

Jacob's Well**Lesson Title:** Biblical Principles—Introduction

Key Concept: Applications may change, but biblical principles are useful in all times and locations. A biblical principle is always relevant, but it loses its relevance when it is not applied in context.

**Scriptures:**

³⁵For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.³⁶I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me. . . .⁴⁰And the King will say, "I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!"
(Matthew 25:35–36, 40 *New Living Translation*)

Context Scriptures: Isaiah 28:10–13; 1 Timothy 5:3–16; Exodus 22:22; Psalms 1:1–2, 68:5; Jeremiah 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Acts 6:1–15; James 1:22–25, 27

**Lesson Thoughts:**

A principle is a fundamental truth that informs our thinking, behaviors, and actions. For Christians, our principles are derived from the Bible. These principles are unchanging, no matter the context in which they are applied: time, place, or audience. For example, God requires his people to take care of the poor and needy. They are often referred to as the "least of these" and include widows, orphans, the fatherless, and the sick. When we tend to the least of these, it is as if we are doing it to God himself.

The Bible is both a timeless and a time-conditioned book. Its principles are intended to be universally applied across time and in any context. And yet, it was written in a specific time and place, and to a specific audience. One of the primary examples of the poor and needy in the New Testament world was widows. The term "widow" was broader than our understanding of the word today, and referred to any woman, young or old, who was left alone, and to

Jacob's Well

single mothers. To be without a husband, especially for an older woman, meant she was left destitute. Women were not able to easily earn a livelihood. Paul gave specific instructions to support widows, calling first on their children and grandchildren, and then on the church, to care for them (1 Timothy 5:3–16). This principle, and others like it, are intended to be broadly applied, but their application *must* adjust. Times are ever changing, and if the application of a principle is not adapted to fit its context (time, place, audience) then the principle loses its relevance.

So how do we apply this principle of taking care of widows in our modern-day Western context? Widows represented the “least of these” in biblical times. However, widows are not necessarily in the same helpless situation today. Women can support themselves with careers, and they have access to healthcare and social services. So, who *are* the “least of these” among us today? Our context has changed since biblical times, but the principle to care for the needy and the poor remains valid. So how can we care for them? As time marches on, the church must routinely ask itself questions like this and find the answers to make the principles that guide us continually relevant.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) What are examples of applications of a principle that have lost their relevance in context?
- 2) What are examples of principles that remain relevant because of their application in context?
- 3) How do we decide how to apply a principle in community?
- 4) What are ways that we can be present in the lives of those that are the “least of these”?
- 5) Why is it important to understand how to apply principles? What happens if we don't?

Next Lesson: Being a Stumblingblock

Jacob's Well

Notes and Reflections

- 1) Read Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 5:3–16. How can we address this principle as the church today?
- 2) Are there actions the church frowns upon that there is no explicit scripture about? Many times, we search for the exact word to see what the Scriptures have to say about the subject. Using that method, we might not find anything on the topic. Take what you have learned in this lesson regarding principles and revisit those actions. Are there principles that support the church's position?
- 3) What do we do when there aren't principles to support one of the church's positions? How do we live as Christians when fellow Christians are wrong?

Jacob's Well

Notes and Reflections, cont.