



EXPLORE **THE BIBLE**®
Adults

Matthew 1–13

Daily Discipleship Guide

Winter 2025-26

THE POWER OF ONE

The teacher writes the essay prompt on the board, and you stare at it blankly: "Name the person who has made the single greatest impact on your life and why." You sense various levels of confusion assault you at the same time. One minute, you wonder if anyone has really made that big of a difference in your life. The next minute, you've got a list of candidates that seems impossible to whittle down.

And even if you could eliminate every name but one, surely the last person standing deserves more attention than you could ever offer in a few hundred words. Someone like that would make such an indelible impression that you wouldn't know where to start, what to include, or what to leave out. Such a transformational figure requires the word count of a novel, not a few pages filled with the snatches of collected memories.

Naming the most influential person in your life? On the surface, it might seem like an impossible task for you and me. But, for a former tax collector named Matthew, the choice was easy: Jesus. See, it was Jesus who had found him at his tax booth, and it was Jesus who had called him in a new direction. It was Jesus who had seen past the social and spiritual stigma that hung on first-century tax collectors like barnacles on a boat. And it was Jesus who taught him what it really means to have a personal relationship with God.

Matthew, the cultural outcast, had met Jesus, and Jesus had made all the difference. That's why Matthew wrote an entire book of the Bible dedicated to the words and actions of Jesus. Thankfully, Jesus is still in the business of transforming lives today. He still accepts outcasts and social pariahs. He still makes room for them in His kingdom.

And He still teaches us what it really means to have a personal relationship with God.

Honestly, Jesus has the single greatest impact on the lives of all who come to Him. If you've never met Him, now is the time. Like Matthew, all you have to do is hear His call and respond by following Him in faith. If you're ready to take that step, here's what you need to do . . .

-
- ▶ **ADMIT** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
 - ▶ **BY FAITH RECEIVE** Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
 - ▶ **CONFESS** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.



SUGGESTED FOR THE WEEK OF

DEC. 7

DEC. 14

DEC. 21

DEC. 28

JAN. 4

JAN. 11

JAN. 18

JAN. 25

FEB. 1

FEB. 8

FEB. 15

FEB. 22

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITERS



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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline. The Key Doctrine statements in this study guide are adapted from these guidelines.

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Winter 2025-26
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- ▶ "Delivery delayed. Now arriving November 9." How well do you wait? When a package you've been anxiously awaiting is delayed, for example, do you respond with patient anticipation or irritated frustration? Personally, one-day shipping,



DoorDash®, and streaming TV shows have spoiled me. When unexpected circumstances require me to wait, it's a needed exercise for me to practice patience.

Jesus's birth in Bethlehem was a long-awaited event. For centuries, God's people waited for the promised One. Old Testament prophets spoke of a Deliverer. This news of a coming Messiah was especially meaningful to those who persevered year after year with no deliverance in sight. "She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Matthew's gospel recounts the story of Jesus's life. This quarter, we will study Jesus's teachings, witness His miraculous power, and examine His earthly ministry.

May this study stir anew within you a deep appreciation for our Savior, the One who delivers us from our sins. We no longer have to wait; those days are over. Our King has come!

In Him,

Amber Vaden

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BIBLE READING PLAN



DECEMBER

- ☐ 1. Matthew 1:1-6
- ☐ 2. Matthew 1:7-11
- ☐ 3. Matthew 1:12-17
- ☐ 4. Matthew 1:18-21
- ☐ 5. Matthew 1:22-25
- ☐ 6. Matthew 2:1-4
- ☐ 7. Matthew 2:5-8
- ☐ 8. Matthew 2:9-12
- ☐ 9. Matthew 2:13-15
- ☐ 10. Matthew 2:16-18
- ☐ 11. Matthew 2:19-23
- ☐ 12. Matthew 3:1-6
- ☐ 13. Matthew 3:7-10
- ☐ 14. Matthew 3:11-12
- ☐ 15. Matthew 3:13-17
- ☐ 16. Matthew 4:1-4
- ☐ 17. Matthew 4:5-7
- ☐ 18. Matthew 4:8-11
- ☐ 19. Matthew 4:12-17
- ☐ 20. Matthew 4:18-22
- ☐ 21. Matthew 4:23-25
- ☐ 22. Matthew 5:1-10
- ☐ 23. Matthew 5:11-12
- ☐ 24. Matthew 5:13-16
- ☐ 25. Matthew 5:17-20
- ☐ 26. Matthew 5:21-26
- ☐ 27. Matthew 5:27-30
- ☐ 28. Matthew 5:31-32
- ☐ 29. Matthew 5:33-37
- ☐ 30. Matthew 5:38-42
- ☐ 31. Matthew 5:43-48

JANUARY

- ☐ 1. Matthew 6:1-4
- ☐ 2. Matthew 6:5-8
- ☐ 3. Matthew 6:9-15
- ☐ 4. Matthew 6:16-18
- ☐ 5. Matthew 6:19-24
- ☐ 6. Matthew 6:25-34
- ☐ 7. Matthew 7:1-6
- ☐ 8. Matthew 7:7-12
- ☐ 9. Matthew 7:13-14
- ☐ 10. Matthew 7:15-20
- ☐ 11. Matthew 7:21-23
- ☐ 12. Matthew 7:24-29
- ☐ 13. Matthew 8:1-4
- ☐ 14. Matthew 8:5-13
- ☐ 15. Matthew 8:14-17
- ☐ 16. Matthew 8:18-22
- ☐ 17. Matthew 8:23-27
- ☐ 18. Matthew 8:28-34
- ☐ 19. Matthew 9:1-8
- ☐ 20. Matthew 9:9-13
- ☐ 21. Matthew 9:14-17
- ☐ 22. Matthew 9:18-26
- ☐ 23. Matthew 9:27-31
- ☐ 24. Matthew 9:32-34
- ☐ 25. Matthew 9:35-38
- ☐ 26. Matthew 10:1-4
- ☐ 27. Matthew 10:5-15
- ☐ 28. Matthew 10:16-20
- ☐ 29. Matthew 10:21-25
- ☐ 30. Matthew 10:26-31
- ☐ 31. Matthew 10:32-39

FEBRUARY

- ☐ 1. Matthew 10:40-42
- ☐ 2. Matthew 11:1-6
- ☐ 3. Matthew 11:7-10
- ☐ 4. Matthew 11:11-15
- ☐ 5. Matthew 11:16-19
- ☐ 6. Matthew 11:20-24
- ☐ 7. Matthew 11:25-30
- ☐ 8. Matthew 12:1-8
- ☐ 9. Matthew 12:9-14
- ☐ 10. Matthew 12:15-21
- ☐ 11. Matthew 12:22-29
- ☐ 12. Matthew 12:30-32
- ☐ 13. Matthew 12:33-37
- ☐ 14. Matthew 12:38-42
- ☐ 15. Matthew 12:43-45
- ☐ 16. Matthew 12:46-50
- ☐ 17. Matthew 13:1-9
- ☐ 18. Matthew 13:10-15
- ☐ 19. Matthew 13:16-17
- ☐ 20. Matthew 13:18-23
- ☐ 21. Matthew 13:24-30
- ☐ 22. Matthew 13:31-33
- ☐ 23. Matthew 13:34-35
- ☐ 24. Matthew 13:36-43
- ☐ 25. Matthew 13:44-46
- ☐ 26. Matthew 13:47-50
- ☐ 27. Matthew 13:51-52
- ☐ 28. Matthew 13:53-58

MEMORY VERSES



SESSION 1:

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."
- Matthew 3:17

SESSION 2:

"Follow me," he told them, "and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. - Matthew 4:19-20

SESSION 3:

Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. - Matthew 2:11

SESSION 4:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:20

SESSION 5:

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. - Matthew 6:33

SESSION 6:

"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." - Matthew 7:24

SESSION 7:

Reaching out his hand, Jesus touched him, saying, "I am willing; be made clean." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. - Matthew 8:3

SESSION 8:

Now when he heard this, he said, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick." - Matthew 9:12

SESSION 9:

Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.
- Matthew 10:28

SESSION 10:

"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news, and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me."
- Matthew 11:5-6

SESSION 11:

"For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."
- Matthew 12:8

SESSION 12:

Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. - Matthew 13:40



“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes” (Matt. 7:28-29). Sprinkled throughout the Gospel of Matthew are nine references to the authority of Jesus. Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus’s authority, or power, served his purpose of proving that Jesus was God’s long-awaited Messiah.

To back up that claim, the Gospel is filled with numerous prophecies showing how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament concerning the coming Messiah. In addition, Matthew interspersed the teachings of Jesus with numerous miracles attesting to Jesus’s divine nature. His intent was to show through the narration of teachings and miracles that Jesus was indeed God’s Messiah and that response to Him brought either blessing or judgment.

While there is no direct reference to the writer of this Gospel as the disciple named Matthew, early church tradition and references from several church leaders in the early second century point to Matthew the apostle as the writer.

At first appearance, the Gospel might be thought of as a chronological summary of the life and ministry of Jesus. It is more than that. The book is a carefully constructed collection of the key teachings of Jesus. While it begins with

the genealogy and birth of Jesus, and closes with His death by crucifixion and resurrection, the central part of the book contains five sections of the collected teachings of Jesus. These five sections are found in chapters 5–7; 10; 13; 18; and 23–25. Each section closes with a formulaic statement, “when Jesus had finished” these teachings (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Between each of these sections of teachings, Matthew narrated the actions of Jesus in healing, casting out demons, raising the dead, and feeding thousands with only a small amount of food.

A second organizing principle in the Gospel was the separate ministries of Jesus in Galilee (Matt. 4:12–14:12) and in Judea (17:22–28:20). In the interval between these two sections was a brief journey into the region of Tyre and Sidon. The climatic section of the book is the final week of Jesus in Jerusalem, culminating in His arrest, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

In the pages of this Gospel, Matthew the tax-collector-turned-disciple, presents to us a snapshot of the life and teachings of Jesus. This certainly is not a complete biography nor an exhaustive collection of Jesus’s teachings. Instead, it is a reliable glimpse into the period of time when God came to earth in flesh and bone to bring about salvation for all who place their trust in Him.



Matthew

- I. Birth and Infancy of Jesus** (1:1–2:23)
- II. Beginning of Jesus’s Ministry in Galilee** (3:1–4:25)
- III. Discourse One: The Sermon on the Mount** (5:1–7:29)
- IV. Jesus’s First Miracles** (8:1–9:38)
- V. Discourse Two: Ministry of Jesus’s Disciples** (10:1–42)
- VI. Responses to Jesus’s Ministry** (11:1–12:50)
- VII. Discourse Three: Parables about the Kingdom** (13:1–58)
- VIII. Close of Jesus’s Ministry in Galilee** (14:1–17:27)
- IX. Discourse Four: Character of Jesus’s Disciples** (18:1–35)
- X. Jesus’s Ministry on the Way to Jerusalem** (19:1–20:34)
- XI. Jesus’s Ministry in Jerusalem** (21:1–23:39)
- XII. Discourse Five: Olivet Discourse** (24:1–25:46)
- XIII. Betrayal, Crucifixion, and Burial** (26:1–27:66)
- XIV. Resurrection and Commission** (28:1–20)



USING THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

A person's spiritual growth hinges on daily Bible engagement. *Daily* implies a discipline much like exercising, brushing teeth, or eating a certain number of calories EVERY day. Our spiritual training should be no different since we need spiritual nourishment every day. The focus is the *Bible*, God's Word. There is nothing wrong with knowing the thoughts of great philosophers, leaders, or theologians, as long as God's Word is the final word on the matter. Engagement carries the idea of participation and involvement. *Engagement* is active, requiring us to read, study, and reflect.

Your *Daily Discipleship Guide* is full of tools to help you engage with God's Word. But like any tool, you have to use it to get the benefit.

- Use this resource when studying with a group. The first four pages of each session help the group examine a Bible passage and move us toward acting on the truths discovered as a group and an individual.
- Use the **Talk It Out** page to hold yourself and others accountable by meeting in a smaller group of same-sex individuals (an accountability group). Share with the smaller group what God has been teaching you through the group time and your personal daily Bible study while working to memorize a Bible verse.
- Use the **Daily Exploration** pages to go deeper into God's Word, building on your group's study experience. Engage in daily Bible study, record your thoughts, reflect on the questions, and take action.
- Use the resource every week even when you are unable to attend the group's Bible study. Missing a group Bible study does not excuse you from being engaged daily with God through His Word.

Want this resource on your phone or tablet for when you are on the go? Purchase an eBook at goExploreTheBible.com or at Lifeway.com/digitalstudies.





Getting the most from Talk It Out

Talk It Out supports groups of three or four people who come together weekly to encourage, share, and sharpen each other. While other issues may be addressed, the Talk It Out section focuses on the weekly memory verse. The questions and comments provide a means for encouraging each other to memorize Scripture while reflecting on the main point of that week's lesson.

These groups are made up of three to four people...

- Participants should be of the same gender.
- These groups should be smaller on purpose.
- These groups can meet at almost any location.
- These groups can easily accommodate each other's schedules.

Some married couples may choose to use the Talk It Out section for a weekly family devotional activity.

...Who meet weekly...

- We were created to relate, so meeting weekly is important.
 - In some cases, your smaller group may need to meet virtually. You may find it best to meet face-to-face every other week or once a month and use virtual tools the other weeks.
-

...To hold each other accountable and encourage each other in their spiritual growth.

- Review the questions and comments in Talk It Out.
- Look for ways the memory verse relates to the main point of the lesson.
- Include time to pray for each other.

SESSION 1

Affirmation

MATTHEW 3:13–4:11

JESUS CAME TO FULFILL THE FATHER'S PLAN OF SALVATION.



Think back to the last time you started a new job. Perhaps you felt excitement as well as apprehension. If you went through a new employee orientation, those feelings of apprehension may have been dispelled—or they may have heightened. They might have lingered until the first words of affirmation came out of the mouth of your boss. Words of encouragement are important in any new endeavor.

WHY DO YOU THINK WORDS OF AFFIRMATION ARE SO IMPORTANT
WHEN YOU EMBARK ON A NEW ENDEAVOR?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The Gospel of Matthew is one of the three Synoptic Gospels, along with Mark and Luke. The word *synoptic* means “with the same eye” or from the same viewpoint. These three Gospel accounts follow a similar order of events and contain many of the same teachings of Jesus. The fourth Gospel, John, approaches the ministry and teaching of Jesus from a different viewpoint. All four Gospels, though, are the account of God’s intervention in history to provide His redemption to sinful humanity through His Son.

Matthew began his Gospel with the announcement and birth of Jesus. The account of Jesus’s ministry begins in chapter 3, some thirty years later. In rapid succession, Matthew tells of three key events that launched Jesus’s ministry—the appearance of John the Baptist, Jesus’s baptism, and His temptation in the wilderness.

John the Baptist is introduced in chapter 3. While John the Baptist’s central purpose was to direct attention to the coming Messiah, we must not lose sight of the fact that

John was a mighty prophet. In fact, he was the first prophet in over four hundred years among the Jewish people. As a result, the Jewish people turned out in great numbers to see and hear John.

John played two roles in God’s plan of redemption. First, he was a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. Prophecy concerning John is found in Malachi 3:1, “See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me.” Second, John was a herald of the good news that God’s Messiah had arrived. His preaching called for people to prepare for the Messiah through repentance and a baptism that illustrated repentance. Continually, John called attention to the fact that “one . . . more powerful” than him was coming.



3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be **baptized** **A** by him. **14** But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” **15** Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us **to fulfill all righteousness.**” **B** Then John allowed him to be baptized. **16** When Jesus was baptized, he **went up** **C** immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. **17** And a **voice** **D** from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by **the devil.** **E** **2** After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** Then the tempter approached him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” **4** He answered, “**It is written:**” **F** Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the **pinnacle of the temple,** **G** **6** and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” **7** Jesus told him, “It is also written: Do not **test** **H** the Lord your God.” **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9** And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me.” **10** Then Jesus told him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” **11** Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

A. John baptized those who repented from sin. Jesus had no need for that, but His baptism signifies full obedience to God’s purposes.

B. Jesus did not contradict John’s assessment. Rather, He affirmed that His own baptism was necessary for full obedience.

C. Matthew’s wording suggests complete immersion. The repetition of the Greek word *bap-tizo* supports this view of baptism.

D. Each member of the Trinity appears in this setting. The coming of the Spirit and the Father’s verbal approval of His “beloved Son” affirmed Jesus’s messianic mission.

E. Greek, *diabolos*. Satan roams the earth as God’s enemy, accusing believers and attacking their faith (Job 1:6-7; Zech. 3:1-2; Luke 22:31).

F. Satan struck at a point of physical weakness, but Jesus responded with the power of God’s Word—not once, but three times.

G. “Highest point” (NIV). Likely, the southeast corner of the temple complex overlooking the Kidron Valley hundreds of feet below.

H. “Tempt” (KJV). The Greek wording suggests deliberately provoking or challenging someone. Here, the idea is “forcing” God to prove Himself.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Obeying God

(Matt. 3:13-17)

Believers are called to demonstrate obedience through baptism by immersion.

- **Why did Jesus come to John for baptism?**
- **What is the purpose of baptism in a believer's life?**

2. Hearing God

(Matt. 4:1-4)

We can rely on Scripture to find strength and resist temptation.

- **How have you found strength and encouragement in God's Word?**

3. Trusting God

(Matt. 4:5-7)

We can trust God's faithfulness without demanding miracles.

- **What are some ways people might try to put God to the test in our culture?**

4. Worshiping God

(Matt. 4:8-11)

We must acknowledge God alone as worthy of our worship.

- **What challenges our worship of God alone? How can we overcome those challenges?**

Apply the Text

- **There is strength in numbers. How can your group members support and encourage one another as they face life's temptations? How can you build accountability in your group?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Baptism

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. (See Acts 2:41-42; Romans 6:3-5.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.

Make a chart with two columns. Title one column "Temptations" and the second column "Responses." In the first column, describe aspects of each of Satan's temptations. Do the same with Jesus's responses in the second column. List ways Satan tempts believers today. Find Scripture you can use to meet each of the listed temptations.



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.



TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 3:17. What did God the Father affirm about Jesus?

Verse 17 reveals the relationship of the Father and the Son. It's also the first of three times in the Gospels that God spoke from heaven. The other times are at Jesus's transfiguration (Matt. 17:5) and after Jesus's prayer that God's name be glorified (John 12:28). The Father's words in verse 17 reveal His evaluation of Jesus. The Greek word translated "well-pleased" means to take pleasure or find satisfaction in.

Why do you think God affirmed Jesus in an audible voice?

Jesus's submission to baptism (Matt. 3:13-16) and the Father's affirmation set the stage for the beginning of His public ministry. The next event, Jesus's temptations by the devil (4:1-11), would test His commitment to the Father's plan. When our lives are connected to Jesus, we can know that we are a part of God's plan to save people from their sin—we join Jesus in His mission.

How does your life express your commitment to God's plan for you?

As you work on memorizing Matthew 3:17 this week, remember to express to Jesus your pleasure in Him.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 3:13-15

Consider the reasons Jesus was baptized.

Matthew introduced the Messiah with a simple statement: “Then Jesus came from Galilee.” He came purposefully to the Jordan River from Nazareth (Mark 1:9) to be baptized by John. This baptism was the climax of John’s ministry and the beginning of Jesus’s ministry. From this point forward, John would decrease, and Jesus would increase (John 3:30).

John’s message was repentance demonstrated through baptism (Matt. 3:2). Thus he was surprised when Jesus came to be baptized by him. Most likely, John knew of Jesus’s divine identity. No doubt, John’s parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, had shared with him the events surrounding the birth of Jesus (see Luke 1:39-45). At first, John resisted the request from Jesus. “No, I need to be baptized by you” was an admission by John of his own sinfulness. But Jesus stated that His own baptism by John was necessary as “the way . . . to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus, fully God and fully man, was baptized to identify with the sinfulness of humanity. Jesus also was identifying Himself with the ministry of John, the forerunner of the Messiah, linking their ministries together. Finally, Jesus’s baptism demonstrated His commitment to fulfill the mission for which He came into the world. It was an act of obedience to the Father and gives us an example of obedience.

What step of obedience to God do you need to take?



Day 2: Matthew 3:16-17

Note the biblical mode of baptism.

Based on the language in verse 16, Jesus’s baptism was by immersion. The Greek word baptized means to “dip or submerge under water.” It is a word that was used in ancient Greek literature of a boat that was sunk in battle. The mode of immersion paints the picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Immersion is the biblical form of baptism. For example, when Philip baptized the Ethiopian official, “both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him,” then “they came up out of the water” (Acts 8:38-39).

Immediately following Jesus’s baptism, the heavens opened and two signs of God’s affirmation of His Son appeared. First, there was a symbol like a dove descending on Jesus. Note the word *like*. This was not a dove but something like a dove; it was a symbol of the Spirit of God on Jesus. Second, God the Father spoke words of affirmation describing Jesus as His beloved Son in whom He was well-pleased. At the baptism of Jesus is clearly pictured God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The three Persons of the Trinity are distinct but without division of nature or essence.

How would you explain to someone the meaning of baptism?



Day 3: Matthew 4:1-4

Compare Matthew 4:4 to Deuteronomy 8:3.

At the outset of His ministry, Jesus faced the issue of what kind of Messiah He would be. Popular opinion believed the Messiah would free the Jews from Rome. But God's plan was different. The Messiah would come to save us from our sins. Jesus was determined to carry out the Father's plan. This resolve, however, would be tested.

After fasting for "forty days and forty nights," Jesus "was hungry." The fact that Jesus was hungry shows that He was human as well as divine. It was at this moment, when Jesus perhaps was most vulnerable, that the devil sought to sidetrack God's plan of redemption.

Notice that the devil didn't doubt that Jesus is God. Instead, he implied: "Use your powers for your own benefit. After all, you're God." This was a temptation to use His powers to meet His own needs rather than trust in God's provision.

Jesus responded to Satan's attack by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. He affirmed that our physical needs are not our most crucial needs. The Word of God and the will of God as revealed in His Word are the most important things in all of life. This was Jesus's declaration of commitment to God's plan. Further, His example of using Scripture, the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), serves to remind us that we can face temptation with the Word of God.

How have you found strength and encouragement in God's Word?



Day 4: Matthew 4:5-7

Compare Matthew 4:7 to Deuteronomy 6:16.

Jesus defeated Satan in round one by quoting the Word of God. Satan now tried to turn the tables on Jesus by using the Word of God himself. His implication was: "Jesus, if you believe so strongly in Scripture, then use it to prove that You are the Son of God." Quoting from Psalm 91:11-12, Satan challenged Jesus to throw Himself off the top of the temple. "After all, God's Word says He will protect you and you won't be injured. That will prove that you are God's Son!" Jumping from the height of 450 feet would be such a spectacular occurrence in the eyes of the temple worshipers that they would immediately realize Jesus was the Messiah.

What is notable is that Satan misused Scripture. The psalm speaks of a life lived in God's will. When our lives are lived in His will, God can be counted on to protect and provide for us.

Quoting this time from Deuteronomy 6:16, Jesus spoke of the danger of presuming on God to watch over us when we venture outside of His plan for our lives. The lesson is simple: don't attempt to put God in a position where He has to come through for you. Don't box Him in a corner and expect Him to act as you desire.

What are some ways people might try to put God to the test in our culture? What biblical truths about God can you always count on?



Day 5: Matthew 4:8-11

Compare Matthew 4:10 to Deuteronomy 6:13.

The devil took Jesus to a tall mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. These kingdoms represented the governments and world systems that God allows Satan to rule. Their splendor would represent that which was glitzy and appealing about all the worldly things these kingdoms possessed. These would be Satan's to give since he was the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31).

Satan tempts Christians today using the same tactics. He attempts to seduce us with promises of success, prosperity, and health. The price, however, involves selling out to him.

Jesus did not need what the devil was offering. The kingdoms of this world were rightfully His already. The kingdoms and the glory would be His because of His death and resurrection (Rev. 11:15). What Satan was offering Jesus was a shortcut that avoided the cross. Satan was offering a way for Jesus to be "King of kings" without suffering the pain and humiliation of the cross.

Again, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus told Satan to "Get lost. God alone is worthy of worship and service." Satan only has power by God's permission. Therefore, at Jesus's command to go away, Satan had no choice but to leave.

After Satan's departure, God sent angels to meet the physical needs of Jesus that He had refused to do for Himself in verse 4.

What challenges your worship of God alone? How can you overcome those challenges?

APPLY THE TEXT

The psalmist said this: "I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11). How can you apply this verse in your life? Develop a plan and strategy for memorizing Scripture that will help you stand against temptation. Start by memorizing Matthew 3:17.

JOURNAL



TITLES OF CHRIST IN THE GOSPELS

- The Gospels contain two classes of titles: those that go back to Jesus Himself and those that are applied to Him by others. There is considerable scholarly discussion about the exact nature of the first group, but the evidence of Scripture must be allowed to speak for itself. Jesus used certain titles for Himself and allowed His followers to refer to Him in certain ways. From these, we gain insight into how He understood Himself and His mission.

Son of Man

This is Jesus's favorite self-designation. It originated in the Old Testament (Dan. 7:13-14), was used during the intertestamental period, and was chosen by Jesus to define his messianic mission. It was serviceable because it had messianic overtones.

It also was sufficiently fluid to allow Jesus to inject His own meaning to it. He needed to do this because the idea of messiahship in His day was that of a military hero who would come to conquer the Romans and reestablish the throne of David in Israel. Instead, Jesus came to be the Savior of the world.

Jesus used the title "Son of Man" in four different ways. First, He frequently used it as a synonym for "I." Jesus was simply referring to Himself by that title (see Matt. 26:24). Second, the Son of Man is one who exercises divine authority (see Matt. 9:6). Third, the Son of Man fulfills His earthly mission

through His death and resurrection (see Matt. 12:40; 17:9,12,23). Fourth, the Son of Man will return in great glory one day to establish His glorious kingdom (see Matt. 16:27-28; 19:28). In this way, Jesus cut through the conventional wisdom of first-century Jewish culture and accurately defined who He, the messianic Son of Man, actually is.

Son, Son of God, Only Son

"Son of God," or "Son" for short, was also a messianic title derived from the Old Testament (2 Sam. 7:11-16). It assumes more an exalted status, however, when it is used by or about Jesus. In fact, it means that Jesus possesses the qualities of the divine nature. It affirms that He is God.

This was quite evident when the heavenly voice cried out to Jesus at His baptism, stating that He was beloved and well pleasing (Matt. 3:16-17). It also was an affirmation reiterated at Jesus's transfiguration (Mark 9:7). While Jesus became completely human from the moment of the incarnation, He never surrendered His deity. He was, is, and ever will be the Son of God.

Jesus's own understanding of His unique relationship to God as Son is reflected in Matthew 11:25-27 and Luke 10:21-22. Jesus expressed the same idea when confounding the Pharisees (Matt. 22:41-46). In the Gospel of John, Jesus is referred to as God's "one and only Son" (John 3:16), a term that means "one of a kind" or "unique."

Lord

This was a title of human honor used of Jesus, the equivalent of "Master" or "Sir." However, we can see lurking in it something of greater significance (Matt. 8:5-13; Mark 2:23-28). In Judaism, "Lord" had become the word pronounced when the personal name Yahweh appeared in Scripture. Thus, "Lord" meant "God." Later, the church used it to mean that Jesus was nothing less than God by virtue of His death and resurrection.

Christ (Messiah)

Jesus was reluctant to acknowledge this title publicly because, as noted, popular misconceptions about the Messiah abounded in first century Jewish life, centering on a king to rule on David's throne. Under the proper circumstances, however, He was willing to confess that He was indeed God's Anointed One (Matt. 16:13-20; 26:62-64; John 4:25-26).

This title was used so commonly later on in the church that it virtually became another name for Jesus. "Jesus the Christ" simply became "Jesus Christ." (As an example of the shifting use of names and titles, see 2 Cor. 12.)

The Word

In the Gospels, this title is found in John (1:1-14). The expression "word of God" is common in both the Old and New Testaments as defining how God expressed Himself and what the content of that communication was.

When referring to Jesus, it makes the self-revelation of God personal. Jesus as the Word of God supremely reveals who God is. If we would know God, we simply need to look at Jesus, the very expression (Word) of God. As Jesus explained to His disciples, "the one who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Savior

It is self-evident in the Old Testament that just as there is only one God, so there is only one Savior (Isa. 43:3,11; 45:21). This is also true in the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10). It is all the more significant, then, that Jesus is announced as the Savior of Israel (Luke 2:11) and the world (John 4:42) in the Gospels. Jesus was understood to be divine redemption incarnate and was proclaimed as such by the early church (Acts 5:31; 13:23; 1 John 4:14).

Holy One of God

This is a term used of Jesus specifically by demons and emphasizes Him as the One who is pure and holy (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69). As such, He sealed their doom in that He is wholly righteous, while they are wholly evil. It identified Jesus with the Holy God (see Isa. 6).

Son of David

Son of David is a messianic title frequently used to refer to Jesus in the Gospels (Matt. 1:1; 9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9,15). The title expresses hope. The Son of David, who was greater than David (22:41-45), would bring deliverance for those living hopelessly in bondage.

This article was adapted from *The Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), pp. 416-417. Used with permission.

SESSION 2

Invitation

MATTHEW 4:12-25

JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM.



An apprenticeship is a process for training others in a trade or a profession. Usually, it involves on-the-job training. The goal is that sometime down the road the apprentice can do the job with the same skill level the master teacher has. Christians are called to apprentice themselves to Jesus. It's called being a disciple. Each of us is called to apprentice ourselves to Jesus.

WHAT ARE SOME JOBS TODAY WHERE YOU MIGHT FIND APPRENTICES? WHAT WOULD BE SOME ADVANTAGES TO BECOMING AN APPRENTICE IN ONE OF THOSE JOBS?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Jesus's baptism and temptation set the stage for His ministry of preaching and healing to officially begin. Two facts are set forth at the outset. First, a signal event took place that gives a time frame reference—John the Baptist had been arrested. Matthew does not give the details behind this arrest until chapter 14. Second, we learn of the geographic location of Jesus's ministry—the northern region of Canaan called Galilee. This region was approximately 60 miles long from north to south and thirty miles wide from east to west. Galilee was divided into two sections: upper Galilee and lower Galilee. Nazareth, Jesus's hometown, was in the heart of the lower region.

The choice of Jesus to begin His earthly ministry in Galilee was not accidental. This was the region He grew up in, but the reasons go beyond that. First, Galilee was a melting pot of Jews and Gentiles. In addition, the area was less inclined toward the strict traditions of Pharisaical Judaism. Thus, the people would be more open to the gospel message. Also, for Jesus to begin His ministry in this environment would

signal His offer of salvation as universal to all people.

Second, this area around the northern end of the Sea of Galilee was widely known for the presence of many rabbis and their students. As a result, there was a lot of curiosity concerning new teachers or teachings. Jesus and His disciples would have fit right in with the culture of religious training in the region.

Third, because of the open-mindedness of the people, Jesus initially would not have stirred up the kind of opposition He would meet when He went south to Judea and Jerusalem. The disciples could learn and observe without much distraction and confrontation. With these thoughts in mind, Jesus returned to the region following His journey into Judea.



12 When he heard that **John** **A** had been arrested, he withdrew into **Galilee**. **B** **13** He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by **the sea**, **C** in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. **14** This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: **15** Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. **16** The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. **17** From then on Jesus began to preach, “**Repent**, **D** because the kingdom of heaven has come near.” **18** As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. **19** “Follow me,” he told them, “and I will make you **fish for people**.” **E** **20** Immediately they left their nets and followed him. **21** Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, preparing their nets, and he called them. **22** Immediately they left the boat and their father and **followed him**. **F** **23** Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of **the kingdom**, **G** and healing every disease and sickness among the people. **24** Then the news about him spread throughout Syria. So they brought to him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the **epileptics**, **H** and the paralytics. And he healed them. **25** Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

A. John the Baptist. For more on John’s arrest, see Matthew 14:1-12 and Mark 6:14-29.

B. The region in northern Israel where Jesus began His public ministry. It was significant for its mixed Jewish-Gentile population (Isa. 9:1; Matt. 28:16; Luke 4:14-15).

C. The Sea of Galilee (also, Lake Gennesaret or the Sea of Tiberias) is a freshwater lake that still serves as a fishing hub for the area.

D. Jesus began His ministry with the same message as John, emphasizing a complete transformation of one’s heart and mind.

E. A metaphor for evangelism, Jesus called His disciples to lead others toward God’s kingdom.

F. Like Peter and Andrew (v. 20), James and John left everything to follow Jesus. In Jesus’s day, disciples literally followed behind their masters.

G. God’s rule and reign on earth, signified by the coming of Jesus as Messiah. The kingdom is a primary theme throughout Matthew’s Gospel.

H. Literally, “moon-struck.” Some ancients believed celestial bodies, particularly the moon, affected human health, including seizures.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Starting Out

(Matt. 4:12-17)

People must repent to enter the Kingdom of God.

- **How can believers point people to God's kingdom?**

2. Calling Out

(Matt. 4:18-22)

Following Jesus will require personal sacrifice.

- **What does it look like to follow Jesus in our culture?**

3. Reaching Out

(Matt. 4:23-25)

Jesus's call means following His example and ministering to others.

- **How can believers follow Jesus's example of sharing the message of God's kingdom?**

DID YOU KNOW?

The Greek term for “disciple” is *mathetes* [math-ay-tes]. It refers to an apprentice, learner, or follower. The word is most commonly used in the New Testament to describe the followers of Jesus, but there are also references to disciples of the Pharisees (Matt. 22:15-16), disciples of John the Baptist (Mark 2:18; Luke 11:1), and disciples of Moses (John 9:28).

Apply the Text

- **There is strength in numbers as followers of Jesus. How can your group encourage and hold one another accountable as you seek to follow Jesus as His disciples?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

The Kingdom

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. (See John 3:3; Colossians 1:13.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Observe when and for what purpose a New Testament passage includes an Old Testament quotation.

