HOMECOMING is a unique Sunday in the life of the church. For some, it is a family gathering of old friends. For others, it is a moment to learn more about their new church family. The needs of your class are also unique on this Sunday.

The resource guide provides a selection of materials for you to use as you see fit. You will find:

First, Thoughts and Reflections About HOMECOMING
Second, four (4) different Sunday School Lessons For HOMECOMING
   - LESSON 1, The Sheep of His Hand, Scriptures: Psalm 23, Psalm 100
   - LESSON 3, Living Water, John 7:1-37

Choose what works for your class.

Dr. Parrott
PART 1
THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS ABOUT HOMECOMING

While we are in this world there is something that draws us back to our earthly home.

- At the end of a long hard day of work you just want to go HOME.
- When you have been on a long trip, you’re ready to get HOME!
- If you have ever traveled to a foreign country, you have no doubt found yourself longing for HOME.

Rod Sterling, the New York playwright, who was most famous as the narrator on the 60’s hit TV SHOW, The Twilight Zone, once wrote:

> “Everybody has to have a hometown. In the strangely brittle, terribly sensitive makeup of the human being, there is a need for a place to hang our hat, a ‘geographical womb’ to crawl back to, a special place where we can say, ‘That’s where I was born’ or ‘That’s where I grew up.”

> When I dig through my memory, this place I call HOME gives me a distinct feeling of warmth, comfort and well-being. For whatever else I may have had or lost or will find, I’ve still got a hometown. And this, no one can take away from me.”

One of the most wonderful and fascinating features of God’s work is that God created animals with an incredible sense of direction called “the homing instinct.”

- Against all odds, SALMON swim home from the sea to spawn in the rivers of their birth.
- After flying thousands of miles, the SWALLOWS return to their nests year after year in San Juan Capistrano.
- Every year thousands of TUNDRA SWAN and SNOW GEESE make a 4,000-5,000 mile journey from Alaska to the Pocossin Lake Wildlife Refuge in eastern North Carolina.

Even domesticated animals have shown a remarkable instinct to “go home.” If a dog or cat strays or is sold to a new owner or is carried long distances away and abandoned, the animal will act lost and homesick as they struggle to find their way back home. There are documented cases of dogs and cats traveling hundreds of miles over a period of weeks and months until they find their way home.

Perhaps God has built a homing instinct into his greatest creation, humanity. There are wonderful examples of home coming in the Bible (teachers; you may want to lift out a few of these stories as are best for your class):
Joseph reunites with his brothers:
*Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt* (Genesis 45:4).

Joseph introduces his family to his father:
*Now Israel’s eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them* (Genesis 48:10).

The marriage of Ruth and Boaz:
*Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel* (Ruth 4:11).

King Saul returns in victory:
*When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres* (1 Samuel 18:6).

God’s promise to abandoned people:
*God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing* (Psalm 66:6)

Exiles return to Jerusalem:
*In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem* (Ezra 1:11).

Mary and Elizabeth comfort one another:
*Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home* (Luke 1:56).

Jesus’ word to a man released from demons:
*“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him* (Luke 8:39).

Jesus goes to Mary and Martha at the death of Lazarus:
*When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home* (John 11:20).

We have hope for an eternal home:
*Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a*
building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling (2 Corinthians 5:1-2).

There is a great homecoming before the throne of God:
Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:
  “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
  be praise and honor and glory and power,
  for ever and ever!”

We have a final homecoming – the New Heaven and the New Earth:
Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” 5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making every thing new!”

We love the songs that remind us of going home:
• Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling... come home.
• Lord, I’m coming home.
• Just as I am... I come.
• When we all get to heaven what a day of rejoicing that will be.
• When the roll is called up yonder I’ll be there.
Part 2
SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS for HOMECOMING SUNDAY

There are four (4) Sunday School lesson in the material that follows. Use a lesson that seems best to you or combine parts of several lessons as works best for your class. The four lessons are:

- LESSON 1, The Sheep of His Hand, Scriptures: Psalm 23, Psalm 100
- LESSON 3, Living Water, John 7:1-37

LESSON 1
The Sheep of His Hand
Scriptures: Psalm 23, Psalm 100

On Homecoming Sunday, it is good to come home to one of the most familiar passages of Scripture in the Bible, the Shepherd’s Psalm. In what follows, you will find resources for a Sunday School Lesson. Use what works for your class.

