

# UNCOMMON CURRENCY

**Discipleship Truths from the Gospels**

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SHOTS**

*Uncommon Currency: Discipleship Truths from the Gospels*

Written by Brent Niedergall

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# Introduction

*Numismatics* is the study or collection of coins, and *numismatists* are people who study and collect coins. Some numismatists hunt for coins to learn about people's cultures, values, and daily lives throughout history. Other numismatists collect coins simply out of a love for their hobby. To them, coins are both exciting and valuable.

For students of Scripture, coins can offer significant insight as they appear in the biblical text. Christ often used the common currency of His day to illustrate important spiritual truths about obedience, God's love and generosity, and the cost of discipleship. A small but important aspect of everyday life pointed toward something greater.

While this study aims to teach students a few things about coins in the Bible, its primary purpose is to cultivate knowledge and love, not of coins, but of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some might enjoy pursuing numismatics, but every Christian is called to pursue following Jesus as a disciple.

This five-lesson study presents parables, miracles, and lessons from Jesus to teach teens to follow Jesus as disciples. His coin conversations, priceless parables, and money miracles challenge all believers to grow in their love and devotion to the Lord.

## Lesson Format

God's Word is the primary catalyst for our spiritual growth. And as God teaches us His truth through His Word, He does so in a way that captivates our attention and opens our understanding. Just as Christ illustrated His teaching with tangible objects—a coin, a tree, or a sheep—you can use illustrations to cement biblical principles in the minds of your students. As you teach, instead of simply talking about how God's Word reveals our heart (James 1:22–25), bring a mirror to show your students.

Hot Shots encourage interaction between students and teacher through exercises, handouts, and lively illustrations. Use the suggestions provided in each lesson, but feel free to enrich the lesson by using your own ideas.

Each Hot Shot lesson follows the same format.

- **The Warm Up** introduces the lesson topic to your students through activities such as songs, games, handouts, and discussion questions.
- **The Bridge** transitions from The Warm Up to the main text of Scripture for the lesson.
- **The Content** introduces and expands the main points. Throughout the lesson, you'll use handouts and discussion questions to help students internalize what they've heard.
- **The Closing** concludes the lesson by reviewing the main points and applying them to your students' lives.

Handouts may be copied for church use. They are also available as a free PDF download on the *Uncommon Currency* product page at [positiveaction.org](http://positiveaction.org).

## Before Each Lesson . . .

1. Read through the lesson and take note of the Objectives, Text, and any preparation needed for creative teaching segments.
2. Adapt the lesson if necessary. Determine ahead of time if you'll need to modify teaching methods or activities to fit your equipment or facilities.
3. Plan your schedule for class time. Each lesson can be taught in 20–30 minutes, but feel free to shorten or lengthen the lesson to fit your needs.
4. Be enthusiastic! Excitement on your part will help cultivate your students' interest. If you don't feel that one of the teaching ideas or Warm Ups provided will excite your teens, modify it to fit your group.

## Course Objectives

This study will . . .

- Define “discipleship” as following Jesus by obeying His teaching and imitating His example
- Explain what it means to follow Jesus Christ
- Identify humility, devotion, love, and trust as key characteristics of a disciple

## Lesson Overview

### *Lesson 1—The Denarius: Grace and Gratitude*

Text: Matthew 20:1–16

- Discipleship is following Jesus by obeying His teaching and imitating His example.
- By grace, God seeks people to follow Jesus.
- God generously rewards Jesus' disciples with eternal life.
- Gratitude is the proper response to God's generous grace.

## ***Lesson 2—The Stater: Honor and Humility***

Text: Matthew 17:24–27

- “Son of God” is a title for Jesus that communicates His great position as anointed Messiah and God.
- Disciples follow Jesus by imitating His humility.
- Humility is lived out by loving and serving others.

## ***Lesson 3—The Lepton: Devotion and Dependence***

Text: Mark 12:41–44

- Genuine disciples are devoted to Christ.
- Devotion to Jesus means following Jesus at all costs and using all of our resources to serve Him.

## ***Lesson 4—The Drachma: Repentance and Rejoicing***

Text: Luke 15:8–10

- Like the woman who searched for her lost coin, God pursues people to bring them to Him.
- God loves all people, no matter who they are or what they have done.
- Jesus’ disciples should show His love to every kind of person.

## ***Lesson 5—The Assarion: Fortitude and Fear***

Text: Luke 12:4–7

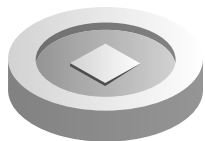
- To fear God means to reverence, respect, and honor Him.
- Disciples are Jesus’ friends.
- Although we will face persecution, we do not need to be afraid of it.





