



EXPLORE **THE BIBLE**®

*Adults*

*Matthew 1-13*

Personal Study Guide (KJV)

Winter 2025-26



# THE POWER OF ONE

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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. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- **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.

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\*Evangelistic Emphasis

# MEET THE WRITER



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# FROM THE TEAM LEADER



“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. “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall 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,

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*Explore*

**Discover**



# WORD WISE



Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

**Bethsaida** [beth-SAY ih duh]—means “house of fish”; town on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee; hometown of Philip, Andrew, and Peter (John 1:44); one of the cities Jesus censured because of the unbelief of its inhabitants (Matt. 11:21)

**Capernaum** [kuh PUHR nay uhm]—Jesus’s base of operations (Matt. 9:1); home of Andrew, Peter, James, and John; economic center of Galilee

**Chorazin** [koh RAY zin]—a city located in Galilee; one of the cities Jesus censured because of the unbelief of its inhabitants (Matt. 11:21)

**Decapolis** [dih KAP oh liss]—place name meaning “ten cities”; mentioned only in Matthew and Mark in the Bible (Matt. 4:25; Mark 5:20; 7:31)

**Galilee** [GAL ih lee]—small region in the northern part of Israel where Jesus did much of His ministry (Matt. 3:13; 4:18,23,25)

**Hades** [HAY deez]—the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term “Sheol”; refers to the place of the dead

**Judaea** [joo DEE uh]—the area including Jerusalem and the territory immediately surrounding it; formerly called Judah in the Old Testament, was given the name Judea following the Babylonian exile

**Nephthalim** [NEF thuh lim]—region north of the Sea of Galilee; named after one of the twelve sons of Jacob (Gen. 30:3-8; Matt. 4:13)

**Nazareth** [NAZ uh reth]—Jesus’s hometown (Matt. 2:23); located in Galilee about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea

**Sidon** [SIGH duhn]—ancient city on the Phoenician coast; often associated with Tyre (Matt. 11:21-22)

**Sodom** [SAHD uhm]—a city renowned for its wickedness during the time of Abraham (Gen. 18:20)

**Syria** [SIHR ih uh]—ancient region located north of Israel; played an important role in the early spread of the gospel; Damascus (Acts 9:1-9) and Antioch (Acts 11:26; 13:1-3) were located in Syria

**Tyre** [TIGHR]—ancient city on the Phoenician coast; often associated with Sidon (Matt. 11:21-22)

**Zabulon** [ZAB yoo lahn]—name of Jacob’s tenth son (Gen. 30:20), the tribe named for him, and the area they settled west of the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 4:13)

# 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

# BIBLICAL BACKGROUND



“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the 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 climactic 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.

# OUTLINE



## 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)**



# Affirmation

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

## MATTHEW 3:13–4:11

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

## MATTHEW 3:1-4:11

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, “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare 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.



**Read Matthew 3:1–4:11 in your Bible. Highlight all the affirmations of Jesus’s identity. What do John the Baptist, the Father, the Spirit, and the angels reveal about Jesus?**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## OBEYING GOD (MATT. 3:13-17)

<sup>13</sup> Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. <sup>14</sup> But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? <sup>15</sup> And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. <sup>16</sup> And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: <sup>17</sup> And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

### VERSE 13

With remarkable understatement, Matthew introduced the Messiah with a simple statement: ***Then cometh Jesus from •Galilee.*** Jesus came purposefully to the Jordan River from Nazareth (Mark 1:9) to be baptized by John. This was the inaugural event in the ministry of the Messiah. 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 (Matt. 3:2). This repentance was demonstrated through the act of baptism. Because of the nature of John's baptism, he was surprised when Jesus came to be baptized by him. Most likely, John knew of the divine identity of Jesus. No doubt, John's parents, Elisabeth and Zacharias, had shared with him the events surrounding the birth of Jesus (see Luke 1:39-45).

### VERSES 14-15

At first, John resisted the request from Jesus. No, ***I have need to be baptized of thee.*** This was an admission by John of his own sinfulness. Jesus, seemingly ignoring John's request, stated that His own baptism by John was necessary ***to fulfil all righteousness.*** This statement is filled with much meaning. First, Jesus, fully God and fully man, was baptized in order to identify with the sinfulness of humanity. Jesus, who would be the sacrifice for sin, identified with sinners by being baptized as they were. Second, Jesus was identifying Himself with the ministry of John, the forerunner of the

Messiah, thus linking their ministries together. Third, Jesus's baptism demonstrated His commitment to fulfill the mission for which He came into the world. Therefore, it was an act of obedience to the Father and gives to us an example of obedience.

### **VERSES 16-17**

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, “they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him,” then “they were come 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.



### **What is the purpose of baptism in a believer's life?**



#### **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.)

## HEARING GOD (MATT. 4:1-4)

<sup>1</sup> Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. <sup>2</sup> And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. <sup>3</sup> And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. <sup>4</sup> But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

### VERSE 1

Following His baptism, Jesus was *led up of the Spirit* into a harsh **wilderness** environment. Scholars point to the Wilderness of Judea, a desolate area between the Dead Sea and Jerusalem, as a possible location for this incident.

Why would the Spirit lead Jesus into a situation where He would be tempted by *the devil*? At the outset of His ministry, Jesus faced the issue of what kind of Messiah He would be. Popular opinion believed the Messiah would be a national leader, freeing the Jewish people 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. This test came at the hands of the devil.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Names and titles for the devil in the New Testament include devil (Matt. 4:1), tempter (Matt. 4:3), the wicked one (Matt. 13:19), Satan (Matt. 4:10), Beelzebub (Mark 3:22), the father of lies (John 8:44), murderer (John 8:44), Belial (2 Cor. 6:15), prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), adversary (1 Pet. 5:8), roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), serpent (Rev. 12:9), and accuser (Rev. 12:10).

### VERSES 2-3

During this period of temptation, Jesus fasted and prayed as He focused on doing God's will. After *forty days and forty nights*, Matthew made the simple declaration, *he was afterward an hungred*. The fact that Jesus was hungry shows that He was human as well as divine.

Hunger often leads to physical, mental, and spiritual weakness. It was at this moment, when Jesus perhaps was most vulnerable,

that the devil sought to sidetrack God's plan of redemption. What form Satan took we do not know. Regardless, this was a real confrontation with a real enemy.

The devil's words, ***If thou be the Son of God***, are best translated, "Since you are God." Satan 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. Breaking His fast in this manner would have been an act of disobedience.

#### **VERSE 4**

Jesus responded to Satan's attack by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. In essence, Jesus 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 a declaration of commitment to God's plan. Jesus would not be lured from His allegiance to God. He affirmed loyalty to God above physical satisfaction. 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?**

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#### **TRUSTING GOD (MATT. 4:5-7)**

**5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, 6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. 7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.**

#### **VERSES 5-6**

After failing to persuade Jesus to use His divine power for His own benefit, Satan brought Jesus to Jerusalem to the ***pinnacle of the temple***. This could refer to the portico of Solomon, a high flat roof area that overlooked the Kidron Valley, some 450 feet below.

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 the Word of God 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 into the valley below. “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!”

In the first temptation, Jesus refused to use His power to prove that He was the Son of God. Here, Satan was saying, “If you won’t use your own power, how about using your Father’s power to prove you are God’s Son.” Jumping from the height of 450 feet without being injured would be such a spectacular occurrence in the eyes of the hundreds of temple worshipers that they would immediately realize Jesus was the Messiah.

What is notable is that Satan misused Scripture, taking 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. For Jesus to misuse this verse and jump off the temple in a spectacular fashion would place Him outside of God’s will.

#### **VERSE 7**

Again, Jesus rejected the temptation of the devil to take an easy approach to His ministry. 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. Once more, Jesus resisted the onslaught of Satan by using God’s Word in proper context.



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

---

#### **WORSHIPING GOD (MATT. 4:8-11)**

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; <sup>9</sup> And saith unto him, All these things will I

give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.<sup>10</sup> Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.<sup>11</sup> Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

### VERSES 8-9

Satan approached Jesus for the third time with a new proposition. Satan dropped the premise, “If you are the Son of God.” Such a statement no longer fit with this next proposal. This would be a temptation directly to Jesus to abandon His allegiance to His heavenly Father.

The devil took Jesus to a tall mountain. From there, he showed Jesus ***all the kingdoms of the world***. These *kingdoms* represented all that Satan controlled—the governments, the economies, and world systems that God allows Satan to rule. Their ***glory*** 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 “prince 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.

### ***What Satan was offering Jesus was a shortcut that avoided the cross.***

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.

### VERSE 10

Jesus’s answer was simple: No! Again, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus told Satan to “Get lost. God alone is worthy of worship and service.” In His answer, Jesus pointed out that worship and service go together. What we worship, we also serve, whether it is God the Creator or materialism or other gods of this world.

Satan only has power by God’s permission. Therefore, at Jesus’s command to ***get thee hence***, Satan had no choice but to leave.

In this act of commanding Satan, Jesus exercised the authority and power that Satan had tried to seduce Him into using.

### VERSE 11

This would not be the last time for Satan to tempt Him. There would be more occasions of Satan trying to sidetrack Jesus's mission. Among those instances would be the rebuke of Peter (Matt. 16:21-23) and the agony of Gethsemane (26:36-46). 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 our worship of God alone? How can we overcome those challenges?**

► **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.

Temptations	Responses

# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers are called to demonstrate obedience through baptism by immersion.
- + We can rely on Scripture to find strength and resist temptation.
- + We can trust God's faithfulness without demanding miracles.
- + We must acknowledge God alone as worthy of our worship.



