFULNESS!

He is saying to his disciples that THE MEN OF THIS WORLD are really creative and resourceful in practicing evil - And He is rebuking all of us for not having this same creativity, energy, and ingenuity for God's work that evil men have for worldly pursuits.

It is amazing what men will do in ORDER TO GAIN WEALTH - or to buy something THEY REALLY WANT - But Christians often LACK MOTIVATION & CREATIVITY when it comes to using their EARTHLY GIFTS for God.

But then Jesus STATES THE PRINCIPLE behind the parable - Listen closely!

**10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.**

Jesus declares that there is a DIRECT RELATIONSHIP between how we handle the small things in this life and HOW WE HANDLE THE BIG THINGS - **You can't say you can handle the big responsibilities of life if you can't handle the little ones!**

Isn't this what we say often to OUR TEENAGERS - **"How can I trust you with a driver's license when I can't trust you to do your homework?"** - This is exactly what Jesus is teaching HIS DISCIPLES.

But, in the next verse He is going to take THIS THINKING A STEP FURTHER and apply this principle to earthly and heavenly things.

**11 "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?"**

Here Jesus says, **"If I can't trust you with earthly things (money), how can I trust you with true riches, which are Spiritual things"**

Some people wonder why God HAS NEVER ENTRUSTED them with spiritual things like LEADERSHIP in the Body of Christ - or SPIRITUAL GIFTS - or WISDOM in counseling others - or gifts that INVOLVE GODLY AUTHORITY & RESPONSIBILITY for others - or even GREATER FINANCIAL resources.

THE REASON FOR MANY is because they have not shown themselves faithful in little things like money - You don't TRUST & HONOR God in the earthly area - YET YOU WONDER why He hasn't entrusted you with more?

God is a WISE MASTER - He passes out responsibility to those who have PROVEN THEMSELVES FAITHFUL in the small things - the EARTHLY THINGS.

I am sure some of you are thinking, **"What in the world does all this have to do with tithing?"** - Everything! - HONORING GOD with the tithe is the beginner's step to **(1) trusting God**, and **(2) recognizing that how you handle the first 10% will reflect how you handle the next 90%!**

Isn't this THE TRUTH BEHIND so many things in this life - If you don't get the FIRST STEP RIGHT, you generally MESS UP the rest of the process - If you DON'T RECOGNIZE GOD with the first fruits of your income, why do you think you will HONOR HIM with the REMAINDER OF IT?

Very few people I know who TRULY TITHE are in a lot of debt - Do you know why? - It is simple - they have DISCIPLINED THEMSELVES in how they spend the first 10% - therefore they have disciplined themselves in how they have HANDLED THE OTHER 90%.

Commentator Warren Wiersbe makes this comment about the stewardship we have over the resources God has put us in charge of - **“True stewardship means that we thank God for all that we have and use it as He directs. Giving God 10 percent of our income is a good way to begin our faithful stewardship.”**

I agree with Wiersbe - Tithing is the beginning - If we can't give God 10% back as an offering, how can we say GOD HAS CONTROL OVER the other 90%? - I THINK We are kidding ourselves!

Look at what Jesus says next in verse 13 - **"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."**

Understand, you can have both God and money - but you can't SERVE BOTH GOD & MONEY - You have to choose which one will be YOUR MASTER - If you want to know which one you are serving, simply look at how you prioritize your spending.

Who do you GIVE TO FIRST? - The Biblical idea behind tithing is that we MAKE A STATEMENT to God that He is first on our financial commitment list - We give to Him first as a declaration that all that HE IS MASTER OF ALL!

Let me challenge you to make a commitment giving the first 10% of income back to God - Do it as an EXPRESSION OF YOUR FAITH - Not that you would get something in return - Not hoping God will bless you with raise - Not hoping somehow you will get some kind of return on your investment!

No, do it just to make a statement to God that YOU TRUST HIM - That you want to be faithful with what He has entrusted to you.

Make a statement to God that you can be TRUSTED WITH MORE - the more important things - the spiritual things.

Our last challenge for this month is very simple - **We challenge you to invite a friend to church.**

April first is Easter Sunday - If there is ever a Sunday when people are willing to go to church, it is Easter Sunday - For most people, they just need someone to invite them.

A recent study by a NATIONAL MARKETING COMPANY found the top reasons that a SALESPERSON did not close a particular sale - Meaning they showed the product, but the sale was not made - Here IT IS:

**1) Never attempted to close** - In other words, **“they NEVER ASKED”** the person if they would like to buy the product! - This was by far the SINGLE BIGGEST REASON - They simply never said the words, **“Would you like to buy this!”**

The author of the study says this, **“If you don’t swing the bat you have no chance at hitting the ball, and if you don’t attempt the close you won’t close. I believe it’s better to get a “no” because I asked than no response because I didn’t.”**

Please understand I am NOT COMPARING inviting someone to church with SELLING A PRODUCT - though there may well be SOME SIMILARITIES - I am simply pointing out that many of us JUST ASSUME our friends or neighbors WOULD NOT want to come to church - So we NEVER ASK THEM!

Unfortunately, over time WE FORGET WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE before God changed our lives - We forget the LONELINESS out there in the world - On the surface, everyone LOOKS SO HAPPY - But they’re not.

Many of your friends are JUST WAITING for you to ask - I hope you will - I hope you will take this challenge - YOU NEVER KNOW what life will be changed simply because you TOOK A CHANCE and asked them to join you!

So there it is - These are our 3 Challenges for March:

- 1. That you would become a more engaged worshipper**
- 2. That you tithe for the next six weeks**
- 3. That you invite someone to church**

Let's Pray.

DON'T FORGET we have set up an Interactive Blog that you can use to talk about how you are doing in the Calvary Challenge. We want you guys to interact with each other over the next few months and talk about how things are going.

Here is how you get there: [calvarycsm.com/challenge](http://calvarycsm.com/challenge)

All the Challenges are there - And you can make a comment about how it is going - What are you learning? - Has it been hard or easy?