



Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

To Save a Life, Or Destroy It

by Nate King

My wife and I rarely argue. In fact, most people don't believe me when I tell them we've never had a real fight in our sixteen years together. But it's true! Also, she's only tried to stab me once. I'm kidding about that, but it is true that we don't argue. It's not like we're perfect or have the perfect relationship. We experience tension in our home, just like everyone else.

In King Casa, Jamie is our resident rule follower. If there is a rule, she assumes it was put there for a reason and tries to follow it. I'm almost the opposite. Maybe it's my sometimes-too-sarcastic nature, but I suppose the rule was put there because someone didn't take the time to develop a better solution. Or, in other words, I rarely see adding rules as an adequate solution to anything. As you may have guessed, this can be a frequent point of tension in my relationships and in my home.

All of us know what it's like to be at odds with someone. Tension, disagreement, and discord are routine parts of our human experience. It's true in my home and your home, just like it was true for Jesus and the folks He regularly encountered.

There was no group of people who seemed more often at odds with Christ than the religious elite of the day. They always had a chip on their shoulder, and for a wide variety of reasons. Most of their tension boiled down to one thing—rules. The religious guys of Jesus' day were big fans of big lists of rules. Jesus, on the other hand, was a big fan of loving and helping those He was sent to minister to.

The interaction Luke shares with us in chapter six of his gospel is a great example of this. The religious guys, we are told, were looking for an excuse to accuse Jesus. Jesus was looking for an excuse to blow some more love shaped holes in their long list of rules. The guy with a withered hand was looking for someone who would love and help him.

Everyone in this story had a lot on the line. The religious folks were worried about their reputations and their socioeconomic status. Jesus wanted to demonstrate His authority, grace, and compassion. The guy in need just wanted some help. It was a perfect scenario for tension.

What did Jesus do? He had the guy in need stand up in front of everyone gathered, and then He asked a question. “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?” (Luke 6:9) Jesus was making a point. He was making it obvious. And He was leaving nothing to question by answering His own question with His next statement, “Stretch out your hand.”

You and I run into this in our lives regularly. Sure, there’s no religious mob waiting to crucify us (hopefully?), but we are called into a moment of decision. We are torn between what somebody’s favorite rule says and the opportunity to make someone’s life better. Like Jesus, I want to default to saving lives.

In our hubris, it can seem like we try to assert our approach on a massive scale, especially when navigating the day’s difficult issues. We can set up on our own opinions as if they were the all-important rules to follow. But what if the biggest and best idea we could foster was one that said we should just help the person standing right in front of us? That’s easier said than done. I know.

I’ve spent over two decades hanging out with college students, both as a pastor and a teacher. Sometimes helping the one right in front of me means showing a massive measure of undeserved kindness and grace, like accepting an assignment from a student when they blew the deadline by a wide margin. And sometimes, it means sharing words of tough love because they needed to hear it.

Always, I hope I’m walking through my everyday world focused on one crucial thing. I hope I can live and love as Jesus did. I want to love the one right in front of me. I want to default to helping instead of hurting. I want to extend grace, forgiveness, truth, acceptance, and love. I want my life to echo Jesus’ words, “stretch out your hand.” If I’ve stepped into the opportunity, full of the grace and love of the One who sent me—it might look like they are pointing in my direction, but they’ll really be reaching for Jesus.

What kind of follower will we be when we become one focused on helping others find the hope they were looking for in Jesus? If you’ve been praying for a friend or family member to find Jesus, that’s great, but Jesus sent them to *you*. Default to the simple way of living that’s unapologetically biased toward loving the one right in front of you—Jesus style.

If asked the question, “Would you choose to help someone or hurt them?” none of us would pick “hurt them,” but sometimes we do. Sometimes our inaction does it. Sometimes our indifference does it. Sometimes our lazy dependence on someone’s rules pushes us away from kindness and the compassion people need.

Help the next one—the one right there with you. Save a life. Love big. Give it all you’ve got, and don’t worry about what happens if you run out. Jesus is right there in the thick of it with you. If you feel like you’ve loved all you can, you’ll probably just hear Him say, “stretch out your hand.” Loving those who need Jesus will always keep you in the company of the King. That’s a great way to live and love well.

Question Do you ever wrestle with “doing the right thing” over caring for others? Who can you help today that you may have ignored yesterday?

Prayer Starter “Dear Jesus, show me areas where I’ve been more focused on “doing the right thing,” instead of taking care of others. Open my eyes today to see opportunities to focus on others’ needs over my own.”

Family Chat When talking about focusing on the needs of others it might be easy to say, “I am too young to do anything,” but that just isn’t true! God wants to use you to help others. Don’t make it complicated! It might as simple as holding the door open for your teacher, packing an extra granola bar in your lunch for someone who doesn’t have food, or dropping off some cans of food at a food pantry. Talk with your children about what *they* can do. Help them find a need to meet.

Take Action Take a moment this week to reflect with your accountability partners about the steps you have taken since the launch of the Life of Christ study, discussing commitments you have made, steps you have taken, and what has and hasn’t worked for you. Talk through practical applications you sense the Lord is leading you to make.