**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?**



**The psalmist said this: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (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.**



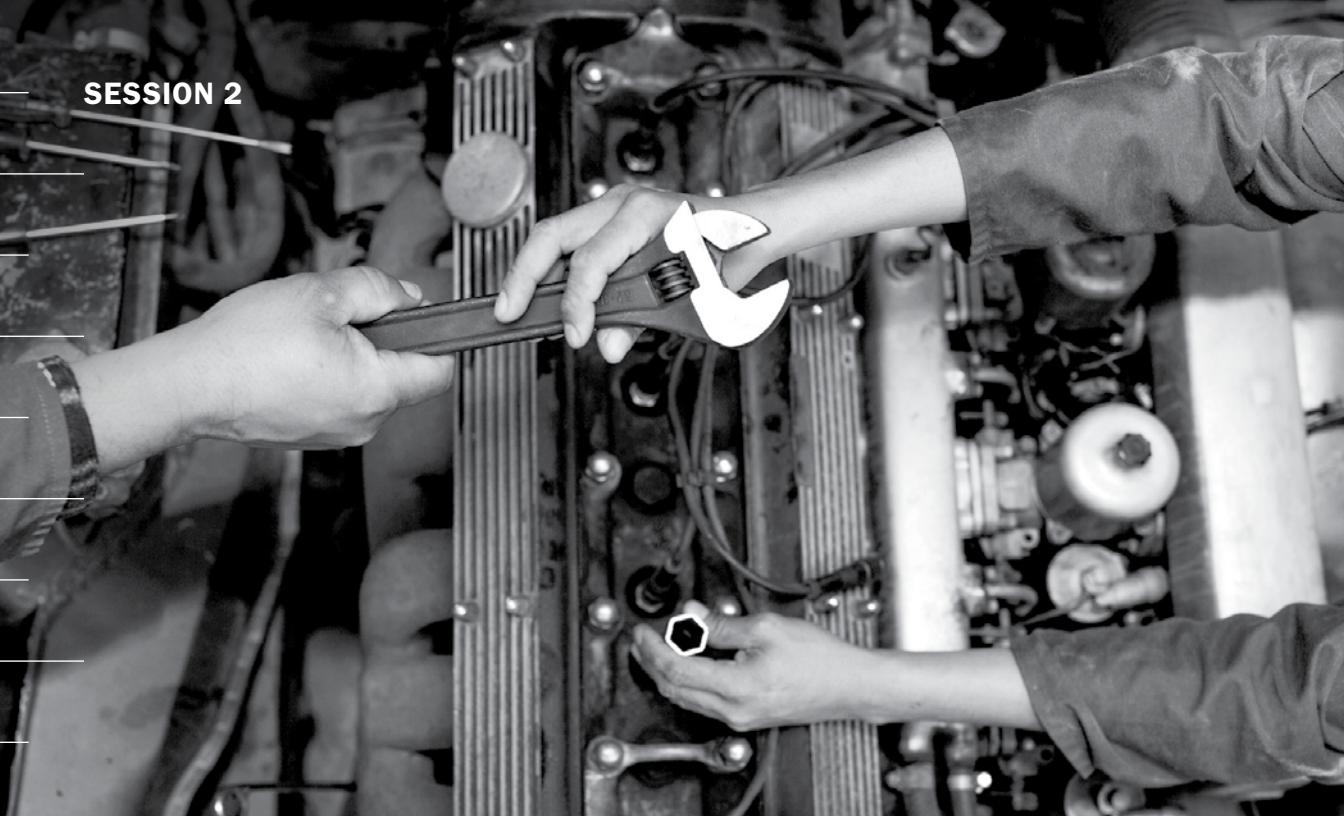
**Memorize Matthew 3:17.**

*Prayer Needs*



**Explore the Bible Prayer Guide**

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



# Invitation

JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM.

## MATTHEW 4:12-25

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

## MATTHEW 4:12-25

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.



**Read Matthew 4:12-25 in your Bible. In a couple of sentences, summarize everything Jesus did in these verses.**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## STARTING OUT (MATT. 4:12-17)

<sup>12</sup> Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; <sup>13</sup> And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: <sup>14</sup> That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, <sup>15</sup> The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; <sup>16</sup> The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. <sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

### VERSE 12

Following His baptism and temptation by Satan, Jesus **departed into Galilee** to begin His earthly ministry. John the Baptist had made enemies of religious leaders, especially the Pharisees and Sadducees, 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 Pharisees and other religious leaders. Instead, He desired to begin His ministry without any premature confrontation with these leaders.

### VERSES 13-16

Initially, Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth. Here, He was rejected, and the people attempted to kill Him (Luke 4:16-30). After that incident, He left •**Nazareth** and moved to •**Capernaum** [kuh PUHR nay uhm]. Unlike Nazareth, which was small, insignificant, and rural, Capernaum was an important city in the region. It was strategically located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee along important trade routes passing through the region. The name *Capernaum* means “village of Nahum,” and could refer to the Old Testament prophet Nahum. Nahum means “compassion,” and this may identify this city as the “village of compassion.”

Here, Jesus established His headquarters. The language of Matthew indicates Jesus moved permanently to this city. In Matthew 9:1, Capernaum is identified as “his own city.” Jesus would

perform a number of miracles here, such as healing the Roman centurion's servant (8:5-13), healing Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15), raising the synagogue official's daughter back to life (9:23-25), and healing an official's son (John 4:46-53).

Matthew interpreted this move of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, locating Capernaum in the region of •**Zabulon** [ZAB yoo lahn] and •**Nephthalim** [NEF thuh lim]. This quote is from Isaiah 9:1-2. Matthew sprinkled these prophecy fulfillment quotations throughout his Gospel to aid in proving Jesus was God's anticipated Messiah. Here, the prophecy concerns the ancient Israelite tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. These two tribes 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.

In the prophecy, Isaiah recognized that these two northern 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 a darkness of great oppression at the hands of the Romans. They also were under the darkness of their sinfulness. God's Messiah, Jesus, came as light shining into the darkness. He announced to those who followed Him, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

### VERSE 17

The phase **from that time Jesus began to . . .** parallels the same phrase in Matthew 16:21, "From that time forth began Jesus to . . . ." These two phrases apparently bracket this section in Matthew dealing with Jesus's teaching and healing ministry. As we have seen, Matthew chapters 1 through the first part of chapter 4 form an introduction to the ministry of Jesus. Matthew 16:21 and following focus on the cross and the growing conflict with His enemies.

To **preach** was to proclaim or to publicly make a message known. Jesus's message was a call to repentance. That is, He urged His listeners to change their hearts, thinking, and behavior. The reason for the need for repentance was that the **kingdom of heaven** had arrived in the presence of God's Messiah.



### CALLING OUT (MATT. 4:18-22)

<sup>18</sup> **And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.** <sup>19</sup> **And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.** <sup>20</sup> **And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.** <sup>21</sup> **And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.** <sup>22</sup> **And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.**

#### VERSE 18

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. If chosen, his primary role was that of a learner—learning the words and the ways of the rabbi with the goal in mind to teach others in the future.

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.

#### ***Jesus called His disciples to be disciple makers.***

The **sea of Galilee**—also called the sea of Tiberias (John 6:1) and the lake of 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 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).

### 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).

### VERSES 19-20

Jesus said to them, ***follow me.*** This imperative 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.

In the Gospels, the term *disciple* is used in two different ways. It often referred to the Twelve whom Jesus specifically picked to be with Him continually. Other times, the word referred to a larger group of people, men and woman, who were devoted followers of Jesus (see Luke 6:13). Another group that followed would have been the crowd—more curious about Jesus than committed to Him.

Unlike the disciples of the various rabbis in the region who were simply learners, Jesus called Peter and Andrew (and later James and John) to be ***fishers of men.*** Their calling as disciples was to gather other disciples to Jesus of Nazareth.

The word ***straightway*** (see also v. 22) 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.

### VERSES 21-22

***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 to follow Jesus in our culture?

## ***Being obedient to Jesus supersedes everything.***

### **REACHING OUT (MATT. 4:23-25)**

<sup>23</sup> And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. <sup>24</sup> And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. <sup>25</sup> And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.

#### **VERSE 23**

These verses summarize the Galilean ministry of Jesus in the first year after gathering His disciples. He traveled throughout the area of Galilee. As Jesus traveled, He carried out a three-fold ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing.

Jesus's **teaching** ministry took place in a variety of settings, including outdoor areas and **synagogues**. 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).

Synagogues emerged from the days of the exile in Babylon and became an essential part of Judaism. Here, children received biblical education and adults found opportunity for study

and worship. Synagogues also were centers for legal matters and social life of the members of the community.

**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 **gospel** is the good news 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 "might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:30-31). Jesus healed every form and kind of **sickness** and **disease**.

#### **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.)

#### **VERSE 24**

Jesus's miracles of healing and teaching soon became news that traveled widely. •**Syria** most likely is used in the broader sense of the Roman province that encompassed the region including Galilee.

As the news spread, people brought to Jesus those needing healing. Matthew said they were **taken with divers diseases and torments**. He elaborated by mentioning three examples of the conditions Jesus confronted. First were those **possessed with devils**. Second were those which were **lunatick**. Literally, this word means "to be moonstruck" 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 **those that had the palsy**, those with crippling handicaps, either from birth or injury. Jesus was able to heal all who came to Him without exception and without limit.

## VERSE 25

Jesus's miracles attracted **great multitudes**, 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 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 can believers follow Jesus's example of sharing the message of God's kingdom?

**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?

# APPLY THE TEXT

- + 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.



**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?**

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**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 that they reflect Jesus more?**

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**Memorize Matthew 4:19-20.**

*Prayer Needs*

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# Worship the King

JESUS THE SAVIOR IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP.

## MATTHEW 2:1-12

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

## MATTHEW 1:1-2:23

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.



**Read Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; and Jeremiah 31:15 in your Bible, then locate these quotations in Matthew 1-2. Why did Matthew quote Old Testament prophecies so many times in his Gospel?**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## SEEKING THE KING (MATT. 2:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

### VERSE 1

The New Testament contains two stories from Jesus's birth. Luke wrote about the birth of Jesus and events surrounding His birth. Matthew recorded an incident that happened within the first two years of Jesus's birth. Scholars have placed the birth of Jesus around 6 BC. This is based on the death of King Herod in 4 BC.

The visit of the *wise men from the east* took place sometime between 6-4 BC. In Matthew 2:16, we read that Herod ordered the execution of male children two years old and younger to safeguard his claim on the throne. This indicates that Jesus was approaching two years of age at the time of this visit.