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
3 he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name’s sake.
4 Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.
A Classic Story About Psalm 23:

The story is told of an actor who was known for his readings and recitations from the Classics. He always ended his performance with a dramatic recital of Psalm 23. Each night, without exception, as the actor began his recitation -- "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" -- the crowd would listen attentively and then rise with thunderous applause, in appreciation of the actor's ability to bring the psalm to life.

One night, just before the actor was to offer his customary recital of Psalm 23, a young man from the audience spoke up. "Sir, would you mind, if tonight, I recite Psalm 23?"

The actor was surprised by this unusual request. However he invited the young man to come onto the stage to recite the psalm; curious to see the how the ability of this youth weighed against his own talent.

Softly the young man began to recite the words of the psalm. When he was finished, there was no applause. There was no standing ovation as on other nights. All that could be heard was the sound of weeping. The audience had been so moved by the youth's recitation that every eye was tearful.

Amazed by what he had experienced, the actor queried, "I don't understand. I have been performing Psalm 23 for years. I have a lifetime of experience and training -- but I have never been able to move an audience as you have tonight. Tell me, what is your secret?" The young man humbly replied, "Well sir, you know the psalm...but I know the Shepherd."

The Japanese Version of Psalm 23:

The Lord is my Pace-setter, I shall not rush;
He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals.
He provides me with images of stillness,
which restore my serenity.
He leads me in ways of efficiency
through calmness of mind,
and His guidance is peace.
Even though I have a great many things
to accomplish each day,
I will not fret, for His presence is here;
His timelessness, His all importance,
will keep me in balance.
He prepares refreshment and renewal
in midst of my activity,
By anointing my mind with His oils of tranquility.
My cup of joyous energy overflows,
surely harmony and effectiveness
shall be the fruits of my hours,
for I shall walk, in the pace of my Lord
and dwell in His house forever.

_Toki Miyashina_

An Outline of Psalm 23

_A-God is With Us In The Best of Times, vs. 1-3_

**QUESTION:** How and when has God been with our class through the best of times this year? (Use the opportunity to recall stories of God’s blessings and grace as poured out on the members of your class.)

_B-God is With Us In The Worst of Times, vs. 4-5_

**QUESTION:** How and when has God been with our class through the worst of times this year? (Again, use the opportunity to recall how the class has helped each other through difficult times.)

_C-God is With Us Through All of Time, vs. 6_

**QUESTION:** What is our prayer for the year to come? (Use the opportunity to help the class look forward to and pray for the year ahead.)

Conclude by reading Psalm 100:

> Shout for joy to the **Lord**, all the earth.
> 2  Worship the **Lord** with gladness;
> come before him with **joyful songs**.
> 3  Know that the **Lord** is God.
>     It is he who made us, and we are his;
>     we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
> 4  Enter his gates with thanksgiving
>     and his courts with praise;
>     give thanks to him and praise his name.
> 5  For the **Lord** is good and his love endures forever;
>     his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Additional Resources:

[https://bible.org/article/exposition-psalm-23](https://bible.org/article/exposition-psalm-23)

LESSON 2
*A Good Report*
Acts 14:21-28

In many ways, PAUL and BARNABAS looked upon the Church at Antioch as their "home church."

We learn in ACTS 13:1-3 that it was from the Church at Antioch Paul and Barnabas were sent off on their first of three missionary journeys through the region of Asia Minor.

We also learn in ACTS 13:5 that a young man named John Mark also accompanied them on this journey, but he became homesick early on and returned to Antioch.

As we come to our scripture text in ACTS 14, PAUL and BARNABAS have just returned home after their two year missionary journey. The first thing they did was gather all the Church together for a big HOMECOMING CELEBRATION.

As we reflect on what HOMECOMING meant to the Church in Antioch, we gain some insight on what HOMECOMING means to us today.

**Bible Lesson: Where We Have Been, Acts 14: 26-27**

> 26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.
> 27 On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

I don't know about you, but I would love to have been present at that Homecoming at the Antioch Church of Christ and heard Paul and Barnabas talk about all the places they had been. Thank the Lord, we have their travel log recorded in the scriptures.

