

Think Outside the Box

THINK

CHOOSE TO LIVE

*Then Jesus said to His disciples,
“If anyone wishes to come after
Me, he must deny himself, and take
up his cross and follow Me. For
whoever wishes to save his life will
lose it; but whoever loses his life
for My sake will find it. For what
will it profit a man if he gains the
whole world and forfeits his soul?*

*Or what will a man give in ex-
change for his soul? For the Son of
Man is going to come in the glory
of His Father with His angels, and
WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN
ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.*

Matthew 16:24-27

Think Outside the Box

A few years ago a comic film depicted three middle-aged, big-city businessmen searching for meaning in life. Each was experiencing his own midlife crisis, and so for their annual vacation they decided to prove their manhood by going to a working ranch. *City Slickers* was the movie's title, and these city yuppies struggled to learn to ride, rope, and herd cattle. After adjusting to ranch life, each mellowed a little as he began to appreciate his assigned duties and the magnificent Western landscape. Curly, the old ranch boss who was like an army drill sergeant, forced the men into various situations that developed their skills and attitudes, not only about ranching but about life itself. This old, leathery ranch boss, played by Jack Palance, was riding alongside one of the fellas, played by Billy Crystal, and a conversation began between them. The dialogue took a more serious tone and Curly asked, "You know what the secret of life is?" Crystal responded, "No, what?" Then, Curly says, "One thing; just one thing— You stick to that, and everything else don't mean nothing." Crystal replies, "That's great! What's the one thing?" Turning his weatherworn face and staring at Crystal for a long minute, he says, "That's what you've got to figure out!"

Curly was correct. We need to figure out what the secret of life is and stick to that. The echo of an old business principle can be heard—*The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!* The key is to know the main thing. As discussed in the previous chapters, I am afraid too much focus in the past has been placed

CHOOSE TO LIVE

on the question of the rich young ruler, and in so doing we have failed to emphasize Christ's answer. The issue is the re-orientation of LIFE!

Jesus turned the tables on the lawyer and sought to redirect the thinking of the rich ruler. In both instances Jesus revealed how to experience life. No, not just exist, but to really live. To bring us to the main point, we will consider a number of passages concerning the *enriched living* found in the *save-your-life* principle taught by Jesus in the Gospels.¹

Let's not be afraid to change our thinking so that we too can answer Curly's question—"You know what the secret of life is?"

Exchanged-Life Paradox

To save is to lose and to lose is to save. What is contradictory to common sense is a paradox. Jesus uses a paradox to explain "real" success in life. The secret is an exchanged life. Progressive development of the exchanged-life paradox is covered on one of the five separate occasions in three of the Gospels (Matt. 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24).² From it we can know the following:

Verse	Content
<i>Requirements</i>	
Matt. 16:24	Christ gives three requirements: "He must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me" for those who desire to "come after Him." ³
Mark 8:34	
Luke 9:23	
<i>Responses</i>	
Matt. 16:25	In a paradoxical statement Christ put forward two possible responses to His requirements for those who desire to "come after Him." Either invest one's life in devotion to the world system and physical
Mark 8:35	
Luke 9:24	

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Verse	Content
	protection and as a consequence miss life's true meaning and die without ever having lived, or lose one's life in devotion to Christ and possible martyrdom but save one's life.
	<i>Rationale</i>
Matt. 16:26 Mark 8:36-7 Luke 9:25	In the terminology of a business transaction, Christ explains the rationale for losing one's life in devotion to Him. Pursuing an exchanged life far outweighs any worldly gains forfeited.
	<i>Results</i>
Matt. 16:27 Mark 8:38 Luke 9:26	When Christ returns as Judge, our works and motives will be evaluated. The result will be regret for having lived in devotion to the world or honor for losing one's life in dedication to Christ.

As we consider these texts, keep in mind Christ's instruction to the rich ruler on how he could experience a full and enriched life here and now. Is the "life" concept the same? Let's see if there is a correlation.

Major Issues in Paradox

Once again Jesus' teaching creates tension. "To save is to lose and to lose is to save." Does that make sense to you? It needs some explanation, particularly in relationship to the stipulations and the outcome presented above. Let's consider the major concerns that must be addressed to clarify the tensions. Like before, whatever your theological framework, the friction in each must be resolved in harmony with the key points in the passages. Here are the *six major issues* and the chapters in which they are addressed:

CHOOSE TO LIVE

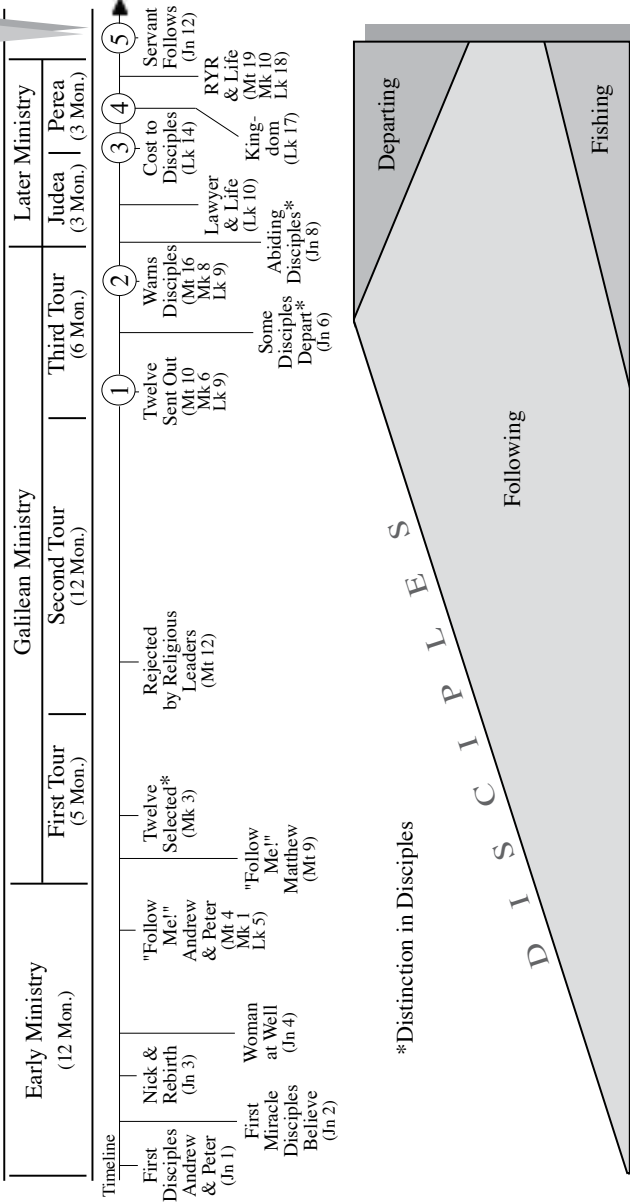
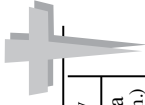
<u>Major Issue</u>	<u>Chapter</u>
1. Jesus' Use of the Paradox	Chap. 11
2. Alternatives within the Paradox	Chap. 12
3. Recipients of the Paradox	Chap. 13
4. Requirements in the Paradox	Chap. 14
5. Results of the Paradox	Chap. 14
6. Clarification of the Paradox	Chap. 15

Issue One Jesus' Use of the Paradox

Jesus taught the exchanged-life paradox numerous times to different people: (1) Matthew 10; (2) Matthew 16; Mark 8; Luke 9; (3) Luke 14; (4) Luke 17; and (5) John 12. Therefore it is important to note the significance of His words. Even more critical is the timing of this teaching during Christ's earthly ministry. The timeline chart, *Exchanged-Life Paradox and Life of Christ* (page 149), illustrates the historical perspective of the five times this topic is addressed in the Gospels (see the five circled items). As indicated, all five occurred during the last year of Christ's earthly ministry.

The chart concerns selected events in the three-and-one-half-year ministry of Christ. As depicted, followers of Jesus grew in number through the early years of His ministry. After Christ's rejection by the religious leaders in Matthew 12, Jesus begins to focus His attention on the preparation of the Twelve for what would lie ahead after His return to the Father. Jesus' on-the-job training of the Twelve prepared them for being sent out to minister (Matt. 10; Mark 6; Luke 9). Approximately one-and-one-half years earlier Jesus told

EXCHANGED-LIFE PARADOX and LIFE OF CHRIST
(Selected Events)



Adapted from: *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ*
A.T. Robertson/Harper & Row

CHOOSE TO LIVE

them, “Follow [come after] Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). As shown on the chart, the Twelve began their fishing ministry in the last year of Christ’s earthly ministry.

Significant factors impact the timing of Jesus’ exchanged-life teaching. The content of His message took a different emphasis. In His bread-of-life lesson (John 6:41-71) He speaks of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, thereby creating tension and disbelief within the group of followers, with many disciples deciding to depart. His teachings continue to become increasingly serious with

*Significant
factors impact the
timing of Jesus’
exchanged-life
teaching.*

demands for anyone who would follow Him. In the familiar discipleship passages Jesus says, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23) and “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother...even his own life, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

This seems quite different from His past interaction with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and the woman at the well (John 4:1-42). In those instances He did not mention the cost of following Him. Why the change in approach? Could it be that in the final year of His earthly ministry, Jesus’ primary purpose was not to attract additional followers, but that instead He is invoking the commitment of those who were already followers? Establishing a growing intimacy, allegiance, and dedication to Christ became the emphasis. This was the pattern with the Twelve. Now He speaks of the demands on all those who follow Him. As His final days draw to a close He is preparing His followers to grasp life and to impact the world after His departure. Only committed disciples would be able to embrace an enriched life and accomplish the task.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Timing Is Everything

Seeing Jesus' teaching on "saving your life" through discipleship in its historical context gives perspective to His ministry. Certainly He came to die for our sins on the cross so that salvation can be ours. Nevertheless He also came to establish His church on earth, particularly through the Twelve He chose and prepared. Beyond the Twelve, Jesus appealed to others to follow Him in order to experience an enriched life and participate in this new endeavor. As with the Twelve, a new thinking, motivation, and behavior were required to embrace the "secret of life" in order to minister effectively. This emphasis primarily characterized Christ's later ministry on earth, as His time to return to the Father drew near.

Chapter 11, NOTES

1. The *save-your-life* teaching is given nine times in the New Testament (Matt. 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; Heb. 10:39; Jam. 1:21; 5:20; 1 Pet. 1:9; 3:20) and a similar expression is found in three other New Testament texts (Matt. 10:39; Luke 14:26; John 12:25). These three texts have a similar paradoxical statement:

Matthew 10:39: “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.”

Luke 14:26: “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciples.”

John 12:25: “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.”

2. Appendix B, *Exchanged-Life Texts*, provides the five separate occasions for the exchanged-life teaching in the Gospels.
3. “Come after Me” is the identical request that Jesus made in Matthew 4:19 when He called Peter and Andrew to follow Him and be His disciples. “Come after Me” is the call to discipleship.