Who were the *wise men from the east*? The Greek word is *magi*, and is a root for our English word “magic.” However, these men were not magicians nor sorcerers. They were astronomers and astrologers who played prominent political and religious roles in eastern countries, most notably Persia. They also were interpreters of dreams. The book of Daniel speaks of wise men (Dan. 5:11), and Daniel himself was the “chief” wise man in Babylon.

While tradition gives these men the title of “kings,” and even gives them names, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, this is speculative. Their names are unknown as well as the number of wise men. The number three has been assumed because of the number of gifts given to the Christ child. In reality, all we know is that a group of wise men came from the east to Jerusalem.

The region of Persia once was under the rule of the Babylonians. Recall that the Jewish people were 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. These men could very well have been God-fearers. Based on their studies and observation of signs in the sky, they made their way to Jerusalem, the chief city of the Jewish people and the seat of the Roman government in Judea.

## VERSE 2

The wise men were alerted to the Messiah's birth by seeing a ***star in the east***. This sighting of a new star was interpreted as the herald of the birth of someone significant in the region where the star appeared.

The concept that they “followed the star” is not completely accurate to Matthew’s text. The appearance of the star signaled to them a monumental event had occurred. 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 that is born King of the Jews?*** This speaks volumes. They were searching for the legitimate claimant to the throne by virtue of birth. That certainly wasn’t Herod. Herod was a usurper to the throne. He was Idumean and came to power though Roman appointment. He was a convert to Judaism out of convenience, not out of conviction.

*King of the Jews* was a phrase only used by non-Jews in Matthew’s narrative. It is found again in 27:11,29,37, each time from those who were not Jews. Jewish people would refer to this coming king with the language of “Son of David,” “King of Israel,” or “Messiah.”

## DID YOU KNOW?

Herod the Great ruled at the time of Jesus’s birth. Other Herods mentioned in the New Testament include: Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who killed John the Baptist and questioned Jesus at His trial (Matt. 14:1-11; Luke 23:6-12); Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, who executed James the apostle and put Peter in prison (Acts 12:1-5); and Herod Agrippa II, son of Agrippa I, before whom Paul was tried (Acts 25:23–26:32).

### VERSE 3

**Herod** ruled from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC. While he is known for many building projects, including an extensive renovation of the Jerusalem temple, he is better 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 deep panic, as well as ***all Jerusalem with him***. No doubt those who lived and worked around Herod were disturbed because of the anticipation of his murderous anger.

### In what ways is Jesus a King?

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#### 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.)

### FINDING THE KING (MATT. 2:4-8)

<sup>4</sup> And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. <sup>5</sup> And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, <sup>6</sup> And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. <sup>7</sup> Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

#### VERSE 4

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 *chief priests* would have included the high priest and the leading priests in charge of the twenty-four divisions of priests who ministered in the temple.

Originally, the *scribes* were those who painstakingly copied by hand the Old Testament Scriptures. Eventually, they evolved into a group who also studied and interpreted the Old Testament writings. They primarily were Pharisees and were considered authorities on the law of Moses.

#### VERSES 5-6

The religious leaders reported that the Messiah would be born in **Bethlehem of •Judaea**. The small town of Bethlehem lay five miles south of Jerusalem. It was located on the main road going from Jerusalem down to Egypt and was the ancestral home of King David. To verify this report, the religious leaders cited the announcement of the prophet Micah.

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: "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2b).

### ***The theme of the entire Bible is Jesus!***

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, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27). The theme of the entire Bible is Jesus!

Matthew also picked up wording from 2 Samuel 5:2, ***that shall rule*** (shepherd) ***my people Israel***. This phrase spoke of a familiar Old Testament concept and indicated the kind of ruler Jesus would

be—tenderhearted and kind. This phrase also linked Jesus to David's throne as the Shepherd of God's people.

### VERSES 7-8

In light of this revelation of the birthplace of this expected King, Herod hatched a terrible and murderous plot. To execute his plan, he quietly enlisted the help of the wise men, who unknowingly became his spies. Herod's desire to know ***what time the star appeared*** 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).

Herod continued his wicked chicanery with a false pretense of devotion. He certainly had no intentions of joining the wise men in worshiping the Christ child.

 **How can you help people come to know Jesus as their King?**

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### WORSHIPING THE KING (MATT. 2:9-12)

<sup>9</sup> When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. <sup>11</sup> And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

### VERSE 9

The wise men didn't realize Herod's evil plan. Later, they were warned of Herod's wickedness in a dream and did not return to Jerusalem as he had directed.

This is the first mention of ***the star*** actually moving. Any conjectures as to the identity of *the star*, such as a comet or conjunction of planets, are of little value. Nothing can be known for certain. Whatever the wise men saw was interpreted by them as a divine guidance.

## VERSE 10

The wise men *rejoiced with exceeding great joy*. The Greek text piles up superlatives here—“they gladly rejoiced exceedingly with abundant joy and delight.” 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.

## VERSE 11

The phrase *when they were come into the house* indicates that some time had passed since the manger scene portrayed in Luke 2. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were now staying in a house. Any portrayal of the wise men and the shepherds worshiping together on the night Jesus was born is a nice, sentimental portrayal but not accurate to the biblical account.

Once the wise men entered the house, they immediately knelt before the child and *worshipped him*. The word *worshipped* means to fall down or prostrate oneself before the one honored. This move showed that the wise men were true seekers after God. God had spoken to them through the star, and they responded to His call by worshiping the Messiah.



### Why is Jesus worthy of your worship?

As a part of their worship, they *opened their treasures* and presented luxurious gifts to the child. *Gold, and 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).

► **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.

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### VERSE 12

Dreams play an important role in Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus. In Matthew 1:20-25, Joseph received assurance from God in a dream concerning Mary’s pregnancy. In Matthew 2:13, Joseph was warned in a dream to flee with his family to Egypt. In verse 12, the wise men were ***warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod.*** While they did not perceive 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?**

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## APPLY THE TEXT

- ⊕ We can recognize Jesus as the one, true King.
- ⊕ We can know that Jesus is King because His birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.
- ⊕ We acknowledge Jesus as King through our worship.



**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?**



**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?**



## Memorize Matthew 2:11.

## *Prayer Needs*



## ► *True Righteousness* ◀

JESUS DEFINES WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN HIS KINGDOM.

### **MATTHEW 5:13-20,43-48**

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 5:1-48

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).



**Read through Matthew 5 in your Bible. Which of Jesus’s teachings about what it means follow Him presents the greatest challenge for you?**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## INFLUENCE YOUR CULTURE (MATT. 5:13-16)

<sup>13</sup> **Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.** <sup>14</sup> **Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.** <sup>15</sup> **Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.** <sup>16</sup> **Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.**

### VERSE 13

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.

**We cannot allow society to pollute and dilute our influence as followers of Jesus.**

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 have lost his savour.*** 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 ***cast out*** and ***trodden under foot of men.*** 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.

## VERSES 14-16

In John 8:12, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” Here, He told His followers: ***Ye are 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 ***bushel.*** 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.

### ***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 men.*** When disciples allow the light of Jesus to shine through, their ***good*** (attractive) ***works*** bring glory to God. To ***glorify*** 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 happens when believers serve as salt and light in the world?**

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#### **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.)

## OBEY YOUR FATHER (MATT. 5:17-20)

<sup>17</sup> Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. <sup>18</sup> For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

### VERSE 17

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. Jesus was accused of violating the law and teaching others to violate it. 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 destroy*** the law. Jesus, however, told His disciples that He hadn’t come to “set aside” the law. His was no movement to overthrow or destroy the ***law*** and ***prophets***. (These were two of the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures, which also included “Writings.”) Jesus was speaking of the entirety of the Old Testament. Instead, Jesus came for the purpose of bringing the law to its intended goal.

The law was God’s absolute basis for truth, morality, and determining right and wrong. It was the guide for living in a way that pleased God and met His just demands. Jesus didn’t teach anything contrary to those absolutes. They are applicable for all time. He came to ***fulfil*** the law—that is, to complete the purpose of the law. That purpose was to show people their sinfulness and need for a Savior.

### VERSE 18

Jesus continued with a strong affirmation: ***For verily I say unto you.*** Jesus spoke with full authority to declare God’s Word was permanent. ***Till heaven and earth pass***, God’s Word will remain authoritative.

Jesus emphasized this permanence by pointing to the smallest parts of the alphabet. Not even the smallest detail would be deleted or erased from God's law ***till all be fulfilled***. This no doubt included all the prophecies in Scripture and God's plan of redemption for a lost world.

### VERSE 19

Since Jesus did not come to diminish the law, His followers must not do that either. The word ***break*** spoke of annulling or setting aside the law as no longer applicable. Jesus gave a stern warning to anyone who would teach others to break God's commands.

Jesus spoke of those who are ***least*** and ***great in the kingdom of heaven***. Jesus was most likely speaking of honor from God in the coming kingdom. This is not the loss of salvation but the loss of blessings and rewards in heaven.

### VERSE 20

The ***scribes and Pharisees*** were considered the most righteous people imaginable. Jesus told His followers that entrance into ***the kingdom of heaven*** would require greater righteousness than that of these leaders. 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.



### How can followers of Jesus impact society?

## LOVE YOUR ENEMIES (MATT. 5:43-48)

<sup>43</sup> Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. <sup>44</sup> But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; <sup>45</sup> That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? <sup>47</sup> And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the

**publicans so? <sup>48</sup> Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**

#### **VERSE 43**

In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus pointed to six Old Testament commandments. The command to ***love thy neighbor*** is from Leviticus 19:18. The second part of Jesus's statement, ***hate thine 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.

#### **VERSES 44-45**

Jesus called His followers to a higher standard: ***Love your enemies, bless them that curse you.*** This likely was startling to His hearers. The culture and traditions of the day taught the opposite. In the Greek text, the pronoun *I* in the phrase ***I say unto you*** is emphatic to contrast God's law against the man-made teachings of the day.

The word ***love*** is the term *agape*. This 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 ***which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*** In doing so, the disciple would be putting the entire situation in God's hands, relying on Him.

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

#### **VERSES 46-47**

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—***publicans***. 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 **salute** 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.