As Paul and Barnabas told of their great missionary adventure it soon became obvious to the members of the Antioch Church theirs' had not been a “sight-seeking-vacation.”

- Their journey had started on the Isle of Cyprus, which is where Barnabas called home. They traveled to several cities on that island preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- While in the city of PAPHOS, they encountered a false prophet named Bar-Jesus ("Bar" means, "son of"). So this false prophet was either portraying himself to be "the son of Jesus" or he was the son of another Jesus (a common name). He even tried to buy the power of Holy Spirit from Paul and Barnabas.
• Paul and Barnabas went on to tell about preaching in the city of PERGA. It was there, young John Mark left them and returned home. This issue of John Mark leaving would become a great point of contention between Paul and Barnabas later.

• After leaving the Island of Cyprus Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch of Pisidia. According to historical writings it is believed that this is the place where Paul came down with a bad case of malaria. It was through their preaching of the gospel many Gentiles came to accept Jesus Christ. But the JEWS who lived in that region stirred up a riot against Paul and Barnabas and ran them out of town.

• From Antioch Pisidia they traveled to Iconium; from Iconium it was on to Lystra; and then Derbe. While in Lystra, Paul nearly lost his life when the people stoned him and drug him outside the city and left him for dead.

Don’t you know the people gathered at that great Homecoming that day were glued to the edges of their seats as they listened to Paul and Barnabas tell of all these experiences in the places they had been.

Let’s reflect for a few moments on how God has moved and worked through our Sunday School Class.

**QUESTION:** Today is an appropriate moment to remember what God has done through our class across the years. What are some of the moments you remember about our class across the years?

**ACTIVITY:** (This works for some groups.) On a white board or a long sheet of paper, space out years. Invite people to write to say when they joined the class. Ask for specific memories from across the years. You can fill in the timeline for the class history.
LESSON 3
Living Water
John 7:1-37

Ancient Israel had their equivalent of a HOMECOMING celebration. It was called the Feast of Tabernacles is a week-long fall festival commemorating the 40-year journey of the Israelites in the wilderness. It is one of the three great pilgrimage feasts recorded in the Bible when all Jewish men were required to appear before the Lord in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The word Sukkot means "booths." Throughout the holiday, Jews continue to observe this time by building and dwelling in temporary shelters, just like the Hebrew people did while wandering in the desert. This joyous celebration is a reminder of God's protection, provision, and faithfulness.


The Feast of Tabernacles:

The Bible reveals dual significance in the Feast of Tabernacles. Agriculturally, the Feast of Tabernacles was Israel's "thanksgiving," a joyous harvest festival to celebrate the ingathering of grain and wine. As an historical feast, it's main characteristic is the requirement to dwell in temporary shelters or booths in remembrance of God's protection, provision and care during their 40 years in the wilderness. There are many interesting customs associated with the celebration of Sukkot.

- The booth of Sukkot is called a sukkah. These shelters consist of at least three walls and are framed with wood and canvas. The roof or covering is made from cut branches and leaves, placed loosely atop, leaving open space for the stars to be viewed and rain to enter.
- It is common to decorate the sukkah with flowers, leaves and fruits.
- Today, the requirement to dwell in the booth can be met by eating at least one meal a day in it. However, some Jews still sleep in the sukkah.
- Since Sukkot is a harvest celebration, typical foods include lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Feast of Tabernacles and Jesus as God's Anointed

During the feast of tabernacles, two important ceremonies took place.

First, the Hebrew people carried torches around the temple, illuminating bright candelabrum along the walls of the temple to demonstrate that the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles.

Second, the priest would draw water from the pool of Siloam and carry it to the temple where it was poured into a silver basin beside the altar. The priest would call upon the Lord to provide heavenly water in the form of rain for their supply.
During this ceremony the people looked forward to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Some records reference the day spoken of by the prophet Joel. Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles and spoke these amazing words on the last and greatest day of the Feast: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." (John 7:37-38) The next morning, while the torches were still burning Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

The Story of Jesus Attending the Feast of Tabernacles

The story is exciting and not well known to many people. You could tell the story as found in John 7. The climax of the story in found in vs. 35-39.