## LESSON 1

# THE DENARIUS: GRACE AND GRATITUDE



*Wisdom is not bought with earthly coin, nor is it sold in the marketplace, but in heaven. And it is sold for genuine coin, the imperishable Word, the royal gold.*

—Clement of Alexandria<sup>1</sup>

Disciples cannot be too grateful for God's grace. In this lesson, we will study Jesus' parable of the vineyard workers. This parable features a coin called the *denarius*. This is a great place to start our study for both a practical reason and a theological one. Practically, the coin featured in this parable is the most common coin in the New Testament. The monetary values of several coins in later lessons will be compared to the value of the denarius. Therefore, studying the denarius first will allow you to refer back to it when comparing how much other coins were worth. Theologically speaking, this lesson is a foundational place to begin this study on discipleship. In this parable, God seeks people to follow Christ and generously rewards all who do so.

## Objectives

- Discipleship is following Jesus by obeying His teaching and imitating His example.
- By grace, God seeks people to follow Jesus.
- God generously rewards Jesus' disciples with eternal life.
- Gratitude is the proper response to God's generous grace.

## Text: Matthew 20:1–16

This parable teaches us about God's lavish grace. The master hiring workers for his vineyard shows us that God is actively seeking people to believe in Jesus and follow Him. The master generously paying his workers shows us that God rewards those who follow Jesus.

Most Christian disciples would heartily affirm and cherish the doctrine of God's grace. We've read and heard over and over that God offers

## Preparation

You will need . . .

- Handout 1 (one copy per student)
- Pens or pencils
- Small, identical prizes for the Warm Up activity, one for each student

salvation to everyone. And we're so thankful that God accepts everyone who believes the good news of Jesus Christ.

Most of us would not make any objection to God's grace up to this point. But here comes the challenge. God graciously rewards believers equally, despite their spiritual achievements.

## Warm Up

**Handout:** Hand out a copy of "Worker Achievement Calculator" to each teen. Tell the students that the person with the highest number of points for their "Total Worker Achievements" will get a prize (e.g., a candy bar or treat). Give them time to fill in their responses and add up their points. Once they have completed their handouts, rank the students according to the point values they credited to themselves.

Give the students with the fewest points the same prize promised to the students with the most points. Starting with the students with the fewest points, work your way up, giving each student the exact same prize.

## Bridge

We expect those who work more to receive a greater reward than those who work less. The popular message is that if you work hard and get noticed, you can have anything you want. But the activity we just did turned this idea on its head. Everyone was rewarded equally no matter how little or how much they accomplished.

We will study a parable in which Jesus described a similar occurrence. Despite how much each laborer worked, all the laborers received the same pay. Jesus used this parable to teach His followers to be humble and grateful for God's freely-given grace. Both attitudes are important attributes that Jesus wants to see in His disciples.

## Lesson

This series is about discipleship. Before we go any further, we should understand the importance of this word. Discipleship means following Jesus by obeying His teaching and imitating His example.

**Discussion:** We will discuss discipleship more in the coming lessons, but let's start with a basic truth—a disciple is a follower of Jesus. How would you explain what it means to follow Jesus?

The words *follow me* are spoken by Jesus on six occasions in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus was in the business of calling people to follow Him. His message was an invitation to repentance. He was inviting people to turn from their sin and follow Him. But what were His requirements?

**Cross Reference:** Jesus did not sugarcoat the path of discipleship. **Read Matthew 16:24.** Shockingly, Jesus compared the path of discipleship to a criminal's path to execution. In a demonstration of authority, the Roman government forced criminals to submit to its will by carrying part of their own cross, just as Jesus would eventually do. Jesus used the cross to teach that disciples must submit to God's will and authority. The path of discipleship means willingly putting God's desires above all else.

Matthew arranged the material in his Gospel purposefully. In the chapter immediately preceding our parable, Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and follow Him. Sadly, the rich young ruler was unwilling to give up his wealth and follow Jesus. Shortly afterwards, Peter spoke up and reminded Jesus that he and the other disciples had given up everything they had to follow Jesus. They had sacrificed their jobs, paychecks, houses, and families. What reward would they receive for their total sacrifice? Jesus answers that they would indeed be rewarded in eternity, along with everyone else who makes sacrifices to follow Him. But notice what Jesus says in conclusion. **Read Matthew 19:30.**

This statement from Jesus will appear again at the end of this parable of the vineyard workers. We are probably all happy that God will save anyone and reward them with eternal life. This often comes with an unspoken expectation that God will reward disciples according to what we feel is fair. But Jesus' parable shatters that expectation. God's grace is not based on our achievements—something for which we should all be thankful.

## God Graciously Seeks Disciples (vv. 1–7)

### *The Kingdom of Heaven and Vineyard Workers*

**Read Matthew 20:1–2.** Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a master of a vineyard hiring some workers. But first, what is the kingdom of heaven?