#### VERSE 48

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 are some obstacles to loving our enemies?

**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)



# APPLY THE TEXT

- ✚ 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.



**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?**



**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.**

▶ **Memorize Matthew 5:20.**

*Prayer Needs*



# Treasure

JESUS CHANGES OUR PRIORITIES.

## MATTHEW 6:19-34

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, on the other hand, 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

## MATTHEW 6:1-34

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.



**Read through Matthew 6:1-34 in your Bible. Make a list of what Jesus said *don't* do, then list the things Jesus said *do*. Circle the actions that pose the greatest challenge for you.**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## POSSESSIONS (MATT. 6:19-24)

<sup>19</sup> Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: <sup>20</sup> But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. <sup>22</sup> The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. <sup>23</sup> But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! <sup>24</sup> No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

### VERSES 19-20

The Bible has much to say about money and possessions. 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 “covetous.” He didn’t want His followers to be like them. He told His disciples, ***lay not up for yourselves*** possessions. The term *lay up* is the verb form of the noun ***treasures*** and is the word from which we get our English word “thesaurus”—a “treasury” of synonyms. Literally, Jesus said, “Don’t treasure up treasures for yourselves.”

For the wealthy religious leaders of Jesus’s day, such treasures included precious metals, clothing, gems, land, wine, and olive oil. 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 through and steal***. Often valued possessions were buried in the ground to hide them. (See Matt. 13:44.) The term *break through* 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 ***lay up . . . treasures in heaven***. Material possessions cannot be carried beyond the grave

into the heavenly kingdom. 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.

### DID YOU KNOW?

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

### VERSES 21-23

Our hearts are impacted by what we *treasure*. Jesus emphasized that His followers needed to make sure their hearts were right. The condition of the heart impacts how possessions are handled.

Verse 22 summarizes the truth from verse 21. 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 *single* speaks of a clear, singular focus on one purpose alone. An *evil* eye causes the entire body to be darkened. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word *evil* sometimes is translated as "bad" 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.

***The disciple's attitude toward possessions and money impacts every aspect of life.***

### VERSE 24

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 we assess where our true devotion lies?

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### WORRY (MATT. 6:25-30)

<sup>25</sup> Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? <sup>26</sup> Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

<sup>27</sup> Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? <sup>28</sup> And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: <sup>29</sup> And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

### VERSE 25

The word **therefore** contrasts this section with verses 19-24. 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. The words **take no thought** is a key word in this section that is repeated six times. Worry is doubting God's faithfulness and ability or willingness to provide. Jesus told His followers to replace worry with trust in God.

## VERSES 26-30

Perhaps gazing out over the hillside, Jesus motioned to the *fowls* 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 could be counted on to provide.

Jesus wants His followers to know that they were created in God's image and were the pinnacle of God's creation. If God would take care of the birds, how much more would He do for His children who are ***much better*** or differ in value from the birds of the air.

### 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.)

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

The lesson from wildflowers continues with a comparison to the ***glory*** of Solomon's kingdom. First Kings 4:20-34 provides a description of Solomon's wealth and opulence. Jesus spoke of how Solomon ***arrayed*** himself. The word *arrayed* 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 kinds of things might you be tempted to worry about—and why?**

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**To worry is to show little faith in God.**

### **TRUST** (MATT. 6:31-34)

<sup>31</sup> **Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?**  
<sup>32</sup> **(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.**  
<sup>33</sup> **But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.** <sup>34</sup> **Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.**

#### **VERSES 31-32**

Followers of Jesus are to **take no thought** or get agitated 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 reminded His disciples that God **knoweth** our needs, and He is more than able to meet those needs (Phil. 4:19).

#### **VERSE 33**

This verse reaches the climax of Jesus’s teaching about material possessions. Here, Jesus commanded us to align our priorities with God’s kingdom. The result would be that God provides us with basic human necessities.

The phrase **seek ye first** speaks of priority. What should be the priorities of a follower of Christ? **Seek** is the same word used in verse 32 to picture the Gentiles seeking worldly goods. The word depicts a preoccupation—either with the things of this world or with the things of God.

Using a parallel thought to the **kingdom of God**, we are also to be preoccupied with **his righteousness**. This is the kind of life that pleases God. This kind of life comes with an assurance. Jesus said, ***all these things shall be added unto you***. In context, this refers to food, drink, and clothing. This refers to what we need, not to the things we want. Jesus was not giving His followers a carte blanche statement where God becomes a celestial vending machine.

#### VERSE 34

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. ***Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof***. This is a realistic look at life. Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). Believers are to live one day at a time in complete trust of their heavenly Father.



**What situation do you need to entrust to God today?**

**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?



# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should focus on heavenly treasures rather than worldly possessions.
- + Placing too much priority on material possessions leads to worry and anxiety.
- + Believers can trust God to provide what they need.



**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?**



**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?**

▶ **Memorize Matthew 6:33.**

*Prayer Needs*





## • *Authority Acknowledged* •

JESUS'S WORDS HAVE AUTHORITY.

### MATTHEW 7:15-29

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

## MATTHEW 7:1-29

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 "as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (v. 29).



**Read Matthew 7:15-29 in your Bible. Make a list of words that describe the lifestyle of followers of Christ and another list of words that describe the way of the self-righteous religious leaders.**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## FRUIT (MATT. 7:15-20)

<sup>15</sup> Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. <sup>16</sup> Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? <sup>17</sup> Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire <sup>20</sup> Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

### VERSES 15-20

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. The phrase “wolf in *sheep's clothing*” arises from this. Later, Jesus denounced the scribes and Pharisees, saying “woe unto you . . . hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matt. 23:25-26).

### DID YOU KNOW?

Wolves are used symbolically in the Bible to describe people who cause harm to others—they ravage and devour for personal gain (Gen. 49:27; Jer. 5:6; Ezek. 22:27; Zeph. 3:3; John 10:12; Acts 20:29).

These religious leaders could be discerned by *their fruits*. Though Jesus said we are not to judge (v. 1), He called His followers to be “fruit inspectors.” He illustrated this in terms of gathering *grapes of thorns* and *figs of thistles*. 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 bringeth forth good fruit* and *a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit*.

Later, Jesus said that “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19). The condition of the heart is evidenced by the lifestyle produced.

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 that a tree that doesn’t produce genuine fruit will be **hewn down** and destroyed by **fire**. This is the theme that was preached by John the Baptist: “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matt 3:10).

This section began with the command to “beware of false prophets” (v. 15). It ends by making the simple, yet profound statement, **by their fruits ye shall know them**. 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.



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

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## **OBEDIENCE** (MATT. 7:21-23)

**<sup>21</sup> Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? <sup>23</sup> And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.**

### **VERSES 21-23**

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 which is in heaven**. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (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.

### ***Religious activity can be a mask that disguises a heart far from God.***

Notice the repeated emphasis on doing these religious activities ***in thy 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.

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.

Verses 22 and 23 closely parallel Jesus's parable about the 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, "Lord, Lord." But they were denied entrance into the banquet. The words of the Master's rejection were simply: "I know you not" (25:12).

Here are those same words used for those who masqueraded as Christ followers. To these who cry out, ***Lord, Lord***, the reply will be ***I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*** 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?



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

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### 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.)

### WISDOM (MATT. 7:24-29)

**<sup>24</sup> Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: <sup>25</sup> And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. <sup>26</sup> And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: <sup>27</sup> And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. <sup>28</sup> And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: <sup>29</sup> For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.**

### VERSES 24-25

Jesus called His followers to build their lives on the strong foundation of His teaching. He illustrated this with a parable about houses, foundations, and storms. 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. The one who does this is ***wise***. Building your life on the teachings of Christ is the only sensible thing to do.

Jesus contrasted two groups who faced the same storm in life. Compare the description of the storm in verse 25—***the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat***

**upon 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. The storms of life reveal the foundation on which we are building our lives.

#### **VERSES 26-27**

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. Jesus called this group **foolish**.

Jesus continued to contrast two groups: those on the narrow path and those on the wide path (vv. 13-14), the good tree and the bad tree (vv. 17-18); the rock and the **sand**; and the wise and the **foolish**.

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, **great was the fall of it**.

***Building your life on the teachings of Christ  
is the only sensible thing to do.***

#### **VERSES 28-29**

Jesus **had ended** 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 **doctrine** 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?



**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 “shall not make haste.” 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.

# APPLY THE TEXT

- + 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.

 **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.**

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 **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.**

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 **Memorize Matthew 7:24.**

***Prayer Needs***

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# Every Life Valued

JESUS VALUES EVERY PERSON.

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

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 8:1–9:8

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 went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease 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 manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him” (vv. 23–27).



**Review Matthew 8:1–9:8 in your Bible. Highlight the different ways Jesus reacted with people. What kinds of needs did He address?**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## LEPROSY (MATT. 8:1-4)

<sup>1</sup> When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. <sup>2</sup> And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. <sup>3</sup> And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. <sup>4</sup> And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

### VERSE 1

Following His Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5–7, **great multitudes** followed Jesus down from the mountain. They had never heard someone teach with such authority (Matt. 7:28–29). The fact that the crowds followed Jesus does not necessarily mean they acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. Many followed only out of curiosity.

### VERSE 2

As Jesus came down from the mountain, He encountered a **leper**. The term “leprosy” covered a variety of skin diseases from simple psoriasis to the full-blown disease that causes nerve damage, skin lesions, and open sores. In certain forms, leprosy can spread to others through body fluids from the nose and mouth. Leprosy was a dreaded disease with no known cure.

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 leprous people. If anyone approached them, they would have to shout, “unclean, unclean,” as a warning to stay away. 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 thou wilt, thou canst make me clean***. There are two elements in the leper’s request. First, there was a belief in Jesus’s divine sovereignty—***if thou wilt***. This was not

a demand but a request. Second, there was a belief in the power of Jesus to heal him: *thou canst make me clean*. The leper did not know if Jesus would heal him, but he was confident Jesus could. There was no doubt whatsoever in Jesus's ability to heal. These two elements are necessary in every petition for healing—belief in God's sovereignty and belief in God's ability.