Matthew quoted Isaiah 9:1-2 to describe how Jesus fulfilled prophecy as He lived and ministered in northern Galilee—the ancient land of Zebulun and Naphtali. Read Isaiah 7 and 8 to give context for Isaiah 9:1-2. How would the people of Isaiah's day have been encouraged by the hope of the Messiah? What was similar about the people touched by Jesus's ministry in Galilee?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 4:19-20. Do you enjoy—or think you might enjoy—fishing? Why or why not?

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus encountered two fisherman by the Sea of Galilee: Andrew and Peter. He invited them to join Him in His work, challenging them to fish for men.

How do you explain Andrew and Peter's willingness to abandon everything—including their livelihood—to follow Jesus?

Jesus asked Peter and Andrew to do something they were familiar with: fishing. But instead of fishing for fish, Jesus elevated His call to them to fish for something much more important—to fish for people. They would be doing what Jesus was doing, calling people to follow Jesus. The brothers responded to Jesus’s call to discipleship immediately.

What is involved in fishing for people? Discuss ways you can improve your fishing skills.

Encourage one another during the week by texting: *How's the fishing?*, *Have you caught anything yet?*, *Got any nibbles?*, or something similar.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 4:12-17

Note the contrast between darkness and light.

Following His baptism and temptation, Jesus withdrew into Galilee to begin His ministry. He initially returned to His hometown of Nazareth. Here, He was rejected, and the people attempted to kill Him (Luke 4:16-30). After that, He left Nazareth and moved to Capernaum.

Matthew interpreted this move of Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2, locating Capernaum in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. The ancient Israelite tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were the closest of the twelve tribal territories to first-century Galilee and the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. For centuries this area had a large Gentile population. Isaiah's prophecy contains references to this Gentile population. Isaiah recognized that these two tribes had been through great calamity at the hands of the Assyrians. Yet though the citizens of this region sat in the darkness of defeat, God spoke of a light breaking out on them. This light was God's coming Messiah.

Matthew saw the same truths in the first-century world. Those living in Galilee found themselves under the darkness of Roman oppression. They also were under the darkness of their sinfulness. Jesus came as light shining in the darkness (John 8:12). His message was repentance. The reason for the need for repentance was that the kingdom of heaven had arrived in the presence of God's Messiah.

How can you point people to God's kingdom?



Day 2: Matthew 4:18

Pay attention to the fact that Jesus took the initiative.

Because this region was a hotbed of rabbis and pupils, for Jesus to walk along the lake shore calling for some to follow Him would not be unusual. There are, however, several differences. Typically, a promising Jewish student would choose a rabbi he wanted to attach himself to and would ask to become his disciple. Jesus reversed the procedure by approaching those He wanted to be His disciples and calling them to follow Him. Second, these disciples were called to much more than to simply learn from Jesus. They were summoned to be actively involved in reaching others to become disciples of Jesus. Jesus called His disciples to be disciple makers.

The Sea of Galilee—also called the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1) and Lake Gennesaret (Luke 5:1)—measures thirteen miles long and eight miles wide and is situated approximately 700 feet below sea level. For centuries it has supported commercial fishing. Jesus's first four disciples were commercial fishermen. The first of these were two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew. Based on the Gospel of John, Jesus had encountered these two brothers before (John 1:35-41). Not only that, Jesus had used Peter's boat as a platform for teaching the crowds standing on the shoreline (Luke 5:1-11).

Why does it matter that Jesus took the initiative in calling you?



Day 3: Matthew 4:19-22

Highlight the words “follow” and “followed.”

The imperative *follow me* is literally “come after me.” This was in keeping with the accepted pattern of rabbis and pupils in the first-century. Proper rabbinic etiquette called for the pupils, or disciples, to walk directly behind their teacher. Thus, this was a command from Jesus for Peter and Andrew to become His disciples. As disciples, they would develop a close companionship—serving Jesus, observing Him, learning His words, and imitating His ministry—all with the intent to one day expand what they learned to others who would be disciples. Unlike the disciples of the various rabbis who were simply learners, Jesus called Peter and Andrew (and later James and John) to a life of fishing for people. Their calling as disciples was to gather other disciples to Jesus of Nazareth. The word *immediately* points to the quickness of their response. There was no delay. They were all in, as demonstrated in the abandoning of their nets, the tools of their occupation.

James and John were the next disciples called. Jesus found them with their father, Zebedee, mending their fishing nets. Like Peter and Andrew, these brothers immediately left their fishing enterprise; they also left their father to follow Jesus. An initial belief that Jesus was God’s Messiah impelled them to abandon their fishing business and even family ties to follow Him. They were beginning to realize that being obedient to Jesus supersedes everything.

What does it look like for you to follow Jesus in your culture?



Day 4: Matthew 4:23

Underline the three things Jesus did.

As Jesus traveled throughout the area of Galilee, He carried out a three-fold ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. Teaching was a regular part of synagogue life as rabbis would give explanation of the Scriptures. Teaching focused on content and the discovery of truth in God’s Word. As an itinerant rabbi, Jesus was welcomed in most synagogues and was asked to read and comment on Scripture (see Luke 4:16-21).

Preaching differed from teaching in that it was proclaiming or announcing a message. Teaching would explain the message. Preaching was making the message known. In this case, Jesus was proclaiming that God’s Messiah had come to usher in the kingdom, that is, the rule and reign of the Messiah. The term *good news* is the gospel message of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus the Messiah. The proclamation by Jesus was the good news concerning God’s answer to the sins of humanity.

The third aspect of Jesus’s ministry was healing. Jesus’s miracles were important as they gave evidence to His deity and divine power. They were the “credentials” of the Messiah. John’s Gospel talked about Jesus performing “many other signs” so that people “may believe that Jesus is the Messiah” (John 20:30-31). Jesus healed every form and kind of disease and sickness.

How is your church carrying on the three-fold ministry of Jesus? How are you involved?



Day 5: Matthew 4:24-25

Identify the reasons people were following Jesus.

Jesus's miracles of healing and authoritative teaching soon became news that traveled widely. As the news spread, people brought to Jesus those needing healing. Matthew mentioned three examples of the conditions Jesus confronted. First were the demon-possessed. Second were epileptics. Literally, this word means "to be moon-struck" and reflected a primitive thought that somehow this malady was influenced by the moon with the result that the person suffered from seizures. Finally were the paralytics, those with crippling handicaps, either from birth or injury. Jesus was able to heal all who came to Him without exception and without limit.

Jesus's miracles attracted large crowds, some of whom came for healing or the healing of others. Others came to hear Him teach and preach. Some came out of curiosity.

Matthew gives a partial list of where all these people came from. The Decapolis was a region of ten cities located east of the Sea of Galilee. The area beyond the Jordan was the region of Perea, on the east side of the Jordan River and south of the Decapolis.

Some of the people coming to see and hear Jesus would believe and become devoted followers. Others listened and watched but never surrendered to Him and became a part of His kingdom.

How does "the news about him [Jesus] spread" (v. 24) today?

APPLY THE TEXT

Jesus calls us to follow Him. Following Jesus as a disciple involves the desire to become more and more like Him. Is there a desire in your heart to be more like Jesus? What are some proofs of that desire in your life? What are some areas in your life that you need to work on so they reflect Jesus more?

JOURNAL

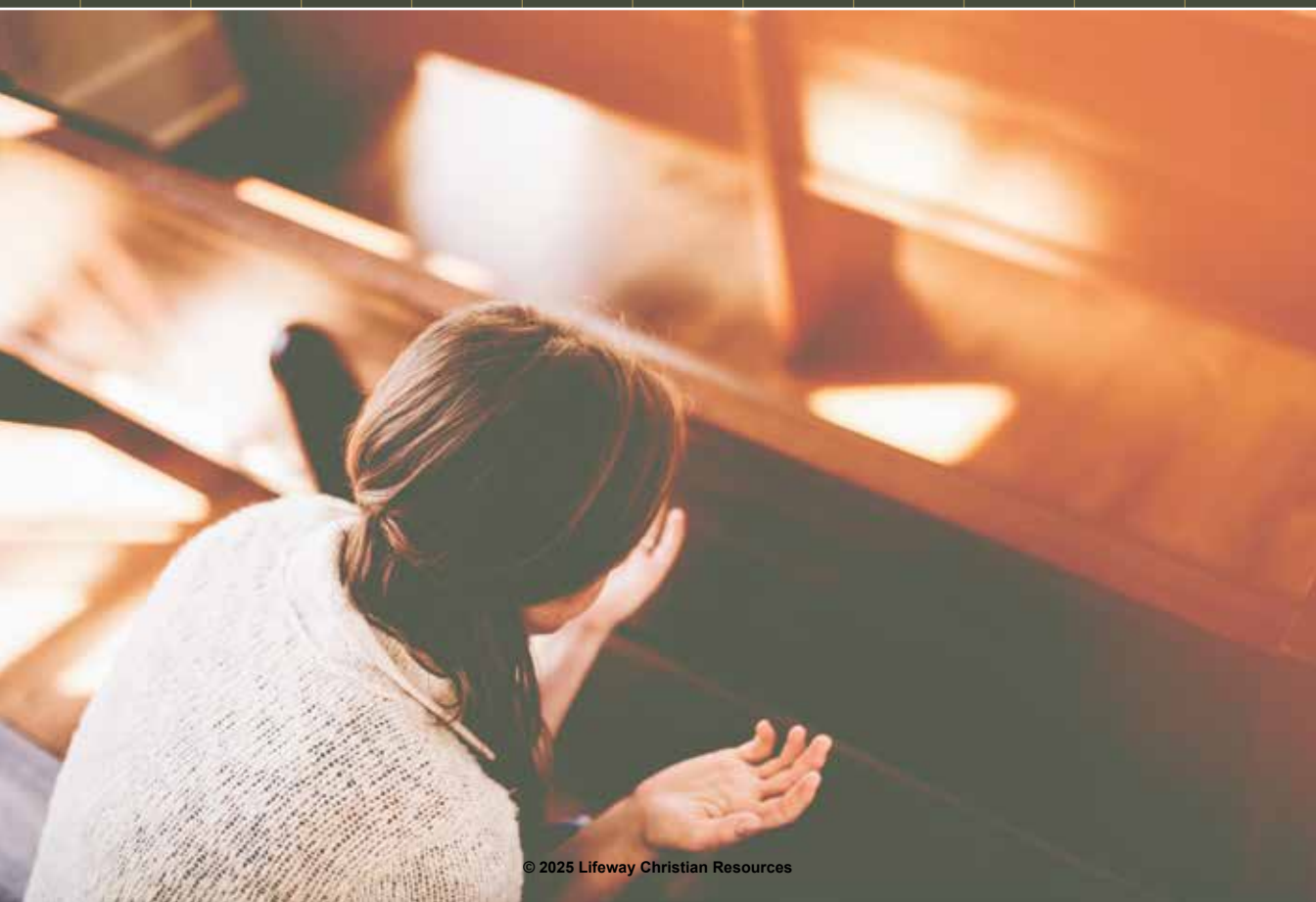


SESSION 3

Worship the King

MATTHEW 2:1-12

JESUS THE SAVIOR IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP.



Much of life is driven by value. We want to know, “Is it worth it?” Advertising will speak of activities that are worth the time and of possessions that retain their worth. We speak of a person being “worthy” of a certain honor. An athlete plays for “all he’s worth,” meaning to the full extent of his ability. Our challenge is to identify and pursue that which is most worthy.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT YOU CAN BUY OR ACTIVITIES THAT YOU CAN DO THAT ARE “WORTH IT”? HOW DO YOU THINK THE WORTH OF SOMETHING IS DETERMINED?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

One of the subtle differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke is the audience targeted by each writer. Mark most likely wrote his Gospel to Gentiles in Rome. He took great effort to explain Jewish customs and translate Aramaic words. Luke also wrote to share the good news of Jesus with a Gentile world. Matthew, on the other hand, wrote primarily to a Jewish audience. His purpose was to provide irrefutable proofs that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah.

Matthew incorporated numerous Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus. Two of these Old Testament prophecies are found in the context for this week’s study. Matthew began his Gospel account by tracing the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, who was engaged to Mary. He noted how an angel appeared to Joseph to explain the supernatural birth of Jesus. This was a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 (see Matt. 1:23).

The next Old Testament prophecy fulfilled was the location of Jesus’s birth found in Micah 5:2. This quotation concerning Bethlehem occurs in the story of the visit by the wise men who came from the east to see the Christ child (Matt. 2:6).

Following the visit by the wise men, Joseph was warned by an angel of Herod’s plan to kill the baby. Taking Mary and the baby, Joseph fled for the land of Egypt, a journey of over four hundred miles. Herod’s plot to kill all the male children in Bethlehem two years old and under was his solution to keep his throne from being stolen by this newborn “King of the Jews.” Matthew quoted a third Old Testament passage, Jeremiah 31:15, which prophesied about the death of the children of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:18).

After Herod’s death in 4 BC, Joseph brought his family back from Egypt and settled in Nazareth, the hometown of Mary and Joseph.



1 After Jesus was born in **Bethlehem of Judea** **A** in the days of **King Herod**, **B** **wise men** **C** from the east arrived in Jerusalem, **2** saying, “Where is he who has been born **king of the Jews**? **D** For we saw his **star** **E** at its rising and have come to worship him.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was **deeply disturbed**, **F** and all Jerusalem with him. **4** So he assembled all the **chief priests and scribes** **G** of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” **7** Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and **search carefully** **H** for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.” **9** After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: **gold, frankincense, and myrrh**. **I** **12** And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

A. Village just south of Jerusalem. Known as the home of David, it was also prophesied as the home of the Messiah (vv. 5-6; Mic. 5:2).

B. Herod the Great, who reigned as “king of the Jews” by Roman decree from 37 BC until 4 BC.

C. “Magi” (NIV; NASB). Likely, astrologers from Persia or Babylon. Their mission highlights the universal scope of the gospel.

D. The same title granted to Herod by Rome. However, the wise men sought one “born” a king, suggesting Herod’s claim was not genuine.

E. The wise men viewed the star as a divine guide on their mission.

F. The Greek word implies being stirred from the inside. Something that should be at peace is agitated. The context suggests Herod’s inner turmoil was intense.

G. If Herod had been a true Jew and held a legitimate right to the throne, he would have known the prophecies about the Messiah. Instead, he had to rely on the religious leaders.

H. Diligent investigation. Herod wanted exact details about this threat to his throne.

I. Gold symbolized royalty and majesty, affirming Jesus as King. Frankincense was used in the temple, highlighting His role as priest. Myrrh was a burial spice, foreshadowing His death.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Seeking the King

(Matt. 2:1-3)

We can recognize Jesus as the one, true King.

- **How did Herod respond to the wise men's inquiries? Why?**
- **In what ways is Jesus a King?**

2. Finding the King

(Matt. 2:4-8)

We can know that Jesus is King because His birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

- **Why would prophecy be important to understanding who Jesus is both then and now?**
- **How can you help people come to know Jesus as their King?**

3. Worshiping the King

(Matt. 2:9-12)

We acknowledge Jesus as King through our worship.

- **What motivated the wise men's incredible sense of joy?**
- **What gifts can you offer to Jesus as an act of worship?**

Apply the Text

- **This is a time of year when it is easy to focus on anything but Jesus. There is one thing worthy of our attention: Jesus. How can your group help each other to keep your focus on Him during this season?**

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. (See Luke 1:35; Hebrews 1:1-3.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use a concordance and/or Bible dictionary to help understand a passage.

Use a concordance to find references in Scripture to “myrrh” and “frankincense.” (See Gen. 37:25; Ex. 30:23,34-37; Esth. 2:12; Ps. 45:8; John 19:39.) Read about “myrrh” and “frankincense” in a Bible dictionary. Make a list of the various ways these spices were used in biblical times.

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 2:11. What tangible objects do you consider your “treasures”?

The wise men followed the star toward Bethlehem. When they found the house where Jesus and His family were staying and saw Jesus, they fell to their knees and worshiped Him, presenting Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Falling to one's knees or lying prostrate on the ground were and are physical ways of expressing worship. These men were the first non-Jews (Gentiles) to worship Jesus as the King.

What do the star, the journey of the wise men, and their gifts reveal about Jesus?

As Gentiles, the wise men represented God's universal offer of salvation to all people. Jesus the Savior is worthy of our worship. Through our worship, we acknowledge Him as King.

What is the “gold, frankincense, and myrrh” you can offer to Jesus?

For the next seven days, make “falling to their knees, they worshiped him” a repeating event on your phone.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 2:1-2

Reflect on the significance of Jesus being “born king.”

The “wise men from the east” were astronomers and astrologers who played prominent political and religious roles in eastern countries, most notably Persia. The region of Persia once was under the rule of the Babylonians. The Jewish people had been exiled to this area after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 BC. It might be that through contact with Daniel and other Jewish people living in Babylon that a messianic expectation arose in the area. These wise men might have been influenced by Jewish prophetic writings concerning the Messiah, especially the writings of Daniel.

They were alerted to the Messiah’s birth by a “star at its rising.” This was interpreted as the herald of the birth of someone significant in the region where the star appeared. They proceeded to Judea because of prophecies they had studied. After they learned of the prophecy of Bethlehem, the star reappeared and then lead them to Bethlehem and the house where the Christ child was.

The wise men asked, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” They were searching for the legitimate claimant to the throne. That certainly wasn’t Herod. Herod was a usurper to the throne. He was Idumean and came to power through Roman appointment.

In what way is Jesus your King?



Day 2: Matthew 2:3-4

Consider why all of Jerusalem would be disturbed with Herod.

Herod was known for his insane fear of losing his throne. He exhibited constant paranoia that someone was going to steal it. To satisfy this fear, Herod had his wife, three sons, brother-in-law, and mother-in-law killed because he thought they were trying to take over his throne. It is reported that as he approached death, he had leading citizens of Jerusalem imprisoned with the instruction that, upon his death, they were to be killed. His reasoning was no one would weep when he died, but at least when these prominent Jews died, there would be weeping on the day of his death. News from the wise men of a new claimant to the throne sent Herod into a panic.

Herod was the Roman appointed king of the Jews and a convert to Judaism. Yet, he had no clue of Jewish prophecy concerning the Messiah. Such was his limited knowledge of Scripture. The chief priests and scribes were called in. The term refers to the leaders among the priests. “Scribes” made handwritten copies of the Scriptures. More importantly, they were considered authorities on the law of Moses. Herod “asked them where the Messiah would be born.” As we will see, he wanted more than an answer to give the wise men.

Why might the news that only Jesus is King and worthy of worship disturb some people today?



Day 3: Matthew 2:5-6

Compare Matthew 2:6 to Micah 5:1-2.

The religious leaders reported that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. To verify this report, the religious leaders cited the announcement of the prophet Micah (Mic. 5:1-2). In his prophecy, Micah set up a contrast between the capture of Judah's king by the Babylonians (Mic. 5:1) and the birth of God's coming Messiah in Micah 5:2. Clearly this One who would be born in Bethlehem was the Messiah because the verse goes on to speak of His eternal nature: "His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times" (Mic. 5:2b).

Jesus was always God's plan of salvation. We can know this is true because of the many Old Testament prophecies He fulfilled. After His resurrection, Jesus explained to His disciples how all of the Old Testament pointed to Him (Luke 24:25-27).

Matthew also picked up wording from 2 Samuel 5:2, "who will shepherd my people Israel." This phrase spoke of a familiar Old Testament concept and indicated the kind of ruler Jesus would be—tender-hearted and kind. This phrase also linked Jesus to David's throne as the Shepherd of God's people.

Notice that the scribes and priests knew the prophetic text concerning where the long-awaited Messiah would be born, but they showed no interest in finding Him.

Why does it matter that the Old Testament foretold many details about Jesus?



Day 4: Matthew 2:7-8

Take note of Herod's deceitfulness.

In light of this revelation of the birthplace of this expected King, Herod hatched a murderous plot. To execute his plan, he quietly enlisted the help of the wise men, who unknowingly became his spies. Herod inquired of the wise men "the exact time the star appeared." His desire was to ascertain the approximate age of the child. This would prove useful when he issued a death warrant for every male child two years and under living in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).

Based on Ezra's journey four centuries earlier, a trip from Babylon could have taken four months. A trip originating in Persia would have been even longer (Ezra 7:9). The star probably appeared even earlier than that, allowing time for them to prepare for their journey. So, Jesus may have been born at least a year before the wise man arrived in Jerusalem.

Herod told the wise men to search carefully for the King in Bethlehem and then report back to him. True to his deceitful nature, Herod told them he wanted to worship the child. But he certainly had no intentions of joining the wise men in worshiping the Christ child.

In what ways do people misrepresent their intentions toward Jesus today?



Day 5: Matthew 2:9-12

Identify the responses of the wise men upon finding Jesus.

The wise men were overwhelmed with joy. All the weeks and months of anticipation were complete; they had reached their goal. The joy they experienced, no doubt, was brought about by the fact that the star pinpointed the very house in which Joseph, Mary, and the Christ child were living.

The phrase “entering the house” indicates that some time had passed since the manger scene portrayed in Luke 2. Once the wise men entered the house, they immediately knelt before the child and worshiped Him. As a part of their worship, they opened their treasures and presented luxurious gifts to the child. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were gifts typically given to royalty. Gold was a precious metal of great value in the ancient world as it is today. Frankincense and myrrh were costly fragrant perfumes or spices used in worship and adoration. It is possible that Joseph and Mary sold these gifts to finance their trip to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15).

In verse 12, the wise men were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod. While they had not perceived Herod’s wicked scheme, God knew and warned them to avoid Herod. Once again, the wise men were obedient to God’s leading. God had led them to leave their home and travel to Bethlehem to see the Christ child. Now He led them back to their home along a different route.

What gifts can you offer to Jesus as an act of worship?

APPLY THE TEXT

Make a list of things in your life that have value or worth. Hopefully you will list your faith in Jesus Christ. What order would you rank each item as to its value today and for the future?

JOURNAL



SESSION 4

True Righteousness

MATTHEW 5:13-20, 43-48

JESUS DEFINES WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN HIS KINGDOM.



A new phenomenon over the last fifteen years has been the advent of social media influencers. In fact, the term “influencer” was not added to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* until 2019. These “influencers” on the internet produce interest in a variety of products and ideologies. This approach to marketing has a value of well over \$20 billion dollars. Some of these influencers have become folk heroes to many internet users.

WHO ARE SOME SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS YOU ARE AWARE OF?
ARE YOU ABLE TO IDENTIFY WAYS THAT YOU HAVE BEEN IMPACTED
BY THESE INFLUENCERS?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Matthew 5–7 make up what is normally called the Sermon on the Mount. In many ways, this set of teachings was for the disciples only. Jesus was teaching them what it meant to follow Him. In fact, Matthew 5:1-2 states specifically that Jesus left the crowds and ascended a hill or mountain. Once seated, His disciples gathered around Him and He began teaching them concerning how one is to live as a follower of Jesus.

Chapter 5 begins with what is familiarly known as the Beatitudes (vv. 3-12). These eight statements speak of how fortunate the followers of Jesus are when they find themselves in a variety of situations because of their faith in Jesus. These are eight attitudes that Jesus described as worthy of congratulations. There is a promise attached to each of the Beatitudes.

Jesus was saying to His disciples, “If you are going to follow Me, this is what your life will look like.” He spoke of what makes His followers distinct from the rest of the world. This would include the reality of facing persecution as a follower

of Christ. Also included was being difference-makers by being salt and light in the world (vv. 13-16).

Chapter 5 closes with Jesus’s teachings regarding His followers’ relationship to the Old Testament law (vv. 17-48). The law of Moses in the Old Testament and the New Testament teaching regarding our freedom from the law are not at odds. Jesus is the key to interpreting both. He came to fulfill Old Testament law. God’s standards of holy living did not change with the coming of Jesus. However, the stipulations of the law found their deeper meaning in Christ. In fact, Jesus called for a higher standard of living from those who follow Him (v. 20).



13 “You are the **salt of the earth**. **A** But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and **trampled** **B** under people’s feet.

14 You are the **light of the world**. **C** A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. **16** In the same way, **let your light shine** **D** before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. **17** Don’t think that I came to abolish **the Law or the Prophets**. **E** I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

18 For truly I tell you, until **heaven and earth pass away**, **F** not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. **19** Therefore, whoever **breaks** **G** one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. [. . .] **43** You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same? **48** **Be perfect**, **H** therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

A. In Jesus’s day, salt was used for seasoning and preservation. Likewise, believers hinder corruption in society.

B. Salt mixed with impurities was worthless. Likewise, a compromised faith is spiritually impotent and can’t make an impact on culture.

C. A metaphor for the disciples’ visible, transformative presence in a dark world. Believers are called to reflect the one true “Light of the world” (John 8:12).

D. Believers shine through their “good works.” We do not receive salvation by works, but we do reveal our salvation through works.

E. The “Law” refers to the Torah, the first five books of our Bibles. The “Prophets” include the historical books, along with the Major and Minor Prophets.

F. Jesus affirmed the eternity of God’s Word. Even when all creation passes from the scene, the authority and power of God’s Word will remain (Ps. 119:152; Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:25).

G. The Greek word can mean “loosen” or “release.” Jesus was warning His listeners against discounting or disregarding God’s words.

H. Not sinless, but complete and mature. This is a call to ongoing growth toward Christlikeness.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Influence Your Culture

(Matt. 5:13-16)

Kingdom people make a positive impact on the world for God's glory.

- **What makes salt and light good illustrations for faith?**
- **What happens when believers serve as salt and light in the world?**

2. Obey Your Father

(Matt. 5:17-20)

Kingdom people find genuine satisfaction and purpose by keeping God's commands.

- **When have you been accused of something that wasn't true?**
- **How can followers of Jesus impact society?**

3. Love Your Enemies

(Matt. 5:43-48)

Kingdom people reflect their heavenly Father by loving their enemies.

- **What was so revolutionary about Jesus's teaching in these verses? What makes it difficult for us today?**
- **What are some obstacles to loving our enemies?**

Apply the Text

- **Discuss with your Bible study group ways you can work together to extend Christ's love to people not being reached by your church. This could include the homeless, refugees, impoverished, and internationals living in your community. How could your group influence the lives of these people?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ. (See John 20:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:8.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.

Read Matthew 5:20,44-45 and highlight the terms "righteous" and "righteousness." Scribes and Pharisees thought righteousness was achieved rather than received. To understand righteousness, read how the following verses answer these questions: What is the source of righteousness? (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:21) How do people become righteous? (Rom. 3:22; 4:3-5) How can believers demonstrate righteousness? (Rom. 6:13-20).

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 5:20, noting the requirement for entering the kingdom of heaven.

The Pharisees were considered the most righteous people imaginable. They tried to separate themselves from all forms of sin and dedicated themselves to doing what God commanded. Jesus told His followers that their righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees if they hoped to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Does your righteousness surpass that of the Pharisees? Explain.

Jesus's statement about needing to surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees would have shocked His listeners. What they didn't understand was that no one is able to attain God's requirement of perfect righteousness. The only way we can get into the kingdom of heaven is to depend on Jesus's perfect righteousness, permanently given to the believer at the moment of conversion (2 Cor. 5:21). We need the righteousness that comes from God as a gift through faith in Jesus.

Discuss what this verse tells us about a works-based approach to salvation.

Place Matthew 5:20 on your phones or on cards and agree to memorize it together.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 5:13

Consider how believers function as salt in society.

When Jesus declared that His followers are “the salt of the earth,” He was using a familiar commodity. Salt was a valuable substance, often traded as a part of transactions for goods and services. To say that Jesus’s followers were the salt of the earth pointed to their value in the world.

In Jesus’s day, the primary use of salt was for preservation. Lacking refrigeration, salting meat was essential to preserving it. Salt prevented its spoilage. Jesus understood that the culture was corrupt with moral decay. The presence of His followers would add preservatives to the world to stop corruption.

There was the possibility, though, that a follower of Jesus might fail in the task of being salt in the world. Jesus introduced a conditional statement: “if the salt should lose its taste.” Chemically, it is impossible for salt to lose its salty taste, but it can be “defiled.” This is a more literal translation of the statement. As salt becomes diluted and polluted, the result is that it becomes worthless as a preservative. It becomes good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. We cannot allow society to pollute and dilute our influence as followers of Jesus. To do so is to become worthless in changing the culture.

In what ways are you functioning like salt in the world?



Day 2: Matthew 5:14-16

Compare Matthew 5:16 to John 8:12.

Jesus told His followers: “You are the light of the world.” In John 8:12, Jesus said “I am the light of the world.” Followers of Jesus reflect His light. Light brings illumination. Christ followers are to shine truth into the world’s darkness. Our purpose is to shine—not to be hidden.

Jesus reinforced this word picture by pointing out that many towns were built on the summit or side of a hill where they could be seen from a distance. They were visible by day, and the light from every home would make the cities visible at night. These cities shining on the hill could not be hidden. Those who follow Jesus are clearly visible. People see our actions and hear our words.

A light is not meant to be hidden under a basket. Through this analogy, Jesus taught that His followers must not isolate from society. Instead, we are to be influencing society by reflecting Jesus into the world’s darkness.

Light that is hidden loses its ability to illumine. Jesus directed His followers to let their light shine before others. When disciples allow the light of Jesus to shine through, their good (attractive) works bring glory to God. To give glory to God involves honoring God with praise and acknowledging how great He is. As followers of Christ shine their light, making Him more visible to others, God is glorified.

What “dims” your light? How could your light shine brighter?



Day 3: Matthew 5:17-20

Reflect on how Jesus fulfilled the law.

Verse 17 is a watershed teaching. Here was the divide between the self-righteousness practiced by the scribes and Pharisees and the righteousness proclaimed by Jesus. Much of the “law” of the Pharisees was man-made traditions for which Jesus had little use. Because of His disdain for these traditions, He was accused of wanting to abolish the law. Jesus, however, told His disciples that He hadn’t come to “set aside” the law. Instead, He came for the purpose of bringing the law to its intended goal.

The law was God’s absolute basis for truth and morality. Jesus didn’t teach anything contrary to those absolutes. They are applicable for all time. He came to fulfill the law—that is, to complete the purpose of the law. That purpose was to show people their sinfulness and need for a Savior.

“Until heaven and earth pass away,” God’s Word will remain authoritative. Jesus emphasized this by pointing to the smallest parts of the alphabet. Not even the smallest detail would be erased from God’s law until all things are accomplished.

Jesus said that entrance into the kingdom of heaven would require greater righteousness than that of scribes and Pharisees. Their righteousness was a self-achieved righteousness. Jesus pointed out that whatever could be accomplished through self-effort would never be sufficient. His followers needed a different righteousness that comes as a gift from God through faith.

Why must your righteousness surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees? How can it?



Day 4: Matthew 5:43-45

Underline “love your enemies.”

In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus pointed to six Old Testament commandments. The command to “love your neighbor” is from Leviticus 19:18. The second part of Jesus’s statement, “hate your enemy,” was added by the scribes and Pharisees. Hating your enemy is easy. No wonder the Pharisees and scribes thought they were righteous. They could keep their traditions and convince themselves they were fulfilling the demands of God’s law.

Jesus called His followers to a higher standard: “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” The culture and traditions of the day taught the opposite. In the Greek text, the pronoun *I* in the phrase “I tell you” is emphatic to contrast God’s law against the man-made teachings of the day.

The word *love* (*agape*) is love that puts the needs of another ahead of personal needs. It is the highest form of love that God demonstrated when He gave His Son for us.

Jesus was aware that this new, radical lifestyle He was teaching to His followers would illicit persecution. Thus, He called for prayer for “those who persecute you.” In doing so, the disciple would be putting the entire situation in God’s hands.

Following Jesus as disciples means following God’s example of loving others. It is by our love that we show the world we are followers of Christ (John 13:35).

What are some obstacles you face in loving your enemies?



Day 5: Matthew 5:46-48

Highlight verse 48.

The scribes and Pharisees thought they were righteous before God because they loved their neighbors. But they defined “neighbors” as those whom they liked and got along with. Thus, they were no different than the people whom they loathed—tax collectors. This group of people were hated because they worked with Rome to inflict misery on the Jewish people. Jesus’s followers were to treat those perceived as enemies or persecutors in a different way—by unselfishly looking out for their needs.

To greet only those to whom you are close wasn’t anything to be applauded. Even those who are not followers of God do that. Jesus said to His disciples that their ways needed to be different than the world’s ways.

The new standard Jesus called His followers to follow was nothing less than being perfect the way God is perfect. This does not mean we must be sinless. Instead, the word is better understood as “complete” or “mature.” This was a challenge to grow in godly character. Again, Jesus was speaking about the personal righteousness of those who follow Him. Be better than the self-righteous Pharisees; be like God.

What does being “perfect” as God is perfect look like in your life?

APPLY THE TEXT

Think about your circle of family, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. In what ways could you serve this week as a positive influence in their situation? Choose one person and work specifically to meet a particular need in their life.

