

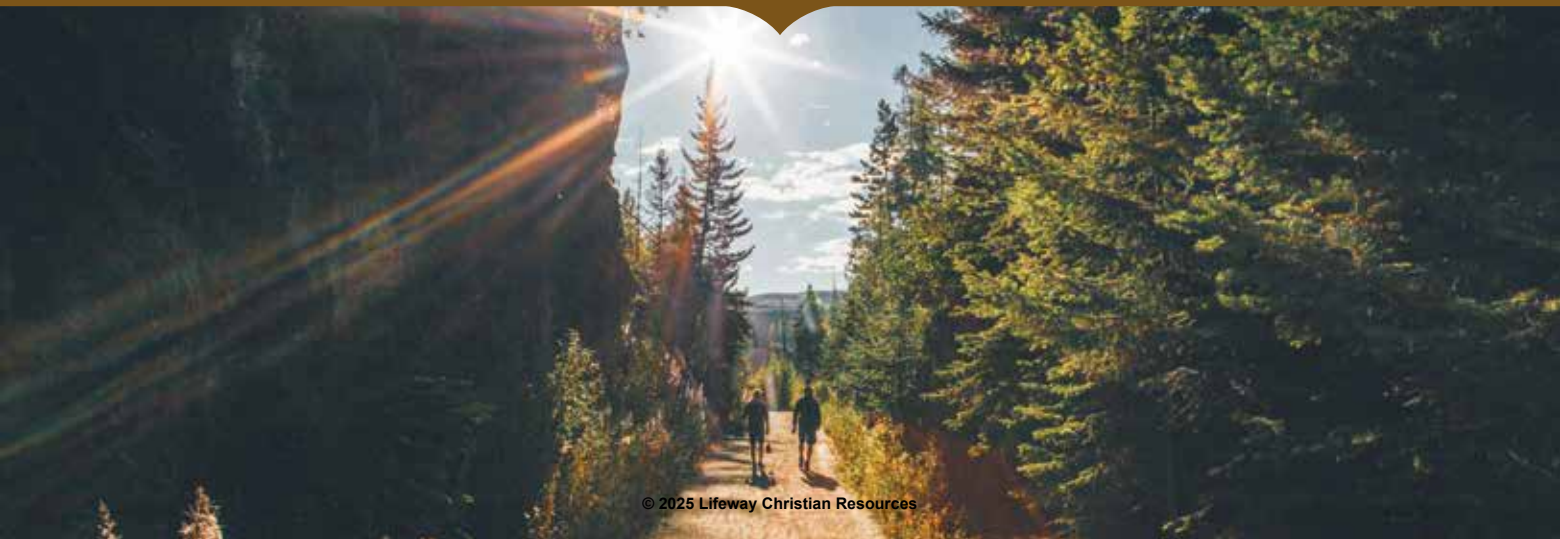


EXPLORE **THE BIBLE.**
Adults

Matthew 1–13

Leader Guide (CSB)

Winter 2025-26



THE POWER OF ONE

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

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

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

Matthew, the cultural outcast, had met Jesus, and Jesus had made all the difference. That’s why Matthew wrote an entire book of the Bible dedicated to the words and actions of Jesus. Thankfully, Jesus is still in the business of transforming lives today. He still accepts outcasts and social pariahs. He still makes room for them in His kingdom. And He still teaches us what it really means to have a personal relationship with God.

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

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God’s Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. 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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MEET THE WRITERS



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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. “She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Matthew’s gospel recounts the story of Jesus’s life. This quarter, we will study Jesus’s teachings, witness His miraculous power, and examine His earthly ministry.

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

In Him,

Amber Vaden

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Explore

Discover



The Impact of Prayer

G. Dwayne McCrary

God has been kind to me, allowing me to be a part of some wonderful churches and to serve in multiple ways. He has allowed me to see Him do some mighty things that opened doors for me to help other leaders.

For example, God allowed me to be in a church that grew by a thousand people in attendance over a five-year period. Of course, God used a lot of resources to make that happen in that church. Staffing, city culture, and a variety of other factors came together for that particular church to be driven with a passion to reach people with the gospel. Along the way, we saw college students, convicted felons, a satanist, and many others become faithful followers of Jesus.