***The leper did not know if Jesus would heal him, but he was confident Jesus could.***

#### **VERSE 3**

In response, Jesus **touched** the leper. He could have just spoken a command as He did in other instances. For example, Jesus healed the centurion's servant from afar without touch (Matt. 8:5-13). But in this instance Jesus reached out His hand and touched the leper. This would have rendered Jesus "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 and gave the leper what he probably longed for, a loving touch.

The healing occurred **immediately** so that all could see it happen. The defilement was gone, and everybody saw it go away. This was an obvious miracle before the crowd's eyes.

#### **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.)

#### **VERSE 4**

Jesus gave the healed man two instructions: First, he was not to tell anyone. This was a pattern throughout Jesus's ministry (see Matt. 9:30; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9). Why? 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 more openly enter into the city” (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.



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

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### **FEVER AND DEMON-POSSESSION (MATT. 8:14-17)**

<sup>14</sup> And when Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever. <sup>15</sup> And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them. <sup>16</sup> When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: <sup>17</sup> That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

#### **VERSES 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 illustrate 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.

The story of Peter’s mother-in-law is the shortest of all the healing narrations. 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**. Luke’s Gospel tells us the fever was high, indicating that she was extremely ill.

When Jesus reached down and **touched her hand**, she was immediately healed. The healing was evident in what took place next. Peter's mother-in-law **arose, and ministered unto** Jesus and the other guests in the home.

#### VERSE 16

The words **when the even was come** 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 multitudes that came to be healed were **many that were possessed with devils**. As Jesus encountered them, He **cast out the spirits** by rebuking them and commanding the demons leave the person. Because of the divine authority of Jesus, these demons could only respond by obeying His command.

In addition to this activity of exorcism, Matthew tells us that Jesus also healed all those who came to Him with physical ailments. A distinction is made here between demon possession and physical sickness.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The Greek word translated “fulfilled” appears fifteen times in the Gospel of Matthew, more than any other Gospel. Many scholars believe there are more than 300 prophecies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled by Jesus.

#### VERSE 17

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. Jesus was the Suffering Servant of whom Isaiah spoke. He **took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses**. Certainly, Matthew had in mind the entirety of Isaiah's prophecy, which includes: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). Jesus came not only to heal physical ailments but to heal spiritually—to save us from our sins (Matt. 1:21).



**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?**

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## **PARALYSIS (MATT. 9:1-8)**

<sup>1</sup> And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. <sup>2</sup> And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. <sup>3</sup> And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. <sup>4</sup> And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? <sup>5</sup> For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? <sup>6</sup> But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. <sup>7</sup> And he arose, and departed to his house. <sup>8</sup> But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

### **VERSES 1-2**

Matthew 9:1 forms a transition. Leaving the region of Gadara (8:28), Jesus **passed over** the Sea of Galilee to **his own city** 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 **man sick of the palsy** to Jesus. The man was **lying on a bed**. 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, ***thy sins be forgiven thee.*** Jesus, as the Son of God, used His divine authority to pronounce forgiveness. Forgiveness of sin is our greatest need.

## ***Forgiveness of sin is our greatest need.***

### **VERSES 3-8**

To the religious leaders who were present, such an action was perceived 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.

While the objections from the **scribes** were not spoken aloud, Jesus in His omniscience knew **their thoughts**. He 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, ***whether is easier,*** to pronounce forgiveness or to make a paralyzed man walk? The scribes no doubt would have answered that both were impossible to man. Both, however, are possible with God. For Jesus 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. The term **Son of man** was Jesus's favorite way of referring to Himself. It comes from Daniel 7:13-14, where it described a divine ruler who would reign over an eternal kingdom.

Jesus spoke of the **power** He had ***on earth***. This authority was vividly illustrated when Jesus commanded the paralyzed man to ***arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.***

## ***Jesus demonstrated that every person has value.***

In obedience to Jesus's command, the man who once was paralyzed ***arose, and departed to his house.*** This was irrefutable proof that Jesus had the authority and power to heal and forgive.

This was more than an effort to win an argument with the scribes. The healing was, first and foremost, 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.

The crowd **marvelled** at the power of God seen in Jesus. They **glorified God** and acknowledged that the **power** of Jesus came from God.



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

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**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.

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- ⊕ We should value those whom some consider to be outcasts.
- ⊕ We should value people at all stages in life.
- ⊕ We should care for and value persons with physical handicaps.

📍 **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.**

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📍 **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?**

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▶ **Memorize Matthew 8:3.**

*Prayer Needs*

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## ► *Mercy Extended*

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

### **MATTHEW 9:10-19,23-26**

Suffering is everywhere. Hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and wild-fires are in the news frequently. Add to that cancer, heart disease, 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?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## MATTHEW 9:9-38

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.



**Review Matthew 9:10-19, 23-26 in your Bible. Summarize and contrast the attitudes of the Pharisees to the compassionate attitude of Jesus.**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## JESUS'S MISSION (MATT. 9:10-13)

<sup>10</sup> And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? <sup>12</sup> But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. <sup>13</sup> But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

### VERSES 10-11

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 **publicans** as well as other **sinners**, likely including criminals, 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. This could have been the first time Jesus was criticized for being "a friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. 11:19).



**What does it mean that Jesus was a "friend of sinners"?**  
**What does it look like for His followers to be friends of sinners?**

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The Pharisees raised an objection with Jesus's disciples: **Why eateth your Master with publicans 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.

## VERSE 12

Word reached Jesus of the Pharisees' question. How this happened is uncertain. This verse simply states, ***but when Jesus heard that.*** He may have overheard the question being asked, or the disciples may have repeated it to Him. Jesus responded to the Pharisees on behalf of the disciples. For Him to answer the question rather than the disciples may have been disconcerting to the Pharisees. Often, these confrontations between the religious leaders and Jesus ended with the Pharisees being embarrassed in front of the crowds.

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. The Greek historian Plutarch quoted this parable from a Spartan king named Pausanias: "It is not the custom of doctors to spend time among people who are healthy, but where people are ill."

Jesus, however, shifted the meaning of the proverb away from physical healing. He had already demonstrated His power and His willingness to heal physical maladies. 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.

### 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.)

## VERSE 13

Quoting Hosea 6:6, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their uncaring attitude. It was obvious they cared only for themselves. ***Go ye and learn what that meaneth*** 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' mind, they were spiritually healthy. Therefore, they saw no need for what Jesus offered.

The tax collectors and sinners, on the other hand, knew that they were not right with God and needed what Jesus offered.



**How would you summarize what Jesus came to do?**

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### **JESUS'S WORK (MATT. 9:14-17)**

<sup>14</sup> Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? <sup>15</sup> And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. <sup>16</sup> No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. <sup>17</sup> Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

#### **VERSE 14**

Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees because He associated with outcasts. In verse 14, He 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.

This is the first mention of *the disciples of John* in the Synoptic Gospels. The fourth Gospel mentions John's disciples prominently in the first chapter (John 1:35-37). Andrew was a disciple of John who began to follow Jesus. John the Baptist had said, “[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Yet some of his disciples continued to follow him. In fact, those who called themselves John's disciples continued long after John was executed by Herod Antipas. Paul even encountered them in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 18:25; 19:3).

To *fast* was to forego eating in order to fully concentrate on devotion to God. John had promoted it 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.

## VERSE 15

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, Jesus 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 bridegroom*, who represents Jesus. His presence required celebration. After He departed, there would be time enough for fasting.

### DID YOU KNOW?

There are over 70 references to fasting in the Bible. Both the Old and New Testaments teach its value. Notable examples include 2 Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 8:23; Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 69:10; Matthew 4:1-2; and Acts 13:1-2.

## VERSE 16

Jesus continued to press the emphasis on a new approach to living in relationship with God. The life of freedom He 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 *new cloth* with an *old garment*. *New cloth* refers to cloth that has not been cleaned or combed to remove the oils in the fabric. Such fabric when it is washed shrinks quickly. One cannot sew the new piece onto an old piece of cloth that has been washed frequently. The new way of grace that Jesus brought was incompatible with the legalistic ways of the Pharisees.

## VERSE 17

The same principle applied to *new wine* being put into *old bottles*, meaning wineskins. The soft and pliable leather of new wineskins will adequately hold new wine that is continuing to ferment and give off the fumes of fermentation. But to put that same new wine into wineskins that were old, dried, and stiff ran the risk of the skins bursting with the ongoing fermentation.

Again, 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?

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**Jesus was offering that which was new—far removed from rules, rituals, and regulations.**

### JESUS'S COMPASSION (MATT. 9:18-19)

<sup>18</sup> While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. <sup>19</sup> And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

#### VERSE 18

At the end of chapter 9, Matthew wrote that when Jesus “saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (v. 36). Jesus’s compassion is clearly demonstrated in verses 18-34.

The miracles of Jesus frequently started with an interruption. As Jesus was responding to John’s disciples, He was interrupted by the plea of *a certain ruler* begging Jesus to come and give life back to his *daughter*. Both Mark and Luke identify this leader as Jairus, a chief official in the local synagogue (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41). 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 *worshipped* or knelt 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.



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

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## VERSE 19

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, “much people followed him, and thronged him” (Mark 5:24).

***Sometimes, interruptions are divine appointments.***

## JESUS'S POWER (MATT. 9:23-26)

<sup>23</sup> And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, <sup>24</sup> He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. <sup>25</sup> But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. <sup>26</sup> And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

## VERSES 23-24

Arriving at the house, Jesus discovered ***the minstrels and the people making a noise.*** 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 sleepeth,*** they ***laughed*** in disbelief. By saying she was asleep, Jesus was indicating that the girl's death was not permanent. The term *sleepeth* is used as a synonym for death throughout the New Testament. (See John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 15:6; 1 Thess. 4:13.)

## VERSES 25-26

The words ***put forth*** 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. So in the crowd's mind, Jesus rejected tradition once again by demanding they leave the house.

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, “arise” (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 **went abroad into all that land.**



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

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► **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?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- ⊕ We can trust that Jesus came to offer salvation to sinners.
- ⊕ We can rejoice in the truth that salvation is not based on religious works or rituals.
- ⊕ We can know that Jesus cares and will respond to our needs.
- ⊕ We can trust that Jesus has the power to transform lives.