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

In this powerful incident, Jesus reveals himself as the water of life. There are people who are confused. Others are determined to silence him. Still others, believed. We are living in an age when, more and more, it takes courage and wisdom to believe and follow Jesus.

QUESTION: How has God given you courage and wisdom to follow Christ this year? How and when do you detect the "rivers of water" in your inner life?

Commentary on John 7:35-39

Below is the InterVarsity Press Commentary about the passage.

John now takes us to Jesus' shocking, clear claim made on the last and greatest day of the Feast (v. 37). On each day of the feast there was a procession of priests to the pool of Siloam to draw water (m. Sukka 4:9). The priests returned to the temple, where the water was taken in procession once around the altar with the choir chanting Psalms 113-118, and then the water was poured out as a libation at the morning sacrifice. All-night revelry lead up to this morning libation. This was a time of joy so great that it was said, 'He that never has seen the joy of the Beth he-Sh'ubah [water-drawing] has never in his life seen joy' (m. Sukka 5:1; cf. Deut 16:14-15; Jubilees 16:20, 25). This joy was associated with Isaiah 12:3, 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.' On the seventh day of the festival the priests processed around the altar with the water not once but seven times (Bloch 1980:200; cf. Beasley-Murray 1987:113 for a more detailed description).
At this high point of the festival Jesus dramatically cries out loudly (krazo, as in v. 28), *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink* (v. 37). If he spoke this invitation during the revelry, he would have to shout just to be heard. But we have also an allusion to the image of Wisdom, calling out, inviting all mankind to come and drink (cf. Prov 8—9; Sirach 24:19). What Jesus offers is the fulfillment of the very things they were celebrating. Here is grace upon grace (Jn 1:16). Here the Son is repeating the offer of the Father, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters" (Is 55:1). Indeed, he is fulfilling the role of God, who "will guide them and lead them beside springs of water" (Is 49:10). His offer shows he is far more than just a prophet or an agent; here we have God himself offering us life.

In Jewish writings water is a very rich symbol (cf. Goppelt 1972:318-22). God himself can be called "the spring of living water" (Jer 2:13; 17:13). Other texts that use water imagery speak of Wisdom (Baruch 3:12; Sirach 15:3; 24:21, 25-27, 30-31), the law (Sifre on Deuteronomy 48) and, as here in John 7:39, the Holy Spirit (Genesis Rabbah 70:8; Targum of Isaiah 44:3). Jesus, in offering the Spirit (v. 39), is claiming to be able to satisfy people's thirst for God. The cries of the psalmists are answered. David prayed, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Ps 63:1). The sons of Korah sang, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Ps 42:1-2). Both of these psalms go on to speak of meeting God in the temple: David has seen God in the sanctuary (Ps 63:2), and the sons of Korah speak of "leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng" (Ps 42:4). When Jesus cries out at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles on this particular day, the worshipers meet God in his sanctuary—in the person of his Son. The longing for God is met with God's invitation to come and be satisfied. In Jesus, God's own desire for man is expressed and the desire of man for God is met. All that the temple represented is now found in Jesus.

This invitation to come and drink is the climax of a series of references to water in this Gospel: the water turned to wine (chap. 2), the water of the new birth (chap. 3), the living water (chap. 4), the cleansing water of Bethesda (chap. 5) and the calming of the waters (chap. 6). All of these have revealed Jesus as the agent of God who brings God's gracious offer of life.

In offering them the Spirit he is claiming that the age to come has already arrived. Just as water flowed out from the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:10-14), so a river flows from the eschatological temple (Ezek 47). Ezekiel's vision has begun to be fulfilled in Jesus' offer in the temple, and it will come to completion in heaven in "the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev 22:1). That heavenly water of life is already available through Jesus. His invitation at the Feast of Tabernacles is repeated in the invitation at the end of the book of Revelation: "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev 22:17).

The words of Jesus' invitation echo in our ears. Jesus stands at the doors of our hearts and speaks to the heart of each person on earth, offering the water of eternal life—the life that flows from God. Evangelism is a matter of our giving voice
to this spiritual call. Christians need to hold up Jesus in all his beauty, that those with a desire for God may find the God who is offering himself.