FINDING THE REAL REASON

Several of us joined the staff at the beginning of those five years, giving the appearance that we were major contributors to that growth. Several of us began being asked to write articles and lead conferences explaining what we were doing. As those invitations began coming, the challenge we faced was figuring out what we were actually doing that contributed to the growth.

Obviously, God was using us and the talents He had given us to make an impact and to shape what was going on. We were faithful to train people, to look for ways to reach out in our community, to start new Bible study groups, and to make outreach a priority. But those were actions other churches and leaders were taking without seeing the same results.

The answer to why the growth was taking place came on an early Saturday morning when I went to the church parking lot to meet a group of men for a golf outing. To my surprise, another group of men was already in the church facilities. It was a smaller group by comparison, no more than ten men. They had keys to the building, which was unusual to say the least.

Turns out, they met in the building every Saturday morning to pray. They prayed for what would happen the next day, for God to remove obstacles for those who needed the Sunday School lesson and sermon, and for the people who would be leading the classes and worship. This smaller group met regardless of the weather or the season. Not all would be present every week, but some of them would always be there.

Their only purpose for these meetings was to pray. There was no coffee or food. They simply had been faithfully doing this work of prayer for several years. The church had been steady during those years, but what was happening at that point was what these men had been asking God to do from the first day they met to pray.

They were finally seeing God answer the prayer they had begun voicing for several years.



People were aware of this group of praying men, and most folks were impressed by their consistency. But the vast majority was not impressed enough to make the commitment to join them. To be fair, they invited others to join them, but they did so with humility and without fanfare. They did not brag about what they were doing. Instead, they simply carried out the task of asking God to impact their city—every Saturday morning—for years. The men in this group were marked by prayer.

They were the reason we were seeing God do what He was doing at that time in the life of that church.

IMAGINE YOUR CHURCH

Now that you’ve heard my story, reflect on your own context. Imagine what might happen in your church if a few people were willing to be marked by prayer, to approach God with the hope of seeing Him reach your community or your city for His glory, regardless of who He decided to use or how He determined to do it.

Imagine Sunday school classes ending their weekly gathering with a time of prayer that grew out of the passages studied during that hour. Imagine believers committing themselves to follow God in whatever way He saw fit.

Imagine what might happen if the people who attended those Bible study groups then spent some of their prayer time during the week talking with God in a way that echoed the emphasis of the Bible passage studied, expressing their willingness to follow Jesus and His plans for them.

As leaders of Bible study groups, we can make a difference in our community by the way we lead the people in our group to pray. Here are some specific actions we can take that might help:

- Maintain a list of the names of people our group is praying for who need to know and follow Jesus.
- Carry a list of people for whom we and the group are asking God to draw to Him through our conversations and witness.
- Make sure those names are the first item on any prayer list we distribute to our Bible study group.
- Each month, set aside the second Sunday’s group prayer time to focus specifically only on those same names, adding names and updating the list as needed.

What other actions could you take to encourage your group to consistently pray for people who are far from God and for the opportunity to share with them?

G. Dwayne McCrary is the manager of adult ongoing Bible studies at Lifeway. This article is adapted from his soon-to-be-released book, *Marked by Prayer*. The book, releasing February 17, 2026, can be preordered at [Lifeway.com](https://www.lifeway.com).



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

Judea [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

Naphtali [NAF tuh ligh]—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)

Zebulun [ZEB yoo luhn]—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

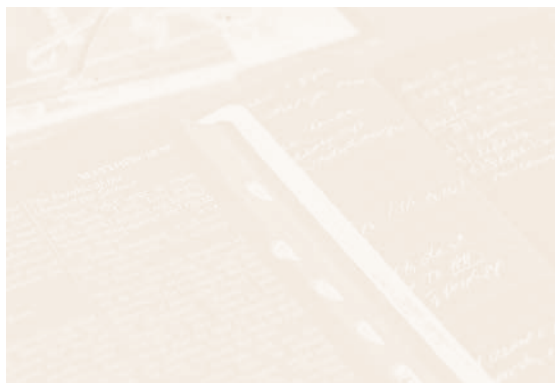
JANUARY

- ☐ 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

USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD



BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

1. STUDY THE CORE PASSAGE.

Prepare early. Read the passage, listing key people, places, words, phrases, and actions. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* and the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* to dig deeper into the items you listed. If a QR code is available in a lesson, scan it to gain additional information on what's found in the passage. Write a summary of the session's main idea. Use the statement printed under each session title as a starting place.