📍 **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.**

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📍 **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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▶ **Memorize Matthew 9:12.**

*Prayer Needs*

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# Loyalty Tested

JESUS IS WORTH EVERYTHING.

## MATTHEW 10:16-20,26-34

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

## MATTHEW 10:1-42

Disciples following rabbis was an integral part of Judaism in the first-century world. A young man 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 power" (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.



**Read Matthew 10:1-42 in your Bible. What warnings did Jesus give His disciples? What promises did He make to them?**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## SNAKES AND DOVES (MATT. 10:16-20)

<sup>16</sup> Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. <sup>17</sup> But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; <sup>18</sup> And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. <sup>20</sup> For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

### VERSE 16

As Jesus was sending out His disciples, He gave them a stark warning. He prefaced His warning with the word **behold**, 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 in the midst of 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.

***Christ followers are to live with pure motives and cautious alertness.***

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



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

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### VERSE 17

The wolves would have the authority to inflict punishment on the disciples. Jesus called on His followers to **beware** and be on guard. The term **deliver you up** spoke of formal arrest. **Councils** referred to the local synagogue councils. Saul of Tarsus fulfilled the actions described in this verse when he “desired . . . letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:2; see also 8:1,3).

### VERSES 18-20

The continued warning of Jesus to His disciples about the persecution they would face was a telling summary statement of the persecution of the church. The apostle Paul experienced what verse 18 describes when he stood before King Agrippa (Acts 25-26).

The reason for this persecution was **for my sake**. Jesus said in John 15:20, “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” In that same passage, He told the disciples they 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 to **take no thought** 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).



## 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.)

### SPARROWS AND HAIRS (MATT. 10:26-31)

**<sup>26</sup> Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.** <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. <sup>28</sup> And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. <sup>30</sup> But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

#### VERSE 26

How would Jesus's disciples react to His warnings of suffering and persecution? Jesus told them, ***fear them not***. 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 ***revealed*** and ***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.

#### VERSE 27

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.

## VERSE 28

Once again Jesus encouraged His followers not to fear. This time, however, the source of fear was *them which kill the body*. The prospect of martyrdom was suddenly front and center for the disciples. Jesus sought to allay their fears by differentiating between the temporal and the eternal. The enemies of Christianity might kill the *body*, but they could not quench the essence of life, the *soul*. Only God could *destroy both soul and body*. *Hell* is the term “Gehenna,” which referred to the valley outside of Jerusalem where the garbage was burned. It became symbolic of the literal and eternal punishment that awaited those who rejected God. The term *destroy* doesn’t picture annihilation but rather eternal punishment. God is the one who can bring about that destruction. Therefore, Jesus said, *fear not* and reverence Him.

### DID YOU KNOW?

After Jesus’s death, the disciples experienced persecution and martyrdom. According to church tradition, all the apostles, except for John (and of course Judas), died for their faith.

## VERSES 29-30

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 farthing*, 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, “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Matt. 6:26). He said this so they would not worry.

Continuing His reference to God’s intimate care, Jesus spoke of the *hairs* on one’s *head*. For us to count the hairs on our heads might prove to be an impossible task. But God already has counted and *numbered* them. Our heavenly Father cares about even the smallest detail of our lives.

### VERSE 31

Once again, **fear ye not**. If God watches over the sparrows, the followers of Jesus can count on God's care and concern in every circumstance. God's plans for His children are always good, even if we don't consider them good at the time. Thus, 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. Paul expressed it like this: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).



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

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***Our heavenly Father cares about even the smallest detail of our lives.***

### PEACE AND SWORDS (MATT. 10:32-34)

**<sup>32</sup> Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.**

**<sup>33</sup> But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. <sup>34</sup> Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.**

In calling the Twelve, Jesus moved them into a process of apprenticeship. First, He called them to be with Him, learn from His teachings, and observe His ministry. Then He sent them to carry out His teaching and healing ministry. The anticipation was that one day Jesus would leave them, and they would continue that work on His behalf. Hovering over this entire discipleship pattern was the prospect that they might be called to die for Jesus. Jesus would tell them: "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:38-39). Dying "because of me" would be the ultimate act of loyalty to Jesus.

### VERSE 32

The word **therefore** is a transition word. This verse moves from the Twelve Jesus sent out earlier (10:1) to **whosoever** who will declare their allegiance to Jesus. The word **confess** means to openly confess or affirm one's commitment to Jesus. It involves trust and dependence on Him.

Note again, there is no room for secret allegiance. Confession of Jesus as Lord was to be public, **before men**. 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. Note this acknowledgment will take place before **my Father which is in heaven**. This phrase **my Father which is in heaven** is rarely used by Jesus in the Gospels. Oftentimes it is “your Father” or “our Father.” Jesus used the phrase **before my Father which is in heaven** here to speak of the final judgment. (See also Matt. 7:21.)

### VERSE 33

Denying Jesus can be done either actively or passively. That is, 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. This declaration of a day of reckoning also continues the theme of judgment that began in verse 28.

***Those who follow Jesus must realize  
that Jesus is worth everything!***

### VERSE 34

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 King David. Jesus wanted His followers to know that such was not the case. He would not **send 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.

This verse introduces Jesus's teaching that loyalty to Him must take precedence over loyalty to family (v. 37). 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?

**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.

Metaphor	Meaning	Application
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## APPLY THE TEXT

- ⊕ Loyalty to Jesus may mean we encounter hostility to the gospel.
- ⊕ Believers should not fear those who oppose the truth of the gospel.
- ⊕ Loyalty to Jesus is more important than any other loyalty.

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

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?

## Memorize Matthew 10:28.

## *Prayer Needs*



## Confronting Doubts

JESUS DEMANDS DECISION.

### MATTHEW 11:1-6,16-24

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

## MATTHEW 11:1-30

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).



**Read Matthew 11:1-6,16-24 in your Bible. In what ways were doubt and skepticism expressed? How did Jesus respond to the doubters and skeptics?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## UNCERTAINTY (MATT. 11:1-6)

<sup>1</sup> And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities. <sup>2</sup> Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, <sup>3</sup> And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: <sup>5</sup> The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

### VERSE 1

After Jesus sent out the disciples on their mission (chap. 10), He moved on to the area surrounding Capernaum. Capernaum lay on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee and was the headquarters of much of Jesus's ministry. Matthew referred to it as Jesus's "own city" (Matt. 9:1). On this solo mission, Jesus would **teach and... preach** in the towns of that region.

### VERSES 2-3

Matthew gave us the story of John the Baptist in bits and pieces. John and his ministry were introduced in chapter 3. Matthew 4:12 tells us that he had been arrested. The disciples of John questioned Jesus's disciples in 9:14. We see a glimpse of John in prison in 11:1-6. Finally, we learn of his death at the hand of Herod Antipas in 14:1-12.

While in prison, John heard news of **the works of Christ**. 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, **Art thou he that should come?** The phrase *he that should come* was a frequent way of speaking of the coming Messiah. It appears in the psalms,

“Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD” (Ps. 118:26). Other references to *he that should come* are sprinkled throughout the Gospel records (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; 13:35).

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 King David. This Messiah would remove the Roman government from Israel and reestablish David’s kingdom. But this wasn’t happening with Jesus. John might have wondered, “Did I misunderstand who Jesus is?” To allay this confusion, John dispatched his disciples to ask Jesus, ***do we look for another?***

### ***Focusing on our circumstances can cause us to doubt what God is doing.***

#### **VERSES 4-5**

To answer John’s question, Jesus pointed to the evidence. He gave John’s disciples a list of miracles He had performed. In doing this, 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 the disciples of John is followed by this statement: “And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight” (Luke 7:21). Then, Jesus told John’s disciples to “go your way, and tell John what things ye 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***. Nowhere in the Old Testament is there any mention of a miracle of restoring sight to the blind. This had not occurred until the coming of Jesus. The man born blind that Jesus healed in John 9 responded to Jesus’s critics: “Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing” (John 9:32-33).



**How would John have understood Jesus's reply in verses 4-5 based on his knowledge of the Old Testament?**

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### **VERSE 6**

This short blessing is spoken in the third person singular. Jesus likely was addressing John personally. You are **blessed**, John, if you aren't **offended in me**. The word *offended* is a Greek word from which we get the term "scandal." Blessed is the person who is not "scandalized" because of Me, Jesus said. In other words, John was warned not to be tripped up by doubt.



**How should we respond to our honest doubts about Jesus?**

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### **CYNICISM (MATT. 11:16-19)**

**<sup>16</sup> But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, <sup>17</sup> And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. <sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. <sup>19</sup> The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.**

### **VERSE 16**

Many people in the crowds who followed Jesus were cynical. He responded to their unbelief with a common Jewish phrase, ***whereunto shall I liken this generation?*** Jesus compared them to **children** at play in the **markets**. The marketplace would be a central location in most villages where people gathered to buy, sell, and trade. Children accompanied their parents and used the center of the marketplace as a playground.

## VERSE 17

In Jesus's comparison, He 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. In these activities children would act out two important events in the life of the community. 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, or vice versa. With this comparison, Jesus set up the hearers for the condemnation He was about to bring.

## VERSES 18-19

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. John, as it were, "mourned unto you," but the people refused his call. He was too strict for them. They said he had a *devil*. They enjoyed their wicked lifestyle which ran contrary to the righteous lifestyle John lived and promoted. Their initial curiosity about John's ministry ended quickly.

For the critics, Jesus wasn't strict enough in following the traditions of Judaism. Not only that, but He associated with those who also didn't follow the ways of the Pharisees. He was *a friend of publicans and sinners*. This had been seen a short while earlier during the banquet at Matthew's house: "And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" (Matt. 9:10-11).

In His comparison, Jesus metaphorically "piped" for the people, but they refused to dance. Gradually, over the weeks and months, the people rejected Jesus. Their doubts turned to disbelief and rejection.