JOURNAL

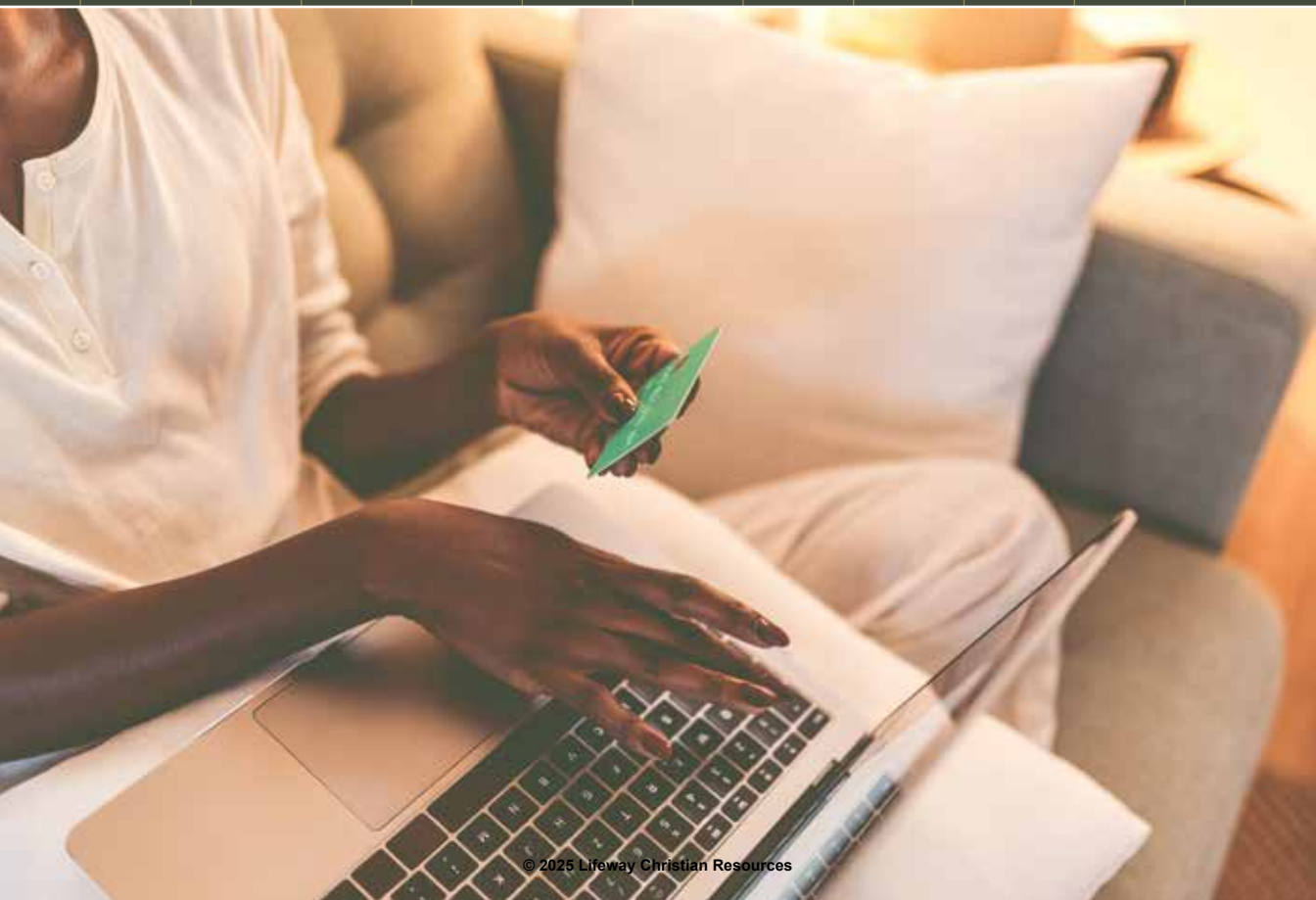


SESSION 5

Treasure

MATTHEW 6:19-34

JESUS CHANGES OUR PRIORITIES.



Common types of household debt include mortgages, car loans, student loans, and credit cards. Debt is any money you owe a person or a business. Money experts talk about good debt and bad debt. They describe good debt as debt you can leverage to build wealth. Bad debt is debt used to purchase items that lose value over time. Or, it is any debt you are unable to pay. Many people today are drowning in bad debt because of misplaced priorities.

*DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE THAT MISPLACED PRIORITIES FUEL DEBT?
EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER.*

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In chapter 5, Jesus declared that the righteousness of His followers must exceed the hypocritical righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). In chapter 6, Jesus contrasted sincere religious activities with the insincerity of those He called “hypocrites.” Jesus was speaking of motivation. The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees were motivated by selfishness and pride. They performed acts of piety for the attention and accolade of others. Jesus’s followers were to engage in acts of devotion out of a desire to glorify God.

Jesus used the example of helping the poor (6:1-4). The religious leaders gave to the poor in such a way that everyone could see their actions and speak highly of them. The followers of Jesus were to give quietly and discreetly, not calling attention to themselves. Their reward would come from God and not from the watching crowds.

The same principle held true for prayer (vv. 5-15). The Pharisees prayed loudly in public in such a way that they would be noticed. Jesus’s followers, on the other

hand, were to pray in secret to the only audience that really mattered—the heavenly Father. Rather than the temporary accolades of the watching crowds, they would be rewarded with eternal blessings.

Jesus moved next to the practice of fasting (vv. 16-18). Fasting was abstaining from food for religious purposes. Here again, the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees wanted everyone to notice that they were fasting, so they feigned a ragged appearance in public. This was designed to gain attention—not to deepen their walk with God. For Jesus’s followers, fasting was done only for God and His eyes alone.

Chapter 6 concludes with Jesus’s teaching about possessions and priorities (vv. 19-34). He challenged them to store up for themselves treasures in heaven, not treasures on earth. He then gave them the antidote to anxiety—trust in the heavenly Father.



19 “Don’t store up for yourselves **treasures** **A** on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. **22** The **eye** **B** is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. **23** But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness! **24** No one can serve **two masters**, **C** since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. **25** Therefore I tell you: **Don’t worry** **D** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? **26** Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet **your heavenly Father feeds them**. **E** Aren’t you worth more than they? **27** Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? **28** And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. **29** Yet I tell you that not even **Solomon** **F** in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. **30** If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith? **31** So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ **32** For the **Gentiles eagerly seek** **G** all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and **all these things** **H** will be provided for you. **34** Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

A. The things an individual values most. Jesus drew a distinction between material treasures on earth and eternal rewards in heaven (v. 20).

B. Spiritual focus, parallel to one’s heart in verse 21. In context, a healthy eye (heart) represents a whole, God-centered perspective, while an unhealthy eye signifies selfishness.

C. Jesus drew a contrast between a heart devoted to God and a heart devoted to the world. Only one can hold authority over a person’s life.

D. Worry demonstrates a lack of faith and leads to spiritual distraction. See Philippians 4:6.

E. The key to avoiding worry is trusting God’s provision. He cares for birds and flowers (see vv. 28-29), so He will care for His people.

F. Solomon was unmatched in both wisdom and wealth (1 Kings 10:23). Gold was so abundant that silver was like rocks (2 Chron. 9:27). Yet, God gave humble wildflowers greater glory.

G. Jesus told His people to be different. Instead of seeking earthly riches like the Gentiles, they were to pursue God’s kingdom (v. 33).

H. For those who seek Him fully, God will provide the material needs that are necessary for life.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Possession

(Matt. 6:19-24)

Believers should focus on heavenly treasures rather than worldly possessions.

- **How can we assess where our true devotion lies?**

2. Worry

(Matt. 6:25-30)

Placing too much priority on material possessions leads to worry and anxiety.

- **What kinds of things might you be tempted to worry about—and why?**
- **What are practical things you can do to get through times when you have “little faith” in God?**

3. Trust

(Matt. 6:31-34)

Believers can trust God to provide what they need.

- **Why does “tomorrow” create so much anxiety for us?**
- **What situation do you need to entrust to God today?**

DID YOU KNOW?

The Bible includes more than 2,300 verses about money and possessions.

Apply the Text

- **People in your Bible study group likely face challenges related to material possessions and/or making ends meet. How could you help one another in these areas?**

KEY DOCTRINE: Stewardship

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. (See Luke 12:16-21; Philippians 4:19.)

BIBLE SKILL: Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage.

Jesus referenced worry six times in Matthew 6:19-34. Identify each reference to worry and put them in a list. Identify the commands. Identify where worry or worrying is used as a noun and note how it is used. Write a summation of each point Jesus made. How do these statements about worry apply to your life? What steps can you take this week to overcome worry?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 6:33, noting what Jesus said about priorities.

In teaching His disciples about possessions (Matt. 6:19-24), Jesus emphasized the fleeting value of material things. Instead, we should pursue spiritual blessings that hold eternal value. In verses 25-30, Jesus addressed a similar issue: worry. He told His listeners to not worry about daily needs like food and clothing. Worry and anxiety occur when we lack faith in God to provide for our needs. Again in verses 31-34, Jesus taught His followers not to worry since God knows what we need. Instead, we are to pursue kingdom priorities and righteous living.

What things do you worry about? Why?

Verse 33 provides the antidote for worry. To “seek” infers more than mere desire; it means actively going after something to obtain it. It’s not enough to want something; we must pursue it. The qualifier “first” means pursuing God’s kingdom priorities is the primary concern of our lives.

How would your life change if you handed all your worries over to God by trusting Him and pursuing His Kingdom priorities?

Agree to text Matthew 6:33 to each other
this week as a reminder to seek first the
Kingdom of God.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 6:19-21

Note the two types of treasures.

God cares about how His people handle their money, and He cares about their attitude toward material things. In Luke 16:14, Jesus called the Pharisees “lovers of money.” He didn’t want His followers to be like them. Literally, Jesus said, “Don’t treasure up treasures for yourselves.”

Jesus admonished His followers to avoid storing up these items that don’t last. Wool clothing could be eaten by the “moth.” Things made of metal might be corroded by “rust.” This word *rust* means “an eating” and can also refer to possessions being eaten by rodents and insects. Thirdly, thieves might “break in and steal.” Often valued possessions were buried in the ground to hide them. (See Matt. 13:44.) The term *break in* literally means to “dig through” and could refer to digging through a mud wall into a house or digging up buried possessions from their hiding spot.

Jesus called on His followers to “store up . . . treasures in heaven.” The things that carry over into the kingdom of God include the godly character of the disciple and the souls of people influenced for Christ. As Christ followers use their material resources in this life to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others, they are storing up treasure in heaven. Earthly possessions are to be used for the work of building God’s kingdom.

What treasures are you storing up in heaven?



Day 2: Matthew 6:22-24

Identify the choice Jesus is presenting.

Just as the eye gives entrance to light into the whole body, so the heart gives entrance into the whole of a person’s character. If the eye is healthy, all is well. The word *healthy* speaks of a clear, singular focus on one purpose alone. A bad eye causes the entire body to be darkened. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word *bad* sometimes is translated as “evil eye” and speaks of being stingy and begrudging. Such is the attitude of those who allow possessions to put a choke hold on their lives.

Jesus used this analogy of the eye and light and darkness to picture the heart or character of a person. The heart is either healthy with a proper perspective on material things, or it is unhealthy in its approach to wealth. Thus, the disciple’s attitude toward possessions and money impacts every aspect of life.

Wealth and possessions can easily become one’s master. The word *masters* is often translated as “lord” and relates to the owner of a slave. A slave is under the total control of a master. There is no allowance for any other devotion.

We cannot walk in two directions at the same time; neither can we serve Jesus and love possessions at the same time. The result will be love for one and hate for the other.

How can you assess where your true devotion lies?



Day 3: Matthew 6:25-27

Consider the lesson of the birds.

Moving from a warning against stockpiling wealth and possessions, Jesus warned against worrying about life's necessities. The common people in Jesus's day lived under a heavy burden of taxation. It became a struggle to obtain items like food and clothing. In fact, most people ate one meal a day, and meat was served once a week at best. Their daily existence was trying to scrape up what was necessary to sustain life.

As Jesus addressed these circumstances, He told His followers to stop worrying about these things. Worry is doubting God's faithfulness and ability or willingness to provide. Jesus told His followers to replace worry with trust in God.

Perhaps gazing out over the hillside, Jesus motioned to the birds to illustrate His point as He spoke about the need for food. While birds are industrious and constantly searching for food, they are dependent on God's provision. Forces beyond their control can make it difficult to find food: the weather, drought, the seasons of the year and so forth. Yet they are provided for in spite of all this. In the same way, despite all His followers might be facing in their daily struggles, Jesus said God can be counted on to provide.

What kinds of things are you tempted to worry about—and why?

According to these verses, what is the antidote to worry?



Day 4: Matthew 6:28-30

Compare Matthew 6:29 to 1 Kings 10:14-29.

Next Jesus spoke of worrying about clothing. Observe, He said, the wildflowers of the field. As beautiful as they were, the flowers did nothing to bring about their beauty. The word *observe* means to “learn thoroughly from.” There was a lesson to be learned from the flowers that didn't labor, a word pointing to the occupation of men in Jesus's day. Nor did they spin thread, a reference to a task that typically belonged to women.

The lesson from wildflowers continues with a comparison to the splendor of Solomon's kingdom. First Kings 4:20-34 provides a description of Solomon's wealth and opulence. Jesus spoke of how Solomon adorned himself. The word *adorned* speaks of putting on clothing. Yet, the wildflowers of the field were clothed in even greater splendor than the king. Again, this was God's provision.

Wildflowers and grasses are temporary. But just like with the birds, God's care is evident. How much more will God care for His children! Jesus was following a typical Jewish form of logic, arguing from lesser to greater. If God cares for the little things, how much greater will be His care for us who are the pinnacle of His creation?

To worry is to show little faith in God; it is to deem Him as untrustworthy.

What situation do you need to entrust to God today?



Day 5: Matthew 6:31-34

Highlight verse 33.

Followers of Jesus are not to worry about how to make ends meet in life. To worry is to abandon faith. Faith says, “God will provide.”

In using the word *Gentiles*, Jesus pointed to those who were not His followers. A person who doesn’t find hope in a relationship with God will seek to find hope in material things. They will seek temporary substitutes for a faith relationship with God.

Jesus commanded us to align our priorities with God’s kingdom. The phrase “seek first” speaks of priority. We are also to be preoccupied with “the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” This is the kind of life that pleases God. This kind of life comes with an assurance. Jesus said, “all these things will be provided for you.” In context, this refers to food, drink, and clothing. This refers to what we need, not to the things we want.

Jesus returned to the original challenge of verse 25. A follower of Christ must daily exercise dependence on God and avoid the pointless worry about tomorrow’s problems. Each day has enough trouble of its own. This is a realistic look at life. Jesus said, “You will have suffering in this world” (John 16:33). Believers are to live one day at a time in complete trust of their heavenly Father.

What should be the priorities of a follower of Christ?

APPLY THE TEXT

What would you consider to be your greatest barrier in seeking first the kingdom of God? What does your giving to God through your church say about your priorities in life? What is one step you might take to let Jesus be master of your finances?

JOURNAL



THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IN MATTHEW

BY ROBERT WEATHERS

- With frequency and fervency, the Scriptures teach about the coming of God's kingdom on earth. In both the Old Testament languages of Aramaic and Hebrew and in the New Testament Greek, the terms translated "kingdom" referred more to the reign and authority of the king than it did to a geographical area. So in the Bible the "kingdom of God" referred primarily to God's rule, His divine kingly authority, which had come from heaven to earth. The kingdom was not so much a geographic place as it was the reality of God in action.

The Gospel writers used two terms interchangeably to speak of God's kingdom. They called it "the kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of heaven." All four Gospels use "the kingdom of God," but Matthew favored "the kingdom of heaven." Since "kingdom of heaven" was a typical Jewish way to "avoid the use of the name of God" when referring to God's rule, Matthew's preference for this phrase demonstrated his concern for reaching a Jewish audience with the message of Jesus.

Exploring Jesus's use of these terms in Matthew's Gospel illuminates compelling truths about God's reign in the universe. In fact, chapters 12; 13; 16; and 19 provide keys to understanding these truths. Chapter 13 is especially significant. In that chapter, Jesus defined the nature of God's kingdom through a series of parables. Four facts about Jesus's use of "the kingdom of God" or "heaven" emerge as we scan these chapters in Matthew.

First, the kingdom is embodied in Christ. The early Christians realized that the kingdom of God had actually arrived in

Jesus. As Messiah, Christ was the anticipated King. But more than that, He actually embodied the kingdom of God. He brought its mission to earth. He carried bodily the full authority of God.

Matthew recorded events through which Jesus demonstrated His regal authority. For example, when the Pharisees criticized Jesus for permitting His disciples to eat grain and for healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus proclaimed Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:8). Jesus was inaugurating the kingdom of God on earth and asserting His authority as King. Matthew clarified that the King had come by quoting a passage from Isaiah that anticipated the Messiah's arrival (Matt. 12:15-21; Isa. 42:1-4).

Jesus further validated His authority by casting out demons. He taught that the contest between God and Satan was a battle of kingdoms. His arrival on earth meant that Satan was defeated. To the Pharisees, Jesus declared, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28).

Second, the kingdom is a call to discipleship. Jesus's coming requires a response from all who encounter the King. Jesus packaged His call to discipleship with His kingdom teaching. When the Pharisees tried to test Him and asked about His perspective on divorce, Jesus explained God's original intention for marriage. He used marriage as a way to call His followers to fulfill God's intention, rather than to look for a way to dodge God's design (19:1-12).

Not everyone would accept the demands of discipleship. Jesus used the parable of the sower and the soil to compare the ways people responded to His call to enter God's kingdom and become His followers (13:18-23). Matthew was careful to include an explanation with this parable. Although all hear the same message of the kingdom, not all respond the same way. Only the person who is fit for the kingdom "hears and understands the word" (v. 23). That disciple will produce a great bounty for the kingdom. Under the tests of time and endurance, his profession of faith will be proven genuine.

Even Jesus's closest disciples wrestled with the demands of discipleship. Following Peter's great Christological confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus promised that His followers would be kingdom disciples and would have keys to the kingdom. The gospel message was that key to the kingdom. Their actions of "binding and loosing" would create the church on earth, which would then carry out the mission of the kingdom.

The disciples did not fully understand this teaching. While they professed their faith in Jesus as the Son of God, they did not grasp that, as King, He would die a sacrificial death (16:13-23).

Matthew recorded other episodes to underscore Jesus's expectations for His followers. Jesus showed that citizens of His kingdom should have the faith of a child. He also taught

a rich young man that discipleship was a lifestyle that required a complete surrender to the priorities of God's kingdom (19:13-30).

Third, the kingdom is a treasure that God reveals. Jesus's disciples wondered why He taught kingdom truths using parables. Jesus answered, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them" (13:11). He meant that parables have a dual purpose: to reveal and to conceal. The inability to understand stemmed from a hardened heart, but people who were open to the truth would understand Jesus's teaching and choose to follow Him. To see that the kingdom of God has come required accepting God's perspective. God revealed this truth (16:17).

Jesus also taught that, unlike the pomp and pageantry that so often accompanied earthly kingdoms, God's kingdom would begin small, with a handful of disciples. Ultimately, though, it would generate grand results. For that reason the kingdom was like a mustard seed that would become a great tree or like the leaven mixed with dough (13:31-33). He similarly compared the kingdom of heaven to a treasure found in a field and to a pearl of great value (vv. 44-46). The kingdom of heaven is precious—anyone would be wise to make any sacrifice in choosing it.

Finally, the kingdom is both a present fact and a future hope. Though the kingdom of God was established with the arrival of Jesus, its full coming is not yet complete. He has brought its mission to earth and given that mission to the church. However, one day in the future He will return and the kingdom will be realized in all its glory.

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SESSION 6

◀ *Authority Acknowledged* ▶

MATTHEW 7:15-29

JESUS'S WORDS HAVE AUTHORITY.



When we need to get it right, we often turn to the “authority.” The authority is supposedly the most knowledgeable and experienced person in his or her field. The authorities are the ones you count on to have the correct information and skills. To be recognized as an authority in an area of expertise is a unique honor. When that person speaks, people generally pay close attention.

*WHO IS SOMEONE YOU KNOW THAT YOU WOULD CONSIDER AN AUTHORITY IN
A PARTICULAR FIELD? IF YOU HAD A CHOICE, IN WHAT FIELD OF EXPERTISE
WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE CONSIDERED AN AUTHORITY?*

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In chapter 7, Jesus continued to teach His followers what they were to be and to do. First, He addressed the way His followers were to relate to others (Matt. 7:1-6). In contrast to the judgmental attitude of the pious religious leaders, Jesus’s disciples were not to judge (evaluate) others in hopes that they themselves would come off better in such an analysis. Jesus illustrated this in a humorous fashion using lumber and splinters to make His point. He indicated that the disciple wouldn’t want others to treat them judgmentally, so they shouldn’t treat others with critical judgment either.

Returning again to the subjects of both prayer and provision, Jesus taught His followers that God is ready and willing to answer their prayers (vv. 7-12). Using vivid illustrations, Jesus pointed to a loving Father who will take care of His children as they petition Him.

The remainder of chapter 7 points to contrasting ways to live. One way is God’s way, which is the narrow way that few travel. The other way is the way of the world,

pictured as the broad way which leads to destruction. Many are the travelers on that path. God’s way produces good fruit. The world’s way produces bad and worthless fruit. God’s way secures entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The world’s way ends in eternal separation from God. God’s way is built on the strong foundation of Jesus’s teachings. This foundation will withstand the storms of life. The world’s way is to ignore Christ’s teaching, and this choice will end in tragedy.

When Jesus finished teaching His disciples, the crowd that had been listening was amazed because He taught “like one who had authority, and not like their scribes” (v. 29).



15 “Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in **sheep’s clothing** **A** but inwardly are ravaging wolves. **16** You’ll recognize them by their **fruit**. **B** Are grapes gathered from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles? **17** In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. **18** A good tree can’t produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19** Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into **the fire**. **C** **20** So you’ll recognize them by their fruit. **21** Not everyone who says to me, ‘**Lord, Lord,**’ **D** will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ **23** Then I will announce to them, ‘**I never knew you.**’ **E** Depart from me, you lawbreakers!’ **24** Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on **the rock**. **F** **25** The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it **didn’t collapse**, **G** because its foundation was on the rock. **26** But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn’t act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. **27** The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash.” **28** When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, **29** because he was teaching them like one who had **authority**, **H** and not like their scribes.

A. A metaphor for the false prophets who claim to speak for God but teach deception. They are really “ravaging wolves” looking to devour those not grounded in truth.

B. Visible outcomes reveal a person’s true character. Good fruit (like grapes and figs) doesn’t come from thornbushes and thistles.

C. A common New Testament image for judgment and destruction (see Matt. 13:42; Rev. 20:15).

D. Jesus is not deceived by those who claim Him but reject the “will of my Father in heaven.”

E. Some may fool others on earth with good deeds, but their spiritual emptiness will be laid bare before Jesus at His judgment.

F. In contrast to those who only act like believers, wise people build their lives on Him. He becomes the solid foundation for their lives.

G. The rain, rivers, and winds represent the trials and challenges of life. Those who are grounded in Jesus will not collapse under pressure.

H. The scribes’ authority was rooted in repeating traditions and other teachers. Jesus’s authority rested in His own character and His firsthand understanding of God’s Word and will.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Fruit

(Matt. 7:15-20)

Believers' lives should exhibit spiritual fruit.

- **How can you tell the difference between judging someone (v. 1) and discerning fruit (v. 20)?**

2. Obedience

(Matt. 7:21-23)

Believers are known by their desire to obey God's Word.

- **What does obedience to God's Word reveal about one's relationship with God?**

3. Wisdom

(Matt. 7:24-29)

Believers can stand firm on God's Word.

- **What is the primary difference between the two builders?**
- **Who in your circle of friends needs to hear and act on the message of the gospel?**

Apply the Text

- **How can the members of your group encourage and hold one another accountable to hear and act on Jesus's words? Make a list of ways this might be done—phone calls, meeting weekly in pairs, encouraging text messages. Pair up with a group member and commit to weekly connection for accountability.**

KEY DOCTRINE:

The Scriptures

All Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. (See Psalm 119:89; 2 Timothy 3:15-17.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

Wise people build their lives on the foundation of Jesus. Look up the passages in which the psalmist referred to God as his "rock": Psalm 18:2; 62:2,6. List other images in these verses used by the psalmist to describe what it meant to have God as his rock (for example, "fortress"). Prophets also described God as a rock. Read 1 Samuel 2:2 and Isaiah 26:4; 28:16. Note qualities such as "everlasting" and "unshakable." Now read the following New Testament passages: 1 Corinthians 3:11; 10:4; and 1 Peter 2:4-8. How do these verses add to your understanding of Jesus as your foundation?



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.



TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 7:24, paying attention to the words “hears” and “acts.”

Concluding His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that the wise person is the one who both hears and acts on His words. This person's house survived the storm because it was built "on the rock." The New Testament identifies Jesus as our Rock (1 Pet. 2:4-8). With Jesus as the foundation of our lives, we can live securely, regardless of circumstances. In contrast, the foolish person is the one who hears Jesus's words and does not act on them (Matt. 7:26). Both the wise and the foolish heard Jesus's teaching. The difference was that the wise people did what Jesus taught. Jesus emphasized the necessity of His followers *doing* what He taught rather than merely *hearing* what He said. James said the same thing in his letter: "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas. 1:22).

What are your greatest challenges in obeying Jesus's teachings?

In the conclusion of His sermon, Jesus emphasized the choice before us. We must choose between two gates, two roads (Matt. 7:13-14), and two foundations (7:24-27). The choice we make in regard to how we respond to Jesus determines the quality and outcome of our lives.

What is a teaching from the Sermon on the Mount that you will put into action this week?

Agree to text Matthew 7:24 to each other as a reminder to be a doer of Jesus's teachings and not a hearer only.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 7:15-20

Note what Jesus was calling His disciples to do.

Jesus warned His disciples to be alert for false prophets. This pointed to the scribes and Pharisees. Outwardly, these religious leaders appeared righteous, but inside they were filled with selfishness, greed, and hypocrisy.

These religious leaders could be discerned by their fruit. Though Jesus said we are not to judge (v. 1), He called His followers to be “fruit inspectors.” What a bush is by nature determines the type of fruit it bears. What a person is in the heart determines the type of behaviors and attitudes they exhibit. In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit and a bad tree produces bad fruit.

Jesus regularly condemned hypocrisy. He promised judgment on those who were simply wearing religious masks. In verse 19, He continued using the image of trees and fruit by stating a tree that doesn’t produce genuine fruit will be cut down and destroyed by fire.

This section began with the command to “be on your guard against false prophets” (v. 15). It ends by making the simple, yet profound statement, you’ll recognize them by their fruit. We are not to judge one another in the sense of having a judgmental, holier-than-thou attitude. Yet we are to discern the genuineness of people’s profession by inspecting the fruit of their lives.

What is the difference between judging someone (v. 1) and discerning fruit (v. 20)?



Day 2: Matthew 7:21-22

Contemplate the difference between true professions and false professions.

Verses 21-23 uncover the masquerade of those who pretend to be Christ followers. They may make the outright confession that Jesus is Lord. But the genuineness of such a profession is evidenced by obedience to the will of the Father in heaven. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15).

The “kingdom of heaven” is a metaphor for the rule and reign of God as sovereign Lord. To enter the kingdom is to submit oneself to live under the rule of God, as evidenced by a lifestyle of obedience. To not do so is an indication that one is not a part of the kingdom.

Jesus spoke of people who engage in religious activities but are not true followers of Christ. Some are teachers and preachers, while others perform miracles including exorcisms. Religious activity can be a mask that disguises a heart far from God.

Notice the repeated emphasis on doing these religious activities “in your name.” While these words often are used in Scripture as a mark of genuineness, they can also be used to disguise a false profession. Such is the case here.

What does your obedience to God’s Word reveal about your relationship with Him?



Day 3: Matthew 7:23

Underline the phrase, “I never knew you.”

In response to these play-acting followers, Jesus pointed to a day of final judgment when an accounting will take place. These false believers will offer all types of pleas about their spirituality and good works in Jesus’s name. However, they will be exposed for the counterfeits they are.

Jesus emphasized that religious activities are not necessarily synonymous with obedience. The religious activities described here were outward, showy, charismatic activities. But they were all empty substitutes for obedience in daily living.

Jesus told a parable about ten virgins who awaited the coming of the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13). Five of those maidens were foolishly unprepared for the groom’s arrival. When they finally arrived at the door to the wedding banquet, they discovered that it was locked. Their cry was, “Master, Master.” But they were denied entrance into the banquet. The words of the Master’s rejection were simply: “I don’t know you” (25:12). Here are those same words used for those who masqueraded as Christ followers. To those who cry out, “Lord, Lord,” the reply will be “I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers.” Their end will be eternal separation from God.

We must not delude and deceive ourselves into an empty and false profession of Jesus as Lord. Do we really know Him or are we playing games of charades before God?

Pray for the salvation of people who are masquerading as believers but don’t have a saving relationship with Him.



Day 4: Matthew 7:24-27

Note the similarities in the storms but the differences in the foundations.

Building a life is like building a house. The foundation of any house is essential. In this parable, a choice was made of building the foundation on solid rock or shifting sand. We build a rock-solid foundation for life when we listen to and follow Jesus’s words.

Jesus contrasted two groups who faced the same storm in life. Compare the description of the storm in verse 25—“the rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house”—with the storm’s description in verse 27. It’s the same storm. Following Jesus doesn’t exempt us from the same storms that everybody faces. However, believers have a secure foundation that makes it possible to weather the storms.

Jesus addressed those who did not act on His words. These people might have thought they were secure because they heard His teaching. Perhaps they even claimed to follow Jesus (v. 22). But they did not act on His words.

If you have ever built a sandcastle on the beach at low tide, you know what happens when the tide rises. The same is true with a house built on the sand. It cannot withstand the storm. In Jesus’s words, the house “collapsed with a great crash.”

On what foundation are you building your life? How has that foundation affected the way you’ve weathered the storms of life?



Day 5: Matthew 7:28-29

Note the crowd's reaction to Jesus's teaching.

Jesus had finished what He set out to say, and the people were “astonished.” This was no mild reaction on the part of the crowd. They were blown away at the authority Jesus exhibited in His teaching.

In their astonishment, the crowd contrasted the teaching of Jesus to that with which they were familiar—the teaching of the scribes. There was no comparison—Jesus's teachings were superior. Therefore, the crowd recognized His teaching as having greater authority. They recognized Him as the authority on God's law.

Such a development immediately set up the coming conflict with those who considered themselves the authority on all things pertaining to God. The scribes were always quoting other rabbis as their source of authority or referring to the traditions of Judaism. Jesus, however, referred to no other source or tradition. This fact was not lost on the crowds. They saw that His teachings needed no outside source of authority. Jesus Himself was the authority.

Who in your circle of friends needs to hear and act on the message of the gospel? Pray for them.

APPLY THE TEXT

Consider areas of your life where you struggle in obedience to God. How about your prayer life? Sharing your faith? Giving of your resources to God? Your thought life? Name other areas where you need to intentionally seek to shore up your obedience.

JOURNAL



SESSION 7

Every Life Valued

MATTHEW 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8

JESUS VALUES EVERY PERSON.



You might think it would be unnecessary to ask the question, “Does God care for everyone?” Yes, absolutely, would be most people’s answer. God cares for and values every person regardless of age, nationality, ethnicity, or social status. Since that is so, a corollary question must be asked: “Should followers of Jesus care about and value every person?” The answer is yes, but what should that look like?

*WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT MAKE PEOPLE FEEL VALUED?
WHAT MIGHT MAKE THEM FEEL UNVALUED?*

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Matthew’s Gospel is organized around two major activities of Jesus—teaching and healing. An example of that organization is found in Matthew 4:23–9:35. This section begins with a broad statement that “Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (4:23). It concludes with a very similar statement in 9:35, stating almost the same thing that Jesus was going throughout the villages, teaching in the synagogues and preaching the good news of God’s kingdom and healing various diseases.

Between those two bookends, the text first gives to us a body of teaching called the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29). Next, comes the healing ministry of Jesus, beginning in 8:1. In this section, Matthew recorded various healing miracles performed by Jesus. These miracles would include the healing of a leper (8:1–4). Matthew also relayed the story of the healing of a Roman centurion’s servant, which further enforced the authority of Jesus as

Messiah (vv. 5–13). Peter’s mother-in-law was cured of a fever that led to numerous healings in the town of Capernaum (vv. 14–17). In addition to healing various diseases, Jesus encountered people who suffered from demon possession, and He cast out the demons inflicting these people (vv. 28–34).

Within this healing narrative, Matthew included the accounts of two would-be followers of Jesus who drew back from making the commitment to follow Him because they considered the cost too high (vv. 18–22). Also included is the account of Jesus calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee, leading the disciples to ask, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him” (vv. 23–27).



Matthew 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8

8:1 When he came down **from the mountain**, **A** large crowds followed him. **2** Right away a man with leprosy came up and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me **clean**.” **B 3** Reaching out his hand, **Jesus touched him**, **C** saying, “I am willing; be made clean.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. **4** Then Jesus told him, “See that you don’t tell anyone; but go, show yourself to **the priest**, **D** and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” [. . .] **14** Jesus went into Peter’s house and saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. **15** So he touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and began to serve him. **16** When evening came, they brought to him many who were **demon-possessed**. **E** He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick, **17** so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases. [. . .]

9:1 So he got into a boat, crossed over, and came to **his own town**. **F 2** Just then some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, “Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven.” **3** At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, “He’s **blaspheming!**” **G 4** Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts? **5** For which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? **6** But so that you may know that the Son of Man has **authority** **H** on earth to forgive sins”—then he told the paralytic, “Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.” **7** So he got up and went home. **8** When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck and gave glory to God, who had given such authority to men.

Key Words

A. The events described happened after Jesus finished His Sermon on the Mount.

B. To be “unclean” means being separated from community and religious life. Essentially, the man was asking Jesus to give him his life back.

C. Anyone touching an unclean person would also be deemed unclean. This did not stop Jesus from healing the man in this personal way.

D. According to the law, the priests were responsible for declaring a leper “clean.” An elaborate cleansing ritual also involved grain offerings and animal sacrifices (Lev. 14:1-20).

E. Demons are fallen angels loyal to Satan; but, as Jesus demonstrated, they are ultimately subject to God’s authority.

F. Though born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, Jesus’s town was Capernaum.

G. Profane or contemptuous speech or action toward God. The leaders believed Jesus was assuming God’s role by trying to forgive sins.