2. READ THE GROUP TIME PLAN.

Study the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, which include ideas for integrating the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide*. Page numbers for related PSG content are provided in the Group Plans. These page numbers correspond to the regular print version of the PSG and may differ from large print versions. Adjust the plan to fit the needs of your group. Identify ways to engage adults, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas or questions, consult *Explore the Bible QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (which identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson and is found at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras).

Review the items available in the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*. Look at the Lifeway Sunday School blog and Groups Ministry blog for additional helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

3. GATHER AND REVIEW.

Review the group plan and options again and collect any supplies you will need. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for guests.

DURING THE GROUP TIME

4. ARRIVE EARLY.

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet adults as they arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

5. LEAD THE GROUP IN A TIME OF BIBLE STUDY.

Use the plan, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns, so be flexible.

AFTER THE GROUP TIME

6. EVALUATE AND RECORD.

Review and implement the After the Session idea to encourage the group to put the truths they discovered into practice. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you grow as a leader.

7. START PREPARING TO LEAD THE NEXT GROUP TIME.

MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide* and *Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.

Daily Discipleship Guide

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the *Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide* model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group, daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time, and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in the back.

Personal Study Guide

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.

Leader Guide

Resource for leaders of groups using the *Personal Study Guide*. Includes commentary and group teaching plans.

ADDITIONAL LEADER HELPS

Commentary

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.

QuickSource

Resource for leaders, providing additional discussion questions, an object lesson, and dig deeper feature. Also provides ease of use for an individual called on to step in and lead the group on short notice.

Leader Pack

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the *Leader Guide* commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).



Find out more or order at goExploreTheBible.com

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

AUTHORSHIP

When Matthew went to work at his tax booth that morning, he had no idea how his life would be transformed. He was a publican—a tax collector. His fellow Jews hated him and every other tax collector because this was a job that meant receiving duty and taxes from businesses and individuals—all on behalf of the Roman occupiers.

In addition, tax collectors were notoriously dishonest. They were known for taking more than was due and lining their pockets with the profits. But whatever issues Matthew may have had leading up to this day, things would never be the same after his encounter with one man.

Matthew was surprised when Jesus walked by and said, “Follow me,” but he did not hesitate. He left his job, his responsibilities, and his former identity to become a disciple of Christ (Matt. 9:9-13).

Luke’s Gospel refers to Matthew as “Levi” (Luke 5:27). Mark initially called the publican “Levi the son of Alphaeus” (Mark 2:14), although later he referred to his colleague as Matthew (3:18). It was not unusual for men to have two names. The name “Matthew” means “the gift of Yahweh.”

Another disciple, James, also was a “son of Alphaeus” (3:18). Assuming both texts refer to the same Alphaeus, Matthew and James would make the third set of brothers among Jesus’s disciple group, along with Peter and Andrew, James and John.

Matthew always referred to himself as either “Matthew” (Matt. 9:9) or “Matthew the tax collector” (10:3). One gets the sense that he never got over the fact that Jesus called him, a tax collector, to be one of His disciples. Once he had accepted Jesus’s call to follow Him, Matthew invited other tax collectors to dinner at his house so they could meet Jesus too.

Matthew not only wrote a Gospel that bears his name, but he also shared the good news of Jesus with those he knew best (9:10-11). As someone who had been an outsider, he demonstrated a heart for other outsiders.

Early church leaders accepted Matthew as the author of this Gospel. Scholars point out the introductory heading “The Gospel According to Matthew” simply reads “According to Matthew” in earlier manuscripts.

Matthew’s Gospel shares some of the same material as Mark and Luke (example: Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-27; Luke 6:1-5). These books are called the Synoptic Gospels because they have so much in common. The term “synoptic” means “to see alongside,” which describes well how these Gospels connect to one another. Yet, each is unique and, in several instances, contains different details and organization.

Generally, this so-called Synoptic “problem” can be explained by different men writing from different viewpoints that bring together a more complete picture. Many scholars think that the Gospel of Mark was written first, although Matthew is placed first among the four Gospels in the New Testament canon. Depending on how one dates Mark’s book, Matthew probably was written around AD 60-70.

