

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## LUKE 4-5

In 1979, a Laotian political refugee arrived in the US. Being skeptical of government agents, Nikone refused to reveal his surname. A custom official listed his last name as "Unknown." Today, a lot has changed for the former refugee. Nikone now owns a restaurant in Mississippi. But his legal name remains, "Nikone Unknown." He and his family are the "Unknowns..."

Well, as Luke 3 closes, Jesus is also an *unknown*. Our Lord began His ministry by being baptized by John. Afterward, He was tempted in the wilderness; then He returned to Nazareth and settled in Capernaum. By the sea, He worked miracles and casts out demons. *His reputation grew*. Jesus begins Chapter 4 an **unknown**, but by the end of Chapter 5, He's a **household word**.

Luke 4, "Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan..." Understand, Jesus' baptism was the turning point in His earthly life. At His baptism, the Father affirmed His identity, "You are My beloved Son." And He filled Jesus with His Spirit. His *credentials were filed* and His *potentials were filled*.

John 3:34 tells us Jesus received the Holy Spirit "without measure." All God's power and all spiritual gifts were given to Jesus. Nothing was withheld.

And though the **portion** was unique, the **principle** is common. As an example to us, Jesus was *led* and

*empowered by the Holy Spirit.* We also need to be filled and led by the Spirit, not by our own initiatives.

And look at the first place the Holy Spirit leads Jesus...*right into the teeth of temptation.* “*And was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.*”

Realize, temptation is not a sin. Jesus did everything right. He was in the Spirit, yet still tempted by the devil.

God allows temptation. Just as physical resistance builds muscle, spiritual resistance builds up our faith.

Verse 3 “*And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."*”

*Now, what was the first temptation?* Most folks say “*command this stone to become bread,*” but not so.

The first words out of the devil’s mouth are “*If You are the Son of God...*” He wanted Jesus to doubt His identity, and this is the devil’s strategy concerning us.

The key to our Christianity begins and ends with our identity in Christ. If I know *who I am* and *what I have* in Christ, I can stand on God’s promises, and untangle my confusions, and work out of any discouragement. But if Satan gets me to doubt my position in Christ, he can use my uncertainty to steer me as he pleases.

Even our Lord Jesus needed to be certain of His spiritual identity, *and this is where Satan attacked...*

Rather than relying on the Father's testimony at His baptism, "You are My beloved Son..." Satan tries to prod Jesus into proving that He's God's Son through His own efforts and will. *Turn this stone into bread.*

"But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'"

Understand how Satan works. Food is not a sin in and of itself. We not only like to eat, we need to eat, especially after you've fasted (*like Jesus*) for 40 days.

But this is how Satan tempts us. He starts with a *legitimate* need - **food**, friends, sex, money, love - and he tempts us to meet that need in an *illegitimate* way.

You resist temptation by believing God will meet your need in His way - in His time - by His Word. *And how do we know God's ways?* Jesus quotes Scripture. He says, "*It is written...*" and He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3.

**Real deep-down soul-satisfaction isn't found by resorting to our ways, but by resting on His Word.**

"Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All his authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." Remember God had already promised Jesus the kingdoms of this world. The Angel told His mother, Mary, He would sit on David's throne. The temptation here is to have it now!

If Jesus will **bow** to Satan, He'll have authority **now** - *without the wait, without the pain, without the cross.*

And this is how Satan tempts us. *He offers short-cuts... sex without the strings of marriage - rewards without work - privileges without responsibility...*

And again Jesus counters Satan with Scripture. This time He quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 in verse 8, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

"Then (Satan) brought (Jesus) to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here."

Each day just before sunrise, a priest climbed to the Temple's peak and looked east. When the sun peaked over the horizon, he would blow a trumpet, officially opening the Temple doors to the waiting worshippers.

What if at that moment Jesus did a swan dive from the Temple's pinnacle into the crowd and survived. Such a jump would jumpstart His ministry in a big way!