H. The right to exercise power. By healing the paralyzed man, Jesus proved that He also had the power to forgive sin.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Leprosy

(Matt. 8:1-4)

We should value those whom some consider to be outcasts.

- **Who are the outcasts in our society and what are some typical reactions to them?**

2. Fever and Demon-Possession

(Matt. 8:14-17)

We should value people at all stages of life.

- **In what ways can we show that we value the most vulnerable members of society? How do these verses in Matthew provide a model for us?**

3. Paralysis

(Matt. 9:1-8)

We should care for and value persons with physical handicaps.

- **Why do you think Jesus addressed spiritual needs before He addressed physical needs?**

Apply the Text

- **As a group, create a list of those in your community who might be considered outcasts or of lesser value than others in your area. Plan a group project to minister to them in a tangible way.**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Man

The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. (See Genesis 1:26-30; Psalm 8:3-6.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Connect Old Testament prophecy to New Testament fulfillment.

Matthew 8:17 indicates that Jesus's healing ministry was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. Matthew 9:6 quotes Jesus referring to Himself as the Son of Man, a reference from Daniel 7:13-14. Read Isaiah 53. List all the descriptions related to the Messiah. Next, search for the phrase "Son of Man" using a concordance. Take note of how and when the term is used. Finally, think about how Jesus could fulfill Isaiah 53 only by being the Son of Man—both divine and human.

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 8:2-3, noting the difference between “willing” and “can.”

Jesus had concluded His Sermon on the Mount and traveled down the mountain. A man with leprosy approached Him saying “Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean” (Matt. 8:2). Jesus touched the man and his leprosy was immediately cleansed, demonstrating both Jesus’s power and compassion. Jesus could have healed by command and from a distance, without touching the leper. Choosing to touch him was an act of compassion.

The leper said “If you are willing” and found that Jesus was indeed willing. Would people question your willingness to help? Why or why not?

Society considered the leper an outcast, but Jesus loved him. He demonstrated His love by “reaching out his hand” and touching him. Love is not a mere emotion but an action verb; it must be acted out. Love is demonstrated through actions (1 John 3:18), just as faith is demonstrated through works (Jas. 2:17).

What are some ways we can follow Jesus's example to reach out and touch vulnerable and hurting people? Who is someone specifically we can help?

Place Matthew 8:3 on your phones or on cards and agree to memorize it together.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 8:1-2

Identify the two elements in the leper's request.

Following His Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5–7, large crowds followed Jesus down from the mountain. Many followed only out of curiosity.

As Jesus came down from the mountain, right away He encountered a man with leprosy. To prevent the potential spread of leprosy, lepers were isolated from society. They were required to live alone (Lev. 13:46) or to live in colonies with other leprosy people. The disease rendered a person both physically and ritually unclean. So for this man to appear among people and approach Jesus was unusual.

The leper knelt in respect before Jesus, addressing him as “Lord.” In that term was respect, reverence, and acknowledgment of the authority of Jesus.

The leper stated his request: “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” There are two elements in the leper’s request. First, there was a belief in Jesus’s divine sovereignty—“if you are willing.” This was not a demand but a request. Second, there was a belief in the power of Jesus to heal him: “you can make me clean.” The leper did not know if Jesus would heal him, but he was confident Jesus could. These two elements are necessary in every petition for healing—belief in God’s sovereignty and belief in God’s ability.

Who are the outcasts in our society and what are some typical reactions to them?



Day 2: Matthew 8:3-4

Underline “Jesus touched him.”

Jesus touched the leper. He could have just spoken a command as He did in other instances (see Matt. 8:5-13). But in this instance Jesus reached out His hand and touched the leper. This would have rendered Him “defiled” according to the teachings of the day. By touching a leper, He became contaminated and ritually unclean. Jesus, however, would have nothing to do with the phobias of the day. Instead, He showed compassion to one of society’s most unwanted outcasts. The healing occurred “immediately.” The defilement was gone, and everybody saw it go away. This was an obvious miracle before the crowd’s eyes.

Jesus gave the healed man two instructions: First, he was not to tell anyone. Why was this a pattern throughout Jesus’s ministry? (See Matt. 9:30; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9.) In this case, perhaps to keep the healed man focused on obeying Jesus’s instructions. Also, Jesus didn’t want the acclamation of the crowd as simply a worker of miracles or the political deliverer they anticipated. He still had more to teach about the kingdom of God. Mark tells us what happened when the leper disobeyed the command not to tell: “Jesus could no longer enter a town openly” (Mark 1:45). Second, Jesus instructed the man to perform the prescribed steps in the law to show his healing (Lev. 14:1-32). Jesus sent him to carry out the law’s requirements. The first step of faith is obedience.

What is the next step of obedience Jesus wants you to take?



Day 3: Matthew 8:14-17

Compare Matthew 8:17 to Isaiah 53:4-5.

The story of Peter's mother-in-law is the shortest of all the healing narratives. We are not told any particulars of the circumstances. Matthew simply tells us that when Jesus entered Peter's house, He discovered the woman had a fever. Jesus reached down, touched her hand, and she was immediately healed.

The words "when evening came" might imply that the previous healings happened on a Sabbath (see Mark 1:21,29). This could explain why the multitudes who came to Jesus for healing came after sunset. Among the ones who came to be healed were "many who were demon-possessed." Jesus drove out the spirits by rebuking them. He also healed all those who came to Him with physical ailments. A distinction is made here between demon possession and physical sickness.

One of the prominent characteristics of Matthew's Gospel is his pointing to the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. Here, Matthew pointed out that the healing ministry of Jesus was a fulfillment of prophecy, quoting from Isaiah 53:4. Certainly, Matthew had in mind the entirety of Isaiah's prophecy, which includes: "But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds" (Isa. 53:5). Jesus came not only to heal physical ailments but to heal spiritually—to save us from our sins.

In what ways can your church show that it values the most vulnerable members of your community? How do these verses in Matthew provide a model for you?



Day 4: Matthew 9:1-2

Contemplate the significance of the phrase "seeing their faith."

Matthew 9:1 forms a transition. Leaving the region of Gadara (8:28), Jesus crossed over the Sea of Galilee to his own town of Capernaum (see Mark 2:1). There, He began teaching. Quite possibly this took place in the home of Peter, where Jesus apparently was staying. While teaching, Jesus was confronted with another healing opportunity.

A group of men brought a paralytic to Jesus. The man was "lying on a stretcher." Missing from Matthew's account is the detail of the men lowering the man from the roof to the floor (see Mark 2:4; Luke 5:19).

That these friends cared about the paralyzed man is seen in their effort to get him to Jesus. Also seen is their belief that Jesus could heal the man. Jesus, seeing their faith, rewarded their efforts. Faith played a key role in many of the healing miracles of Jesus.

A common belief in Jesus's day was that illness and disease were the direct result of sin. Jesus dispelled that belief in another incident of healing when He told His disciples that a man's blindness was not the result of sin (John 9:1-2). Nevertheless, this paralytic probably had lived his life thinking that his paralysis was punishment for sin. Jesus immediately dealt with the man's spiritual and mental state by exclaiming, "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus, as the Son of God, used His divine authority to pronounce forgiveness. Forgiveness of sin is our greatest need.

How might your faith lead to other people experiencing the power of Jesus?



Day 5: Matthew 9:3-8

Circle the word “authority” in verses 6 and 8.

The religious leaders perceived Jesus’s action as blasphemy. Only God could forgive sins. They were convinced Jesus was usurping a function that belonged only to God. They refused to believe Jesus was God. Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus denounced their unbelief and objections as coming from the evil in their hearts. The problem with the scribes was a problem of the heart.

In response to their objection, Jesus asked, which is easier, to pronounce forgiveness or to make a paralyzed man walk? For Him to claim to forgive sin was easier than physically healing the man. If Jesus could do the harder task of healing, then the assumption would be that the easier task of forgiving sin had been accomplished as well. So Jesus declared that He would heal the man to prove He had the authority to forgive sin.

Jesus’s authority was vividly illustrated when He commanded the paralytic to get up, take his stretcher, and go home. In obedience to Jesus’s command, the man who once was paralyzed got up and went home. This was irrefutable proof that Jesus had the authority and power to heal and forgive.

This healing was an act of compassion toward another of society’s outcasts. In that day, and unfortunately in our day as well, those with handicapping conditions are often looked down on as having lesser value than others. Once again Jesus demonstrated that every person has value.

Why do you think Jesus addressed spiritual needs before He addressed physical needs?

APPLY THE TEXT

Consider your attitude toward people who are often ignored. Consider how your attitude clashes with the attitude Jesus had toward those who were deemed second class in His day. What needs to change in your attitude?

JOURNAL



THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

BY BOB BUNN

- On January 13, 1984, President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation supporting what he dubbed “the sanctity of human life.” Pointing to the deaths of millions of unborn children through legalized abortion, Reagan noted that Americans were “poorer not simply for lives not led and for contributions not made, but also for the erosion of our sense of worth and dignity of every individual.”¹ In response, Reagan proclaimed Sunday, January 22 of that year—the 11th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion—“National Sanctity of Human Life Day.” He issued similar proclamations for the third Sunday of January in each of his remaining years in office, as have several of his successors in the White House.

By the late 1980s, the Sanctity of Human Life movement had gained momentum in many churches, but the seeds of the Southern Baptist Convention’s support for the sanctity of all human life had been planted much earlier. At its 1976 annual meeting in Norfolk, Virginia, the Convention adopted a resolution against abortion. In that resolution, the SBC affirmed “the biblical sacredness and dignity of all human life, including fetal life” and rejected “any indiscriminate attitude toward abortion, as contrary to the biblical view.”²

In its article on “The Family,” the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000) states that “children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord.”³ Later, in the article on “The Christian and Social Order,” it also makes a broader appeal for the universal value of each human life, especially those who cannot defend themselves: “We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf

of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.”⁴

Today, Christians from a variety of backgrounds recognize the importance of protecting the sanctity of human life.

What the Bible Says

Our English word “sanctity” can be traced to the Latin word *sanctus*, which basically means “sacred.” By definition the sanctity of human life considers every life “sacred” or “set apart” by God for His purposes and plans.

Human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). All of us—even those who choose to reject God’s mercy and grace—bear His image. This gives every human being value and purpose. Our lives have meaning because we reflect Him.

In the Psalms, we see that the image of God places humans a little lower than God and that we are crowned “with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). Plus, we

are “remarkably and wondrously made” by the very hand of God (139:14). He “knit” (a word that implies protection and security in Hebrew) us in our mother’s womb, and nothing in our lives is hidden from Him (139:13,15). This is how our Creator sees us, and it underscores our responsibility to view others through the lens of the sanctity of human life.

The sanctity of human life also emphasizes the purposes God has for each individual. Again, the psalmist noted that God knows the course of our days before they even begin (139:16). In addition, the prophet Jeremiah learned that God had set him apart for ministry before his birth (Jer. 1:5).

God, the Creator of the universe, knows each of us and has a plan for each of us. This reinforces the truth that human beings are His highest creation. But the greatest proof that every human life has value can be found in what is arguably the most familiar verse in all of Scripture. John 3:16 states that God’s love for humanity drove Him to make the greatest sacrifice imaginable. He sent His Son to pay the price for our sin. Because Jesus died for humanity, we can affirm the sanctity of all human life.

What It Means

The momentum of Sanctity of Human Life Sunday began with a presidential proclamation regarding the unborn. But if we believe God calls us to value and protect every person He has created, believers must consider expanding their definition of the sanctity of human life beyond the issue of abortion.

In the Old Testament, God sent His people into exile for two primary reasons: idolatry and injustice toward those who could not defend themselves. Today, we don’t have to look far to see how oppression of the helpless and hopeless continues to raise its ugly

head. Some discount the value of the elderly, especially those who can no longer actively contribute to society. Racial strife, economic injustice, physical disabilities, and mental illness leave many on the fringes of society.

By and large, these are the people Jesus helped. He socialized with the “sinners,” seeking to be the Great Physician who offered the cure for their deepest needs. He was the rabbi who touched lepers and other outcasts with a healing hand. He broke down cultural walls built around ethnic, gender, and social constraints. For example, His interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4 shattered several first-century cultural barriers.

Why? So He could fulfill His messianic call articulated by Isaiah centuries earlier: “to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of our God’s vengeance; to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion; to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, festive oil instead of mourning, and splendid clothes instead of despair” (Isa. 61:1-3).

Jesus affirmed the sanctity of all human life through His words and actions. He remains the best template for our lives and ministries as well. His example reminds us, as C.S. Lewis stated, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”⁵

And He challenges us to value the sanctity of every human life just as He does.

Bob Bunn serves as a content editor on Lifeway’s Adult *Explore the Bible* team.

1 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-5147-national-sanctity-human-life-day-1984>.

2 http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1976.pdf

3 <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xviii>

4 <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xv>

5 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/42142-there-are-no-ordinary-people-you-have-never-talked-to>

SESSION 8

Mercy Extended

MATTHEW 9:10-19, 23-26

JESUS SHOWS MERCY TO ALL WHO COME TO HIM IN FAITH.



Suffering is everywhere. Hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and wildfires are in the news frequently. Add to that cancer, dementia, and broken relationships. Overlooking the suffering of others is easy to do when each of us is facing our own form of suffering. We often neglect to extend compassion to others when we ourselves need compassion. Thankfully, Jesus never overlooks the suffering we face. He shows compassion and mercy to all who come to Him.

IN WHAT WAYS CAN WE SHOW MERCY IN OUR EVERYDAY ENCOUNTERS?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

One feature of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is the repeated reference to Jesus's authority. Matthew used the word *authority* nine times (see, for example, Matt. 7:28-29). Following three chapters of authoritative teaching, chapters 8-9 contain stories of Jesus's authoritative power in healing. In each narrative of healing, the compassion and mercy of Jesus is a predominant feature.

Chapter 9 begins with the story considered in last week's study of the paralyzed man brought to Jesus by four friends. Immediately following that narrative, the writer of the Gospel gives us a glimpse into his own calling to be a disciple. While Mark and Luke also record the calling of Matthew, in those two Gospels he is called Levi, which was his Hebrew name. Matthew was his Greek name. He was a tax collector for the Roman government. He mentioned the fact that he was sitting at a tax collector's office or booth in verse 9. This would identify him as one who most likely collected taxes from the many commercial boats that landed at the shore area near Capernaum. Many of

these boats were owned by Gentiles. Thus, Matthew was despised not only because he was a tax collector but also as one who was defiled from frequent contact with Gentiles. No doubt Matthew included the story of his calling to point to the fact that Jesus extended grace even to those considered to be outcasts.

After his calling, Matthew gave a banquet in honor of Jesus. This banquet contributed to a growing conflict between the religious leaders and Jesus (vv. 10-13).

Following the confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus performed additional acts of compassion, including the healing of a chronically ill woman, the resurrection of a young girl from the dead, giving sight to two blind men, and delivering a demon-possessed man (vv. 18-34). Chapter 9 concludes with a summary statement of the compassionate healing ministry of Jesus.



10 While he was reclining at the table in the house, many **tax collectors** **A** and **sinners** **B** came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. **11** When the **Pharisees** **C** saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” **12** Now when he heard this, he said, “It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. **13** Go and learn what this means: **I desire mercy** **D** and not sacrifice. For I didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners.” **14** Then John’s disciples came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” **15** Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the **groom will be taken away** **E** from them, and then they will fast. **16** No one patches an old garment with **unshrunk cloth**, **F** because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse. **17** And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.” **18** As he was telling them these things, suddenly one of the leaders came and knelt down before him, saying, “My daughter just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” **19** So Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him. [. . .] **23** When Jesus came to the leader’s house, he saw the **flute players** **G** and a crowd lamenting loudly. **24** “Leave,” he said, “because the girl is not dead but **asleep**.” **H** And they laughed at him. **25** After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and **the girl got up**. **I** **26** Then news of this spread throughout that whole area.

A. Jews who collected taxes for Rome. They were despised by other Jews for helping the Romans and because of their reputation for dishonesty.

B. General term for those viewed as morally or ceremonially unclean based on human interpretation of Jewish law.

C. The most influential sect of ancient Judaism. Known for strict adherence to the law and traditions, Pharisees often clashed with Jesus.

D. See Hosea 6:6. To God, acts of compassion toward those in need are valued above rituals.

E. While Jesus was with His disciples, they needed to celebrate the coming of the kingdom. Later, they would have time for fasting.

F. If a patch was not pre-shrunk, it would shrink when washed and pull at the fabric, causing a bigger tear. Likewise, new wine would expand through fermentation and ruin older wineskins (v. 17).

G. Professional mourners were hired during times of grief.

H. A common biblical image for death.

I. Jesus raised the girl from the dead. The Gospels also state that Jesus raised a widow’s son (Luke 7:11-17) and Lazarus (John 11:1-44).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Jesus's Mission

(Matt. 9:10-13)

We can trust that Jesus came to offer salvation to sinners.

- **What does it mean that Jesus was a “friend of sinners”?**
- **What does it look like for His followers to be friends of sinners?**
- **How would you summarize what Jesus came to do?**

2. Jesus's Work

(Matt. 9:14-17)

We can rejoice in the truth that salvation is not based on religious works or rituals.

- **What does Jesus offer that religion does not?**

3. Jesus's Compassion

(Matt. 9:18-19)

We can know that Jesus cares and will respond to our needs.

- **What prompted the leader to approach Jesus? Why should we take our concerns to Jesus?**

4. Jesus's Power

(Matt. 9:23-26)

We can trust that Jesus has the power to transform lives.

- **How does it impact your faith when you read of Jesus's miracles and power?**

Apply the Text

- **With your Bible study group, list the different types of needs of which you are aware in the lives of people around you. (You may choose not to use names but categories instead.) Discuss ways your group can work together to extend compassion to someone represented on that list.**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Man

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (See Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 1:21-22.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use a concordance and/or Bible dictionary to learn more about a feature of Israel's religious life.

Use a concordance to find references to fasting in the Bible. Read the article about fasting in a Bible dictionary. What are the different forms of fasting in the Bible? What biblical purposes of fasting did you discover? Consider how fasting can benefit you spiritually. How can you incorporate the discipline of fasting into your life?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 9:12-13. What would cause a sick person to not go to the doctor?

While Jesus was eating a meal in Matthew's house, tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Him and His disciples. The Pharisees saw this and questioned the disciples, wondering why Jesus would eat with such people. Sharing a meal was considered a way of accepting a person into fellowship. To fellowship with sinners like these was something the Pharisees could not understand. Jesus, hearing their question, taught that those who are well do not need a doctor, but those who are sick. He came to call sinners to righteousness.

What is your greatest need? Why do so many people struggle to admit their need of Jesus?

Around Matthew's table, many of the guests—the “tax collectors and sinners”—were spiritually sick. With great irony, Jesus referred to the Pharisees as healthy. He wasn't implying they *were* healthy, only that they saw themselves that way. Self-righteous people don't acknowledge their spiritual need and, therefore, remain sick. Our greatest need is not physical but spiritual, and Jesus is the Great Physician.

Discuss how your lives would be different if Jesus had come to call only “righteous” people—not sinners.

Place Matthew 9:12 on your phones or on cards and memorize it together.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 9:10-11

Matthew 9:10-11 to 11:19.

Luke 5:29 indicates that this dinner was in honor of Jesus. Matthew's life had been so impacted by the call of Jesus that he threw a party in his home. Those invited were his fellow tax collectors as well as other sinners, likely including prostitutes, drunkards, and others who were offensive to the social and religious elite.

Obviously, the Pharisees were not invited to this banquet. But they knew what was going on. They saw the kinds of people with whom Jesus dined, which brought immediate criticism. They raised an objection with Jesus's disciples: "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" In this question was an implicit rebuke of Jesus. The Pharisees hated Him because He didn't do things "their way."

This pattern of questioning the disciples rather than confronting Jesus happened from time to time. Perhaps the reason was the religious leaders' fear of the people. The Pharisees were motivated by hatred for Jesus, but their actions were often tempered by fear of the crowds and the potential reaction of people to their criticism of Jesus.

What does it mean that Jesus was a "friend of sinners"?

What does it look like for His followers to be friends of sinners?



Day 2: Matthew 9:12-13

Compare Matthew 9:13 to Hosea 6:6.

Jesus was aware of the intent of the Pharisees but refused to take the bait. Instead, He answered the question directly by quoting a well-known proverb of the day. The proverb stated that it is sick people who need a doctor. Jesus had already demonstrated His power and His willingness to heal physical maladies. But spiritual healing was Jesus's focus as He addressed the Pharisees. The religious leaders missed the point that sinners needed spiritual healing. Because of this, His ministry among them was essential.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their uncaring attitude. It was obvious they cared only for themselves. "Go and learn what this means" was a double slam to them. Using a phrase that was common in rabbinical writings, Jesus spoke of the Pharisees not as teachers who should know the meaning of the law but as beginning students who needed to start at the beginning to learn the ways of God.

Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Of course, all are sinners. But in the Pharisees' minds, they were spiritually healthy. Therefore, they saw no need for what Jesus offered. The tax collectors and sinners, on the other hand, knew they were not right with God and needed what Jesus offered.

How would you summarize what Jesus came to do?



Day 3: Mathew 9:14-17

Contemplate the meaning of the cloth and the wineskins.

Jesus was criticized by disciples of John the Baptist. Their criticism, while sincere in contrast to the Pharisees, concerned the fact that Jesus's disciples did not fast. This gave John's disciples the impression that the commitment of Jesus's disciples was not deep. John had promoted fasting as a sign of repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah. Now these disciples wanted to know why Jesus wasn't promoting that lifestyle as well.

Jesus's response to John's disciples was simple: the Messiah was present; therefore, it was time for celebration not fasting. To make His point, He used the illustration of a wedding celebration. Joy and celebration are a fitting description of new life in Christ.

Note that the central focus in the wedding illustration is the groom, who represents Jesus. His presence required celebration. After He departed, there would be time enough for fasting.

The life of freedom Jesus offered stood in sharp contrast to the rules and regulations of the Pharisees and even to the austere lifestyle of John. Jesus illustrated this by contrasting unshrunk cloth with an old garment and the new wine being put into old wineskins. Jesus was offering that which was new—far removed from rules, rituals, and regulations. It was a radical departure from man-made efforts to put oneself in right relationship with God. Instead, Jesus came to put us right with God by grace through faith.

What does Jesus offer that religion does not?



Day 4: Matthew 9:18-19

Compare Matthew 9:18-19 to Luke 8:41-42.

The miracles of Jesus frequently started with an interruption, as in verse 18. As Jesus was responding to John's disciples, He was suddenly interrupted by the plea of one of the leaders begging Him to come and give life back to his daughter. Mark and Luke identify this leader as Jairus, a chief official in the local synagogue (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41). In their more detailed accounts, Mark and Luke indicate when Jairus first approached Jesus, his daughter was not dead but at the point of death.

What is significant is the reverence and faith of this father. He knelt down before Jesus. He also expressed belief that, with just a touch of Jesus's hand, his child would live. In putting the life of his daughter in Jesus's hands, this leader was bucking the religious establishment of which he himself was a part. He turned to the only One who could give life back to his little girl.

With compassion, Jesus rose to accompany this grieving father to his home. Jesus knew that, sometimes, interruptions are divine appointments. The disciples also followed, and according to Mark, "a large crowd was following and pressing against him" (Mark 5:24).

What prompted the leader to approach Jesus?

Why should you take your concerns to Jesus?



Day 5: Matthew 9:23-26

Picture in your mind the scene of Jesus taking the dead girl by the hand and speaking gently to her.

Arriving at the house, Jesus discovered the flute players and a crowd lamenting loudly. These were professional mourners. Their presence indicated that enough time had passed since the daughter had died to summon them. Jesus dispersed the mourners. When He declared that the girl was not dead but asleep, they laughed at him in disbelief. By saying she was asleep, Jesus was indicating that the girl's death was not permanent.

The words “put outside” imply more than simply inviting them to step outside. The terminology points to a forceful eviction of the mourners from the house. The presence of mourners was a time-honored tradition. Once the scene was calm, Jesus brought the girl's parents and three of the disciples—Peter, James, and John—into the room (Luke 8:51). Taking the child by the hand, He raised her from death. Both Mark and Luke record Jesus's words, “get up” (Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54). Jesus touched her and spoke gently to her. These gestures demonstrate His compassion toward those in need. His example serves as a strong encouragement to all His followers to extend compassion to others.

As with many of Jesus's miracles, news of this miracle quickly spread throughout that whole area.

How does it impact your faith when you read of Jesus's miracles and power?

APPLY THE TEXT

Consider your daily actions. Would your attitude and actions be characterized as compassionate? What are some steps you can take to develop greater mercy and compassion toward others?

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SESSION 9

Loyalty Tested

MATTHEW 10:16-20, 26-34

JESUS IS WORTH EVERYTHING.



An innate part of human nature is loyalty. People hold a variety of loyalties such as brand loyalties—are you a Ford™ or Chevy™ person? Coke™ or Pepsi™? Loyalty is found in choice of sports teams, television news channels, and political parties. We are loyal to these things for a variety of reasons. But the only valid reason should be, is it worthy of my loyalty? Even more poignant—is my loyalty worth dying for?

WHAT BRANDS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR ACTIVITIES HOLD YOUR LOYALTY?
WHAT MAKES YOU LOYAL TO THEM?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Disciples following rabbis was an integral part of Judaism in the first-century world. A youngman would attach himself to a teacher to learn the teacher's words, observe his actions, and gain an understanding of his ways. At some point, the disciple would be called on to imitate the teacher's ministry and teaching. The intent was that one day the student would also become a teacher of disciples.

After spending weeks and months with Jesus, the time had come for Him to send His disciples out to test what they had learned. They were to preach of the kingdom of God like Jesus did and engage in a ministry of compassion as Jesus had done. Before sending them out, Jesus gave instructions about what they were to do, how they were to do it, and what to expect.

With these instructions about what to take and not take, who to go to, where to stay, and so forth, came a commissioning of the disciples for the task. Jesus "gave them authority" (Matt. 10:1) to preach and to heal. In verse 2, the disciples are called

"apostles" which means "sent ones." They were commissioned to represent Jesus and His mission.

Jesus's instructions included the need to travel as simply as possible and to rely on the hospitality of others (vv. 9-11). In reality, they were to rely on God to provide their needs. Also, they were to devote their time to those who were receptive to their message and to avoid those who were hostile to them (vv. 12-15).

In Jesus's instructions, there is an extension of His description of how they would be treated (vv. 16-25). This description includes the reception of the disciples in their immediate context and extends to the reception of the gospel in the years and centuries to come. These instructions serve all believers as they live out their Christ-given ministry in the world in every generation.



16 “Look, I’m sending you out like **sheep among wolves**. **A** Therefore be as **shrewd** **B** as serpents and as **innocent** **C** as doves. **17** Beware of them, because they will hand you over to local courts and flog you in their synagogues. **18** You will even be brought before **governors and kings** **D** because of me, to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles. **19** But when they hand you over, don’t worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be **given what to say** **E** at that hour, **20** because it isn’t you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you. [. . .] **26** Therefore, **don’t be afraid** **F** of them, since there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known. **27** What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops. **28** Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. **29** Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground **without your Father’s consent**. **G** **30** But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. **31** So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. **32** Therefore, everyone who will **acknowledge** **H** me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. **33** But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven. **34** Don’t assume that I came to **bring peace** **I** on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

A. Sheep depend on the shepherd. The disciples would face hostile opposition, so relying on the Shepherd was even more important for effective ministry.

B. Careful thought, caution, and discernment. Jesus advised His followers to exercise practical wisdom.

C. The Greek wording indicates living without mixture. This reflects purity and moral integrity. Jesus urged a balance of shrewdness with godly character.

D. While the disciples would face persecution, they also would share Jesus at the highest levels.

E. The Holy Spirit would give them the right words to speak in the moment (see v. 20). Jesus affirmed the Spirit’s power for witnessing again before going back to heaven (Acts 1:8).

F. For believers, our fear (reverence) for God should replace fear (terror) of humans.

G. God attends to even the smallest details of His creation, so humans can trust Him (vv. 30-31).

H. Openly confess allegiance to Christ before others. Jesus promised to acknowledge those who openly confess Him.

I. Devotion to Jesus creates conflict. It is like a sword creating divided loyalties, even in the closest of relationships.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Snakes and Doves

(Matt. 10:16-20)

Loyalty to Jesus may mean we encounter hostility to the gospel.

- **Why are both shrewdness and innocence necessary qualities for Christ's witnesses?**

2. Sparrows and Hairs

(Matt. 10:26-31)

Believers should not fear those who oppose the truth of the gospel.

- **What is the connection between fearing God and not fearing man?**

3. Peace and Swords

(Matt. 10:32-34)

Loyalty to Jesus is more important than any other loyalty.

- **What are some ways you can acknowledge Christ before others?**

Apply the Text

- **Discuss with your Bible study group how being part of the group helps you live out your loyalty to Jesus.**

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. (See Acts 1:8; Ephesians 1:13-14.)

BIBLE SKILL: Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.

In Matthew 10:16-20, 26-34, Jesus used three pairs of metaphors in preparing the disciples for their mission. Create a chart with three columns. In one column list the metaphors (sheep and wolves, serpents and doves, sparrows and hairs). In the second column, write brief summaries of the truths communicated in the metaphors. In the third column, write how each applies to you using “I will” or “I can” statements.

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 10:28. Everyone fears something. What are you afraid of?

Before sending out the Twelve, Jesus warned them they would experience rejection. However, this persecution would provide opportunities for them to bear witness to the truth of the gospel. The Holy Spirit would give them words to say. Jesus encouraged His disciples to not be afraid of their persecutors, reassuring them of the Father's sovereign care. They are both known by and valuable to Him.

Which is greater—your fear of God or your fear of man? What's the connection between the two?

Eventually, many of Jesus's disciples were martyred because of their faith. Yet they were willing to die for Him because they believed Jesus was worth it. The more reverence we have for Jesus, the less we will fear anyone else. Because God is sovereign over everything, we have no reason to fear anything. We can confidently confess Jesus in a world that is hostile to the truth of His Word.

Discuss how Jesus's admonition in Matthew 10:28 impacts us as Christ followers today.

Memorize Matthew 10:28, being mindful of opportunities to confess Jesus before others.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 10:16

Circle the words “shrewd” and “innocent.”

As Jesus was sending out His disciples, He gave them a stark warning. He prefaced His warning with the word *look*, which was a word of emphasis. “Pay attention” was the thought here. They were to take special note of the fact that they were being sent as sheep among wolves. Sheep are especially vulnerable and defenseless. The picture here was the vulnerability of Jesus’s followers in the unbelieving world to which they were sent.

Verse 16 serves as a transition between the immediate mission of the twelve disciples in their mission to the Jews of Galilee (vv. 1-15) to a more general warning of the ill treatment Jesus’s followers would experience in the days ahead. What Jesus described is what the disciples experienced in the days after His ascension.

In response to the opposition they would face, the disciples were to be shrewd as well as innocent. In many ancient cultures, the serpents represented qualities of wisdom, caution, and cunning. The followers of Jesus were to be equally alert and wise. The word *innocent* speaks of purity and integrity. Christ followers are to live with pure motives and cautious alertness.

Why are both shrewdness and innocence necessary qualities as you witness for Christ?



Day 2: Matthew 10:17-21

Compare Matthew 10:17-18 to John 15:20-21.

Jesus called on His followers to beware and be on guard. The term “hand you over” spoke of formal arrest. “Local courts” referred to the local synagogue councils. The warning of Jesus to His disciples about the persecution they would face was a telling summary statement of the persecution of the church.

The reason for this persecution was “because of me.” The disciples would be hated by the world because the world hated Jesus. Jesus wanted His followers to be prepared for the opposition they would face. Every trial would provide opportunity to testify of Jesus. While making their defense before these courts they would be able to present the claims of the gospel. They would have opportunities to share Jesus with governors and kings and Gentiles.

Jesus already had taught His disciples not to worry about clothing and food (Matt. 6:25-34). This time, however, He told them not to worry concerning how they would answer their accusers. He promised that a proper defense would be given to them. The Spirit of your Father would provide the words. Jesus promised in John’s Gospel that the Spirit would speak of Jesus and remind the disciples of the words of Jesus (John 15:26-27; 16:13-14).

How can you prepare for opposition to your faith?



Day 3: Matthew 10:26-27

Underline “don’t be afraid” in verse 26.

How would Jesus’s disciples react to His warnings of suffering and persecution? Jesus told them, “don’t be afraid.” He would repeat this injunction three times (vv. 26,28,31). The sobering fact that Christians will face opposition is affirmed repeatedly throughout the New Testament. Jesus wanted His followers to respond to coming persecution with a fearless attitude.

The last part of verse 26 could be interpreted in two ways. Obviously, Jesus wanted His disciples to know that regardless of what they were going through, they could rest assured that in the day of judgment all the deeds and motives of all people will be uncovered and made known. Those who suffered for Jesus would be duly rewarded for their faithfulness under persecution. But these words of Jesus could also be instructions to take the words that He spoke privately to His disciples and make them publicly known so that others will become followers of Christ.

Jesus instructed His disciples to pass on to others what He had taught them privately. They had a message to proclaim—it came from Him. They had been in private instruction, but the time had arrived for the open proclamation of the kingdom of God. The gospel message was not to be kept as a secret. Good news must be proclaimed. Shouting from “the housetops” was a common way in the first-century world to broadcast an announcement.

What will it mean for you to proclaim the gospel “on the housetops”?



Day 4: Matthew 10:28-31

Underline “don’t fear” (v. 28) and “don’t be afraid” (v. 31).

Whatever happens, we can trust the goodness and faithfulness of God. He watches over our every need. Jesus illustrated this from nature. In the marketplace, the least expensive items were sparrows. They were sold for a penny, which referred to a small coin that was the equivalent of a fraction of the daily minimum wage. The sparrows were insignificant and yet Jesus said God watched tirelessly over them. He was aware of their appointed time of death, and God is aware of our appointed time of death as well. It is all part of His providential plan.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they?” (Matt. 6:26). He said this so they would not worry.

