

# HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

by David Robinson



## The Bible in Today's World— Beliefs for Everyday Life

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Lesson 1	<b>Loving the Hated.</b> . . . . .	3
Lesson 2	<b>Being a Good Neighbor</b> . . . . .	8
Lesson 3	<b>Learning To Pray</b> . . . . .	13
Lesson 4	<b>Serving God in Difficult Situations</b> . . . . .	19
Lesson 5	<b>Honesty in a Dishonest World</b> . . . . .	24
Lesson 6	<b>Getting the Chip Off Your Shoulder.</b> . . . . .	29
Lesson 7	<b>You and Your Parents</b> . . . . .	34
Lesson 8	<b>Watch Your Language.</b> . . . . .	39
Lesson 9	<b>Choose Your Friends</b> . . . . .	44
Lesson 10	<b>Stay Sober</b> . . . . .	49
Lesson 11	<b>Watch Your Temper</b> . . . . .	55
Lesson 12	<b>Living in the Sunshine</b> . . . . .	60
Lesson 13	<b>Making Life Choices</b> . . . . .	65

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# Loving the Hated

**Scripture: Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 19:1-10**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will discuss ways to deal with difficult people and situations.**

## Start Here



Today we begin a series of lessons that will deal with Bible-based beliefs that have a practical application for our everyday lives. Many seem to think of the Bible as a book of history that deals with people and events long ago or as a book of mysteries that no one can really understand. Still others regard it as a book about life in the future, about Heaven and hell and the things that will happen to us when we die. Although the Bible does refer to all these subjects, it is also a practical book that helps us deal with the people and problems we face each day.

Not only will we see the practicality of the Scriptures, but we will also see how the real problems we face haven't changed significantly over the years. The lesson for today is about how to deal with people who are hated by others. In all ages, men have hated each other and those who were hated had to deal with their enemies. The Bible offers us some sound information about how we can handle difficult situations and show the grace of God to others in the process.

## Take a Closer Look



**A principle.** Often the Lord gives us a principle to apply and to follow in our lives, and He gives us examples of how we are to make this application. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave the correct interpretation to the relationship between men and their enemies. By tradition, the Jews were taught to love their neighbors and hate

their enemies (Matt. 5:43, 44). But Jesus taught that we are to love our enemies as well as our neighbors. We are to bless those who curse us and do good to those who use us spitefully, that is, those who are motivated by hatred.

We can continue to read and find that Jesus did as He taught. One of the most hated groups in Bible times was a group of men called publicans. These men were tax collectors, and they were allowed to keep a part of the money they collected. They literally had a license to steal and many of the publicans robbed others without mercy. The publicans became wealthy, but, generally, they were hated by the people. Most Israelites regarded them as enemies; however, Jesus reached out to these men. Two such instances serve as the lesson text and illustrate the application of Jesus' teaching.

**A simple invitation.** In Mark 2:14 we read of a simple invitation that Jesus gave to a publican named Levi. When Jesus passed by, Levi was sitting at the place where he conducted his regular business as tax collector. It would have been uneventful for all concerned if Jesus had just gone on by, but He did not. Jesus spoke a simple two-word invitation to Levi. He said, "Follow me." In those two words we see the application of the principle that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

Publicans were a hated group, but every one of them was also an individual, and every one of them needed what Jesus had to offer. The publicans needed to personally accept Jesus as Savior and dedicate their lives to serve Him. This simple invitation was an extension of the love of God to an individual. Jesus was saying that this publican was no better or no worse than others were and that God had noticed his needs as much as God had noticed the needs of others.

Remarkably, Levi, who would change his name to Matthew, immediately left his business and followed Jesus. Matthew went on to be used greatly in the service of the Lord and wrote the book of the Bible that bears his name. However, this would never have happened if Jesus had not reached out in love to a man most people would never have welcomed as a fellow-believer.

Jesus loved Matthew and He loves you and me. Jesus has a place and a plan for everyone, and He graciously invites you to receive Him and let Him come into your life.

**A dinner with a sinner.** The event with Matthew was not an isolated incident. Later in His ministry, Jesus was passing through Jericho. This time Jesus did not pass by the publican's place of

business, but He did notice him. The name of this publican was Zacchaeus. He was a short man physically, but he was also very wealthy. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, so he climbed up into a tree to get a good look at Him. Again, Jesus could have easily and simply walked on by and never noticed this publican. But Jesus did not. He looked up and saw Zacchaeus and told him to come down. Moreover, Jesus declared that the procession would stop and that they would go to the house of Zacchaeus.