Ultimately, the Author of all Scripture is God (2 Tim. 3:16). Yet, God used human writers as more than mere divine typewriters. Rather, He utilized their personalities and experiences to shape their work—all under the direction of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

According to genre, Matthew is considered a Gospel, a term that means “good news.” As a historical narrative, it presents the life of Jesus so readers not only learn about Him but also can believe that He is the Messiah, the Son of God.



Matthew primarily wrote for a Jewish audience. From Jesus's genealogical history onward, Matthew offered proof that Jesus was the Messiah, starting with Jesus's ancestry with Abraham to emphasize His Jewish heritage. Commentators point out how the specific inclusion of the patriarchs and King David highlight Jesus's right to the throne of David as the Messiah (Matt. 1:1-2).

Some scholars see Matthew's account as passing through Joseph, while Luke carries the lineage through Mary. They argue that as Jesus's earthly father, the legal genealogy would follow Joseph's background, as expected by Matthew's Jewish audience. Yet, Matthew carefully showed Jesus was not Joseph's biological son. He offered proof for the virgin birth by quoting from Isaiah 7:14 (Matt. 1:23), and the angelic affirmation that the child was from the Holy Spirit (1:18-20).

OCCASION

Matthew's Gospel is not merely a history of Jesus's life. Commentators argue that, like other Gospel writers, Matthew was not so concerned with the sequence of events as with the purpose of the narration. Speaking to his fellow Hebrews, Matthew offered a first-person portrait of the Messiah.

Matthew's Gospel emphasizes Jesus as King. From His genealogy to the kingdom parables, Jesus is identified as the Messiah. He is the fulfillment of prophecies and long-held desire in the hearts of Israel's people. His miracles were further proof of who He is.

MAJOR THEMES

Who is Jesus? Matthew emphasized Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus's distinctively Jewish genealogy, His miracles, and His fulfillment of prophecy all pointed to Him as the Christ.

What did Jesus teach? Two important sections of Matthew 1-13 share deep insights into the manner and subject matter of Jesus's teachings. First, readers learn how to relate

to God and to people. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) contains some of the most cherished treasures of instruction for Jesus's followers. These instructions often contrast the letter of tradition with the deeper spirit of God's Word.

Second, readers are shown the kingdom of heaven. For example, chapter 13 contains several "kingdom" parables, which illustrate aspects of God's rule and reign. Three of the five times Matthew uses the Greek word translated "gospel" or "good news," he associates it with the kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14).

What did Jesus do? Jesus's actions can be grouped under two primary headings: His personal life and His public ministry. In His personal life, Christ was blameless. He endured temptation without yielding to sin (4:1-11), and He associated with sinners without becoming one (9:10-11). Publicly, Jesus performed numerous miracles (especially Matt. 8-9) that fulfilled three purposes: revealing His divine authority, demonstrating His compassion for hurting people, and fulfilling messianic prophecies.

What were the results? Jesus was loved and hated. Crowds gathered wherever He went, and His disciples left everything to follow Him. Yet, people in His hometown rejected Him (13:53-58). Even John the Baptist experienced conflicting emotions, endorsing Jesus as the Christ, while later questioning whether He was the One (11:1-3).

People haven't changed much. Many love Jesus and follow Him regardless of the consequences. Others reject Him because they want to continue in sin without a sense of guilt. In the end, every person will recognize Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). The only question each person must answer will be "Is He Savior?"



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.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 3:13–4:11 Memory Verse: Matthew 3:17

Perhaps no other subject generates more controversy than the nature and mission of Jesus Christ. Arguments regarding most issues—from abortion to gender identity and more—depend on what one believes about Jesus's person and purpose. People who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior don't fear or hate those who hold different societal or personal values. By their words and lives, believers simply proclaim Christ as God's Son and Lord of all. Their beliefs, values, and choices are defined by their commitment to Jesus.

Consider how you make decisions. Are they based on your affirmation of Jesus as Messiah and Master? If He is our Savior, He is our Lord. If He is our King, He holds authority over every aspect of our lives. As you prepare to lead this opening session from Matthew's Gospel, reflect on how Jesus affects the way you relate to others and how you can surrender more control to Him each day. Ask God to help you lead adults to understand that the more we embrace Jesus as the Son of God—our Sovereign and Savior—the more others see Christ in us and desire to know Him too.