Only the Gospel of Matthew uses this term. The “kingdom of heaven” is synonymous with the “kingdom of God” that appears elsewhere in Scripture. It refers to the earthly kingdom promised to Israel in the Old Testament that would include salvation along with other spiritual and physical blessings. Israel rejected Jesus, her King, at His first coming. But Jesus will one day return to establish this promised kingdom on Earth, called the millennial kingdom. Following the millennial kingdom, God will continue to reign for all eternity, and Christians will reign with Jesus (see 1 Cor. 6:2). God's eternal kingdom will follow. Therefore, we can relate the kingdom of heaven to the believer's hope of eternal life.

What is the setting for this parable? In Jesus' day, it was common for workers who needed jobs to gather in the public market and wait for someone to hire them. In the early morning, the vineyard owner showed up in the marketplace to hire some workers. But before the workers began their jobs, wages had to be agreed upon. The master would pay each of these workers one denarius for a full day's labor.

### ***The Denarius Was a Generous Reward for the Workers***

The *denarius* was a Roman silver coin. The owner agreed to pay each of his employees one denarius for a day's work. How does this compare to the usual rate for a day of labor back then?

An ancient source from around the time Jesus was born records how a man received 1/4 of a denarius for a day's labor. Another ancient source from the latter half of the first century AD shows that a farm laborer received 2/3 of a denarius for a day's labor. Given these values around the lifetime of Jesus on Earth, we can reasonably estimate from them that the average compensation for a day's labor was much closer to 1/2 of a denarius instead of an entire denarius.<sup>2</sup>

This means that an entire denarius was not standard payment for a day's labor. The vineyard owner was paying his workers twice the usual rate. This vineyard owner was extremely generous! The master's generosity will be a significant point to remember as this parable unfolds.

### ***The Master Continues to Hire Workers***

**Read Matthew 20:3–7.** Timekeeping was not as exact in first-century Palestine as it is today. Hours were counted from sunrise to sunset, so the third hour would have been around 9:00 A.M. At this time, the vineyard owner sees some people standing around in the marketplace and doing nothing. Like he did with the workers from the early morning, he hires these people to work in his vineyard. But notice that this time they do not agree upon a wage. The master does not specify an amount. He simply tells the workers he will pay everyone what is fair.

And the hiring spree continues. At the sixth hour, around noon, the owner again hires some additional workers. He repeats the process yet again at the ninth hour (around 3:00 P.M.). In these two instances, Jesus does not say that the owner communicated what he would pay to the workers. But His hearers would assume that the vineyard owner would prorate the workers' pay and give them a fraction of a denarius for working a fraction of the day.

Lastly, the owner makes one final trip to the marketplace to hire workers at the eleventh hour (around 5:00 P.M.). After a brief conversation about how no one had hired this final batch of workers all day, these workers, too, head for the field. Once again, we are not told how much money these latecomers will receive for their work.

# God Generously Promises Disciples (vv. 8–12)

## *The Last-Hired Workers Are Generously Rewarded First*

**Read Matthew 20:8–9.** When the end of the workday finally arrives, it's time to pay all the workers who labored in the vineyard. The owner instructs his foreman to pay everyone, starting with those who were hired last and working backwards.

And how much does he pay these workers who put in so little work? Each of them receives the astonishing sum of one denarius each. Keep in mind that the approximate daily wage for a field worker was 1/2 of a denarius. These latecomers only worked for about an hour, but they received an entire denarius. How much will the other workers make who labored longer? More, right?

## *All Workers Are Generously Rewarded Equally*

**Read Matthew 20:10–12.** The foreman works his way backward, paying everyone in the reverse order of when they were hired. And when those hired first are about to receive their wages, they are expecting to receive more than they had been promised. And why shouldn't they? After all, those who worked for a tiny fraction of the day received an entire denarius. Certainly, those who worked for the whole day would get paid even more.

But what do they get? The same as everyone else—one denarius. And now they're upset. They grumble. They strongly disapprove of the owner's decision to pay them only a denarius. They worked all day under the hot sun, and all they had to show for it was the exact same amount as the latecomers had earned for working only one hour. That hardly seems fair. And that's the point Jesus is trying to make.

## *Disciples Are Rewarded in Eternity*

Jesus prefaced this parable with a word of explanation (see Matt. 20:1). This story helps us understand something about the kingdom of heaven. What does Jesus want disciples to know?

- That God is going to give every believer a denarius in the kingdom? No.
- That we must work hard on Earth to earn eternal life? No.
- That we can live mostly for ourselves until we reach the end of our life and then serve God to receive eternal reward? No.