If God watches over the sparrows, the followers of Jesus can count on God’s care and concern in every circumstance. Even when we are persecuted for our faith, we can trust that God is working for our good (Rom. 8:28). Not even the prospect of martyrdom should cause Christ followers to shrink back in fear. We know death is a release from the sufferings of this life and will usher us into the very presence of our loving Father for all of eternity.

What is the connection between fearing God and not fearing man?



Day 5: Matthew 10:32-34

Pay attention to the contrast between acknowledging and denying.

There is no room for secret allegiance to Jesus. Confession of Jesus as Lord is to be public, before others. Those who express their loyalty to Jesus will also be acknowledged by Jesus as belonging to Him. Those who honor Jesus will be honored by Christ before the very throne of God.

Denying Jesus can be done either actively or passively. It can be an outward declaration of rejection or take the form of a silent failure to acknowledge and follow Him. Either way, Jesus pointed to the consequences. The consequences would be simple: He will also deny those who deny Him. Note also that these verses are written in future tense, pointing to the coming day of judgment.

Many Jews had the false expectation that when the Messiah appeared, He would break the back of Roman oppression and usher in a period of peace and prosperity such as had characterized the nation under David. Jesus wanted His followers to know that such was not the case. He would not bring peace but turmoil. Just as in the judgment God would separate those loyal to Jesus from those who deny Him, so Jesus's presence separates people based on their loyalty to Him.

Nothing is to be more important than allegiance to Christ. Those who follow Jesus must realize that Jesus is worth everything!

What are some ways you can acknowledge Christ before others?

APPLY THE TEXT

Consider the steps in the disciple-making process of Jesus—being curious about Jesus, being with Jesus, being on mission with Jesus, and being willing to die for Jesus. Where would you place your level of loyalty at this point in your life? What step might you take to move to a new level?

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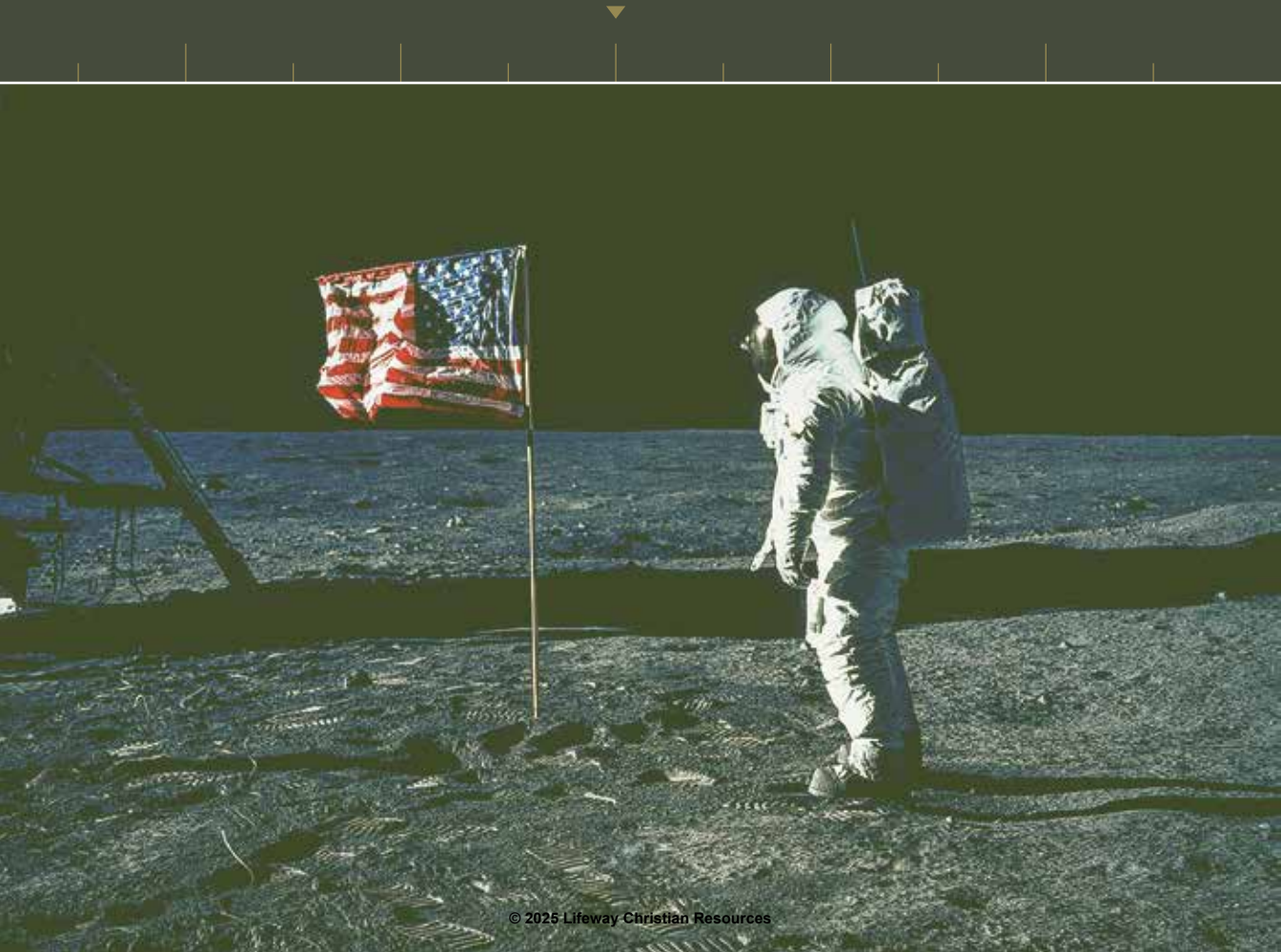


SESSION 10

Confronting Doubts

MATTHEW 11:1-6, 16-24

JESUS DEMANDS DECISION.



Skepticism abounds! It has been almost fifty-seven years since Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, yet there are still people who believe it was a hoax. Nearly every news story today will elicit skepticism concerning the facts. Doubt and skepticism are good if they force us to investigate the truth. They can be disastrous when they lead to denial of truth. Such was the case with Jesus. Skepticism led many to miss the life He offered.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU ENCOUNTER THAT LEAD TO
DOUBT AND SKEPTICISM?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

After sending out the disciples in chapter 10, Jesus apparently undertook a solo preaching tour in the surrounding towns of Galilee. During this period of preaching and teaching, Matthew introduced the element of doubt concerning Jesus. There was no doubt among the people that Jesus was a mighty miracle worker and teacher. The issue lay in the evidence that He was the Messiah. They understood the coming Messiah would overthrow the Romans and usher in peace and prosperity. But Jesus didn't fit the anticipated pattern. Even John the Baptist was puzzled and sent his disciples to question Jesus (Matt. 11:1-6).

After Jesus answered the question sent from John, He asked the crowds about their views of John. What might they have thought about John, whose role was that of the forerunner to the Messiah? Jesus assured the crowd of the legitimacy of John's baptism and ministry. He affirmed that John was the forerunner to the Messiah. In addition, Jesus referred to John as the greatest among all who lived under the

old covenant. With the coming of Jesus, a new covenant era began. Under the new covenant, anyone who was part of the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus would be greater than John (vv. 7-15).

Jesus directly confronted the doubters and skeptics (vv. 16-19). He condemned their unbelief and specifically called out the unbelief He found in Galilee (vv. 20-24).

The closing section in Matthew 11 may not fit chronologically with the preceding verses. Rather, it set up a contrast to doubt and skepticism. Those who come to Jesus in faith will find their deepest hunger and greatest thirst satisfied (vv. 25-30).



1 When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he **moved on from there A** to teach and preach in their towns. **2** Now when John heard **in prison B** what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples **3** and asked him, “**Are you the one C** who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” **4** Jesus replied to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: **5** The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the **good news, D 6** and **blessed E** is the one who isn’t offended by me. [. . .] **16** To what should I compare this generation? It’s like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children: **17 We played the flute F** for you, but you didn’t dance; we sang a lament, but you didn’t mourn! **18** For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ **19** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a **glutton and a drunkard, G** a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.” **20** Then he proceeded to denounce the towns where most of his miracles were done, because they did not repent: **21** “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. **22** But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the **day of judgment H** than for you. **23** And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to **Hades. I** For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. **24** But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

A. Jesus resumed His preaching and teaching. It can be presumed that the disciples were also ministering in various towns around Galilee.

B. Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great) had put John the Baptist in prison. He would later order John’s execution (Matt. 14:1-12).

C. The Messiah (see Ps. 118:26; Heb. 10:37). Despite hearing about Jesus’s works, John’s time in prison caused him to doubt.

D. Jesus proclaimed the arrival of God’s kingdom, which offered healing and hope to the marginalized and oppressed.

E. The word suggests joy and contentment, particularly for those who put their faith in Christ despite their challenges.

F. Children would play in public spaces, pretending to be at a wedding (playing a flute) or a funeral (singing a lament).

G. Some condemned both John’s austerity and Jesus’s liberty. Neither accusation was valid.

H. God will hold people accountable for their rejection of Jesus. Cities in Galilee faced a higher standard because they had witnessed the Messiah’s works and message.

I. The realm of the dead is often associated with judgment or separation from God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Uncertainty

(Matt. 11:1-6)

We may experience honest doubts, but confessing our doubts to God is a step toward genuine faith.

- **How would John have understood Jesus's reply in verses 4-5 based on his knowledge of the Old Testament?**
- **How should we respond to our honest doubts or question about Jesus?**

2. Cynicism

(Matt. 11:16-19)

We are to be sensitive to the fact that God sometimes works in ways that contradict our expectations.

- **What primary complaints did people have about John and Jesus? Why?**
- **How do people's preconceived notions about God cause them to miss what He is doing?**

3. Denial

(Matt. 11:20-24)

Take seriously the fact that all people will bear responsibility for how they respond to Jesus.

- **Jesus pronounced a warning to the cities that had the greater opportunities to witness His miracles. How does this warning apply to you?**

Apply the Text

- **Acknowledge that some people sitting in your Bible study may struggle with doubt. Discuss with your group ways to respond that will not alienate or condemn those struggling with honest doubts.**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Last Things

The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord. (See Luke 16:19-26; 2 Peter 3:7-13.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use a Bible atlas and Bible dictionary (print version or on the internet) to locate and learn about places mentioned in Scripture.

Find the location of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in a Bible atlas or map. Then use a Bible dictionary to learn more about these locations. What are some significant facts about these cities that Jesus emphasized?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 11:4-6, noting the types of miracles Jesus referenced.

When John the Baptist heard in prison what Jesus was doing, he sent his disciples to ask if Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Matt. 11:2-3). Jesus confirmed His identity as the Messiah by pointing to the kind of things He was doing (vv. 4-5). The miracles Jesus referenced fulfilled Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1).

What do you think had happened to cause John's uncertainty about who Jesus was? Be willing to share with one another anything that has challenged your faith.

Rather than answering John's question directly, Jesus challenged his followers to go and report to John the evidence that pointed to who Jesus was. By linking what He was doing to the Old Testament prophecies concerning Him, Jesus provided us with a model for the right way to answer doubt—examine God's Word.

How can you tell the difference between honest doubts and willful disbelief? Do you respond to both in the same way? Explain.

Memorize Matthew 11:5-6, considering the evidence in your life that points to who Jesus is.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 11:1-3

Consider reasons why John the Baptist had doubts about Jesus.

While in prison, John heard news of what Jesus was doing. Most scholars think John had been in prison for over a year and had heard only sketchy reports of Jesus's ministry. What he heard didn't necessarily answer his questions about Jesus. He may have been asking himself, "Why hasn't Jesus started the revolution? Why hasn't He used His powers to get me out of prison?"

In response to these creeping doubts, John sent his disciples to Jesus. Their question to Him was simply, "Are you the one who is to come?" The phrase "the one who is to come" was a frequent way of speaking of the coming Messiah. It appears in the psalms, "He who comes in the name of the LORD is blessed" (Ps. 118:26).

Although John had declared that Jesus was God's Messiah (John 1:29-34), his circumstances and perhaps an inadequate understanding of the role of the Messiah opened the door for doubt. Even today, focusing on our circumstances can cause us to doubt what God is doing. John likely shared the expectations of most Jews who believed the Messiah was to be a conquering military leader like David. This Messiah would remove the Roman government from Israel. But this wasn't happening with Jesus. John might have wondered, "Did I misunderstand who Jesus is?"

Be honest about any doubts you have about the faith. Identify a strong Christian in your life with whom you can discuss doubts as they arise.



Day 2: Matthew 11:4-6

Pay attention to how Jesus responded to John's question.

To answer John's question, Jesus pointed to the evidence. He gave a list of miracles He had performed. Jesus was alluding to the Old Testament prophecies concerning the types of miracles the Messiah would perform. Jesus was saying to John, "Identify me through the miracles that I do."

Luke's account of this question from John's disciples is followed by this statement: "At that time Jesus healed many people of diseases, afflictions, and evil spirits, and he granted sight to many blind people" (Luke 7:21). Then, Jesus told John's disciples to "go and report to John what you have seen and heard" (7:22). These were the messianic miracles prophesied in Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:5-6; and 61:1-2a.

Note that Jesus mentioned first the giving of sight to the blind. This had never occurred until the coming of Jesus. The man born blind whom Jesus healed in John 9 responded to Jesus's critics: "Throughout history no one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything" (John 9:32-33).

The short blessing in verse 6 was likely addressed to John personally. You are blessed, John, if you aren't offended by me. Jesus was warning John not to be tripped up by doubt.

How should you respond to others' honest doubts and questions about Jesus?



Day 3: Matthew 11:16-19

Note the accusations made against John and Jesus.

Many people in the crowds who followed Jesus were cynical. Jesus compared them to children at play in the marketplaces. In His comparison, He most likely was referring to two popular games that children played—weddings and funerals. Play-acting weddings would involve joyful singing and dancing. Acting out funerals would require somber wailing and mourning as was typical in that day. Inevitably there would be a child or two who refused to play, perhaps wanting to play funeral when the other children wanted to play wedding. Just like a disagreeable child who refused to join in the wedding game's dance of joy, so some criticized Jesus for the joyful way He interacted with those sinners who followed Him. And just like children who refused to mourn at a pretend funeral, there were those who criticized the strict lifestyle of John.

John and Jesus lived contrasting lifestyles. Yet neither approach was acceptable to those who were skeptical of both men. They resented John's austerity and call for repentance and Jesus's association with tax collectors and sinners.

When Jesus said that “wisdom is vindicated by her deeds,” He was saying that both the ascetic lifestyle of John and the joyful lifestyle of Jesus were correct in God's grand scheme of things. Each of these has a place in God's kingdom.

How do people's preconceived notions about God cause them to miss what He is doing?



Day 4: Matthew 11:20-22

Note why Jesus denounced these towns.

Jesus moved from mildly chastising the skepticism and doubts of those following Him out of curiosity to a full-blown denunciation of their unbelief. His message was simply this: You've had a greater opportunity to see God's power and hear the message of the kingdom. Because of that, you carry a greater accountability before God.

This condemnation included the town of Chorazin as well as Bethsaida, the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip (John 1:44). These villages had seen the power of Jesus and had heard His call for repentance, but they chose to ignore it. Jesus indicted them by pointing to two notoriously pagan Gentile cities, Tyre and Sidon. These two cities had been dreaded enemies of ancient Israel. Jesus said if they had seen the same miracles the inhabitants of Chorazin had seen, they would have expressed repentance by wearing the mourning clothes of sackcloth with ashes poured over their heads as a sign of grief. He later visited the region surrounding Tyre, where He healed the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Matt. 15:21-28).

Jesus contrasted the coming judgment on Chorazin with that of Tyre and Sidon by declaring that the day of judgment would be more tolerable for the people of Tyre and Sidon. Chorazin would be held to a greater accountability because they had the greater witness of the miracles of Jesus.

Pray for lost people you know to respond to the gospel message.



Day 5: Matthew 11:23-24

Identify the sin that kept the people of Capernaum from responding in faith to Jesus.

Capernaum served as Jesus's headquarters. More miracles took place in Capernaum than anywhere else. But just like the towns mentioned in verse 21, its residents remained indifferent and perhaps hostile toward Jesus and His message.

Jesus spoke of their desire to be "exalted to heaven." This could be an allusion to the Old Testament prophecy concerning the king of Babylon who sought to ascend to heaven and rule as supreme (Isa. 14:13). This was the sin of pride, and Jesus denounced their arrogance by stating that they would be brought down to Hades. The term *Hades* often refers to the grave or realm of the dead (Acts 2:27). The term also was used in the New Testament to speak of the place of torment for the wicked (Luke 16:23).

Once again, Jesus served notice that more tolerance would be given to Sodom than to Capernaum. The people of Capernaum would be held accountable for what they experienced but refused to embrace. Greater opportunity calls for greater accountability.

How does Jesus's warning to the cities that had the greater opportunities to witness His miracles apply to you?

APPLY THE TEXT

Be honest about any doubts you have about the faith. Identify a strong Christian in your life with whom you can discuss doubts as they arise.

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SESSION 11

Rejecting Legalism

MATTHEW 12:1-14

JESUS OFFERS MERCY, NOT RELIGIOUS RULES.



We love freedom. Seldom do we like it when someone tells us what to do. And so we often chafe against rules that limit our freedom. Most people who live in an orderly society follow the rules willingly. Occasionally, though, we may hear of situations that demand a rule or regulation be set aside. When established rules become burdensome or unreasonable, we often become angry at the system.

WHAT SITUATION CAN YOU THINK OF WHERE LAWS AND REGULATIONS WERE ADMINISTERED WHEN MERCY MIGHT HAVE BEEN A BETTER APPROACH?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Matthew 12 introduces a major turning point in the ministry of Jesus. While there had been minor grumblings of His opponents, chapter 12 introduces the first major confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus. They even began to plot how they might kill Him (Matt. 12:14). The initial conflict in chapter 12 centered around rules related to the Sabbath observance. It involved two incidents where Jesus and His disciples acted outside the prescribed traditions of the Pharisees (vv. 1-14).

The religious leaders' opposition of Jesus went beyond Sabbath rules. They essentially opposed everything Jesus and His disciples did. This included Jesus's healing ministry. The Pharisees raised the issue of the source of Jesus's power to heal. Was it from God or from Satan? They accused Jesus of driving out demons by the power of Satan (v. 24).

Because of the escalating conflict, Jesus sometimes warned those whom He healed not to spread the news of their healing (v. 16). He recognized that further

escalation of conflict with the religious leaders would lead too quickly to His arrest. At this point, the time had not yet arrived for His death; there was more work to be done.

Jesus pointed to the heart of the Pharisees' problem. They had substituted their traditions for a genuine relationship with God. The result of that lack of relationship clouded their judgment on everything about Jesus. Jesus declared that religious rule without a relationship with God leads to disaster (vv. 43-45).

Chapter 12 concludes with a brief glimpse of the reaction of Jesus's mother and siblings to Jesus. While His family relationship was important, Jesus expanded that relationship to include all who come to Him in faith.



1 At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to **pick and eat** **A** some heads of grain. **2** When the **Pharisees** **B** saw this, they said to him, “See, your disciples are doing what is **not lawful** **C** to do on the Sabbath.” **3** He said to them, “Haven’t you read **what David did** **D** when he and those who were with him were hungry: **4** how he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence—which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests? **5** Or haven’t you read in the law that on Sabbath days the **priests in the temple** **E** violate the Sabbath and are innocent? **6** I tell you that something **greater than the temple** **F** is here. **7** If you had known what this means, I desire **mercy** **G** and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. **8** For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” **9** Moving on from there, he entered their synagogue. **10** There he saw a man who had a **shriveled hand**, **H** and in order to accuse him they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” **11** He replied to them, “Who among you, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn’t take hold of it and **lift it out**? **I** **12** A person is worth far more than a sheep; so it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath.” **13** Then he told the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out, and it was restored, as good as the other. **14** But the Pharisees went out and plotted against him, how they might kill him.

A. Ancient roads often cut through vineyards and fields. The law allowed travelers to pluck some produce during a journey (Deut. 23:24-25).

B. A prominent Jewish religious group known for strict observance of the law.

C. According to the Pharisees’ traditions, the disciples were harvesting grain. This violated the command against working on the Sabbath.

D. In 1 Samuel 21, David and his men ate the Bread of the Presence, which was reserved for the priests (see v. 4). Yet, God did not condemn him.

E. The responsibilities of priests called for them to work on the Sabbath, but God held them “innocent” of the law.

F. Jesus asserted His superiority over the temple and its rituals. Later, He called Himself “Lord of the Sabbath” (v. 8).

G. Quoting Hosea 6:6, Jesus’s point was that God cares more about people than rituals. The Pharisees had failed to grasp this truth.

H. Many scholars believe the Pharisees used the man as “bait,” hoping to accuse Jesus.

I. The implied answer to Jesus’s question was affirmative. He proved that the leaders would bend their own rules if necessary.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Religious Rules

(Matt. 12:1-2)

We should avoid judging others based on their adherence to a religious tradition or practice.

- **What role should religious tradition play in the practice of our faith?**

2. Something Greater

(Matt. 12:3-8)

We should give greater attention to the condition of our heart than to adherence to man-made rules.

- **What can we learn from Jesus's response?**
- **What do these verses teach us about Jesus and His expectations of His followers?**

3. Compassionate Response

(Matt. 12:9-14)

We must seek to make our priorities and practices consistent with what God values most.

- **How might the authority of Jesus be perceived as a threat?**

DID YOU KNOW?

First-century Jewish rabbis divided work into thirty-nine categories of labor that was prohibited on the Sabbath, with each category having hundreds of sub-categories.

Apply the Text

- **Who in your Bible study group might be facing a difficult situation that could be eased by showing mercy? What might your group do to extend to this person the mercy they need?**

KEY DOCTRINE: The Lord's Day

Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. (See Mark 2:27-28; John 4:21-24.)

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

Compare Mark 3:1-5 and Luke 6:6-10 to Matthew's account of the man with the shriveled hand in 12:9-14. Record any additional details you find in the parallel passages. How do the parallel passages help you get a broader picture of this scene?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 12:8, considering why we still need this reminder today.

Jesus and His disciples passed through grainfields when the disciples began to pick and eat some grain. The Pharisees criticized them for picking heads of grain on the Sabbath because this violated their religious traditions. Jesus responded by citing examples from the Old Testament. He taught that God is more concerned with our hearts than with our adherence to man-made rituals. Jesus pointed to Himself as greater than the temple and its priesthood, and He proclaimed that He was “Lord of the Sabbath.”

What does it mean that Jesus is the “Lord of the Sabbath”? What are some of the practical implications?

Jesus made the point that people are more important than religious ritual; human need takes precedence over man-made traditions. Even more importantly was what Jesus revealed about Himself. One of the implications is that we are to evaluate all things in light of Jesus—not man-made traditions. When God’s revealed Word has the final say in determining His will, we avoid a legalistic approach to life.

Discuss how you can make sure Jesus and His Word take precedence over religious traditions in your life. Why do people confuse the two?

Place Matthew 12:8 on your phones and agree to memorize it together.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 12:1-2

Identify why the Pharisees criticized Jesus's disciples.

Over time, religious leaders moved away from God's intention for the Sabbath. They took great effort to make up the definitions of what could and couldn't be done on the Sabbath day. For example, they established rules that regulated how far a person could travel on the Sabbath. According to their tradition, one could travel around 3,000 feet, slightly more than a half mile. Jesus and His disciples ignored those man-made rules as they "passed through the grainfields."

Not only were they traveling on the Sabbath, but the disciples "began to pick and eat some heads of grain." Picking grain would be understood as harvesting. Rubbing the grain in their hands to separate the kernel from the husk would be interpreted as threshing and winnowing. The disciples' action violated the Pharisees' man-made traditions. But it wasn't a violation of God's commandment related to the Sabbath. God is dishonored when we put man-made traditions on the same level as His Word.

Typically, adherence to rules and regulations becomes more lax over time. This was not the case with the Jewish religious leaders after the Babylonian exile. They kept adding more layers of interpretation and application to the law of Moses. Keeping the Sabbath had become burdensome for people as they tried to follow the minutia of the traditions.

What role does religious tradition play in the practice of your faith?



Day 2: Matthew 12:3-6

Compare Matthew 12:3-4 to 1 Samuel 21:1-6.

Jesus gave two examples from the Old Testament refuting the strict interpretation of Sabbath observance by the Pharisees. (See 1 Sam. 21:1-6.) The "bread of the Presence" consisted of twelve loaves, one for each tribe of Israel, that were baked fresh every week and placed in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:30). The loaves that were replaced were to be eaten only by the priests. But David and his men were given these loaves by the priest for their nourishment. By telling this story, Jesus was saying that some needs may supersede ceremonial law. In other words, hunger can be a priority over ritual.

The second illustration from the Old Testament to which Jesus pointed was that of the priests in the temple who were required to perform the daily sacrifice of the lambs—even on the Sabbath. This involved killing animals and maintaining fire on the altar. Exodus 35:3 forbid the Israelites to build a fire on the Sabbath. Yet these priests were innocent in violating that regulation. They were doing what was necessary in the worship of Israel.

Jesus concluded His two illustrations with a startling claim: "something greater than the temple is here." Jesus's authority was greater than that of the temple. The implication was that His authority superseded the traditions of the Pharisees.

How should Jesus's authority impact the weight we give to church tradition?



Day 3: Matthew 12:7-8

Contemplate what it means that Jesus is “Lord of the Sabbath.”

Jesus enforced His defense of the action of the disciples by pointing to the first part of Hosea 6:6: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” (See also Matt. 9:13.) Jesus reiterated that God places compassion ahead of ritual. For the Pharisees, ritual was more important than people. Because of their attitude, the Pharisees had “condemned the innocent.”

The word *innocent* is the same word Jesus used in verse 5 to speak of the priests carrying out their sacrificial duties on the Sabbath. Both the priests and the disciples were without guilt because God’s will is mercy over religious ritual.

Jesus often spoke of Himself as the “Son of Man,” a title that pointed to His humanity. This term, however, was used in Daniel 7 to speak of an exalted being to whom belonged glory and eternal dominion. Jesus used that term to refer to Himself throughout His earthly ministry. It speaks of Jesus as fully man and fully God.

As the Messiah, Jesus is also “Lord of the Sabbath.” In saying this, Jesus was claiming that He was greater than the Sabbath. His authority preempts man-made laws. He has the authority to direct the way in which the Sabbath should be observed. This is because He is God.

What do these verses teach you about Jesus and His expectations of you?



Day 4: Matthew 12:9-10

Note the motivation of the Pharisees.

The exact destination is not revealed, but Jesus “entered their synagogue.” This likely would have been the synagogue of the Pharisees who had confronted Jesus and His disciples in the previous verses. Some scholars speculate that Jesus was aware of the presence of the man with the “shriveled hand” and planned to use his presence to give a real-life lesson on the meaning of Sabbath-keeping and to demonstrate His divine authority.

Evidently, the Pharisees had ignored Jesus’s earlier statement that God desired mercy instead of ritual. Aware of this man, they chose to place their man-made rules over his needs. They baited Jesus with a question designed to trap Him: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” They asked this “in order to accuse him.” The word *accuse* means to charge, condemn, or critically judge. In fact, the English word “categorize” comes from the Greek word for accuse. The Pharisees wanted to “categorize” Jesus as a lawbreaker. Interestingly, in their question they implied that Jesus could heal the man.

The possibility of breaking Sabbath law arose from the fact that the man’s shriveled hand was not a life-threatening malady; therefore, Jesus could have waited until the next day. If the man had been in grave danger of dying, the traditional interpretation of the law allowed for assisting on the Sabbath.

What are some examples today of Christians valuing man-made rules over people?



Day 5: Matthew 12:11-14

Consider the implications of “it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath.”

Jesus contrasted the man-made rules of the Pharisees that permitted rescuing an animal on the Sabbath with the prohibition to heal a person on the Sabbath. In so doing, He exposed the inconsistency of the Pharisees. He stated the obvious: “a person is worth far more than a sheep.” In theory, every Pharisee would agree with that statement. In the reality of this situation, though, the Pharisees were so filled with hatred for Jesus that they would be more inclined to help the sheep and ignore the man who needed healing.

The response of Jesus is significant: “it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath.” Jesus then commanded the man to “stretch out” his hand. The man might have initially held back, thinking he had no ability to stretch out his hand. But when he obeyed, his shriveled hand was restored and was “as good as the other.”

The Pharisees were not convinced by Jesus’s argument nor His miracle of healing. Instead, they moved to get rid of this upstart teacher. They “plotted against him.” The implication is that they had already decided to get rid of Jesus; what remained was the how of doing it. The word *kill* also means “destroy.” Their hatred was so great that they would rather destroy Jesus for breaking their traditions than allow mercy to be shown to a suffering person.

How might Jesus be perceived as a threat to some people?

APPLY THE TEXT

Consider how you may have put man-made rules and traditions above Scripture. How can you correct this problem?

JOURNAL



THE PARABLES OF JESUS

- Perhaps the most distinctive style of Jesus’s teaching was His use of parables. Aside from His miracles, Jesus may be best known for the stories He told. For example, even individuals who are not familiar with church or the Bible might understand what it means to be a “Good Samaritan” or a “Prodigal Child.” Jesus’s parables have left an indelible mark on the church and the larger culture.

A parable has been defined as a comparison from nature or daily life designed to teach a spiritual truth. From the outset of His public ministry until the last days in Jerusalem, one comes across His timeless parables. Matthew’s word is appropriate at every juncture: “He told them many things in parables” (Matt. 13:3).

Parables and Teaching

Everyone loves a good story. Jesus developed stories from familiar images and ideas that reveal truth about the nature of God, prayer, spiritual values, stewardship, judgment, and the kingdom of God. He used parables as a teaching device with His disciples, antagonistic religious leaders, and ordinary people.

The Synoptic Gospels contain between fifty and sixty such stories. Add to that number ten brief stories found in John’s Gospel. Some of them are very brief, such as the parables of the pearl of great price, the leaven, and the hidden treasure. Some are full-length stories like the parables of the good Samaritan, the talents, the sower and the soils, the rich fool, and the prodigal son.



Parables and Daily Life

Jesus was the keenest of observers about daily life. He drew lessons from farmers sowing in the field, from village customs about weddings, from shepherds and sheep, from banquets, and so much more. Recall that His audiences often were simple, uneducated people such as fishermen, farmers, and villagers. They could grasp His lessons easily about an unjust judge or a friend who knocked on a neighbor’s door at midnight. Jesus used good storytelling to project divine truths about redemption, the kingdom of God, and ethical values.

There is a timelessness about these stories, as well as a haunting beauty. They always present some powerful lesson about God and His will for today. And they have the potential to open the doors for evangelism, especially with those who are not familiar with the Bible otherwise.

Parables of the Kingdom

Many of Jesus's parables deal with the arrival of the kingdom of God, a major message He sought to bring to Israel in His day. Matthew 13 is the great chapter on this theme. There, Jesus used a series of parables to proclaim the actions of God in His own ministry.

Parables on God's Nature

Some parables illustrate unforgettably the nature of God as Jesus came to reveal this essential truth. Speaking of the love of God to the Pharisees who were grumbling about tax gatherers and sinners around them, Jesus produced some memorable parables in Luke 15 that reflect God's love and compassion toward those who have lost their way or stand estranged from Him.

These parables of Jesus on the nature of God are excellent examples of His understanding of simple truths for daily living. For example, he related the shepherd's concern about a lost sheep, the peasant woman's loss of a coin, and the prodigal's lapse so terrible that he was feeding swine when "he came to his senses" (Luke 15:17). Again, these were topics and illustrations the common people could grasp and embrace. And, when necessary, the religious leaders of the day also realized that Jesus was condemning them and their brand of "faith" (Matt. 21:45-46).

Themes of the Parables

Though Jesus did not follow a consistent theme in His teachings through parables,

He did address some of the major subjects of His ministry through these stories. He dealt with the relation of the old covenant with the new covenant in parables of the barren fig tree and the great feast. His lessons on prayer were highlighted by the parables of the friend who knocked at midnight and the unjust judge. Stewardship was another important theme as portrayed by the stories of the unjust steward and the rich fool.

Jesus's solemn teachings on judgment come through His parables of the wise and foolish virgins and the talents. The parables of Jesus touch movingly on death and resurrection in His parable of the rich man and Lazarus, as well as the parable of the wicked husbandman.

Approaches to the Study of Parables

Contemporary Bible students strongly insist that Bible students who seek the message of Jesus through His parables must understand the setting of the story. It is also important to realize that the parable usually has one major lesson to teach. Using an allegorical approach to the study of parables is both inappropriate and inaccurate. Students of Scripture should seek one primary lesson from each parable.

Jesus's timeless reputation as a Teacher certainly comes from the substance and content of His inspired and authentic lessons. When we add the unique form of these lessons through the parables, we quickly affirm the conclusion of the centuries regarding Jesus's teaching: they "were astonished at his teaching, because he was teaching them like one who had authority" (Matt. 7:28-29).

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SESSION 12

Judgment Coming

MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43

FAITH IN JESUS DETERMINES OUR ETERNAL DESTINY.



The Great Divide! Every day we find ourselves on one side or the other of the great divide—country music, yes or no? The G.O.A.T. in basketball—Michael Jordan or LeBron James? Broccoli—yes or no? Everywhere you look, people are being divided into one of two groups based on preferences, circumstances, or the whims of others. Sometimes we get to choose on which side we will fall; other times we have no choice. Today’s session speaks of a divide where each has a choice as to where they land. Choose wisely!

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER DIVIDES YOU’RE CONFRONTED WITH DAILY?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In chapter 12, Matthew focused on the escalating conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus. The opposition to Jesus soon extended beyond the religious leaders to include many people of the land. The result was the dividing of people into two groups: those who believed Jesus was the Messiah and those who didn’t.