What an idea, *but it wasn't God's idea*. Jesus was sent to be a servant, not a show-off. He was to capture our hearts with truth and tenderness, not theatrics.

And notice what Satan does next. He starts quoting the Bible. "For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over You, to keep You,'" and, 'In their hands, they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.' Satan knows the Scripture better than we do, and he's a master at twisting it to

say what it never meant. The devil loves to take *the text out of context*.

“And Jesus answered and said to him, “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’”

Satan quoted Psalms that speak of *protection*, not *presumption*. God comes to our aid when we’re doing His will, not when we embark on selfish pursuits. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 - *God is nobody’s stooge*.

**Legitimate needs, short-cuts, selfish ambition** are all temptations. We learn to avoid them *by knowing who we are in Christ and by knowing God’s Word*.

“Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.” Notice the battle ain’t over. Satan is defeated. He goes off to lick his wounds, but he’ll try again later. He’s persistent.

He’s always waiting “*until an opportune time*” - *when you’re tired, or hungry, or frisky, or alone... BEWARE!*

“Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.” There was abuzz about Jesus.

*Just who was He? Was he a teacher? A politician? A prophet? A magician? Or perhaps, even the Messiah?*

Questions swirled around Jesus... “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up.” He returns to *where He’s from* to declare *what He’s going to do*.

“And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day...” Notice, it was Jesus’ habit, or “*custom*,” to go to church! And if gathering for worship was Jesus’ priority; then it should be ours too.

“And (he) stood up to read.” As a visiting dignitary, He was asked to read the Scripture. Jesus found what we call Isaiah 61 and read, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Jesus declares His intentions. Here’s what He wanted to do then and wants to do in your life today!

He brings *good news* to those who lack such news.

He *heals* people who’ve been emotionally wounded.

He *unshackles* people locked up in addiction.

He *opens spiritual eyes* that are blinded by doubt and lust...

And Jesus *frees* hurt people who’ve been beaten down and trapped in their own bitterness...

*And He does it today!* I love one paraphrase of verse 19, “*To announce, 'This is God's year to act!'*” All that He’s listed, Jesus is ready to do right here and now.

“Then He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.” *You could hear the proverbial pin drop.* Everyone knew Isaiah’s prophecy described the ministry of the Messiah. *Would Jesus ascribe this to another man or claim it Himself?*



“And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Here’s a definitive moment.

Jesus claims to be the Messiah of Israel. What Isaiah spoke 700 years earlier, Jesus now applies to Himself. *And it still applies.* These are still His intentions for us!

“So all bore witness to Him and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.”

The crowd in Nazareth was on the verge of belief, until a few skeptical minds spewed their doubt, “They said, “Is this not Joseph's son?” “Hey, he’s nobody special. We recall Him... He’s just the carpenter’s boy.”

“(Jesus) said to them, “You will surely say this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.’” Then He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country.” This was a popular proverb. A modern-day equivalent might be, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” People are too proud to admit a former associate might have special status or be favored by God. “We were in the same 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class at Nazareth Elementary... He’s nobody special.”

People lift themselves up by keeping others down.

But Jesus answered them, verse 25, “But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them

was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” In both instances, needy Israelis were too proud to go to God’s prophet for help.

Yet God was so determined to heal and bless somebody, He went outside the borders of Israel to find a person humble enough to bring their need to Him.

And today, if God can’t find a person here at CCSM humble enough to want His help, He’ll go wherever He can to find a heart He can forgive, and heal, and help.

Verse 28 “So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath (He angered their pride), and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.” On our tours to Israel, we go to this precipice just outside of Nazareth. It’s a steep and deadly drop.

The townspeople went to push Jesus over, but “Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.”

It was a miracle. The same Lord who parted the Red Sea to escape from Egypt also parted this angry mob.

Verse 31 “Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee...” This was a fishing village on the NW coast of the Sea of Galilee - the home of many of His disciples. It served as Jesus’ northern headquarters.