While Jesus is clearly offering the water of the Spirit, it is not entirely clear to whom him refers (v. 38). Both the ancient church and modern scholars are divided over whether him refers to Jesus or the believer (cf. NIV text and margin). A reference here to Christ is more in keeping with John's thought. Christ is clearly described as the one through whom believers receive the Spirit; he breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). Although John 4:14—"Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"—refers to the believer with language similar to that in verse 38, Jesus speaks there not of an outward flow to others, but of an inward well of eternal life. Christ indeed dwells in believers and radiates from them his light and life and love, but, despite the claims of some contemporary ministers, believers do not mediate the Spirit to others. Rather, they bear witness to Jesus (4:39), and people come to him (4:40-42) and receive the living water of the Spirit (4:10) from him. This is clear in the context of Jesus' invitation, for it is to himself that he invites the people to come (7:38) and those who believe in him are the ones who receive the Spirit (7:39).

No Old Testament verse speaks of living water that flows from within him, him being either a believer or the Messiah. But there are many Scriptures that speak of God's provision of water as evidence of his grace and as an image of his gift of life in his presence. Indeed, many of these texts were read at this festival, such as the gift of water from the rock (Ex 17:1-6), the water from the eschatological temple (Ezek 47:1-11; cf. Joel 3:18) and the water from Jerusalem that will flow in the age to come (Zech 14:8; cf. Beasley-Murray 1987:116). In Nehemiah there is a reference to the water from the rock in the wilderness (Neh 9:15), which is followed by a description of God's gracious provision: "You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst" (9:20; cf. Carson 1991:326-27). In Nehemiah the focus is on the giving of the law, but the connection between the gift of the Spirit and the giving of manna and water suggests correlations in the Jewish tradition. Given John's motif of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's earlier revelation, the reference here to Scripture probably recalls a general set of images in the Old Testament rather than one particular text. Jesus provides the promised water of the age to come, which was itself a fulfillment of earlier provisions of water.

The people could not receive this Spirit until Jesus was glorified (Jn 7:39), that is, until his death (cf. 12:16, 23; 17:1). In the Son's death the glory of God shines brightest since God is love and love is the laying down of one's life (1 Jn 4:8; 3:16). One of the Spirit's roles is to bear witness to Jesus (Jn 15:26), and he could not do this until the revelation was complete. Until the Son's death, the heart of God could not be known and thus eternal life, which is knowledge of God (Jn 17:3), could not yet be experienced (cf. 1 Jn 2:20). Until the death of the Son, the life of God could not be conveyed by the Spirit.

Jesus' offer of the Spirit is both universal and addressed to individuals: If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink (v. 37). The first requirement is thirst. Everyone has spiritual thirst, for it is part of the human condition. Our need, our thirst, is what we bring to our relationship with God. This verse is one of many
revealing, diagnostic texts in John. What do we thirst for? What do we really desire? Sin is our seeking relief from this thirst in something other than God.

Jesus invites those who know their need, those who are poor in spirit (cf. Mt 5:3), to take the initiative and come to him and drink (v. 37). Drinking refers to believing (cf. v. 38), which means aligning oneself with him, trusting him, receiving his teaching and obeying his commands. Such faith will enable one to receive the Spirit and enter an abiding relationship with Christ after his glorification. All of this is based on who God is and what he has done for us. When we believe we open our hands to receive what his grace offers—we come and drink.
LESSON 4
The Great Feast in the Kingdom
Luke 14:16-24

HOMECOMING is a time for gathering, remembering, rejoicing, and feasting. Today, we gather with all the church, young and old, wealthy and poor, long time members and those who just started to attend. One can say with certainty, “Blessed are those who eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

QUESTION: What is especially a blessing for you and for our class this day? (This is an opportunity to rejoice over those who are new to your class this year, over difficulties that you have shared together as a class, etc.)

Bible Study, Luke 14:16-24 (a brief commentary on the passage follows)

One of those at the table with him said to Jesus, Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Jesus replied: A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, “Come, for everything is now ready.”

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, “I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.”

Another said, “I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.”

Still another said, “I have just got married, so I can’t come.”

QUESTION: Notice that the “excuses” are not legitimate. How buys a field and then goes to see it? How buys oxen and then tries them? What do you think is really going on here? Why didn’t these obviously wealthy people not want to accept the invitation?