In response, Jesus told several parables to illustrate the divide. The Greek word translated *parable* means “to lay or place something alongside of.” A parable lays something alongside something else for comparison or contrast.

The parables Jesus told were stories related to daily life laid alongside spiritual truths. There was always a central point in each parable Jesus told.

Matthew 13 contains eight parables that relate truths concerning the kingdom of God. In several of them we find an explanation of the growing divide between those who follow Jesus and those who resist Him.

Following the parable of the seed and sower (Matt. 13:3-9), Jesus was asked by the disciples, “Why do you teach in parables?” In response, He revealed two reasons: (1) to reveal truth to those willing to listen and heed the teaching and (2) to conceal truth from those who stubbornly refused to believe. This fulfilled the prophecy given in Isaiah 6:9-10 that spoke of unbelief that led to the inability to comprehend what was being taught.

Jesus sometimes explained the meaning of a parable. Such was the case with the parables of the seed and the sower (vv. 18-23) and the wheat and the weeds (vv. 24-30, 36-43).

Other parables in this chapter include the mustard seed and leaven (vv. 31-33), the hidden treasure and a valuable pearl (vv. 44-46), and the fishing net (vv. 47-50).



24 He presented another **parable** **A** to them: “The **kingdom of heaven** **B** may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. **25** But while people were sleeping, his **enemy** **C** came, **sowed weeds** **D** among the wheat, and left. **26** When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared. **27** The landowner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Master, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?’ **28** ‘An enemy did this,’ he told them. ‘So, do you want us to go and pull them up?’ the servants asked him. **29** ‘No,’ he said. ‘When you pull up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat with them. **30** Let both **grow together** **E** until the harvest. At **harvest time** **F** I’ll tell the reapers: Gather the weeds first and tie them in bundles to **burn them**, **G** but collect the wheat in my barn.’” [. . .] **36** Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” **37** He replied, “The one who sows the good seed is the **Son of Man**; **H** **38** the field is the world; and the good seed—these are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the **children of the evil one**, **I** **39** and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. **40** Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. **41** The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness. **42** They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **43** Then the righteous will **shine like the sun** **J** in their Father’s kingdom. Let anyone who has ears listen.”

A. A story that conveys spiritual truth in everyday images.

B. The reign of God, present and future, encompassing His redemptive work through Christ and fulfilling His rule.

C. Satan, the very real opponent of God (v. 39). Satan twists God’s words and creates cheap imitations to undermine His work in the world.

D. Sowing weeds in an enemy’s field was so common that Rome made a law against it.

E. It would be difficult to tell the wheat from the weeds until they both matured. Likewise, believers and unbelievers may look similar, but their true natures will be revealed eventually.

F. The time of judgment when God will separate the righteous from the wicked (vv. 39-42).

G. The ungodly will face God’s wrath and judgment. Meanwhile, the righteous will be gathered into God’s presence.

H. A messianic title Jesus used for Himself (Dan. 7:13-14), emphasizing both His humanity and His divine authority.

I. Those who follow Satan by rejecting the gospel and opposing God’s kingdom.

J. Rather than being tormented by fire, God’s true people will be radiant like the sun.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Wheat or Weeds

(Matt. 13:24-30)

We must examine our own faith as we wait for Jesus's return.

- **Is it always possible to distinguish sincere believers from insincere believers? How?**

2. Jesus or the Devil

(Matt. 13:36-39)

We need to recognize that not all who profess to believe in Jesus are genuine believers.

- **Why would Satan want to sow "weeds" in the world?**
- **What is the church's responsibility regarding the "weeds" sown by the devil?**

3. Heaven or Hell

(Matt. 13:40-43)

We can trust that Jesus will have the final word and that He will judge righteously.

- **Does knowing there will be a final judgment with eternal consequences bring you comfort or concern? If concerned, talk to your group leader about your concerns.**

DID YOU KNOW?

Sowing weeds in an enemy's field was such a common practice in that day that the Roman government issued a law against it.

Apply the Text

- **What role does your Bible study group have in discerning true followers of Christ from those who are counterfeit?**
- **What might your group do to help people move from counterfeit followers to true followers of Jesus?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Last Things

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. (See Matthew 16:27; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.

Focus on Matthew 13:40-42. Read the verses aloud, emphasizing the actions of the angels. Then read the verses again, emphasizing the responses of those "guilty of lawlessness." How do these verses make you feel? How do they motivate you to share Christ's gospel?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 13:40-43. Are these verses terrifying or comforting? Explain.

Jesus told a parable about wheat and weeds growing together in a field. The landowner's servants questioned if they should pull up the weeds. They were told not to pull the weeds for fear of uprooting the wheat also. Only at harvest time could the two be distinguished and separated. Jesus explained to His disciples the meaning of the parable. The wheat represents believers and the weeds represent unbelievers. At the end of the age, Jesus will send His angels to separate genuine believers from unbelievers.

Jesus and His angels will make the separation at the final judgment. How might our attempts to act as judges damage the “good” plants?

This parable makes clear that some people outwardly identify with Christ or the church but haven't been genuinely saved. Only those who hear and act on the words of Jesus—who by faith in Him are made right with God through Jesus's death on the cross—will spend eternity in the Father and Son's kingdom. Those who choose to ignore God's call to repentance and His offer of salvation in Jesus will be separated from the Father forever. Faith in Jesus determines our eternal destiny.

Discuss ways you need to apply this parable. Accept Jesus's offer of salvation? Spread the message?

This week, repeat Matthew 13:40 several times throughout the day as a reminder to pray for the lost.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 13:24-28

Pay attention to the tactics of the “enemy.”

This parable follows logically from an earlier parable about the seed and the sowers (Matt. 13:3-9). In that parable, Jesus spoke of four soil types, with the spotlight on the good soil. Verses 24-30 speak of two types of seed, and the spotlight is not on the “good seed” but on the bad seed that produced weeds in the field. In this parable, the good seed represents not the Word of God (as in 13:19) but people who hear and respond to the Word.

The Greek word for *weeds* likely refers to darnel, a toxic weed that closely resembles wheat in its early growth. It was impossible to tell the two plants apart until the grain formed. As the wheat and weeds grew in proximity to each other, their roots became intertwined. This made it impossible to root out the weeds without also uprooting the wheat. In the same way, godly and ungodly people populate the same community. While they may outwardly look similar, eventually each will manifest their true nature.

In this parable, it is clear that the weeds were not random weeds growing here and there throughout the wheat as is often the case. Rather, weeds were everywhere, giving evidence that these weeds had been deliberately sown.

How is the devil like the enemy in this parable? (See also John 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:14; and Rev. 12:9.)



Day 2: Matthew 13:29-30

Note the patience of the landowner.

The landowner knew that while the presence of the weeds in the wheat would limit the yield of the crop, he also knew that greater damage would be done if there was an attempt to pull the weeds before the harvest. The only successful way to remove the weeds was to wait until harvest. Then they could be separated without damaging the wheat. At harvest time, the good plants would become obvious.

The Bible reveals that God is a patient God. He is “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth” (Ex. 34:6). He is “patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

The reapers in verse 30 are different from the servants in verses 27-28. Most likely, those who harvested regularly would be able to discern between wheat and weeds. Both plantings would be dealt with—wheat would be gathered into the barn and the weeds would be piled up and burned.

Two different words are used in dealing with each of the crops. To *gather* means to put similar things together, in this case, for destruction. The weeds were to be gathered for the fire. The reapers were to gather the wheat into the barn, a place of preservation.

Is it always possible to distinguish sincere believers from insincere believers? Explain.



Day 3: Matthew 13:36-39

Identify the one who sows good seed, the field, and the good seed.

Jesus responded to the disciples' request, "explain to us the parable," by identifying the characters of the parable and the setting of the story (vv. 37-39). The meaning of the parable followed in verses 40-43. The one who sowed the good seed in the field is identified here as the "Son of Man," meaning Jesus. The field that received the good seed is identified as the world. Because Jesus is the one who sows, this field is His. Even though the world may be under the power of Satan temporarily, the devil is not coequal with Christ.

Some have suggested the parable addresses the presence of genuine and false believers in the church. But Jesus specified the field as the world, not the church. This doesn't minimize the fact that there are in the church both genuine believers and people who masquerade as followers of Christ. We need to recognize that not all who claim to have a relationship with Jesus are genuine believers.

The good seed are the "children of the kingdom." These are Jesus's true followers. The weeds are sown by "the evil one." Jesus identified the evil one as the devil. Satan methodically plants his children in the world to oppose the kingdom of heaven.

But at "the end of the age" there will be a day of judgment. God will separate the righteous from the unrighteous.

How does this parable compare to Matthew 7:15-20?

What is your responsibility regarding the "weeds" sown by the devil?



Day 4: Matthew 13:40-41

Note the two things that will happen to counterfeit believers.

Two things will happen to the counterfeits. First, they will be gathered. Second, the weeds will be "burned in the fire." This was a typical approach to dealing with weeds in a field. This burning, however, will be unique—it takes place "at the end of the age." Thus, the real and the counterfeit followers of Christ will live together in this world until the time that God the Father determines. The word *end* speaks of completion or consummation. It is a word meaning nothing follows. There will be no second chance for those who fall into the category of weeds to change their status. The "Son of Man," Jesus, will bring judgment on all those "who cause sin" and who are "guilty of lawlessness."

Earlier in the parable, the landowner's servants asked if they should pull up the weeds (v. 28). The answer was "no" (v. 29). Instead, the instrument of judgment will be the angels belonging to the Son of Man. They, like the reapers (v. 30), know the difference between wheat and weeds.

Note that the counterfeits are those who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness. From the Greek word for *cause sin* we get our word *scandal* in our English language. It means a "stumbling block." The picture is of those who commit sin through disobeying God's Word and lead others to sin.

In what ways are counterfeit believers a stumbling block to others?



Day 5: Matthew 13:42-43

Compare these verses to Matthew 8:12 and Revelation 20:10.

At the end of the age the angels will throw the unrighteous ones into “the blazing furnace.” Scripture pictures hell as “the unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43). It will also be an “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46). The anguish of this never-ending place of torment and punishment is seen in the reaction of those thrown into the blazing furnace: “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” This is a vivid picture of anguish and despair.

Remember again that this is a parable of separation: separation of those who follow Jesus from those who reject Him. The good seed—those who belong to the Son of Man and His kingdom through their faith in Him—are called “righteous.” The word righteous speaks of a right standing before God. We cannot achieve righteousness on our own; it is provided by God through Jesus (Gal. 2:21; 3:6).

In the parable, the reapers collect the wheat into the landowner’s barn (Matt. 13:30). The word *collect* speaks of being led into God’s place of preservation.

Jesus concluded with these words: “Let anyone who has ears listen.” This was a challenge to seriously consider the meaning of the parable. One day there will be a dividing of the righteous from the unrighteous. Which group will you be in?

Does knowing there will be a final judgment with eternal consequences bring you comfort or concern? If concerned, talk to your group leader about your concerns.

APPLY THE TEXT

Jesus told His followers, “You’ll recognize them by their fruit” (Matt. 7:16). Consider the fruit of your own life. Does it give evidence to the fact that you are a follower of Jesus?

JOURNAL



TO HAVE DISCIPLES IN THE FIRST CENTURY

BY BOBBY KELLY

- The presence of disciples or learners who attached themselves to a teacher was a constant theme in the first century. Prophets, philosophers, and master teachers captivated the minds and hearts of others. This was true of both Jews and pagans. But what did it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

Terminology

The Gospels and Acts employ two terms to describe a disciple. The Greek word *mathetes*, appearing 261 times in the Gospels and Acts, designated a pupil, apprentice, learner, or disciple. The term referred to a person under the authority of someone superior in knowledge and/or wisdom. The term depicted a close personal attachment that shaped one's whole life.

The Gospels used the term specifically of the Twelve (Matt. 10:1; 11:1; Mark 5:31; 6:1; Luke 9:16; John 4:31). The term also could refer to Jesus's disciples more generally, as in the introduction for Jesus's Sermon on the Plain: "After coming down with them, he stood on a level place with a large crowd of disciples" (Luke 6:17). Women too made up part of this group. The Gospel writers also used this term to describe those who followed John the Baptist (Luke 7:18-19; John 1:35; Acts 19:1-3).

The verb "to walk behind" (Greek, *akolouthēin*) is the other New Testament term that describes Jesus's disciples. A disciple was one who walked behind

his master. In the case of the Twelve, Jesus called them to "come follow me" (Matt. 4:19; 9:9; 16:24; 19:21). Their affirmative response indicated a commitment to literally walk behind Him as He traveled throughout Galilee and finally Jerusalem. Such "followship" was an expression of the disciple's submission to the teacher.

Disciples in Greek Culture

The term *mathetes* first appeared in conjunction with the Greek philosophical tradition and designated individuals who gathered around respected philosophers or philosophical schools. Plato was a disciple of Socrates. Plato gathered learners around himself and ultimately established the Academy, which was an informal association of intellectuals.

Aristotle was a disciple of Plato, who likewise gathered pupils and eventually established his own philosophical school in Athens. He built a library and gathered around him a group of intellectuals called "peripatetics" from a Greek word meaning "to walk around." They walked around as Aristotle led their discussions. These "disciples" were not chosen but initiated a relationship with a great teacher and attempted to

learn his manner of life and teaching. The goal was more the adoption of the teacher's way of life. Such imitation did not require knowledge of the teacher personally, only his way of life.

While Jesus's disciples were similar to those of the ancient Greek world, the differences were significant. To begin, Jesus chose His disciples; they did not choose Him. More importantly, Jesus called His disciples to bear witness to Him, not merely to transmit His teaching.

Disciples in Judaism

The evidence indicates that among Jews in Jesus's day, learners attached themselves to authoritative teachers called rabbis. The fact that Jesus's disciples frequently addressed Him as "Teacher" or "Rabbi" highlights the connection between Jesus and His disciples.

In the rabbinic system, the student took the initiative to link up with a respected teacher. Furthermore, the task of the learner in the rabbinic model was to receive the rabbi's teaching and then to pass that teaching along intact as a way to promote the teacher. Jews expected a disciple to be righteous according to the law. This explains why the scribes and Pharisees grumbled about Jesus's decision to associate with and issue the call of discipleship to women, sinners, and tax collectors.

In stark contrast to the rabbis, Jesus took the initiative in calling His disciples. The Twelve

did not seek out Jesus in order to be identified with Him; rather, He called them. In the case of Andrew, Peter, James, and John, Jesus was walking along the shore and called each of them to "follow me" (Matt. 4:19-22). Similarly, Jesus saw Matthew sitting at the tax office and called him (9:9). "Righteous" Jews would have viewed many of those whom Jesus called as unworthy to bear the moniker "disciple." Matthew was a tax collector (Matt. 9:9) and Simon the Zealot was radical politically. Many others Jesus called who were not part of the Twelve but were His disciples in a broader sense were sinners according to the law (Luke 15:1-2).

Finally, Jesus's disciples did more than merely pass on His teachings; He called them to bear witness to Him. Jesus's disciples did not merely transmit His teachings; they shared their whole lives with Him without condition. Thus, Jesus distinguished Himself from the rabbis (1) in the manner in which disciples came into relationship with Him, (2) in the type of people He called, and (3) in the basic function they served. "The distinction between [Jesus] and the [rabbis] was not one of degree as between different teachers. It was a fundamental one. He taught as one especially authorized by God, so that His Word was God's Word which men could not evade."¹

Perhaps the most helpful parallel to Jesus's call for discipleship is the prophetic model of Elijah calling Elisha to be his apprentice.

*Jesus's disciples did not merely transmit His teachings;
they shared their whole lives with Him
without condition.*



The Church of the Beatitudes is built on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The church is octagonal, representing the eight beatitudes in Jesus's sermon. Some have equated Jesus's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 with His Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:17-49. Though both contain several items that are alike, the plausible explanation is that they were two different sermons by Jesus.

In 1 Kings 19:19-21, Elijah found Elisha plowing with the twelve teams of oxen. Elijah walked by Elisha “and threw his mantle over him” (1 Kings 19:19). The mantle represented Elijah’s prophetic anointing and authority. This was Elisha’s prophetic call. Elisha’s request to go home and kiss his parents goodbye indicates a hesitation or an attempt to stall. Elijah responded with a strong challenge to Elisha: “Go on back,” he replied, “for what have I done to you?” (v. 20). Elisha met the challenge and slaughtered his oxen as a sacrifice to God, a dedication of himself to the prophetic call and a commitment to become Elijah’s apprentice.

Elijah’s forbidding Elisha to return home to tell his parents goodbye echoes a later scene in Jesus’s ministry when He called an unnamed man to “follow me.” The man responded, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:61-62).

In reality, Jesus’s demand was more radical than Elijah’s. Further, His call to obedience and commitment surpassed the demands of other religious leaders of the day. And yet, without apology, He called others to follow in His footsteps. He would show His followers the way of costly discipleship in His willingness to come down from the right hand of glory, to suffer humiliation and agony, and to give His life in a grisly crucifixion. The path is costly, but He has shown us the way, and the way leads to life.

This article first appeared in the Spring 2017 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Dr. Bobby Kelly is the Ruth Dickinson professor of Bible at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

1. Helmut Kramer, Rolf Rendtorff, Rudolf Meyer, and Gerhard Friedrich, “προφητης” (prophets, prophet) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 6 (1968), 843.

LEADER HELPS

Using the Daily Discipleship Guide to Lead a Bible Study Group

The *Daily Discipleship Guide* was created for the purpose of building disciples. As the leader of the group, you play a major role. You can build disciples through the group Bible study time, encouraging daily Bible engagement, facilitating smaller groups, and apprenticing future leaders.

Building Disciples through the Group Time

Leading the group Bible study time is the most direct way you will build disciples. Each week, you will introduce the group to the Bible passage, examine the key message in that passage, challenge the group to act on that passage, and encourage them to reflect more deeply in the week that follows. Doing so requires preparation. Here is a way to prepare that gives you adequate time to study the lesson and will make the session fresh in your own life.

Early in the Week (Sunday or Monday)

- Ask God to open your mind and heart to His Word as you study.
- Read the Bible passage for the coming session, and review Understand the Context and Key Words.
- If a QR code is available in the Leader Helps, scan it to gain additional information on what's found in the passage.

Through the Week

- Ask God to use the Daily Explorations to help you understand and apply the lesson to your life.
- Complete the Daily Exploration activities in the days leading up to the group time.
- Meet with a group of three to four other teachers to share and pray for each other. Use Talk It Out to start your conversation.
- Pay careful attention to the Apply the Text sections for that session, looking for ways you need to apply the Bible in your own life.
- Start gathering items you may use in the group time.

The Day before Group Study Time

- Review the group plan in the back of the *Daily Discipleship Guide*.
- Review the first four pages of the *Daily Discipleship Guide* for that session and the commentary provided in the Leader Helps for that session.
- Review your responses and notes from the completed Daily Explorations.
- Listen to the weekly podcast at goExploreTheBible.com/Adults-Training.
- Adjust the plan to fit the needs of your group.
Note: You can create custom plans using the DOC file provided in the Digital Download for the Leader Pack—it's the same content printed in the Leader Helps.
- Consult *QuickSource* for additional insights and ideas.
- Review the weekly Adult Extra idea on the Explore the Bible blog (goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras).
- Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* for additional insight.
- Pull needed posters from the *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack* (or create your own using Visual Ideas on pages 160–161).
- Make sure you have all your resources gathered including extra copies of the *Daily Discipleship Guide* for guests.

The Day of the Group Study Time

- Arrive early. The group time begins when the first person arrives so make sure that is you.
- Pray for the study and the group.
- Adjust the room as needed.
- Lead the study, adjusting as you go.



After the Group Study Time

- Consider the After the Session idea at the end of the group plans.
- Contact the group, encouraging them to complete the Daily Exploration section and sharing gathered prayer requests and other appropriate information.
- Record insights gained about teaching, individuals in the group, and Scripture.
- Pray for specific needs of people in the group.
- Do it all again, asking God to open you mind and heart to His Word this week.

Building Disciples by Encouraging Daily Bible Engagement

Here are some ways to encourage your group to engage with the Bible daily.

- **VISIT THEM.** Deliver a copy of the Daily Discipleship Guide to every person in your group.
- **ASK THEM.** That seems simple, but the simple is not always easy. Learn to comfortably ask if group members are studying the Bible. You may want to use a statement instead of a question, such as, “I hope you took a look at the Day 3 activity for this week.” It’s a question disguised as a statement, so it’s not as threatening.
- **TELL THEM.** Let them know that you are using the Daily Exploration section as well. Set the standard.
- **SHOW THEM.** Point to the Daily Exploration section at the conclusion of the group study. From time to time, demonstrate how to use the section, guiding them through Day 1 as a group.
- **INVITE THEM.** Call on pre-enlisted volunteers to share with the group what they are learning and how they are using the Daily Exploration section.

As teachers, we have taken on the responsibility of encouraging everyone on our ministry list (class roll, membership list, etc.) to engage daily in Bible study. We can’t make them do it, but we can provide them with a tool and encourage them to use it.

Building Disciples through Smaller Groups

Talk It Out is designed for smaller groups of three to four people to meet weekly. The goal of the smaller groups is simple: holding ourselves and others accountable for living a Christ-honoring life.

Create smaller groups:

- Explain the importance of the smaller groups, emphasizing the goal.
 - Allow the group to form their own initial groups of three by gender (men's smaller groups and women's smaller groups). This tends to work better than assigning groups.
 - Allow the smaller groups to add one person from the names on the ministry list of people who are not present.
 - You may want to encourage the groups to form based on neighborhoods or proximity to work.
 - Make sure some of the groups have extra space for new people and guests.
 - As the Bible study group grows, you may need to reorganize the smaller groups, but try not to regroup too often so that trust can be built within each smaller group.
-

Support the smaller groups:

- Provide opportunities for the members of the smaller groups to pray with each other during the group time.
 - Make study assignments in the weekly group time based on the smaller groups.
 - Pre-enlist a volunteer to share with the larger group how participation in the smaller group is impacting his or her life.
 - Periodically organize fellowship events built around the smaller groups. The smaller groups could be the basis for teams during the event.
-

Be in a smaller group:

- Meet with two or three other Bible study leaders as part of your weekly preparation.
- Be part of a smaller group within your class.
- Host a smaller group for guests and new group members.

Building Disciples by Apprenticing Other Leaders

Starting new groups is critical to the life of your church and the lives of the individuals in your group. People in your group need to be challenged to take on a greater role in your church. Providing the opportunity to do so helps them grow and removes the largest barrier to starting new Bible study groups—finding a leader. You can make a difference in the growth of individuals and in the future growth of your church by apprenticing potential group leaders. Here’s how you can use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* to make this happen.

- **STEP 1:** Prior to group time, ask a potential leader to follow along in the Leader Helps for that session as you lead the group. Tell him or her to note what you did and what you adjusted. You’re just coaching your apprentice to use the book he or she has in a different way.
- **STEP 2:** After that group experience, spend time with the group member going over what you did and how you adjusted the leader material for the group.
- **STEP 3:** Invite him or her to do this again in a few weeks.
- **STEP 4:** Ask him or her to lead a group time or part of one using the suggestions in the Leader Helps for that session. You may be away that week, or you can simply observe as a group member. Offer to help him or her prepare if needed.
- **STEP 5:** As your apprentice gains confidence, allow him or her to teach more in the near future.
- **STEP 6:** As a need for a new group surfaces, prepare to move on to lead the new group, with the apprentice becoming the leader of the current group (which tends to work best), or commission the apprentice and a few others from the group to start a new group.
- **STEP 7:** Do it all again.

Not everyone in the group will become a Bible study leader. For those who do, you can become a mentor to potential leaders, extending your teaching ministry and demonstrating discipleship.



Affirmation

Session 1 • Matthew 3:13–4:11



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13*) to highlight during the session. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*) and **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) to distribute to the group.

INTRODUCE: Invite the group to read the opening paragraph on page 13.

ASK: Why do you think words of affirmation are so important when you embark on a new endeavor? (p. 13)

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion of the group's responses. Allow two or three volunteers to share encouraging words they've received and why those words were so meaningful to them.

RECAP: Remind the group that they are embarking on a study of Matthew 1–13 over the next twelve weeks. For context, summarize the first paragraph from **Understand the Context** on page 13.

TRANSITION: Share that this session examines the early steps in Jesus's public ministry.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXT: Use **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13*) to provide a brief overview of the entire study. Distribute **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*) for additional context.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 3:13–17 while the group listens for one of the watershed moments in Christianity. Share that this passage presents a paradigm shift: Jesus was beginning His public ministry, which meant that John the Baptist's ministry was reaching its climax.

ASK: Why did Jesus come to John for baptism? (p. 15)

RECAP: To explain the reasons for Jesus's baptism, share the following information from Day 1 of **Daily Exploration** (p. 17):

- “Jesus, fully God and fully man, took this step to identify with the sinfulness of humanity. . . . Jesus's baptism demonstrated His commitment to fulfill the mission for which He came into the world. It was an act of obedience to the Father and gives to us an example of obedience.”

EXAMINE: Direct attention to the phrase “went up” in verse 16. Share that this means

Jesus actually went under the water. Point out the **Key Doctrine** (p. 15). Emphasize the Greek word for baptism (*baptizo*) means “to immerse.” Note that this indicates full immersion is the proper mode of believers’ baptism.

ASK: What is the purpose of baptism in a believer’s life? (p. 15)

EXPLAIN: Discuss baptism as the visual representation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and a believer’s willingness to identify with that.

HIGHLIGHT: Point to God’s words of affirmation. Highlight the involvement of each member of the Trinity in this event. Note that Matthew 3:17 is the session memory verse and encourage adults to reflect on it and memorize it during the week.

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 4:1-4 silently and to identify one word or phrase that summarizes the temptation.

EXPLAIN: Briefly highlight Jesus’s condition when the devil approached Him. Note that He had gone nearly six weeks without food. Affirm that Satan often strikes when we are weak and our defenses are more likely to be down.

SHARE: Encourage adults to share the word or phrase they identified as they read the verses. Note that this temptation was not just a physical challenge. Emphasize that Satan was suggesting that Jesus use His power for His own satisfaction rather than trusting God to meet His needs.

RECAP: Use this content from Day 3 of **Daily Exploration** (p. 18) to examine Jesus’s use of Scripture:

- “Jesus responded to Satan’s attack by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. He affirmed that our physical needs are not our most crucial needs. The Word of God and the will of God as revealed in His Word are the most important things in all of life. This was Jesus’s declaration of commitment to God’s plan. Further, His example of using Scripture, the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17), serves to remind us that we can face temptation with the Word of God.”

ASK: How have you found strength and encouragement in God’s Word? (p. 15)

DISCUSS: Facilitate a brief discussion about the merits of using Scripture when we face temptation. Share that Satan was not done with his temptations, and Jesus was not done relying on God’s Word.

READ: Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 4:5-7 as adults again identify a single word or phrase that summarizes the temptation in the verses.

EXPLAIN: Point out that scholars have different ideas about where this pinnacle of the temple might be. Note that some believe it could be part of Solomon’s Porch, which rose to more than 450 feet above the Kidron Valley. Share that others think it could have been an area known as Herod’s portico, which also rose high above Kidron. Emphasize that the exact location is not as important as Satan’s purpose for bringing Jesus there.

DISCUSS: Briefly review the second temptation and allow adults to share the word or phrase they identified as the verses were read. Talk about how those terms are significant to the story.

RECAP: Explain Satan's attempted use of Scripture and Jesus's response by sharing the following:

- **(4:4-6)** *The devil quoted Psalm 91:11-12 but he misused the Scripture, taking the verses out of context. The psalm speaks of a life lived in God's will. When our lives are lived in His will, God can be counted on to protect and provide for us. The devil knew that if he could induce Jesus to act contrary to God's will, Jesus's actions would disqualify Him from being humanity's Savior.*

ASK: What are some ways people might try to put God to the test in our culture? (p. 15)

STATE: *Jesus used another Scripture, Deuteronomy 6:16, to reject Satan's temptation. He understood the meaning of the passage that Satan was twisting, so He could respond with wisdom and the authority of God's truth. Context matters when it comes to understanding and applying God's Word in our lives. We have to be careful to avoid the temptation to twist God's Word to fit our own ideas and agendas.*

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 4:8-11 silently to identify the third temptation of Jesus and to summarize it in a single word or phrase.

RECAP: Encourage volunteers to share their responses from the reading.

SHARE: Remind adults that Satan was offering kingdoms that will belong to Jesus one day anyway, according to Revelation 11:15. Highlight that the real issue was not authority over kingdoms, but becoming King without the suffering of the cross.

PRAY: Note that Jesus again used Scripture to defeat Satan. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) and encourage adults to reflect on how they can pray the truth of Matthew 4:10 using the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** (QR code on page 15).

ASK: What challenges our worship of God alone? How can we overcome those challenges? (p. 15)

CHALLENGE

EMPHASIZE: Baptism is the first step of obedience after salvation. Let adults know you are available to talk with anyone who has questions. Also, remind adults that Scripture memory is a vital tool for fighting temptation.

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion of the **Apply the Text** questions on page 15.

AFTER THE SESSION

Email or text the group and share that you are praying for them this week. Remind them that while this session largely focused on using Scripture to fight temptation, a well-rounded Christian also uses it proactively.



Invitation

Session 2 • Matthew 4:12-25



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) and **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19*).

ASK: What are some jobs today where you might find apprentices? What would be some advantages to becoming an apprentice in one of those jobs? (p. 23)

INTRODUCE: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 23. Lead a brief discussion about the goal of an apprentice. Emphasize that apprentices gain the skills needed to perform at the same level as the master.

SAY: *Believers are called to apprentice themselves to Jesus. A more common way of saying this is that we become His disciples. It's not a commitment to take lightly because it's a commitment that lasts a lifetime.*

CONTEXT: Explain that this session picks up Matthew's description of Jesus's early ministry. Briefly review Jesus's baptism and His temptation in Session 1.

OVERVIEW: Use **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) to locate Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Share that this city was an important

economic hub on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and that Jesus's ministry in this area fulfilled prophecies spoken by Isaiah seven centuries earlier. Note that Galilee—including Capernaum—had a large Gentile population, highlighting Jesus's desire for the gospel to be shared with all people.

TRANSITION: *Galilee is also important because it was the home of Jesus's first followers. As we examine their lives, we can learn more about what it means to be Jesus's disciples.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Call on a volunteer to read **Matthew 4:12-17** aloud while the group listens to identify the specific action that Jesus took and why.

EXAMINE: Direct adults to create an even number of teams. Each team should have 2-3 people. Direct the teams to complete the following assignments:

- Direct half the teams to examine Luke 3:15-20 and identify why John the Baptist was arrested. Discuss the impact John's arrest had on Jesus moving to Capernaum.
- Direct half the teams to examine Luke 4:20-30 and identify how Jesus was received in His hometown of Nazareth.

Discuss the impact Nazareth's rejection had on Jesus moving to Capernaum.

RECAP: After a few minutes, allow volunteers from each set of teams to share what they discovered. Lead a brief discussion on the role each event could have had on Jesus's move to Capernaum. Summarize the following information:

- **(4:12-16)** John the Baptist had made enemies of religious leaders whom he denounced as hypocrites. Therefore, they would have looked upon Jesus, the One to whom John pointed, with suspicion. Jesus's withdrawal from the region certainly was not because Jesus was afraid of the religious leaders. Instead, He desired to begin His ministry without any premature confrontation with these leaders. Further, Jesus's move to this region fulfilled prophecy. More than seven hundred years earlier, Isaiah foresaw the Messiah bringing light into the area's spiritual darkness (Isa. 9:1-2).

EXPLAIN: Direct the group to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*). Note that much of Jesus's ministry occurred in Galilee. Highlight the similarities between John's message and Jesus's message. Point out that Jesus's mission didn't focus initially on miracles and healings but on preaching that pointed people to the kingdom of God.

ASK: How can believers point people to God's kingdom? (p. 25)

READ: Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 4:18-22 aloud while the group identifies Jesus's expectations for the first disciples.

RECAP: Invite the group to share the requirements they identified for Jesus's disciples. Direct attention to the **Did You Know?** feature (p. 25). Point out that a disciple is an "apprentice, pupil, or follower."

SHARE: Point out that abandoning nets and boats was tantamount to abandoning their occupation, while leaving a father elevated Jesus above family.

ASK: What does it look like to follow Jesus in our culture? (p. 25) Allow volunteers to share personal stories of how following Jesus has radically changed their lives.

PROMPT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19*) and identify it as the memory verse. Encourage the group to work on memorizing these verses this week.



The Twelve Disciples

Who were Jesus's disciples? Scan this QR code to discover the names and biblical lists of the twelve disciples.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 4:23-25 aloud while the group listens for the three primary components of His ministry.

RECAP: Allow adults to share the three components of Jesus's ministry in these verses. Share that Matthew provided a summary of how Jesus carried out his work during the early days of His Galilean ministry.

EXPLAIN: Use the following information to explain the different groups Jesus healed.

- **(4:23-25)** Jesus healed “all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains.” In other words, He healed whatever ailment He encountered without exception. People also brought “the demon-possessed” to Jesus. He had authority over evil spirits and cast them out by His Word (Matt. 8:28-32). Scripture makes a clear differentiation between physical illness and demonic possession. Jesus has power over both. People also brought Him “epileptics and paralytics.” No wonder news about Him spread everywhere.

EMPHASIZE: Emphasize that Jesus’s focus remained on revealing God’s kingdom and that we should make that a priority in our lives as well.

ASK: How can believers follow Jesus’s example of sharing the message of God’s kingdom? (p. 25)

CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Review these points from this week’s Bible passage:

- People must repent to enter the kingdom of God.
- Following Jesus will require personal sacrifice.
- Jesus’s call means following His example and ministering to others.