And He “was teaching them on the Sabbaths. And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority.” The Jewish rabbis, like lawyers today, appealed to precedent. They stood on the wisdom of other rabbis. But Jesus based



His pronouncements on the Scripture and His own application of God's Word.

He quoted Scripture like He'd written it... *for He had.*

“Now in the synagogue, there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are - the Holy One of God!”

Verse 35 “But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him.” Today, demons may behave in more sophisticated ways, but they are no less real. And Jesus has the power to rebuke and cast out demons!

“Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, “What a word this is! For with authority and power, He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.” Notice, it was not just *what Jesus was doing* that impressed the Jews, but *how He did it.*

At the time, Jewish exorcists roamed the countryside using a host of bizarre techniques to cast out demons.

They would hook a ring in a victim's nose to try and pull out the demon... Or recite incantations... Or place a victim in water and try to splash the demon out...

But Jesus just spoke a word, and demons obeyed.

“And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.” His popularity was growing.

“Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her.” Later, “*Simon*” is renamed by Jesus. He's called “*Peter*.” And here's a problem for Roman Catholics who consider Peter the first pope. He had a mother-in-law. That means their first pope was *married*!

Yet Peter had an even bigger problem. His mother-in-law had a “*high fever*.” Dr. Luke uses the Greek word “*megas*” or “*mega-fever*” - *perhaps, a case of malaria*.

It's interesting, some of us come to church and try to hide the problems we're having at home. But not Peter.

He took Jesus home with him to fix the fever. *I hope you take Jesus home with you to help fix your illness.*

Verse 39 “*So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them.*” The Greek word translated “*rebuke*” means “*to muzzle*.” Some of you might want to muzzle your mother-in-law, but Jesus muzzled her fever.

*And how did she respond?* She serves! Receive a healing touch from Jesus, and you'll also want to serve.

“*When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them.*” No illness too difficult, no person turned away - **Jesus was enough for everyone.** *He still is.*

I was thinking yesterday, how cool it would've been to follow Jesus at this time. *Every day a miracle.* It wouldn't be like this forever, but it was fun for a season!

“And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of God!” And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.” *Who wants a demon in charge of your publicity?* Jesus wisely shut them up.

“Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; but He said to them, “I **must** preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.” And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.” Notice, Jesus understood the “**musts**” God had put on His life. *In this New Year are we focused on **our** musts?* Are we motivated by the *commands of God* or the *demands of people*? Jesus knew if you don’t set your priorities others will. Let’s follow *our musts*!

Once, two fellows skipped church to go fishing. After a few hours, one of the fishermen started to feel guilty.

He confessed, “Charlie, I should’ve gone to church today.” Charlie answered him, “Clem, I couldn’t have gone to church anyway. My wife is home sick in bed.”

Well, in Luke 5 Jesus goes *fishing* and has church at the same time. He gives His disciples a new *mission*.

“So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret...” another name for the “**Sea of Galilee**.”

Remember Luke sailed the Mediterranean with Paul. What the Jews called a sea, Luke calls a *lake*. The Sea is a pear-

shaped, fresh-water lake in NE Israel, 14 miles long by 7 miles wide. At the time of Jesus, the western or Galilean bank was the most populated.

The "Plain of Gennesaret," or "Nof Ginnosar" as the Hebrews called it (*marked by the red star*), runs down the western shore. This was the Jewish side of the lake. Villages like *Magdala, Gennesaret, Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida* dotted the shore. Folks living here came in droves to see Jesus and "*pressed about Him.*"

"And (Jesus) saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets." The good fishing was at night. These guys were done. They were cleaning up and headed home.

Then (Jesus) got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat." It became a stage from which Jesus taught.

In 1986, there was a severe drought in Israel. The water level in the lake was at an all-time low. Two brothers Moshe and Yuval Lufan, members of a local Kibbutz, found a boat in the mud near Gennesaret.

The boat was 27' long by 8' wide. Tests dated it to the first century AD. It could've been Simon's boat from which Jesus taught. There's no way to know, but the kibbutz calls it "The Jesus Boat," and has it on display.