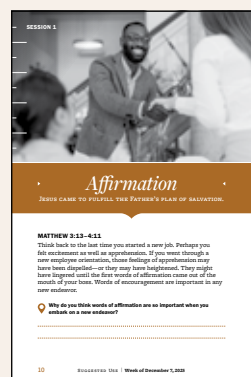
Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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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. (PSG, p. 10)

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)

“In those days.” The opening phrase of Matthew 3 establishes foundations on which the ministry of John the Baptist and the mission of Jesus the Christ are understood. Those days followed centuries of preparation across generations from Abraham to David to Jesus. “Those days” looked back at an angelic annunciation to a young virgin that she would bear the Son of God. Those days occurred in the aftermath of wise men from the East searching, finding, and worshiping the One born as King of the Jews. Casting a glance into Luke’s Gospel, those days saw the miraculous birth of a prophet to a childless, priestly couple—a child who rejoiced in his mother’s womb at the approach of the mother of his Lord (Luke 1:5-45).

Fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 40:3), the adult John did not look like one who would herald the Son of God. He lived a rough life in the wilderness, wore rough clothing, and shared a rough message. He called religious leaders a “brood of vipers” when they came to his baptisms (Matt. 3:7). Still, the people streamed from Jerusalem, the Judean countryside, and the Jordan River valley to hear John preach, and they remained with repentant hearts to be baptized.

John’s ultimate purpose was to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. John’s commission centered on identifying God’s Son, the Christ (John 1:29-34). When Jesus came, requesting baptism, John immediately knew He was the

One. As Jesus rose from the water, John watched as the Holy Spirit descended in dove-like fashion and rested on Him. John heard the voice of God proclaiming from heaven that this was His Son in whom He was well-pleased.

Though you have not seen and heard as John did, Bible study leaders can experience and express the reality of Jesus—the Son of God.

Jesus quickly experienced challenges to His identity and His mission. Going further into the wilderness, He fasted and prayed for forty days. In the midst of His physically weakened condition, Satan challenged Him with a series of temptations. Twice the enemy questioned His identity: “If you are the Son of God . . .” (Matt. 4:3,6).

On his third attempt, the devil confronted Jesus’s mission. Of course, Satan cared nothing for the kingdoms of the world. Jesus could have them all and avoid the cross if He would worship him. None of these tests swayed Christ. He knew who He was and why He had come. He dismissed the devil as He had before—with Scripture.

You and I also have the power to resist temptation as we submit to the Son of God and resist Satan with the Word of God.

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? (PSG, p. 11)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13) to highlight during the session. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: Matthew Time Line) and **Pack Item 9** (Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel) to distribute to the group.

INTRODUCE:

Invite the group to read the opening paragraph on page 10 of the PSG.

ASK:

Why do you think words of affirmation are so important when you embark on a new endeavor? (PSG, p. 10)

DISCUSS:

Lead a brief discussion about the group's responses. Allow two or three volunteers to share encouraging words they've received and why those words were so meaningful to them.

RECAP:

Remind the group that they are embarking on a study of Matthew 1–13 over the next twelve weeks. For context, share this information from page 11 of the PSG:

The Gospel of Matthew is one of the three Synoptic Gospels, along with Mark and Luke. The name “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. . . . 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.

TRANSITION:

Share that Jesus had a mission from God and that this session examines these early steps in His public ministry from Matthew's perspective.



Group Activity Option

Music

Play “Holy Water” by We the Kingdom. Draw attention to the second verse, which refers to baptism. Highlight how the song points to baptism as a sign of repentance and testimony of salvation. Ask: **How is baptism a public and formal way to demonstrate faith in Christ?** Share that today's session examines why Jesus was baptized and how it initiated His ministry on earth.

Obeying God (Matt. 3:13-17)

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

(v. 13) Human nature struggles with submission, even when it comes to obeying God. Jesus demonstrated obedience to the Father in every way. Paul declared that Jesus, who is God in human flesh, still humbled Himself and obeyed His Father—all the way to the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

Jesus provided an excellent example in His baptism. John the Baptist had been ministering for some time when **Jesus came from •Galilee**. Growing up in Nazareth, Jesus likely worked with His family until He reached the age to begin His ministry. He traveled to the Jordan so He could be **baptized** by John. The English word “baptize” is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizo*, meaning “to immerse or put under.”