The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.”

“Sir,” the servant said, “what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.”

QUESTION: Put yourself in the place of the servant (and we are the servant’s of the Master). What was he or she thinking while inviting the poor, crippled, blind, and lame? What was he or she thinking when this group off the streets began to pour into the Master’s house?

Then the master told his servant, “Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell
you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."

QUESTION: Why is the Master so intent on filling the house? If you were the servant (and you are), where and how would you start to fill the house?

Commentary on Luke 14:15-24

This passage from the InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary provides excellent background on the story

The third part of the discussion around this very eventful meal involved the telling of a parable. Jesus' rebuking was making some of the guests nervous, so someone at the table pronounced a blessing on those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. Surely it will be a great day when eternal fellowship with God comes. No doubt the person who speaks up thinks that all at the table will agree with this blessing. But Jesus takes even this occasion to issue yet another warning through a parable. In effect, he says, "Do not count your chickens before they hatch. And do not count your blessings too early. There will be surprises at God's banquet table."

The parable revolves around a man's invitations to a grand occasion, a great banquet. In the ancient world such a meal would have been preceded by invitations, which would have been accepted by those planning to attend, much like our RSVP. The next step was to hear from the host's servant that the meal was ready, which is exactly what happens in verse 17.

But a surprising thing happens on the way to the dinner. Last-second refusals pour in, despite the RSVPs. As the text says, they all alike began to make excuses. Jesus notes three in particular.

The first excuse involves the need to check out a recently bought field. Some ancient purchases did require a postpurchase inspection. So the excuse is a culturally natural one, but it also reveals priorities: something else is more important than this celebration.

The second excuse involves the purchase of five oxen. Since most ancient landowners had only one or two oxen, this man is clearly wealthy by ancient standards (Jeremias 1972:176-77). Of course the reaction again reflects priorities.

The third excuse involves a recent marriage and the desire to spend time with the new bride. The Old Testament allowed one to be freed from certain obligations in case of marriage (Deut 20:7; 24:5). But it is hard to see why this would be sufficient reason to keep the man from attending this party, especially since he had already accepted the invitation. Again, he is choosing other priorities.

The servant tells the master of the refusals. The master decides, however, that his party will go on anyway. Nothing is to be delayed. The promised celebration will be held as announced.

The celebration pictures the arrival of salvation in the kingdom's initial phase. There is no delay to the kingdom's arrival associated with Jesus. There are
only others who will be invited to come. The cultural imagery and timing control the meaning of the imagery in this text.

So the host, angered but not defeated, sends the servant out into the streets and lanes so the poor, maimed, blind and lame may come. This list recalls Jesus' earlier remarks about who is receptive to his message and shows the spiritual connection in the story. God now will invite all kinds of people to the table, and some who had appeared to be in line for an invitation will miss the meal, by choice: when the time to celebrate arrives, they refuse what is on offer.

The servant reports back, noting that many have come but the room is not yet full. So a second invitation goes out to those on the highways and in the hedges (on "hedges" see Michaelis 1967c:68); thus the invitation is now extended to travelers from outside the city who may not know the host.

It seems that the allusion here is to Gentiles. There is no great temporal break between the invitations, so Jesus is likely foretelling the apostolic mission beginning in Acts 10. Jesus views the current time of his ministry as a celebration, a time when the groom is present (Lk 5:33-39).

He concludes the parable by noting that those who were originally invited will not share in the banquet. At this point the parable becomes a rebuke. The warning is that many in the nation of Israel who were in line for divine blessing and who had responded to an initial invitation to be engaged with God's promise have failed to step forward now that the wedding day has come. The parable obviously pictures Jesus' invitation to experience the blessing of God's kingdom by responding to him.

It is crucial to understand here is that the party goes on despite the reneging of the original invitees. The party is not postponed; others are invited to take their place. Opportunity has been lost by some, grace has been extended to others, but the meal is still served. The question is on which side of the divide Jesus' listeners and Luke's readers fall. God's grace continues, but we can miss blessing if we do not respond to Jesus. Even those who seem to be first in line will miss the party if they refuse to come to the celebration. To use Jesus' words elsewhere, "the first have become last, and the last have become first."

Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do... but how much love we put in that action.

*Mother Teresa*