Verse 4 "When (Jesus) had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Jesus wants to go fishing!

“But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word, I will let down the net.” Simon is skeptical. He’s thinking, *“We’ve fished all night. Tried all the good spots. But if the Master wants to fish, we’ll humor Him.”*

Simon willingly followed Jesus as long as Jesus was talking Scripture, but fishing was Simon’s domain. And Jesus is doing it wrong... *wrong time, wrong place, wrong depth...* Simon doesn’t like Jesus telling him what to do when it comes to his own area of expertise.

Like the husband who took his wife fishing, *“She did everything wrong. She was too noisy. She used the wrong bait. She had a bad cast. She reeled her line in too slow - **and** she caught more fish than he did...”*

“And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.” *They still sunk.* Imagine all the hoot’n and holler’n among these surprised fishermen.

“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” Peter caught a school and went to school.

Jesus climbed into *Peter’s boat* to prove He was Lord over all of life. You think you’ve got your **marriage** wired - or you’re

good at **business** - or you're an expert **parent**. But one day, you'll come up empty, and Jesus will tell you to throw your net in another direction. You'll learn how you need His help after all.

Jesus used this thrilling event to give His disciples a new mission. From now on, they'll *"catch men."*

*And here's what you learn quickly in ministry...* You can toil all night without a nibble. You can *waste a lot of time and burn a lot of energy* on your own ideas - or you can listen to Jesus and toss your nets at His word!

*"So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him."* From now on they'll fish a world instead of a lake - use the Word instead of worms - fill the church, not a net. **They'll fish for men!**

*And they learn next they'll fish for the most unlikely of men...* *"It happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."* Leprosy was the most dreaded disease of the ancient world.

It was called *"the living death."* It began as a brown spot that became a nodule; then an ulcerated sore.

Before long, it ate away at skin tissue causing gross deformities. Fingers and feet turned to nubs. It produced nostrils without noses, and sockets without eyes. Throats without palates made gurgling sounds.

And that doesn't mention the social abandonment. A leper was untouchable. He lived in a colony. No one risked



contact... The Jews believed it took an act of God to heal leprosy. Thus, for this man to ask Jesus for healing, he was expressing his belief in Him as God.

Verse 13, “Then (Jesus) put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately the leprosy left him.” A Jewish rabbi would stay six feet from a leper. He threw rocks at the leper to keep him away. This was serious social distancing.

**But not Jesus!** Jesus didn’t have to touch this man to heal him, He could’ve just spoken a word, but Jesus went out of His way to touch him to show him how much He was loved. He healed *his heart* and *his body*.

“And (Jesus) charged him to tell no one, “But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.” Leviticus 14 set out procedures where the man’s healing could be confirmed and he be restored to his community. The goal of the miracle wasn’t to create a spectacle but to restore a brother.

“However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.” Notice, as Jesus’ public ministry broadened, His personal life deepened. He spent time with God. Rather than get spread thin, Jesus stayed rooted.

Pastors today capitalize on publicity. They *snap selfies, post to Instagram, send tweets* - Jesus prayed!

“Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them.” Notice, God’s power was particularly present to heal. God is always able, but apparently, there are windows of opportunity, seasons of healing. And this was one such moment...

“Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.” Evidently, the place was a madhouse. It was packed to the gills with people. The only way to get the lame man to Jesus was to tear away the thatched roof and lower him down. *How about an impromptu skylight in your den?*

But don’t miss the lesson. For various reasons, there are people who can’t get to Jesus on their own. This man was blessed. He had friends who helped him.

And “When He saw their faith...” *Who’s faith?* Not the lame man’s faith. Jesus saw the faith of his friends. “He said to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.”

And I’m sure this was a disappointment to these friends. In their minds, their buddy’s problem wasn’t his sin but his crippled legs. Yet Jesus looked right past the physical need to the real need - *his spiritual need*.