When Jesus said that *wisdom is justified of her children*, 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?**

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### **DENIAL (MATT. 11:20-24)**

<sup>20</sup> Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: <sup>21</sup> Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. <sup>23</sup> And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. <sup>24</sup> But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

Jesus now 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 are saddled with a greater accountability before God.

#### **VERSE 20**

The area around Capernaum witnessed the vast majority of the miracles of healing by Jesus. Yet they obviously continued in their indifference to the message of Jesus. Because of this, He began **to upbraid** or censure them for their unbelief.

#### **VERSES 21-22**

The word **woe** was a familiar Old Testament word that expressed judgment as well as grief, wrath as well as sorrow (see Hos. 7:13; Job 10:15). This condemnation included the town of •**Chorazin** [koh RAY zin], which lay about two and a half miles to the north of Capernaum. Included as well was •**Bethsaida** [beth-SAY ih duh],

the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip (John 1:44). Its location is somewhat uncertain, either being on the northeastern side of the Sea of Galilee or close to Capernaum on the western side.

These villages had seen the power of Jesus and had heard His call for repentance but 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 Syrophenician 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.

### **Greater opportunity calls for greater accountability.**

#### **VERSE 23**

The same held true for •**Capernaum** [kuh PUHR nay uhm], which served as Jesus's headquarters. More miracles took place in Capernaum than anywhere else. But just like the towns mentioned in verse 21, they remained indifferent and perhaps hostile toward Jesus and His message.

Jesus spoke of their desire to be **exalted unto 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 **hell**. This is the term •**hades**, which 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). This second use of the term was Jesus's intent in this statement of condemnation.

Again, Jesus used the example of a wicked city that would have repented had they seen the type of miracles Capernaum had seen. In this case, the city of •**Sodom** was the example. Throughout the Old Testament, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah served as the prime example of wickedness before God.

► **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.)

**VERSE 24**

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.



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

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**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?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- ⊕ 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.



**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.**



**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.**

▶ **Memorize Matthew 11:5-6.**

*Prayer Needs*





## ▶ *Rejecting Legalism*

JESUS OFFERS MERCY, NOT RELIGIOUS RULES.

### **MATTHEW 12:1-14**

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 12:1-50

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.



**Read Matthew 12:1-14 in your Bible. What key words or phrases describe the legalism promoted by the Pharisees? What words or phrases describe the mercy offered by Jesus?**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## RELIGIOUS RULES (MATT. 12:1-2)

<sup>1</sup> At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. <sup>2</sup> But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

### VERSE 1

The two incidents of conflict in verses 1-14 took place on the *sabbath*. *Sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word *shabbat*, meaning ceasing, rest, or inactivity, and is based on God's rest in Genesis 2:3. God commanded to the Israelite people to observe a day of Sabbath rest (Ex. 20:9-11).

Sabbath rest was a centerpiece in Judaism. But 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, these leaders 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 obviously ignored those man-made traditions as they *went... through the corn*.

Not only were they traveling on the Sabbath, but the disciples *began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat*. This, too, was a violation of the traditions of Sabbath rest. Picking grain would be understood as harvesting the grain. Also, the disciples would need to rub the grain in their hands to separate the kernel from the husk. This would be interpreted as threshing and winnowing. Clearly, to the Pharisees, the disciples were breaking the Sabbath rules.

### 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.

## VERSE 2

Notice that the Pharisees **saw** the disciples plucking and eating the grain. What were the Pharisees doing in the grainfields that allowed them to see this? Were they following them in order to gain incriminating evidence against Jesus? Throughout the Gospel narratives it seems the Pharisees were continually present, shadowing Jesus (see, for example, Luke 5:17).

### **God is dishonored when we put man-made traditions on the same level as His Word.**

The Pharisees complained to Jesus that His disciples were doing what was **not lawful**. It is important to note that the disciples were not stealing grain, for the law allowed them to do this (see Deut. 23:25). The problem for the Pharisees was that the disciples' action violated their 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 should religious tradition play in the practice of our faith?**

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## **SOMETHING GREATER** (MATT. 12:3-8)

**<sup>3</sup> But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungry, and they that were with him; <sup>4</sup> How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? <sup>5</sup> Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? <sup>6</sup> But I say unto you,**

**That in this place is one greater than the temple.<sup>7</sup> But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.<sup>8</sup> For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.**

#### **VERSES 3-4**

Jesus began His defense of His disciples by asking the Pharisees, **have ye not read** the story of **David** entering **the house of God** to secure bread for his troops? This account is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. What Jesus was saying is this: “Aren’t you teachers of the law paying attention to what you teach?” With this question, He gave two examples from the Old Testament refuting the strict interpretation of Sabbath observance by the Pharisees.

The **shewbread** 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.

#### **VERSES 5**

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 **blameless** in violating that regulation. They were doing what was necessary in the worship of Israel.

**By His very nature as the Son of God,  
Jesus is greater than man-made laws.**

#### **VERSE 6**

Jesus concluded His two illustrations with a startling claim: **in this place is one greater than the temple**. Jesus’s authority was greater than that of the temple. The implication was that His authority superseded the authority and the traditions of the Pharisees.

Such a statement would have greatly angered the religious leaders. It would have exposed the raw emotions of Jesus’s enemies

and contributed further to their hatred of Him. Yet, by His very nature as the Son of God, Jesus is greater than man-made laws. Jesus's argument was preparing the Pharisees for the conclusion in verse 8—Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath!

### ***Jesus is greater than man-made laws.***

#### **VERSE 7**

Jesus enforced His defense of the action of the disciples by pointing to the first part of Hosea 6:6: ***I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.*** This is the second time in Matthew that Jesus quoted this verse (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 guiltless.*** The word *condemned* spoke of judging or pronouncing sentence against someone.

The word *guiltless* 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.

The term *sacrifice* entails the whole of the system of ceremonial law under the old covenant. Jesus wanted the Pharisees to know that God deals with mankind in mercy, and His desire is that people show mercy to others as well.

### ***God's will is mercy over religious ritual.***

#### **VERSE 8**

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 even of the sabbath day.*** 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 us about Jesus and His expectations of His followers?

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### 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.)

### COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE (MATT. 12:9-14)

<sup>9</sup> And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: <sup>10</sup> And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him. <sup>11</sup> And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? <sup>12</sup> How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days. <sup>13</sup> Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. <sup>14</sup> Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

### VERSES 9-10

Matthew records that Jesus ***departed thence***. Plainly, Jesus and the disciples were traveling on the Sabbath in violation of the traditions of the rabbis. The exact destination is not revealed, but Jesus ***went into their synagogue***. This likely would have been the synagogue of the Pharisees who had confronted Jesus and His disciples. Some scholars speculate that Jesus was aware of the presence of the man with the ***withered*** 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.

The Greek text of verse 10 includes the word that can be translated “behold” or “look” to point to the man with the shriveled

hand. From this word of emphasis, the implication is that the man had been largely ignored by the worshipers in the synagogue. But when Jesus and His critics showed up, suddenly the handicapped man was center stage.

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 days?*** They asked this ***that they might 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.

#### **VERSE 11**

In Mark's account of this incident (Mark 3:5), we are told that Jesus looked at His opponents with anger. He responded to their question with a question of His own. This was often the pattern with Jesus when a question was directed to Him.

His question involved an illustration from everyday life. As Jesus had done twice before (Matt. 6:26; 10:31), He contrasted the value of the life of an animal with the value of a human life. Through this illustration, 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.

#### **VERSE 12**

Jesus stated the obvious: ***How much then is a man better than a sheep?*** In theory, every Pharisee would agree that a man is worth more than a sheep. 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 well on the sabbath days.*** The statement was made in the present tense, meaning it is lawful, not just once, but every time.

### VERSE 13

Jesus commanded the man to **stretch forth** 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 **whole, like as the other**. The word **whole** or good parallels the idea of doing good on the Sabbath.

### VERSE 14

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 **held a council against him**. The implication is that they had already decided to get rid of Jesus; what remained was the **how** of doing it. 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 the authority of Jesus be perceived as a threat?

► **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?



# APPLY THE TEXT

- ⊕ We should avoid judging others based on their adherence to a religious tradition or practice.
- ⊕ We should give greater attention to the condition of our heart than to adherence to man-made rules.
- ⊕ We must seek to make our priorities and practices consistent with what God values most.



**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?**

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

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 **Memorize Matthew 12:8.**

*Prayer Needs*

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# • *Judgment Coming* •

FAITH IN JESUS DETERMINES OUR ETERNAL DESTINY.

## MATTHEW 13:24-30,36-43

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

## MATTHEW 13:1-58

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).



**Read Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 in your Bible. What spiritual truth do you think Jesus was illustrating with this parable?**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## WHEAT OR WEEDS (MATT. 13:24-30)

<sup>24</sup> Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: <sup>25</sup> But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. <sup>26</sup> But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. <sup>27</sup> So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? <sup>28</sup> He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? <sup>29</sup> But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

### VERSE 24

This parable follows logically from the 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 **kingdom of heaven** is the sovereign rule and reign of God over the earth and the universe. The phrase *kingdom of heaven* is unique to the Gospel of Matthew. The other Gospels speak of the “kingdom of God”; the two terms are synonymous.

### VERSES 25-26

At this point in the text, neither the man sowing the field nor the **enemy** has been identified. That will be left for the explanation in verses 37-39.

The sowing of **tares** in the field happened at night **while men slept** and the landowner would not be alert. Satan often does his work when people are not on their guard.

The Greek word for **tares** likely refers to darnel, a type of 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.

### 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.

### VERSES 27-28

The servants were puzzled by the presence of the weeds and went to the landowner for an explanation. They knew that the landowner had planted *good seed*. So they asked, *from whence then hath it tares?* The landowner knew the source of the weeds: *an enemy hath done this*. This was an act of sabotage.

The servants asked, *wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?* In the landowner's response to this question in verse 29, we get the hint that these servants were not harvesters who would know the damage that such an action would have on the wheat crop.

### VERSES 29-30

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. *Let both grow together* was the landowner's solution.

*In the time of harvest*, the good plants would become obvious.