REFLECT: Direct adults to consider which statement would be hardest to apply and why. Allow a few volunteers to share their responses.

DISCUSS: Direct attention to the **Apply the Text** question on page 25. Facilitate a discussion on what a disciple of Jesus looks like in a contemporary context. Challenge adults to spend time during the week talking with God about what their lives say to others about their commitment to Him.

MEMORIZE: Point back to **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19). Lead the group in reading the verses two or three times aloud together. Encourage them to continue memorizing the verses this week. Remind them to be alert for opportunities God provides to be a fisher of men in the coming days.

PRAY: Read the session’s focal statement: *Jesus calls people to follow Him.* Give adults a few minutes to pray silently about how He wants them to apply the truths of this session. Close in prayer, asking God to help each adult be the hands and feet of Jesus each day.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group to provide a short list of ways they can reflect Jesus to the world. (Examples: *sacrificing personal time or resources to perform ministry, visiting and praying with people who are ill, challenging an unbeliever to turn away from their sin*) Encourage adults to be intentional about choosing one way they can put their faith into action this week.

Worship the King

Session 3 • Matthew 2:1-12



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Make extra copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: Matthew Time Line) and **Pack Item 10** (Handout: Messianic Prophecies). Hang **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus) on a focal wall.

INTRODUCE: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 31.

ASK: What are some things that you can buy or activities that you can do that are “worth it”? How do you think the worth of something is determined? (p. 31)

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 8** (Handout: Matthew Time Line) and remind adults that the first two sessions examined the early days of Jesus’s ministry on earth. Share that this session will backtrack a couple of chapters and focus on events related to His birth.

RECAP: Note that while Mark and Luke wrote for Gentile audiences, Matthew wrote to Jewish readers. Share the following content from **Understand the Context** (p. 31) to explain how this influenced Matthew’s style and approach:

- “Matthew incorporated numerous Old Testament prophecies concerning the

Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus. Two of these Old Testament prophecies [Isa. 7:14; Mic. 5:2] are found in the context for this week’s study. Matthew began his Gospel account by tracing the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, who was engaged to Mary.”

EXPLAIN: Emphasize that Matthew’s point was that Jesus is the Messiah, so He is worthy of our worship. Note that while our earthly ventures may or may not yield dividends, whole-hearted devotion and worship of Jesus is always worth the investment.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Guide the group to read Matthew 2:1-3 silently and to look for information they may not have noticed in the past.

DESCRIBE: Direct adults to work in pairs to scan the information in Day 1 of **Daily Exploration** (p. 35) and to find information about the wise men. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10** (Handout: Messianic Prophecies) as an additional resource. After a few minutes, allow some volunteers to share what they discovered.

ASK: How did Herod respond to the wise men’s inquiries? Why? (p. 33)

RECAP: Summarize the following information from Day 2 of **Daily Exploration** (p. 35) to provide more context about Herod:

- “Herod was known for his insane fear of losing his throne. He exhibited constant paranoia that someone was going to steal it. To satisfy this fear, Herod had his wife, three sons, brother-in-law, and mother-in-law killed because he thought they were trying to take over his throne. It is reported that as he approached death, he had leading citizens of Jerusalem imprisoned with the instruction that, upon his death, they were to be killed. His reasoning was no one would weep when he died, but at least when these prominent Jews died, there would be weeping on the day of his death. News from the wise men of a new claimant to the throne sent Herod into a panic.”

STATE: *That makes it easier to understand why all of Jerusalem was troubled when Herod was disturbed. But it didn't stop the wise men from seeking the true King of the Jews.*

ASK: In what ways is Jesus a King? (p. 33)
Discuss the group's responses. Emphasize that Jesus isn't just the King of the Jews. Share that He is the King of all creation, and we are called to recognize Him as our Ruler and as the One who is worthy of all worship.

READ: Lead the group to read Matthew 2:4-8 silently to track the next steps of Herod. Draw attention to Herod's need to fill gaps in his knowledge of Scripture.

ASK: Why would prophecy be important to understanding who Jesus is both then and now? (p. 33)

SHARE: Point out that the prophecy found in Micah 5:2 was key to Matthew's argument that Jesus was the Messiah. Direct attention to **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus*). Note that the first three prophecies relate to Jesus's birth. Emphasize that we can know He is the Christ because He fulfilled messianic prophecy.

RECAP: Summarize the following content to illustrate the true character and motives of Herod:

- **(2:8)** Herod relayed the information from the Jewish religious experts about the birth of the Messiah to the wise men, sending them to Bethlehem. Herod then ordered the wise men to come back to Jerusalem and give him the information as to the identity of this newborn Messiah so he could worship the child as the wise men planned to do. Later verses in Matthew 2 reveal Herod's true evil intentions. He had no intention of worshiping the new king. Instead, he wanted to locate the child and eliminate the one he saw as potential competition to his rule as “king of the Jews” (vv. 16-18).

STATE: *Neither Herod nor the religious leaders were interested in finding the Messiah for the right reasons. In contrast, the wise men longed to worship the King whom God was revealing to them.*

ASK: How can you help people come to know Jesus as their King? (p. 33)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 2:9-12 as the group considers the emotions the wise men may have felt at different moments in these verses.

ASK: What motivated the wise men's incredible sense of joy? (p. 33)

RECAP: To highlight the wise men's response, summarize the following:

- **(2:10-11)** Upon seeing the star again, the wise men "were overwhelmed with joy." This phrase could literally be rendered "rejoiced with exceedingly greatest joy." The sight of "the child with Mary his mother" moved the wise men even more than the star. They immediately responded by "falling to their knees," and "they worshiped him." The original language describes prostration as an act of reverence. Then they "opened their treasures." They didn't simply offer a few baubles for the child. The phrase implies they emptied their treasure boxes and "presented him with gifts."

DISCUSS: Direct adults to work in groups of two or three to read the passage again and to identify elements of worship. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share. Highlight the passion for reaching Jesus, as well as their willingness to bow down to Him and their gifts to Him. Suggest that genuine worship involves bowing our hearts to Jesus and giving ourselves to Him.

ASK: What gifts can you offer to Jesus as an act of worship? (p. 33)

MEMORIZE: Highlight Matthew 2:11 as the session's memory verse and repeat it together. Encourage adults to continue memorizing it this week. Suggest they spend time leading up to Christmas asking God to guide them toward worshiping the Savior well.

CHALLENGE

STATE: *The wise men's reverence and passion provide us with a wonderful example of what it means to recognize and acknowledge the Christ—whether during the Christmas season or during any other season of the year.*

GUIDE: Direct adults to the **Apply the Text** question on page 33. Encourage them to share things they consider worthy or valuable. List their responses on the board. Remind them that the true message of Christmas points us to the Savior, the One whose worth is beyond measure.

PRAY: Invite adults to offer sentence prayers, simple declarations to share their devotion to Jesus.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group to encourage them to remember the gift of Jesus, as well as anything they need to present to Him in the days to come. Suggest that such an offering might include a special offering to the church, missions, or a needy family. Point out that physical and material offerings are meaningful acts of worship, just like bowing, praying, singing, and service.

True Righteousness

Session 4 • Matthew 5:13-20,43-48



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13) and **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus’s Mission). Make copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Sermon on the Mount).

ASK: Who are some social media influencers you are aware of? Are you able to identify ways that you have been impacted by these influencers? (p. 39)

DISCUSS: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 39. Facilitate a brief discussion about the positive or negative impact of various influences on the lives of adults.

REVIEW: Explain that following Christmas, this session places us back into Jesus’s ministry. Allow adults to recall things they remembered from earlier sessions. Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus’s Mission). Emphasize Jesus’s commitment to the Father’s plan and the Father’s kingdom.

RECAP: Point out that this session (and the next two) focuses on the Sermon on the Mount. Share this information from **Understand the Context** (p. 39):

- “Matthew 5–7 make up what is normally called the Sermon on the Mount. In many ways, this set of teachings was for the disciples only. Jesus was teaching them what it meant to follow Him. . . . He spoke of what makes His followers distinct from the rest of the world.”

TRANSITION: Examining the Sermon on the Mount offers a great opportunity to consider Jesus in the context of an influencer. He transforms His people, and He calls each of us to make a difference in the world around us. These verses from Matthew 5 will guide us in becoming positive spiritual influencers for God’s kingdom.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXT: Draw attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13). Identify the Sermon on the Mount as the first of Jesus’s major discourses in Matthew. Distribute **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Sermon on the Mount) for further study.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read **Matthew 5:13-16** aloud as the group notes words or phrases that stick out to them. Discuss the words and phrases they noted. Affirm that salt and light are the primary metaphors in the verses.

ASK: What makes salt and light good illustrations for faith? (p. 41)

RECAP: Summarize the following information to explain the importance of salt in the first century:

- **(5:13)** In the ancient world, there were several important uses for salt. Among the most popular were: (1) use in sacrifices, (2) seasoning, (3) preservative, (4) means of purification, and (5) payment (particularly for soldiers). Scholars today debate whether Jesus was referring to salt's purifying or preservative uses. Possibly Jesus had both of these in mind.

ASK: What happens when believers serve as salt and light in the world? (p. 41)

SAY: *As salt, believers reflect God's kingdom values. As light, we reveal Christ to the world around us. By being salt and light, we point people to Jesus and bring glory to God.*

READ: Read **Matthew 5:17-20** aloud as the group identifies Jesus's relationship to the law of Moses.

ASK: When have you been accused of something that wasn't true? (p. 41)

RECAP: Share this content from Day 3 of **Daily Exploration** (p. 44) to explain why Jesus emphasized His relationship to the law in verse 17:

- *"Much of the 'law' of the Pharisees was man-made traditions for which Jesus had little use. Because of His disdain for these traditions, He was accused of wanting to abolish the law. Jesus, however, told His*

disciples that He hadn't come to 'set aside' the law. Instead, He came for the purpose of bringing the law to its intended goal."

EXPLAIN: Emphasize that Jesus described God's Word as eternal—just like God is eternal. Point out that because it reflects the nature of God, His Word must be obeyed. Affirm that Jesus showed us how to live out our faith in a genuine way by fulfilling the Word down to the smallest detail.

QUESTION: How can followers of Jesus impact society? (p. 41)

MEMORIZE: Highlight Matthew 5:20 as the session's memory verse. Emphasize our responsibility to point people to God in a way that helps them see Him as He really is.

SAY: *That doesn't happen through religious rituals. It happens through a relationship with God that transforms our relationships with others.*



The Kingdom of God

What is the kingdom of God, and how should we live as its citizens? Scan this QR code to explore these truths.

READ: Read **Matthew 5:43-48** aloud as adults consider why Jesus's words would have seemed too radical to His listeners.

ASK: What was so revolutionary about Jesus's teaching in these verses? What makes it difficult for us today? (p. 41)

RECAP: To set the context for Jesus's teaching about loving our enemies, summarize this information from Day 4 of **Daily Exploration** (p. 44):

- “The command to ‘love your neighbor’ is from Leviticus 19:18. The second part of Jesus’s statement, ‘hate your enemy,’ was added by the scribes and Pharisees. Hating your enemy is easy. That is the problem with man-made traditions. No wonder the Pharisees and scribes thought they were righteous. They could keep their traditions and convince themselves they were fulfilling the demands of God’s law.”

ASK: What are some obstacles to loving our enemies? (p. 41)

DISCUSS: Guide adults to suggest groups that might be considered “enemies.” (Suggestions: *other races, other religions, other political parties, friends or family members who have betrayed our trust, and so forth*) Record their responses on the board. Encourage adults to suggest practical ways believers can demonstrate God’s love to those groups each day.

SHARE: Explain that the Greek word for “love” used in these verses is *agape*. Note that this is a God-driven love that puts the needs of others above our own needs. Remind adults that this is the kind of love that God showed toward sinful humanity when He sent His Son to die for us.

SAY: *Living out this kind of love was unconventional—and even dangerous—in the first century. It’s really no different today. If we’re going to move beyond the rituals of*

religion and live differently from the world around us, we have to live and love radically. This is the path to developing the spiritual maturity God desires in us.

CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Review these points from this week’s Bible passage:

- Kingdom people make a positive impact on the world for God’s glory.
- Kingdom people find genuine satisfaction and purpose by keeping God’s commands.
- Kingdom people reflect their heavenly Father by loving their enemies.

REFLECT: Encourage adults to consider a principle or truth that resonates with them from this session’s verses.

DISCUSS: Direct attention to the **Apply the Text** question on page 41. Facilitate a discussion on ways your group can extend Christ’s love in your community.

PRAY: Close in prayer. Ask God to help adults be wise as they strive to become salt and light in the world every day and to learn how to love others in a way that brings glory to Him.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group, reminding them to continue praying for opportunities to be salt and light to those around them this week.

Treasure

Session 5 • Matthew 6:19-34



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: *Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) and **Pack Item 11** (Handout: *The Sermon on the Mount*).

INTRODUCE: Read the opening paragraph on page 47 as adults make a mental list of their debts.

ASK: Do you agree or disagree that misplaced priorities fuel debt? Explain your answer. (p. 47)

STATE: Regardless of where individuals stand on the issue of debt, we can agree that humans are prone to let material possessions dominate our lives. When we do, the world steals our proper focus from God and we fail to trust Him like we should.

REVIEW: Remind adults that this is the second of three sessions drawn from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: *The Sermon on the Mount*) and direct them to scan through the content. Encourage them to share what they recall from the previous session.

CONTEXT: Share this information from **Understand the Context** (p. 47) to help set the context for Matthew 6:

- *"In chapter 6, Jesus contrasted sincere religious activities with the insincerity of those He called 'hypocrites.' Jesus was speaking of motivation. The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees were motivated by selfishness and pride. They performed acts of piety for the attention and accolade of others. Jesus's followers were to engage in acts of devotion out of a desire to glorify God."*

TRANSITION: In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus touched on topics like benevolence, prayer, and fasting. The real key to living as a Christ follower in this world is trusting Him with all your heart. That's going to be the focus of this session.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Call on three volunteers to read **Matthew 6:19-21, 22-23, 24** as the group determines which of the three passages is most convicting and which is most inspiring.

DISCUSS: Allow adults to share their responses to the three sets of verses that were read. Discuss what this passages says about wealth as well as what it *doesn't* say. Emphasize that God never condemns wealth when used properly, but He does not want us controlled by material possessions.

SHARE: Direct attention to the **Did You Know?** feature (p. 49). Note that more than 2,300 Bible references to money and possessions prove it is an important topic.

RECAP: To highlight the danger of storing up improper treasures, share this content:

- **(6:19)** *Jesus gave the reason for not storing up treasures on earth: we could lose these things because of moth, rust, or thieves who destroy or steal such treasures. In those days wealth was usually either in cloth (clothing and perhaps tapestries), jewelry, or money; things that easily might be damaged or taken by thieves. What James (Jesus's half-brother) wrote in James 5:2-3 speaks to the impermanence of such material things.*

EXPLAIN: Use the following to highlight the significance of the eye and the choice people must make between two masters.

- **(6:22-23)** Jesus used the eye to illustrate the importance of proper perception. Through this lamp of the body, we observe everything around us. But it's important that our source of spiritual perception stays healthy (or clear). We maintain proper focus when we see as God sees. In context, Jesus addressed the issue of one's treasure and its effect on the heart. He made it clear that we cannot serve two masters. Believers should focus on heavenly treasures rather than worldly possessions. If we love God supremely, we will serve Him alone.

ASK: How can we assess where our true devotion lies? (p. 49)

READ: Call on a volunteer to read **Matthew 6:25-30** aloud. Direct half the group to count how often the word "worry" is used as the other half counts the number of questions Jesus asked.

SHARE: Allow the "worry" group to share what they counted. Encourage adults to identify the sources of worry Jesus mentioned in the passage (*food, drink, clothes*). Emphasize that these were legitimate concerns in the first century. To supplement the context, share the following:

- **(6:25)** *In the first century, questions about what to eat or drink or what to wear had nothing to do with menus or fashion trends. They focused on basic needs for survival. But Jesus emphasized that human existence consists of more than food and clothing. Regardless of economic circumstances, every person should remember that life is about more than our physical stuff. We all have deep spiritual needs that will define our eternity.*

ASK: What kinds of things might you be tempted to worry about—and why? (p. 49)

SHARE: Allow the "questions" group to share what they found. Highlight that Jesus's questions were not for information but for reflection. Point out that the examples of birds and flowers reminded His listeners that they could trust God to take care of their needs, eliminating the need for worry.

ASK: What are practical things you can do to get through times when you have "little faith" in God? (p. 49)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Matthew 6:31-34** aloud while the group listens for repeated words or phrases.

ASK: Why does “tomorrow” create so much anxiety for us? (p. 49)

DEFINE: Note that Jesus referred to those who grasp after food, drink, and clothing as unbelievers because He taught us to counter those concerns with daily prayer.

RECAP: Use the following to explain the two reasons Jesus gave to avoid worry: *We don’t want to act like unbelievers, and we know we can trust God to meet our needs.*

- **(6:32)** Jesus offered two reasons to avoid worrying. First, we don’t want to act like Gentiles. Jesus demonstrated love for all people: Jews, Gentiles, or Samaritans. In this instance, “Gentiles” was a general term for unbelievers. When we allow materialism to consume our lives, we are behaving like those who have no relationship with God. A second reason to avoid worry rests in our heavenly Father. If we have a relationship with God as Father, we believe He cares for us and wants to provide for our needs.

ASK: What situation do you need to entrust to God today? (p. 49). Discuss responses, reminding adults of the futility of worrying about tomorrow and the power of faithful trust in God.

CHALLENGE

HIGHLIGHT: Point out that today’s passage makes it clear that God provides all of our

needs from His abundant resources, so we should trust Him—not obsess over material possessions like they belong to us or worry as if He will not come through when we need Him to move in our lives.

DISCUSS: Encourage adults to read and reflect on the first **Apply the Text** question on page 53: **What would you consider to be your greatest barrier in seeking first the kingdom of God?** Allow a few volunteers to share their struggles and practical ways to put kingdom priorities first.

PRAY: Encourage adults to use the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** (p. 15) to pray through this Scripture passage during the week. Close the session in prayer, asking God to give adults the wisdom and boldness to trust Him and to seek His kingdom as their highest priority in life.

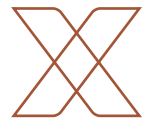
AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group a text or email, directing them to think through the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 49. Encourage individuals who are comfortable to share a personal need they are facing. Commit to praying for those needs and challenge other adults to join you in praying for one another. Suggest that they be sensitive to how God may move them to be the “answer” to one of these prayers.



Authority Acknowledged

Session 6 • Matthew 7:15-29



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Sermon on the Mount).

INTRODUCE: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 57.

ASK: Who is someone you know that you would consider an authority in a particular field? If you had a choice, in what field of expertise would you like to be considered an authority? (p. 57)

STATE: *When Jesus taught, people were amazed because He had an authority they had never experienced. His words carried power, and the traditions and teachings of the religious leaders simply could not hold a candle to the kingdom principles He explained. That authority made Jesus's instructions important in the first century, but they are just as important today. We still need to hear Him and acknowledge His authority in our lives by obeying Him.*

REVIEW: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Sermon on the Mount) and share that this is the third and final session drawn from the Sermon on the Mount. Invite adults to scan the handout and to share

things they have learned from the previous sessions on this sermon.

TRANSITION: *This session highlights contrasting lifestyles. And it challenges us to make a choice. We can experience the joy of following God's way or face the consequences of going our own way.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13). Remind adults that this session comes from the Sermon on the Mount, the first major discourse in Matthew's Gospel.

READ: Read **Matthew 7:15-20** aloud, encouraging adults to note the contrasts described in the passage.

SHARE: Allow volunteers to share the contrasts they noted in the verses. Highlight the imagery of a wolf in sheep's clothing in verse 15. Note the danger in following teachers who look good, but who view their followers as "consumables."

ASK: What false teachings are popular in our culture?

RECAP: To help explain the illustration of fruit used by Jesus in the passage, share the following:

- **(7:16)** *The principle behind the statement “You’ll recognize them by their fruit” is repeated elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt. 12:33; Luke 6:43-45; Gal. 5:19-23; Jas. 3:10-12). In outward appearance, true prophets and false prophets look the same (like sheep). The difference becomes apparent in the fruit they produce. Grapes do not come from thornbushes nor do figs come from thistles. It is impossible for a good tree to produce bad fruit or a bad tree to produce good fruit. The condition of the heart is evidenced by the lifestyle produced.*

ASK: How can you tell the difference between judging someone (v. 1) and discerning fruit (v. 20)? (p. 59)

STATE: *It’s vital for Christ followers to recognize heresy. False teachers will be judged, along with anyone who follows them. While we need to be humble and loving, we can’t afford to let our guard down when it comes to false teachers and false doctrine.*

READ: Lead the group to read Matthew 7:21-23 silently.

DISCUSS: Allow a few volunteers to share what emotions they felt when reading these verses and why this passage raised those emotions in their hearts and minds.

ASK: What are some situations when wearing a costume or a mask might be fun or useful? Emphasize that Jesus was calling out individuals who were wearing spiritual masks—either because they were deceived or because they wanted to deceive others.

RECAP: To explain Jesus’s words to the false followers, summarize this content from Days 2 and 3 of **Daily Exploration** (pp. 61-62):

- “Jesus spoke of people who engage in religious activities but are not true followers of Christ. Some are teachers and preachers, while others perform miracles including exorcisms. Religious activity can be a mask that disguises a heart far from God. . . . These false believers will offer all types of pleas about their spirituality and good works in Jesus’s name. However, they will be exposed for the counterfeits they are. Jesus emphasized that religious activities are not always synonymous with obedience. The religious activities described here were outward, showy, charismatic activities. But they were all empty substitutes for obedience in daily living.”

ASK: What does obedience to God’s Word reveal about one’s relationship with God? (p. 59)

PRAY: Emphasize that looking like a Christian—and even acting like one—is not enough. Direct attention to the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover. Share what it means to be a true follower of Jesus. Encourage adults to spend a moment in silent prayer, talking with God about where they stand with Him. Let adults know that you are available to speak with anyone who would like to learn more about accepting Jesus’s offer of salvation.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 7:24-29 aloud as the group underlines adjectives from the verses that stand out to them.

DISCUSS: Allow volunteers to share what words they underlined and why. Note that while verses 21-23 touched people's emotions, Jesus's story about the builders appeals to people's minds. Point out that this is a hallmark of a master teacher.

ASK: What is the primary difference between the two builders? (p. 59)

EXPLAIN: Point out that two things were the same: Both groups heard Jesus's words and both groups experienced storms. Affirm that Jesus has given us His teachings and "storms" are going to shake our lives. Emphasize that the foundation—accepting or rejecting Jesus and His words—was what made the difference.

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion on how the crowd reacted and why. Affirm that Jesus demands a response from each person.

ASK: Who in your circle of friends needs to hear and act on the message of the gospel? (p. 59)

CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- Believers' lives should exhibit spiritual fruit.
- Believers are known by their desire to obey God's Word.
- Believers can stand firm on God's Word.

REFLECT: Direct adults to read through the application points from the session again and to give themselves a ranking for each

one on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being "lacking" and 5 being "perfect"). After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share which point got their highest ranking and why. Emphasize that no one is perfect, but God wants us to come to Him and allow Him to make us more like Him in each of these areas.

DISCUSS: Encourage adults to read and discuss the **Apply the Text** question on page 59. As a group, make a list of ways they can encourage one another and hold one another accountable for bearing good fruit and building on a strong foundation.

PRAY: Close the session in prayer, asking God to teach each person how to live their faith in a genuine way every day for their good and God's glory.

AFTER THE SESSION

During the week, text or email the group the **Apply the Text** question from page 63. Feel free to share your greatest area of struggle and ask adults to pray for you in that area. Encourage the other adults to share and to pray for one another. Remind them to connect with their prayer partner during the week and to reach out to you if they have more questions about becoming a Christian.



Every Life Valued

Session 7 • Matthew 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8–9*).

READ: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 65.

ASK: What are some things that make people feel valued? What might make them feel undervalued? (p. 65)

CONTEXT: Share that Jesus revealed His love and concern for all people through His teaching and His healing. Summarize this information from **Understand the Context** (p. 65) to share how Matthew focused on these two aspects of Jesus's ministry:

- “Matthew’s Gospel is organized around two major activities of Jesus—teaching and healing. An example of that organization is found in Matthew 4:23–9:35. . . . [This passage] first gives to us a body of teaching called the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29). Next, comes the healing ministry of Jesus, beginning in 8:1.”

EXPLAIN: Note that the miracles in chapter 8 and 9 illustrate Jesus's authority over illness, creation, demons, and even

sin. Emphasize that, ultimately, the miracles revealed Jesus's heart for people.

STATE: *This session supports the sanctity of all human life. This was a principle Matthew understood because he saw Jesus value life at every turn. His Gospel also challenges us to imitate Jesus's attitude. It might be an unborn child, someone with a mental or physical illness, one marginalized by cultural stereotypes, or an elderly man or woman who needs a friend. Whatever the specifics, we are called to love them as Jesus demonstrated His love in passages like Matthew 8.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DISTRIBUTE: Provide the group with copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8–9*) and draw attention to the healing miracles performed by Jesus.

READ: Instruct the group to read Matthew 8:1-4 silently and to underline what the leper said and circle what Jesus did. Encourage volunteers to share what they know about leprosy.

EXPLAIN: To provide more information on what the man's ailment might have been, share the following information:

- **(8:2)** *The Greek word translated “leprosy” could refer to a number of serious skin diseases in addition to Hansen’s disease, which is usually called leprosy today. The Old Testament law required that a person with this skin disease live separated from normal society, outside the village. He was to wear torn clothes and unkempt hair. In addition, the leper was required to cry out “Unclean, unclean” when anyone approached him (Lev. 13:45-46).*

ASK: Based on this information, why is it significant that the man approached Jesus and that Jesus touched him?

EXPLAIN: Highlight Jesus’s compassion in touching the man and how his healing was immediate. Explain the law’s requirements to declare healing.

- **(8:4)** Jesus commanded him, “Don’t tell anyone.” Jesus often told people not to talk about His healing miracles because it could hinder His ability to share the message of the kingdom. Jesus’s admonition was not intended to keep the healing a secret, but to follow the law’s procedure. To be declared clean, the man had to “show yourself” to the priest. Priests were tasked with diagnosing skin diseases and confirming the cure. The man also needed to offer “the gift that Moses commanded” (see Lev. 13-15). Obediently following God’s directions would be a “testimony” to the priests and the community at large.

ASK: Who are the outcasts in our society and what are some typical reactions to them? (p. 67)

READ: Read **Matthew 8:14-17** as the group identifies the actions of Jesus and those He healed.

SAY: *The individuals healed in this passage also would be considered persons of little reputation or held in low regard.*

RECAP: To emphasize how Jesus’s care and compassion continued to shatter the norms established by society, summarize the following information.

- **(8:14-15)** In addition to the leper’s healing, chapter 8 records the healings of a Roman centurion’s servant and Peter’s mother-in-law. Matthew’s narrative of these healings illustrates Jesus’s compassion toward those who might have been considered second-class citizens in Jewish society. Certainly, the leper was an outcast. The servant of a Gentile centurion would be considered to have little value as a person. The same would be true for his master, the centurion. Finally, Peter’s mother-in-law belonged to another category of second-class people in that society—women.

EXAMINE: Divide the group into an even number of teams. Each team should have two or three people. Give them the following directions:

- Instruct half the groups to read and reflect on Matthew 8:16. Discuss why individuals brought people at night and how Jesus responded to those brought to Him.
- Instruct half the groups to read and reflect on Matthew 8:17. Discuss the significance of Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah.

EXPLAIN: After a few minutes, allow the teams to report on their work. Highlight how Matthew was proving Jesus's role as the Messiah through both the authority of miraculous healings and the fulfillment of prophecy.

ASK: In what ways can we show that we value the most vulnerable members of society? How do these verses in Matthew provide a model for us? (p. 67)

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 9:1-8 silently and to identify the various attitudes displayed. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to list the different people mentioned in the passage and the attitude or emotion that best describes each one.

CONTEXT: Enlist two adults to read accounts from Mark 2:4 and Luke 5:19. Discuss similarities and differences in the narratives. Highlight the men's faith in tearing up the roof to help their friend. Share that many scholars believe this was Peter's house.

EXAMINE: Why do you think Jesus addressed spiritual needs before He addressed physical needs? (p. 67)

RECAP: Note that the religious leaders had a different response. Explain their reaction. They were convinced Jesus was usurping a function that belonged only to God. They refused to believe Jesus was God.

STATE: *Jesus proved His authority to forgive sins by demonstrating His authority to heal physical disabilities. As God, He has the power to do both. And He is willing to meet every need because He cares about every human life.*

CHALLENGE

GUIDE: Create a list of those in your community who might be considered outcasts or of lesser value as directed in the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 67. Plan a group project that will allow adults to minister to these individuals in a meaningful way. Suggest they reflect on the **Apply the Text** suggestion from page 71 during the week.

PRAY: Close the session in prayer, thanking God for the gift of each human life. Ask Him to impress that value on the heart of each person as they seek ways to serve as His hands and feet in the world.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group, encouraging them to do some deeper soul searching as they consider the sanctity of human life. Remind them to read and reflect on the **Apply the Text** suggestion from page 71. Let them know that you are praying for them as they seek to become more like Jesus in the area of honoring the sanctity of all human life.



Mercy Extended

Session 8 • Matthew 9:10-19,23-26



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 9:12*) and **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8–9*).

INTRODUCE: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph (p. 75). Encourage one or two volunteers to share words that come to mind when they hear “mercy.” Share this definition found on page 1081 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015): “one’s consideration of the condition and needs of his fellowman.” Share that our mercy toward others is rooted in God’s mercy toward us.

ASK: In what ways can we show mercy in our everyday encounters? (p. 75)

SHARE: Remind adults that the group has been studying the Gospel of Matthew. Note that to this point, Matthew had not mentioned himself, even though he was one of Jesus’s early disciples. Summarize this information from **Understand the Context** (p. 75) to highlight how Matthew revealed his calling in today’s passages:

- “The writer of the Gospel gives us a glimpse into his own calling to be a

disciple. While Mark and Luke also record the calling of Matthew, in those two Gospels he is called Levi, which was his Hebrew name. Matthew was his Greek name. He was a tax collector for the Roman government. . . . No doubt Matthew included the story of his calling to point to the fact that Jesus extended grace even to those considered to be outcasts.”

TRANSITION: *After calling Matthew, Jesus also attended a banquet with “sinners.” As we study today’s verses, focus on how Jesus showed mercy and how He wants us to follow His example.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Read Matthew 9:10-13 aloud, directing adults to underline the direct quotes in this passage.

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus’s Ministry Around Galilee*). Point out the village of Capernaum. Remind adults that this was the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Note that Matthew also worked as a tax collector by the Sea of Galilee.

SAY: *After he accepted Jesus’s call to discipleship, Matthew immediately reached out to his friends. Despite the social*

stigma attached to tax collectors and other “sinners,” Jesus attended a banquet at Matthew’s house. This drew the attention—and the contempt—of the religious elite.

ASK: What does it mean that Jesus was a “friend of sinners”? What does it look like for His followers to be friends of sinners? (p. 77)

- **(9:10)** The large number of tax collectors and sinners were probably attending the banquet at Matthew’s invitation. Matthew wanted his colleagues and friends to know Jesus as he knew Him. What better way for that to happen than for Matthew to invite both Jesus and Matthew’s colleagues to his house.

ASK: How would you summarize what Jesus came to do? (p. 77) Point out **Pack Item 5** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 9:12). Note that this is the memory verse for this session. Encourage adults to ask God to help them learn how to show mercy and lead people toward the Great Physician.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 9:14-17 as adults identify the images Jesus used to make His point.

EXAMINE: Ask the group to identify the three images Jesus used. Discuss what He was emphasizing with each metaphor. Supplement the discussion with the following information.

- **(9:15-17)** Weddings are a cause for celebration, not mourning. The groom represented Jesus and the wedding guests referred to His followers. In the second

metaphor, a patch for a garment needed to be washed before being applied so it would shrink to its permanent size. Without the shrinking, the cloth “pulls away” from the old garment and makes “the tear worse.” Similarly, “no one puts new wine into old wineskins.” Wineskins were made from animal skins that grew hard and brittle over time. Fresh wine would ferment, creating gases that would expand and cause the “skins to burst.” Trying to incorporate the old trappings of ritualistic religion with the fresh spirit of Christ damages both.

SAY: Jesus never rejected fasting as a spiritual discipline, but He did emphasize a new approach to living in relationship with God. And this new approach stood in stark contrast to both the legalism of the Pharisees and the austerity of John’s followers.

ASK: What does Jesus offer that religion does not? (p. 77)

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 9:18-19 silently and to reflect on how they feel about interruptions in their lives. Allow adults to share how they respond to interruptions.

SAY: Some interruptions might seem minor, while others seem to come at the absolute worst times. When we’re in the middle of something we consider important or we’ve finally gotten a measure of momentum, interruptions can test our patience.

CONTEXT: Remind adults that Jesus had been teaching the disciples of John more about who He is and why He had come. Affirm that

this was important for them to understand. Share that, as He was sharing these truths, a synagogue leader named Jairus interrupted His teaching time with a plea for his daughter's life.

ASK: How would you have responded to such an interruption?

RECAP: Emphasize that Jesus did not see this as an interruption, but as a chance to demonstrate mercy to a family in need. Share this statement from Day 4 of **Daily Exploration** (p. 80): *"With compassion, Jesus rose to accompany this grieving father to his home. Jesus knew that, sometimes, interruptions are divine appointments."*

ASK: Why should we take our concerns to Jesus? (p. 77)

EMPHASIZE: Remind adults that Jairus came to Jesus with boldness and humility. Affirm that Jesus still longs to act on our behalf when we come to Him.