So what if he can walk... *all the way to hell. More than functional legs, this man needed a forgiven heart.*

Verse 21 “And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

The religious folks were quick to pick up on the implications of what Jesus said. In Judaism, only God forgives sins. Either Jesus was God or a blasphemer.

“But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk?’” Both healing and forgiveness require God’s intervention. Jesus is about to heal to prove that He can pardon.

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” - He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.” His friend’s faith got him to Jesus, but his faith received healing.

And note how this healing happens. Jesus issues an impossible command... Imagine a quadriplegic confined to a wheelchair. A hospital orderly combs his hair and feeds him daily. Yet Jesus says to him, “*Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.*” “*Say what?*”

Realize, Jesus’ command was all about *willingness*, not *ability*. This man has no ability, but as soon as he believes - in

the microsecond it takes for his brain to fire-off nerve impulses to his legs - God does a miracle.

His legs are strengthened to obey. The moment the man willed to believe, God's power was unleashed.

Verse 26 "And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today!" Indeed they had.

"After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." Tax collectors were hated by Jews. They were agents of Rome and seen as traitors.

The Romans had a *poll tax*, *ground tax*, and *income tax*. They taxed your right to exist, and eat, and work.

And these tax agents worked on commission. Anything they collected over their quota they were allowed to pocket, so they always charged an excess.

It reminds me of three men sleeping in a farmhouse: a Hindu, Jew, and IRS agent? The room had only two beds, so the Hindu volunteered to sleep in the barn.

But when he walked into the barn he saw a cow. He couldn't sleep with a cow. It was against his religion...

That's when the Jew volunteered. But a pig was in the barn. Staying with a pig was against his religion.

Finally, the IRS agent went out to sleep in the barn. That's when a little while later, there was a knock at the farmhouse door... *There stood the pig and the cow.*

Levi was a despised tax-collector, yet Jesus added him to His family. Verse 28 is amazing. “So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.” Whether this was Levi’s first encounter with Jesus, we’re not sure, but he couldn’t have known much about Him. Yet there was something about Jesus that attracted this hated man. Two words from Jesus, “Follow Me” changed his life.

“Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house.” Levi hosted a feast to honor Jesus. *And Jesus came.* In Israel, eating together was a show of acceptance.

And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, “Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus loved people, and without lower the bar of His own behavior, He enjoyed hanging out.

I’ve heard it said, “Life is all about bridges - which ones to build, which ones to cross, and which ones to burn.” Jesus built bridges. The Pharisees burn bridges. And Levi’s fellow sinners crossed the bridge to Jesus.

Verse 31, “Jesus answered (the Pharisees) and said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Jesus came to save folks who recognize a need to be saved.

“Then they said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?” And He said to them, “Can you

make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."

Fasting heightens our spiritual awareness of God's presence. The disciples didn't need to fast because God was present among them in Jesus. When He leaves, then they'll have the time and reason too fast.

The Pharisees questioned the fasting of others, but it was their fasting that needed analysis. God was doing a new thing, but their routines and traditions kept them from cooperating. "Then He spoke a parable to them: "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old." Put a new, unwashed patch on a worn-out pair of Levis, and when the patch shrinks, the jeans will tear.

Likewise, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved." It's the same principle. When new wine ferments in an old, brittle flask, it'll burst the wineskin.

And Jesus isn't just talking about jeans and flasks, but cultural mores and religious tradition. Over time the Jews and Judaism formed assumptions and routines that were incompatible with the new work God wanted to do. *Legalism restricted love. Form replaced fidelity. Procedure interfered with passion.* To follow Jesus and live by grace, people need the freedom to be flexible.



And yet, Jesus knows our nature and our resistance to change. He states in verse 39, "And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'" The human tendency is to follow the rut and resist change - even changes for the better.

Here's a truth, "There's no growth without change. There's no change without loss. And there's no loss without pain." Change is painful and disturbing at first. But to follow Jesus you have to be open to new ways.

In this New Year, let's be a new wineskin, ready for His new wine - open to the changes He has for us.