Note the patience of this landowner. The Bible reveals that God is a patient God. He is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Ex. 34:6). He is “longsuffering

to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

## ***The Bible reveals that God is a patient God.***

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 **tares** 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? How?**

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## **JESUS OR THE DEVIL (MATT. 13:36-39)**

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. <sup>37</sup> He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; <sup>38</sup> The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; <sup>39</sup> The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

### **VERSE 36**

The explanation to the parable was given privately to the **disciples**. Earlier, Jesus told the disciples the meaning of parables was only for those who followed Him. To them God gave understanding into the mysteries of the kingdom (v. 11).

Jesus responded to the disciples' request, **declare unto 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.

### VERSE 37

The one who sowed the good seed in the field is the same one who scattered the seed on the four types of soil (v. 3). He is identified here as the **Son of man**. This phrase is often used by Jesus to identify Himself (8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 12:32,40). The name is taken from the Old Testament prophecy in Daniel 7:13. In that passage, the title *Son of Man* points to one with authority and sovereignty. He is the coming Messiah and is fully God and fully man. Thus, it is God the Son who plants the **good seed**.

**Not all who claim to have a relationship with Jesus are genuine believers.**

### VERSES 38-39

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. Jesus has dominion over all things, including all “angels and authorities and powers” (1 Pet. 3:22).

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 called the **children of the kingdom**. These are Jesus’s true followers. **The tares** are sown by **the wicked one**. They are his children, meaning they belong to him.

Jesus identified **the wicked one** who plants the weeds as **the devil**. Note that he is called the **enemy**. Sabotaging of crops in those days was done by an enemy of the landowner, and the motive was hatred or revenge. This describes the attitude and actions of Satan toward the things of God. The point here is that Satan thoroughly and methodically plants his children in the world to oppose the kingdom of heaven.

All of this will be revealed with the **harvest** at **the end of the world**. At the end of the world, there will be a day of judgment. This is when God will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. Those who will aid the Son of Man in sorting out the children of the kingdom from the children of the evil one will be the **angels**.



**What is the church's responsibility regarding the "weeds" sown by the devil?**

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## **HEAVEN OR HELL (MATT. 13:40-43)**

<sup>40</sup> As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. <sup>41</sup> The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; <sup>42</sup> And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

### **VERSE 40**

Two things will happen to the counterfeits. First, they will be **gathered**. This word *gathered* speaks of putting similar things together or bundling up the same type of substance. This gathering for destruction will be only for those who belong to the evil one. No believer will be a part of this.

Second, the **tares** 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 **in the end of this world**. 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.

### **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.)

#### VERSE 41

The **Son of man**, Jesus, will bring judgment on all **things that offend and them which do iniquity**.

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 *offend* and *them which do iniquity*. From the Greek word for *offend* 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.

#### VERSE 42

At the end of the age the angels will **cast** the unrighteous ones into **the furnace of fire**. The term *cast* paints a strong picture of judgment. Scripture pictures hell as "the fire that never shall be quenched" (Mark 9:43). It will also be an "everlasting 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 shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth**. This is a vivid picture of anguish and despair. The Bible teaches that hell is a literal place, not figurative (10:28); the suffering of the lost in hell will be eternal not temporal (25:46).

**Hell is a literal place, not figurative; the suffering of the lost in hell will be eternal, not temporal.**

#### VERSE 43

Remember again that this is a parable of separation: separation of those who follow Jesus from those who reject Him and continue to live as children of Satan. 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). As noted in the discussion of verse 30, the

word “collect” speaks of being led into God’s place of preservation. Those who are declared righteous through their faith in Christ will **shine forth as the sun**. They will shine forth and be resplendent in God’s kingdom!

Jesus concluded His explanation with these words: **Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.** This was a challenge to seriously consider the meaning of the parable and to apply it to life. 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.**



**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 “which do iniquity.” How do these verses make you feel? How do they motivate you to share Christ’s gospel?



# APPLY THE TEXT

- ⊕ We must examine our own faith as we wait for Jesus's return.
- ⊕ We need to recognize that not all who profess to believe in Jesus are genuine believers.
- ⊕ We can trust that Jesus will have the final word and that He will judge righteously.



**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?**



**Jesus told His followers, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). Consider the fruit of your own life. Does it give evidence to the fact that you are a follower of Jesus?**

▶ **Memorize Matthew 13:40.**

*Prayer Needs*



# 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). It also could refer to Jesus's disciples more generally, as in the introduction for Jesus's Sermon on the Plain: "And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company

of his disciples, and a great multitude of people" (Luke 6:17). Women too made up part of this group.

The verb "to walk behind" (Greek, *akolouthein*) 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." Their affirmative response indicated a commitment to literally walk behind Him as He traveled throughout Galilee and finally Jerusalem. Such "fellowship" 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

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## ***“The path is costly, but He has shown us the way, and the way leads to life.”***

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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.

Perhaps the most helpful parallel to Jesus's call for discipleship is the prophetic model of Elijah calling Elisha to be his apprentice. In 1 Kings 19:19-21, Elijah found Elisha plowing with the twelve teams of oxen. Elijah walked by Elisha "and cast his mantle upon 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 good-bye indicates a hesitation or an attempt to stall. Elijah responded with a strong challenge to Elisha: "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" (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

good-bye echoes a later scene in Jesus's ministry when He called an unnamed man to "follow me." The man responded, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." Jesus replied, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking 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.

# COMING **NEXT QUARTER**



## **MATTHEW 14-28**

Session 1: **Courage** (Matt. 14:22-33)

Session 2: **Real Devotion** (Matt. 15:1-11,16-20)

Session 3: **Following Jesus** (Matt. 16:13-26)

Session 4: **Glory** (Matt. 17:1-13)

Session 5: **Forgiveness** (Matt. 18:21-35)

Session 6: **Our Task** (Matt. 28:1-10,16-20)

Session 7: **Eternal Life** (Matt. 19:16-30)

Session 8: **Grace** (Matt. 20:1-16)

Session 9: **Authority** (Matt. 21:23-32)

Session 10: **Honor** (Matt. 22:15-22,34-40)

Session 11: **Alert** (Matt. 24:36-51)

Session 12: **Active Faith** (Matt. 25:31-46)

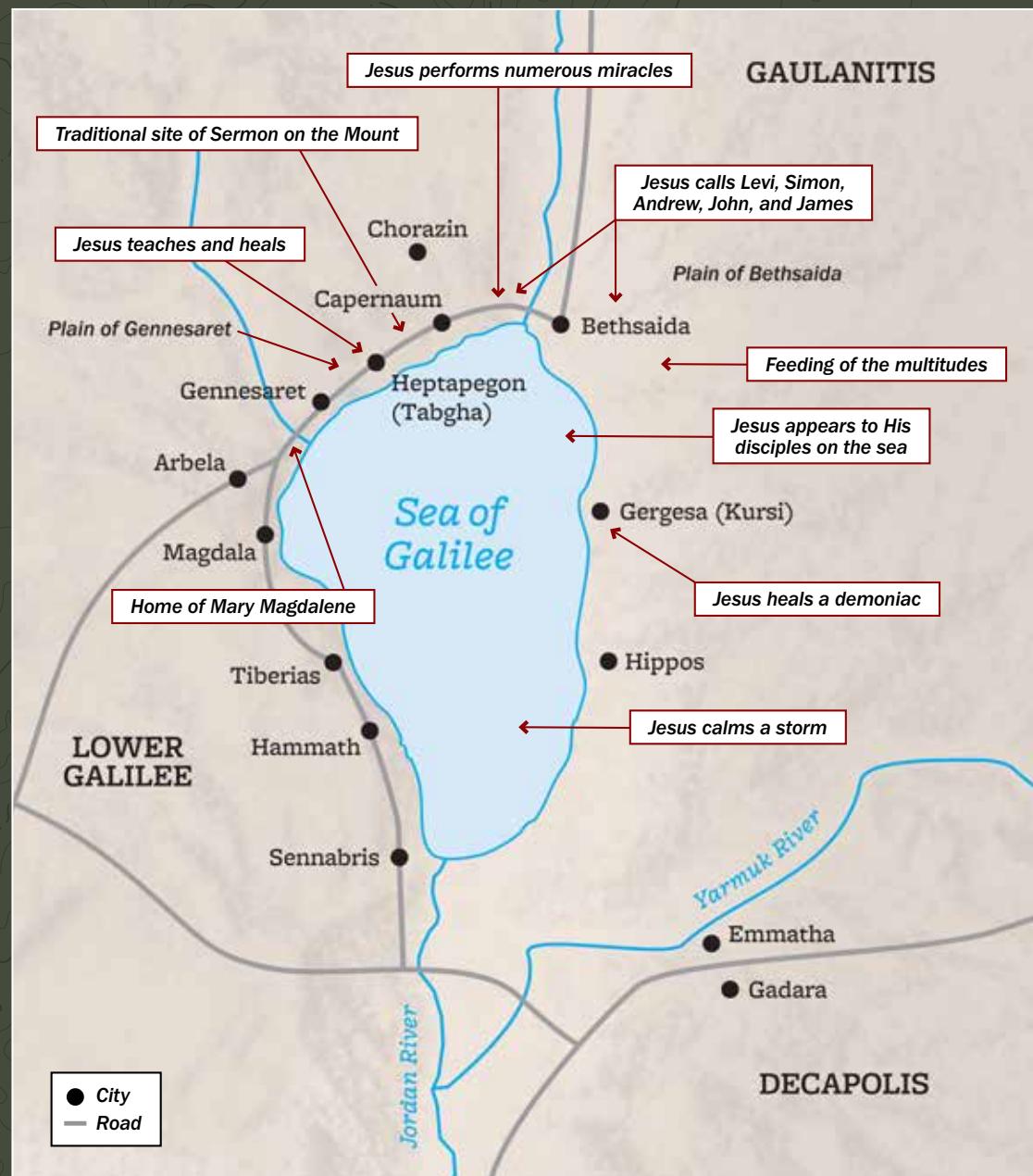
Session 13: **Our Atonement** (Matt. 26:17-30)

Session 14: **Our Savior** (Matt. 27:27-31,45-54)

# *Explore*

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall 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, 1999), 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.

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