READ: Guide the group to read **Matthew 9:23-26** silently and to circle words or phrases that stick out to them. Allow a few volunteers to share what they circled and why.

EXPLAIN: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8-9*). Highlight that healing the woman with a bleeding condition occurred within the verses that describe raising Jairus's daughter from the dead. Note that again we see an interruption that wasn't an interruption for Jesus.

ASK: How does it impact your faith when you read of Jesus's miracles and power? (p. 77)

STATE: *Jesus demonstrated mercy through both His words and His touch. He always makes time for His people when they are in need. He helped the woman with the bleeding condition, and He helped Jairus's family. He will help us, as well.*

CHALLENGE


REFLECT: Direct attention back to **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 9:12*). Note that while Jesus remains the Great Physician, He often uses His people as His hands and feet for ministry. Encourage adults to meditate on this memory verse during the week and to look for opportunities to follow Jesus's example of mercy.

DISCUSS: Encourage the group to examine the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 77. As a group, list groups of people who may be in need. Challenge the group to consider ways they can help meet those needs for God's glory. Remind them that they are called to follow Jesus's example of mercy.

PRAY: Urge the group to continue using the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** (QR code p. 59) in their prayer time this week and to bring their needs to Jesus with boldness and humility. Close the session in prayer.

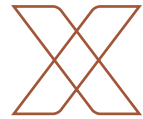
AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group during the week to remind them of Jesus's mercy toward them and their call to show mercy toward others.



Loyalty Tested

Session 9 • Matthew 10:16-20,26-34



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Hang **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*) and **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: The Disciples in History*).

ASK: What brands, organizations, or activities hold your loyalty? What makes you loyal to them? (p. 83)

INTRODUCE: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 83. Note that genuine loyalty often requires making a sacrifice of some kind.

SHARE: Draw attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13*). Explain that this session focuses on Jesus’s words to His disciples in Matthew 10. Point out that this chapter is identified as the Lord’s second discourse on the outline.

CONTEXT: To set the stage for this study, summarize this content from **Understand the Context** (p. 83):

- “After spending weeks and months with Jesus, the time had come for Him to send His disciples out to test what they had learned. They were to preach of the kingdom of God like Jesus did and engage

in a ministry of compassion as Jesus had done. Before sending them out, Jesus gave instructions about what they were to do, how they were to do it, and what to expect.”

TRANSITION: *Jesus wanted His followers to experience both the joys and the struggles of representing Him in the world. While all of them (except Judas) would help spread the news of God’s kingdom after Jesus went back to heaven, this was their first taste of that kind of ministry. By examining Jesus’s instruction to them, we can get a better idea of what He expects of us and how we can continue sharing His message with the world today.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXT: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*). Point out that the events in Matthew 10 would have taken place between AD 29–33.

READ: Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 10:16–20 aloud as adults write their own paraphrases of Jesus’s instructions to His disciples in the margin of their DDG.

EXPLAIN: Talk about the group’s responses. Provide copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: The Disciples in History*) and briefly highlight

each disciple. Note that Jesus had big plans for them, but this was their first taste of personal ministry. Share that Jesus wanted them to be well-prepared for this new adventure.

RECAP: To help explain the significance of shrewdness and innocence, summarize the following information:

- **(10:16)** Being “shrewd” did not mean being cunning. The apostles should be insightful as they worked among people who might harm them. At the same time, they were to be “innocent.” The term connotes a sense of sincerity and integrity.

ASK: Why are both shrewdness and innocence necessary qualities for Christ’s witnesses? (p. 85)

SAY: *Jesus’s words described what His disciples would face as they spread across Galilee, as well as what they would experience sharing the gospel around the world after He returned to heaven. He never watered down the danger, but He did emphasize the opportunities they would get to share His message. They would stand before governors and kings for God’s glory because they were willing to suffer.*

EMPHASIZE: Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 10:19-20. Highlight the promise that Jesus made related to the Holy Spirit. Affirm that allowing the Spirit to lead us allows us to see needs more clearly and to share Jesus with confidence and boldness. Challenge adults to ask God for a greater sensitivity to the Spirit’s guidance in their lives.

READ: Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 10:26-31 aloud while the group counts the number of times Jesus said not to fear.

IDENTIFY: Highlight the following contrasts Jesus drew in verses 26-28:

- Covered/Uncovered
- Known/Unknown
- Dark/Light
- Whisper/Proclaim

RECAP: Summarize the following information to explain the contrasts more fully:

- **(10:26)** Fear sometimes paralyzes people from following Jesus openly. Jesus encouraged His apostles not to be afraid of their adversaries because the truth ultimately will be brought to light. He emphasized His point by using Hebrew parallelism that repeats an idea with slightly different wording. What is “covered” will be “uncovered,” and what is “hidden” will be “made known.” Wrongdoing by the enemies of Christ will be exposed and believers will be vindicated. Christ’s messengers should courageously share His message to the world.

ASK: What is the connection between fearing God and not fearing man? (p. 85)

STATE: *The images of the sparrows and the hairs are really a call to boldness. They emphasize God’s care and sovereignty. Because He is with us, we don’t have to fear anyone or anything that stands against us as we follow His plans.*

READ: Direct the group to read **Matthew 10:32-34** silently and to circle the verbs or phrases that are repeated in each verse.

ASK: Based upon your reading of this passage, why would secret allegiance to Christ be impossible?

SHARE: Encourage adults to elaborate on their responses. Point out that proclaiming Jesus to the world isn't just a good idea. Explain that Jesus actually tied it to our identity as His people. Note that we can share Jesus boldly with others because we know that He is our advocate before the Father (1 John 2:1).

ASK: What are some ways you can acknowledge Christ before others? (p. 85)

RECAP: Affirm that rejecting Jesus comes with its own consequences. Summarize the following information:

- **(10:33)** “Denies” means more than what Peter did on the night before Jesus’s crucifixion (Matt. 26:69-75). Peter’s moment of weakness was followed by repentance and restoration. But Jesus was speaking of a deeper rejection. The word implies a base refusal to acknowledge Jesus as one’s Savior. One day people will give an account at the throne of God. His response will be based solely on what they chose to do with Jesus Christ in this life. Standing before God, it will be too late to change their minds and claim Christ.

SAY: *In many ways, Jesus is the most polarizing person in human history. This means those who follow Him will face*

hostile opposition from those who hate Him. But while He cannot promise peace every moment of our lives here on earth, He does promise eternal blessing and peace to all who demonstrate loyalty to Him as residents of His kingdom.

CHALLENGE

REFLECT: Group the adults into teams of three or four and give each team a sheet of paper and pen. Direct them to write the word “loyal” down the side of the paper in the form of an acrostic. Instruct the teams to use the letters in the word to identify specific ways believers can show loyalty to Christ on a daily basis. After a few minutes, allow a volunteer from each team to share their work. Write their responses on the board.

DISCUSS: Encourage the group to consider the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 85. Lead a brief discussion on how the adults can hold one another accountable for living out their loyalty to Jesus in meaningful ways.

CLOSE: Close the session in prayer, asking God to help each adult know how to stand firm in the face of persecution.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group during the week and encourage them to look for opportunities to take a stand for Jesus, even when it might be difficult.



Confronting Doubts

Session 10 • Matthew 11:1-6,16-24



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee), **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus's Mission), and **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus).

INTRODUCE: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 91.

ASK: What are some things you encounter that lead to doubt and skepticism? (p. 91)

EXPLAIN: Suggest that doubt and skepticism may be very natural and even necessary responses when we are confronted with new ideas or decisions. Note that, even as believers, we might experience times when we are tempted to doubt Jesus in one way or another.

SHARE: Point out **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus's Mission) and remind the group of why Jesus came to earth. Explain that while He fulfilled His role perfectly, even those who knew Him best had questions about Him. Share that today's session examines the doubts of one of these people and how Jesus responded in love and truth.

TRANSITION: By examining what Matthew had to say about Jesus and His response to skepticism and doubt, we can learn how to

respond to our own doubts—and the doubts of those around us.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Guide the group to read **Matthew 11:1-6** silently and to reflect on why John and his disciples might have had doubts about Jesus.

CONTEXT: Allow adults to share their thoughts about John's doubt. Note that John's ministry had diminished. Share that he had been arrested and imprisoned for taking a stand against Herod.

SAY: For some reason, John felt the need to question Jesus. He may have been seeking some measure of reassurance in prison. He also may have reflected the first-century understanding that the Messiah would drive out Rome and reestablish David's kingdom. He might have wondered why Jesus hadn't set him free. Regardless of the reasons, it's a good reminder that even Jesus's most loyal followers can have doubts at times.

DISCUSS: Refer the group to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus's Mission). Allow adults to share how this description of Jesus's mission aligns with His own description in verses 4-5. Point out that while John's ministry was waning, Jesus was upending religious

tradition and His disciples were beginning to replicate His work.

ASK: How would John have understood Jesus's reply in verses 4-5 based on his knowledge of the Old Testament? (p. 93)

RECAP: To supplement the conversation, summarize the following information:

- **(11:4-6)** Jesus did not answer John's question directly. Rather, He challenged John's followers to look and listen for evidence of the Christ's activities. Jesus listed six diseases or conditions from which John's followers could draw material for their report to John. Most appear in Isaiah's discussion of the Messiah's work (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1). The blind regain their sight (Isa. 35:5; 42:7; Matt. 9:27-31). The lame walk (Isa. 35:6; Matt. 8:5-13). Those with leprosy are cleansed (Matt. 8:1-4). The deaf hear (Isa. 35:5; Mark 7:31-35). The dead are raised (Isa. 26:19; Matt. 9:18,23-25). The poor are told the good news (Isa. 61:1; Matt. 9:35).

ASK: How should we respond to our honest doubts or questions about Jesus? (p. 93)

TRANSITION: *It is one thing to have doubts. The key is knowing how to respond to those doubts. Jesus's response encourages us to bring our questions to Him and to ground ourselves in His words and actions.*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 11:16-19 as adults compare Jesus's ministry and John the Baptist's ministry.

ASK: What primary complaints did people have about John and Jesus? Why? (p. 93)

EXPLAIN: Summarize this content for more context:

- **(11:16-19)** Jesus most likely was referring to two popular games that children played, weddings and funerals. The "flute" was typically used at weddings, while a "lament" was sung at funerals. Inevitably there would be a child or two who refused to play. With this comparison, Jesus set up the hearers for the condemnation He was about to bring. John and Jesus lived contrasting lifestyles, yet neither was acceptable to those who were skeptical of both men. They resented John's austerity and call for repentance, and Jesus wasn't strict enough in following the traditions of Judaism.

ASK: How do people's preconceived notions about God cause them to miss what He is doing? (p. 93)

TRANSITION: *In God's design, John's asceticism and Jesus's liberty were both appropriate. Each followed the purpose God had for them. Believers have to be careful to avoid the trap of cynicism, thinking that "one size fits all" when living out our faith.*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 11:20-24 as adults consider the emotions they think Jesus felt.

CONTEXT: Point to **Pack Item 1** (Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee). Note Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum are on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Point out that Jesus was calling out cities where residents had seen Him work miracles. Affirm that this privilege came with great responsibility to

demonstrate faith, a responsibility that many residents failed to embrace.

RECAP: To highlight unbelief in these cities, share the following information:

- **(11:20-24)** *The severity of the sins of Chorazin and Bethsaida was demonstrated by a comparison with Tyre and Sidon—two cities known for their sinful ways. Tyre and Sidon had a reputation for an opulent lifestyle that resulted in judgment from God (Isa. 23; Ezek. 26–28). Capernaum was compared with the city of Sodom, which was proverbial along with Gomorrah for its wickedness and God’s judgment of the city (Gen. 18:20; Matt. 10:15; Luke 10:12; Rom. 9:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7).*

ASK: Jesus pronounced a warning to the cities that had the greater opportunities to witness His miracles. How does this warning apply to you? (p. 93)

CHALLENGE: Emphasize that these verses warn us to take seriously the fact that all people will bear responsibility for how they respond to Jesus. Encourage adults to consider if their understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done for them needs an adjustment.

CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Review these application points from this week’s passage:

- We may experience honest doubts, but confessing our doubts to God is a step toward genuine faith.

- We are to be sensitive to the fact that God sometimes works in ways that contradict our expectations.
- Take seriously the fact that all people will bear responsibility for how they respond to Jesus.

REFLECT: Encourage the group to think about which of the following represents the greatest challenge for them: doubts about Jesus, being sensitive to God’s work, or accepting the responsibilities of our walk with Jesus. Spend a few minutes discussing their responses and why they made those choices.

DISCUSS: Direct adults to the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 93 and to identify reasons believers might struggle with doubts about Jesus. After a few minutes, lead a brief discussion about their answers. Allow them to suggest ways they can support one another without condemnation of honest questions.

PRAY: Close the session in prayer, asking God to give adults the courage to face their doubts and to seek ways to demonstrate their faith in genuine ways this week.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group and assure them that you are praying for any struggles they may be having. Invite them to send you a personal message describing their struggles if appropriate. Encourage them to read and reflect on the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 97. Affirm that you are willing to help them connect with a mentor who can walk with them.

Rejecting Legalism

Session 11 • Matthew 12:1-14



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *Jesus's Mission*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: *Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) and **Pack Item 14** (Handout: *Legalism Worksheet*).

INTRODUCE: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 99.

ASK: What situation can you think of where laws and regulations were administered when mercy might have been a better approach? (p. 99)

SAY: *We have laws to protect us and to keep our society secure. Parents make rules for the benefit of everyone living in the house. Teachers establish rules in classrooms so students can learn without distractions. But, in every setting, we need to leave room for mercy and grace—not just the letter of the law.*

EXAMINE: Explain that only focusing on the letter of the law without accounting for grace and mercy is called “legalism.” Note that legalism is not just a social challenge but a spiritual one. Summarize the following information to provide more insight into hypocrisy and legalism:

- Legalism and license stand at opposite poles of the same problem: hypocrisy. Legalism requires strict adherence to the letter of the law and traditions. License uses opposition to legalism as an excuse for self-indulgence. Both reveal hypocrisy: the first because breaking one law means breaking them all and the second because people want the freedom to sin without consequence. Hypocrisy involves both being something you're not and demanding of others what you excuse in yourself (Matt. 23:1-4). Jesus condemned the Pharisees for a hypocrisy that held others accountable to the law while ignoring their own responsibilities to God.

TRANSITION: *In this session, we'll examine how Jesus responded to hypocrisy in the form of legalism and discover why we must be aware of the dangers it presents in our lives.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Call on a volunteer to read **Matthew 12:1-2** as the group considers why the Pharisees saw a violation of the law.

CONTEXT: Encourage one or two volunteers to share what they know about the Sabbath in Scripture. Summarize the following information to offer more explanation:

- **(12:1-2)** Sabbath rest was a centerpiece in Judaism. But over time, religious leaders moved away from God's intention for the Sabbath. Mosaic law forbade harvesting or reaping on the Sabbath (Ex. 34:21), but rabbinical traditions listed another thirty-nine prohibitions that served as a "hedge of protection." These man-made religious rules were not part of God's commands. Although the disciples only plucked a little grain by hand, the Pharisees viewed this as a kind of harvesting and, as such, was contrary to their understanding of the law

EXPLAIN: Point out that, according to the law, the disciples were permitted to pick some grain in the fields and eat it. Emphasize that the Pharisees' problem was rooted in their own interpretations and tradition, not anything God actually intended for the law.

ASK: What role should religious tradition play in the practice of our faith? (p. 101)

DISCUSS: Direct adults to suggest important traditions believers still observe today and record their ideas on the board. Lead a brief discussion on the origins of those traditions. Note that traditions that don't come directly from Scripture aren't necessarily bad.

SAY: *We just have to be careful about letting our human traditions take priority over what God has clearly revealed in His Word. And we have to make sure that we don't use our own standards to judge the righteousness or sinfulness of others.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 12:3-8 aloud while adults determine how Jesus countered the Pharisees' criticisms.

ASK: What can we learn from Jesus's response? (p. 101) Point out that Jesus's opponents had spent their lives studying the Scriptures, but Jesus used the Scriptures they knew so well to prove they were wrong. Note the importance of a solid understanding of the Bible.

RECAP: Summarize the content in Day 2 of **Daily Exploration** (p. 103) to explain Jesus's illustrations in verses 3-5. Share the following information to highlight Jesus's statement in verse 6:

- **(12:6)** *If Sabbath rules could be set aside for temple service, then it makes sense that Sabbath rules could be set aside in the presence of something greater than the temple. The word "something" referred to the Person of Jesus and the nature of His mission. If priests were exempt from obeying Sabbath rules because of temple service, then the disciples who serve the One greater than the temple were guiltless as well. If the Pharisees could have seen Jesus for who He is, they would have seen the error of their ways.*

ASK: What do these verses teach us about Jesus and His expectations of His followers? (p. 101)

TRANSITION: Remind adults that God calls His people to respond with mercy and love, not judgment and criticism.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 12:9-14 aloud while the group listens for indications that the Pharisees had shifted from being spectating critics to active opponents.

EXAMINE: Allow volunteers to share things that stuck out to them from the verses. Supplement the discussion with the following:

- **(12:9-10)** *The Pharisees who confronted Jesus in the fields were probably leaders in this synagogue. Note that some scholars believe they used the man as a “set up” in order to accuse Jesus of breaking the Mosaic law. Mark and Luke pointed out that the Pharisees were watching Jesus closely (Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7). The word “accuse” means to charge, condemn, or critically judge. In fact, the English word “categorize” comes from the Greek word for accuse. The Pharisees wanted to “categorize” Jesus as a lawbreaker.*

ASK: How might the authority of Jesus be perceived as a threat? (p. 101)

RECAP: Note that Jesus turned the tables on the religious leaders. The Pharisees wanted to put Jesus into a theological corner but found themselves trapped instead. Jesus further revealed their hypocrisy by emphasizing that “a person is worth far more than a sheep.” So, if it was acceptable to rescue their animal, God would not be offended by helping another human being.



The Synagogue

The synagogue played a central role in the lives of first-century Jews. Scan here to view a reconstruction of a typical synagogue.

EXPLAIN: Point out that instead of accepting the truth, the Pharisees rejected Jesus's message. Note the irony of condemning Jesus for doing good on the Sabbath, yet plotting evil against Him on the same day. Affirm that legalism and hypocrisy can lead to devastating and dehumanizing attitudes and actions.

CHALLENGE

REFLECT: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Legalism Worksheet*). Allow adults to work in teams of three or four to reflect on how legalism shows up in our world and how the Bible responds to those efforts. Allow each team to report on their work. Remind adults that legalism is rooted in hypocrisy and inevitably erodes our compassion for others.

DISCUSS: Direct attention to the **Apply the Text** questions on page 101. Encourage adults to be sensitive to the needs of others and to seek opportunities to show mercy instead of criticism.

PRAY: Urge adults to continue praying these verses back to God during the week using the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide**. Close the session in prayer.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group a text or an email. Encourage them to read and reflect on the **Apply the Text** question from page 105 as they seek God's help in rooting out their own legalistic and hypocritical tendencies. Assure them that you are praying for them as they work through these issues in their lives.



Judgment Coming

Session 12 • Matthew 13:24-30,36-43



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) and **Pack Item 7** (*Poster: Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13*).

READ: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 109.

ASK: What are some other divides you find yourself confronted with daily? (p. 109)

Discuss responses. Point out that some divisions are harmless, like pulling for a sports team or choosing a flavor of ice cream. Note that the impact of other choices is much more serious.

REVIEW: Share that today's session focuses on our most important choice: accepting or rejecting Jesus. Remind adults that Jesus had confronted religious leaders in Matthew 12, and they were ready to kill Him. Note that in Matthew 13, Jesus used parables to further highlight this division.

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 7** (*Poster: Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13*) and briefly review each parable. Share this content from **Understand the Context** (p. 109):

- "The Greek word translated 'parable' means 'to lay or place something

alongside of.' A parable lays something alongside something else for comparison or contrast. . . . Matthew 13 contains eight parables that relate truths concerning the kingdom of God. In several of them we find an explanation of the growing divide between those who follow Jesus and those who resist Him."

TRANSITION: As we work through these parables, reflect on your walk with Jesus. If you've been putting off a relationship with Him, today is the perfect day to cross the divide. If you are standing with Christ, consider how you can become a more effective "kingdom citizen" and point others to Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*). Point out that initially Jesus was sitting by the sea (Matt. 13:1). Point out Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and suggest that this area could have been the setting for Matthew 13.

READ: Guide the group to listen as you read Matthew 13:24-30 aloud. Encourage them to jot down key points and characters in the margin of their DDG.

DISCUSS: Direct attention to **Pack Item 7** (Poster: Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13). Highlight “The Wheat and the Weeds.” Encourage adults to summarize the plot of the parable. Discuss what each element might represent. Enlist a volunteer to read the **Did You Know?** feature (p. 111). Talk about why one group might have sown weeds in the fields of someone else. Highlight the distinction between believers (wheat) and unbelievers (weeds).

ASK: Is it always possible to distinguish sincere believers from insincere believers? How? (p. 101)

RECAP: To dig deeper into the parable, share the following information:

- **(13:25)** *The Greek word translated “weeds” could refer to several weeds, though it is generally assumed that the weed in question was called “darnel.” This weed was poisonous and carried a fungus that could attack wheat. Early in its maturation it is difficult to tell the difference between darnel and wheat. In the same way, godly and ungodly people populate the same community. While they may outwardly look similar, eventually each will manifest their true nature.*

STATE: *While the landowner directed his servants to wait until the harvest to pull anything up, he had definite plans for each kind of plant in his field. Eventually, the weeds would be tied up and burned, while the genuine wheat would be protected and used for his benefit. Likewise, those who reject Christ can expect punishment from Him, while true believers will enter God’s presence.*

The important thing is not how we look, but how we respond to God.

READ: Lead the group to listen as you read **Matthew 13:36-39** aloud and to identify the symbols in the parable.

DISCUSS: Remind adults what each element in the parable symbolizes. Allow volunteers to share why it is important to understand these symbols. Affirm that the disciples recognized this as they heard Jesus teach, so they came to Him later looking for answers to their spiritual questions.

ASK: Why would Satan want to sow “weeds” in the world? (p. 111)

EXPLAIN: Instruct a volunteer to read John 10:10 aloud. Point out that while Satan is a defeated enemy, he is still powerful, and his main goal is to create chaos and disorder in the world. Remind adults that God created everything “good” in Genesis 1, and Satan has been working to corrupt that goodness ever since.

RECAP: Direct attention to the “harvest” at the end of time. Use the following content to highlight how the wheat and weeds will be separated:

- **(13:39)** Jesus promised a harvest at “the end of the age.” This refers to Christ’s return and the final judgment of the world. Looking forward to the end times does not minimize the immediate judgment that occurs at death, but it does remind us that judgment awaits everyone at some point. Jesus identified “the harvesters” as angels who participate in the gathering.

ASK: What is the church's responsibility regarding the "weeds" sown by the devil? (p. 111)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read

Matthew 13:40-43 as adults consider additional images or phrases that capture their attention.

DISCUSS: Allow adults to share what resonates with them. Highlight the word picture created by the burning weeds and discuss the implications for both believers and unbelievers. Highlight Matthew 13:40 as the session's memory verse and repeat it aloud together.

RECAP: Point out the human response to separation from God for eternity. Share this content from Day 5 of **Daily Exploration** (p. 115) to emphasize the reality of hell and its terrors:

- *"Scripture pictures hell as 'the unquenchable fire' (Mark 9:43). It will also be an 'eternal punishment' (Matt. 25:46). The anguish of this never-ending place of torment and punishment is seen in the reaction of those thrown into the blazing furnace: 'there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' This is a vivid picture of anguish and despair."*

ASK: Does knowing there will be a final judgment with eternal consequences bring you comfort or concern? (p. 111)

SHARE: Briefly walk through the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover. Point out that each session during this quarter has highlighted Jesus as Messiah and Savior.

Challenge adults who have not accepted His offer of salvation to talk with you or another trusted leader about becoming a Christ follower and avoiding the coming judgment.

CHALLENGE

DISCUSS: On the board, list the images Jesus used in the parable (*wheat, weeds, enemy, landowner, harvest, and so forth*). Allow adults to explain what each image symbolizes and why that image is important. Direct attention to the summary statement for this session: *Faith in Jesus determines our eternal destiny*. Encourage the group to discuss the statement and share what God might be saying to them through that truth.

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion of the **Apply the Text** questions on page 111.

PRAY: Close the session in prayer, asking God to help each adult move deeper in their relationship with Him, including those who may be reaching out to Him for the first time. Pray that the group will have discernment as they act as wheat and seek to minister to weeds before Jesus comes back.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send a text or email to the group, encouraging them to read and reflect on the **Apply the Text** question on page 115. Share that the group will be starting a series of studies on the second half of Matthew's Gospel (chaps. 14–28) during the next session.

VISUAL IDEAS

These items are available in the *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack* (see goExploreTheBible.com) or you can use these descriptions to create your own.

Pack Item 1

Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee
Sessions 1-12

Locate a map that highlights the region of Galilee in the first century, including key places where Jesus traveled and ministered in Matthew 1-13.

Pack Item 2

Poster: Outline of Matthew 1-13
Sessions 1-12

Refer to page 9 of the DDG to create a poster that outlines Matthew 1-13.

Pack Item 3

Poster: Jesus's Mission
Sessions 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11

Create a poster that describes Jesus's work and mission using "God the Son," Article II.B. from the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000).

Pack Item 4

Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19
Session 2

Create a poster with the text of Matthew 4:18b-19.

Pack Item 5

Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 9:12
Session 8

Create a poster with the text of Matthew 9:12.

Pack Item 6

Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus
Sessions 10-12

Use a Bible dictionary or other resource, to create a poster that identifies the prophecies Jesus fulfilled in Matthew's Gospel. Include the event, the Old Testament prophetic reference, and the New Testament fulfillment reference.



Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus

One evidence that Jesus is the Messiah is the way He fulfilled messianic prophecies from the Old Testament. Below is a list of several prophecies Jesus fulfilled in Matthew 5-13. Jesus pointed to fulfilled prophecy to assure a struggling John the Baptist that He really is the Christ (Matt. 11:3-6).

EVENT IN JESUS'S LIFE	OLD-TESTAMENT REFERENCE	FULFILLMENT IN MATTHEW
Virgin birth	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23, 23:23
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 24:6
Refugee years in Egypt	Hosea 11:3	Matthew 23:15
Baptized in Nazareth	Isaiah 11:1	Matthew 2:23
Preaching in Galilee	Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:23-25
Healing ministry	Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:16-17
Avoiding unexamined attitudes	Isaiah 42:1-4	Matthew 12:16-21
Teaching in parables	Psalms 78:2	Matthew 13:34-35

LEADER PACK SAMPLE POSTER

Pack Item 7

Poster: Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13
Session 12

Use a Bible dictionary or other resource, to create a poster that explains Jesus's parables in Matthew 13. Note the name of the parable, the references, and the truth Jesus was teaching for each story.



Pack Item 8

Handout: Matthew Time Line **Sessions 1-12**

Use a study Bible to create a time line of the major people and events related to Matthew's Gospel. Include both biblical and non-biblical historical references for context.

Pack Item 9

Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel **Sessions 1-12**

Create a handout to help adults pray through key Scriptures in Matthew's Gospel. Focus on the following questions: *What does this passage teach me about God and His character? How should I respond to what He is showing me about Himself?*

Pack Item 10

Handout: Messianic Prophecies **Session 3**

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a handout that highlights the messianic prophecies fulfilled in the birth narratives of Matthew 1-2 and Luke 2-3.

Pack Item 11

Handout: The Sermon on the Mount **Sessions 4-6**

Use a commentary, Bible handbook, or other source to create a handout that describes the divisions and key points of Jesus's sermon in Matthew 5-7.

Pack Item 12

Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8-9 **Sessions 7-8**

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a chart that highlights the miracles Jesus performed in Matthew 8-9. Note the miracle and its reference.

Pack Item 13

Handout: The Disciples in History **Session 9**

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a handout that provides biographical information on Jesus's twelve disciples, including their ministry after Jesus returned to heaven.

Pack Item 14

Handout: Legalism Worksheet **Session 11**

Create a two-column chart for an application activity. Label one column "How People Try to Earn Salvation" and the other column "The Biblical Response to those Actions." Challenge adults to list ways people rely on good works, along with biblical truths that refute those efforts.

COMING NEXT QUARTER



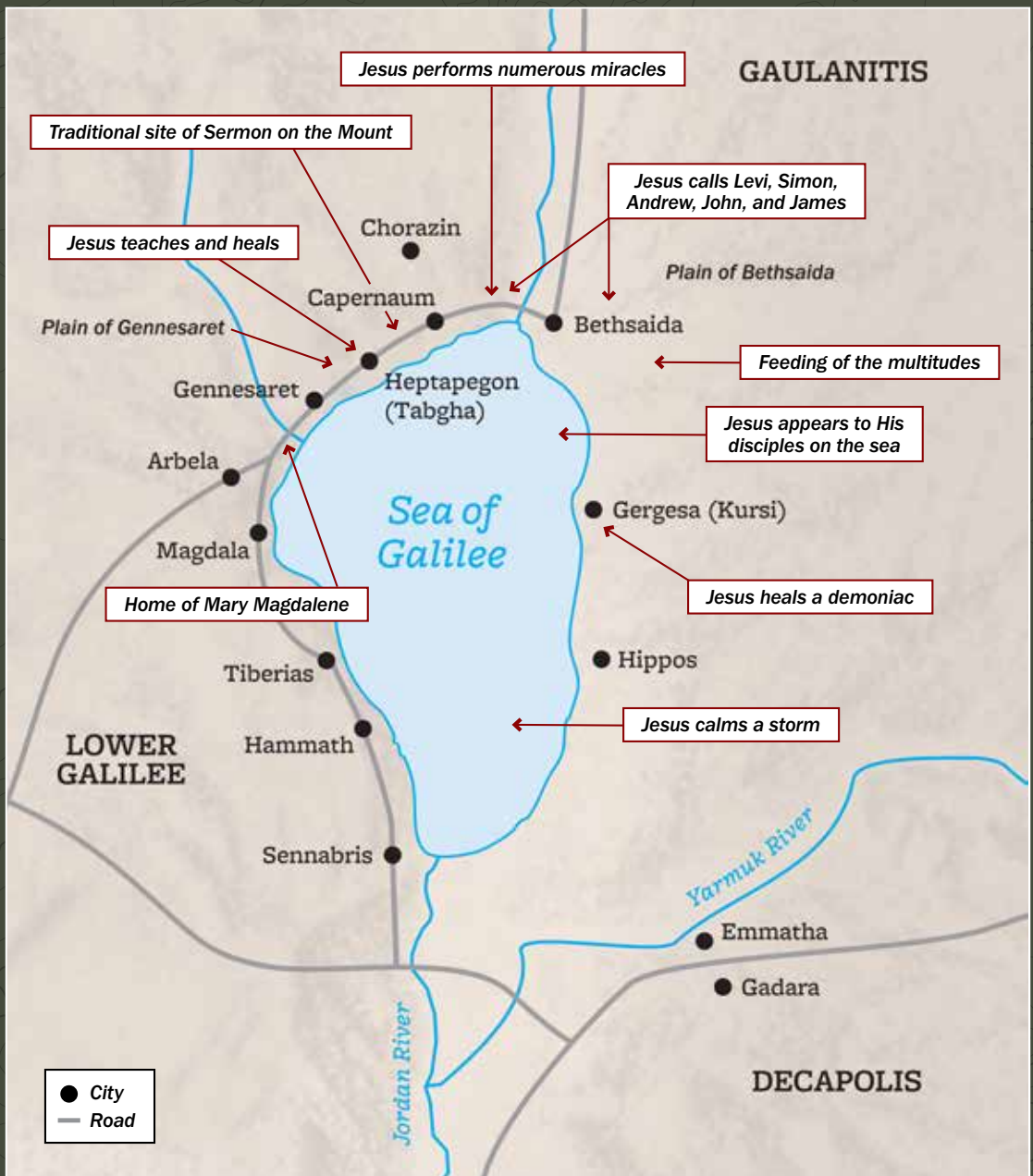
Matthew 14–28

- Session 1: **Courage** (Matthew 14:22-33)
-
- Session 2: **Real Devotion** (Matthew 15:1-11,16-20)
-
- Session 3: **Following Jesus** (Matthew 16:13-26)
-
- Session 4: **Glory** (Matthew 17:1-13)
-
- Session 5: **Forgiveness** (Matthew 18:21-35)
-
- Session 6: **Our Task** (Matthew 28:1-10,16-20)
-
- Session 7: **Eternal Life** (Matthew 19:16-30)
-
- Session 8: **Grace** (Matthew 20:1-16)
-
- Session 9: **Authority** (Matthew 21:23-32)
-
- Session 10: **Honor** (Matthew 22:15-22,34-40)
-
- Session 11: **Alert** (Matthew 24:36-51)
-
- Session 12: **Active Faith** (Matthew 25:31-46)
-
- Session 13: **Our Atonement** (Matthew 26:17-30)
-
- Session 14: **Our Savior** (Matthew 27:27-31,45-54)
-

Explore

“You will seek me and find me when you search for me
with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

JESUS'S MINISTRY AROUND GALILEE



"Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee" is taken from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1998), p. 221. Used with permission.

MATTHEW 1-13

When high school and college students are interested in a certain career path, they often shadow an expert in that field for a day or two. It gives them a better feel for the job's requirements and a clearer understanding of what will be expected. They learn what to do by watching the example of one who's walked that path already. For Christ followers, we have no greater example than what we see in the life of Jesus. By listening to His words and watching His actions, we learn the do's and don'ts of living out our faith. As you study Matthew 1–13, you'll get a firsthand account of what it's like to walk with Jesus each day—and learn what it means to become a citizen of God's kingdom.

Lifeway adults

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RELIGION/Biblical Studies/Bible Study Guides



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