This delighted Zacchaeus, but it brought murmuring from the crowd that was watching. Why would Jesus go to the house of a sinner? Why would the Lord want to associate with men like this publican? Those who were watching could not understand it. Perhaps they failed to see that all men are sinners. Some sins are visibly evident and some are not, but all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and all men need Jesus as their Savior.

We learn that although Zacchaeus was a publican, he was an honest man. He was in a hated profession, but he was doing the best he could. He gave half of everything he had to the poor. If Zacchaeus found out that he had taken anything wrongfully, he paid the man back four times what he had taken. There is a tendency to stereotype others. If he is a publican, he is a sinner, and so forth. But in the case of Zacchaeus this was a mistake. Zacchaeus was not like most publicans. He was caring, and he was honest. We should be careful when we think like those who criticized Jesus for eating with Zacchaeus. How many of us give half of our goods to the poor? How many, even among Christians, would repay fourfold if we had taken anything by mistake? When we will honestly examine things, we will find that the “good people” often are not really all that good, and the “bad people” may be better than we thought they were. We should be careful about judging others until we really get to know them and see for ourselves what they are doing.

Jesus did not defend or accuse Zacchaeus. He did, however, tell him what he needed. Zacchaeus needed to be saved. No amount of good works will ever satisfy us spiritually. Only Jesus can save us from our sins. The good news of salvation came to Zacchaeus that day. Jesus then declared His motive in coming to the house of this publican and in coming into the world. Jesus had come to seek and to save the lost. Jesus was not here so that the good people could be better people. He was here so that sinners could be saved and have everlasting life.

This puts a new slant on things. If Jesus’ goal was to seek the lost, He had to search where they were. This is what Jesus was

doing when He invited publicans and sinners to follow Him and when He went into the houses of sinners to eat and to fellowship with them. Jesus loved those who hated Him. He demonstrated His concern for those who were against Him. Jesus reached out in love to everyone with whom He came in contact. Many refused Him; nevertheless, He reached out to them. Jesus gave us an example to follow when dealing with those who hate us.



How do you see the world? Do you divide it into the “good people” and the “bad people?” Are there “my people” and “the others?” Do you automatically know what to expect from some people because of the jobs they have, where they live or the color of their skin? Do you think that there are some people who automatically hate you even though they do not know you?

Now, how are you going to deal with those whom you assume are your enemies? Jesus dealt with these two men by giving them an opportunity to become His friends. They responded and became loving disciples of Christ. Certainly, not everyone who hated Jesus became a disciple, but some did. We cannot make everyone on earth be our friends, but we can always follow the teaching of Jesus and some will respond to that teaching.

There is no way we can avoid prejudice and hatred. These things are facts of life, but there are ways we can deal with them. Those who automatically hate things and people need to have their hearts renewed. They need to be saved. But, if that is ever going to happen, someone must present the truth to them and give them an opportunity to accept Jesus.

We can do this. We cannot stop others from hating us, but we can witness to them. When we are motivated by love and concern, we have an opportunity to see the power of the gospel of Christ change hearts and save the lost.

## **Building Blocks**

Many relationships were not planned in our lives. We have parents and maybe brothers and sisters because we were born into

this relationship. But many other relationships, often some of the most important relationships of our lives, are made. They are not automatic; they are the result of our own interaction with each other and with the Holy Spirit.

The principle is simple. The cycle of hatred and hurt has to stop, and it has to stop in the heart of the child of God. We cannot go on loving those who are good to us and hating those who are bad to us. We have to love everyone, especially those who do us evil.

We cannot do this in our own strength. This kind of love is not the result of super strength. It is not natural and it does not naturally dwell within us. This love is the kind of love that God showed to the whole world when He sent Jesus to die for our sins. This is the love of God that is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 5:5).

The person who hates, as well as the person who is hated, is a person in need. He needs the saving grace of God, and he needs to hear the gospel. When the gospel is presented to those who are lost, they have an opportunity to accept the wonderful work that Jesus came into the world to do. “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

## Springboard



We may not have a choice in our circumstances. Often we have little or no choice in how others see us, but we always have a choice in how we respond to others. If Jesus had responded to these publicans in judgmental outrage, many would have applauded. Instead, He chose to break the cycle of hate and respond to these men in love. We should learn from this principle and these applications that, when we will dare to be different and to do the unexpected, blessings can flow from the occasion. There will always be people who are hated, but we do not have to hate them. We can choose to follow the example of Jesus and deal with them one by one and in Christian love.