Jesus wants His disciples to know that they will be rewarded. And that reward is eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. In His conversation with the rich young ruler, Jesus equated this “treasure in heaven” with eternal

life (see Matt. 19:16, 21). One of our rewards will be never-ending life and fellowship with God Himself.

In Matthew, Jesus speaks of the “least” and “greatest” in the kingdom of heaven. These indicate a person’s present status, not their eternal one. According to the standard Jesus gives, only the “greatest”—those God approves of—will enter the kingdom of heaven. While we might think that the “greatest” are going to be the spiritual superheroes, Jesus reveals that every true disciple is actually among the “greatest.”

The Lord will reward every true disciple with eternal life in His kingdom. The judgment seat of Christ teaches us that we will give an account for our work. However, it does not teach that the outcome of that judgment will result in distinctions between believers for eternity (see 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Even the repentant criminal on the cross, who trusted in Jesus for salvation at the very end of his life, received the promise of eternal life (Luke 23:43).

## God Sovereignly Rewards Disciples (vv. 13–16)

### *The Master Decides How to Reward His Workers*

**Read Matthew 20:13–15.** Gently calling the grumbling worker “friend,” the owner responds to his complaint by reminding him of their arrangement. A denarius paid for a day’s work. The owner has done nothing wrong. He’s kept up his end of the bargain. If he wants to pay everyone a denarius for their work, that’s his business. The owner in the parable can be as generous as he wants. Remember that a whole denarius for each worker was a generous wage.

### *All Workers Will Be Rewarded Equally*

**Read Matthew 20:16.** Jesus concludes with words similar to the ones He spoke right before this parable, that many who are first would be last, and the last, first (see Matt. 19:30). In this statement, the “first” were unbelievers who were successful in the world’s eyes, and the “last” were believers who gave up everything to follow Christ.

But in this parable, “first” and “last” both refer to believers. Jesus’ point is that in the kingdom of heaven, you can flip rank on its head. There is no distinction between “great” Christians and “lesser” Christians. Those who came to Christ early in their lives will be rewarded no differently than those who came to Him late in life.

Is it unfair that all disciples will receive the same reward? It may seem unfair if we believe that the reward is based on our performance. But the real basis for the reward is the goodness and love of God, not our efforts. God’s grace may not seem fair, but it is generous. “The precious truth,” as Craig Blomberg explains, is “that all true disciples are equal in God’s eyes.”<sup>3</sup>

**Discussion:** If God rewards all true disciples equally with eternal life, does this mean it doesn't matter what we do with our lives? No, because when we understand how generous God is toward us, we will want to thank Him by serving and obeying Him.

Remember how much a denarius was worth in Jesus' day? It wasn't a day's wage—it was around two days' wages. An entire denarius was generous payment for one day's labor in the master's vineyard. And God's reward of eternal life is generous for every disciple. It's much more than any of us deserve.

Such generosity of God should prompt gratefulness and praise in us. As we meditate on how much God has given us—not based on what we've done, but on who He is—we will love Him more. We can show our gratitude to God by serving Him.

And our view of God's grace should affect how we evaluate others. Out of sinful pride, we can think too much of ourselves because we do so much to serve the Lord and we try to win people to Christ. Out of sinful pride, we might also think poorly of those who don't seem to serve God as much as we do. But as Scripture reminds us, we have no reason to boast about ourselves. We only have reason to boast about what Jesus has done for us (see 1 Cor. 1:28–31; Gal. 6:14).

## Closing

In this parable, every worker received one denarius despite how long he had been working. No one received more. No one received less. And that was more than any worker deserved. Every vineyard worker had reason to go home grateful and happy that evening.

Likewise, every disciple should be grateful to God for His goodness and grace. We cannot earn a better standing with Jesus. He gives us so much more than we deserve. He is our master and friend. Faithfully follow Him with deep joy. Serve Him with gratitude.

**Discussion:** Ask for any final questions or comments. Then close in prayer, asking God to help the group follow and obey Jesus out of heartfelt gratitude.



# Worker Achievement Calculator

Review each task in the chart below. If you performed any of these tasks within the last month, write that task's point value in the **Worker Achievement** column. Add your points at the bottom of the chart to determine your **Total Worker Achievements**.

Task	Point Value	Worker Achievement
Set table	10	
Cleared table	20	
Washed dishes	30	
Put away groceries	25	
Made bed	10	
Picked up clutter in room	20	
Helped with cooking	25	
Put away laundry	20	
Cleaned the bathroom	50	
Worked in the yard	50	
Washed the car	50	
Checked mail	10	
Babysat	50	
Fed or cared for pet	25	
Vacuumed or swept floors	30	
Emptied trash	25	
Shoveled snow	50	

**Total Worker Achievements:**