(v. 14) John’s baptism was different from typical Jewish baptism. Many Jews saw baptism as a cleansing ritual or as a way to initiate proselytes into Jewish traditions. John, though, required proof of true repentance (Matt. 3:8).

When Jesus approached, John was shocked. He recognized Jesus as the Son of God who had no need to repent (John 1:27). Instead, John protested, **I need to be baptized by you**. Here was the Christ who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, the One whose sandals John was not worthy to untie (Matt. 3:11).

(v. 15) Jesus did not deny John’s statement but told him, **Allow it for now** because it would **fulfill all righteousness**. Jesus was not saying that baptism makes anyone righteous. Righteousness means being in a right relationship with God.

Jews thought righteousness was obtained by following the Mosaic law. Scripture says we are made righteous through faith in Christ and His sacrifice for our sins (Rom. 10:3-11). Centuries earlier, Habakkuk had declared that just people (or righteous ones) live by faith (Hab. 2:4). Paul reiterated this truth in his letters (Rom. 1:17).

Jesus told John that by obeying God in this manner both of them could demonstrate faith and fulfill the demands of righteousness. Consequently, **John allowed him to be baptized**.

Christians understand the deeper faith meaning of baptism. Immersion points people toward Jesus’s death and resurrection, and it identifies believers with Him (Rom. 6:3-5). We are not saved by baptism. We are baptized to demonstrate our obedience to Jesus because He has saved us.

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.)

(vv. 16-17) **He went up immediately from the water** described Jesus rising out of the river. The historical nature of baptism and the innate meaning of *baptizo* combine to support immersion as the method of Jesus’s baptism.

After His baptism, **the heavens suddenly opened**, and the triune God testified to Christ. The **Spirit of God** came down **like a dove**. This suggests no actual bird appeared, but the Spirit still made His presence felt in a real way.

The Father also spoke: **This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased**. He would affirm Jesus in a similar way on two other occasions: on the mountain of transfiguration (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35) and a few days before the crucifixion (John 12:27).



CONTEXT:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers are called to demonstrate obedience through baptism by immersion.

Use **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13) to provide a brief overview of the entire study. Distribute **Pack Item 8** (Handout: Matthew Time Line) for additional context.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 3:13-17 while the group listens for Matthew’s description of one of the watershed moments in Christianity. Share that this passage presents a paradigm shift: Jesus was beginning His public ministry, which meant that John the Baptist’s ministry was reaching its climax.

ASK:

Why did Jesus come to John for baptism?

RECAP:

To explain the reasons for Jesus’s baptism, share the following information from pages 12-13 of the PSG:

Jesus, fully God and fully man, took this step to identify with the sinfulness of humanity. Jesus, who would be the sacrifice for sin, identified with sinners by being baptized as they were. . . . Jesus’s baptism demonstrated His commitment to fulfill the mission for which He came into the world. Thus it was also an act of obedience to the Father and gives to us an example of obedience.

EXAMINE:

Direct attention to the phrase “went up” in verse 16. Share that this means Jesus actually went under the water. Point out the Key Doctrine (PSG, p. 13). Emphasize the Greek word for baptism (*baptizo*) means “to immerse.” Note that this indicates full immersion is the proper mode of believers’ baptism.

ASK:

What is the purpose of baptism in a believer’s life?
(PSG, p. 13)

EXPLAIN:

Discuss baptism as the visual representation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and a believer’s willingness to identify with that.

HIGHLIGHT:

Point to God’s words of affirmation. Highlight the involvement of each member of the Trinity in this event. Use the content for verses 16-17 on page 18 in the Leader Guide for more on the Spirit’s appearance “like a dove” and the Father’s words of affection and affirmation. Note that Matthew 3:17 is the session memory verse and encourage adults to reflect on it and memorize it during the week.

Hearing God (Matt. 4:1-4)

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** Then the tempter approached him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” **4** He answered, “It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

(v. 1) To obey God, we must hear Him. One tool God uses to speak to us is His Word. In these verses, Jesus displayed the value of knowing and applying Scripture. The introductory word **then** indicates that these events took place shortly after Jesus’s baptism. Mark left the same impression in his Gospel (Mark 1:9-13).

Many believers think hearing God and following His Spirit frees us from difficulties, but this scene shows that the Spirit may lead us *into* challenging situations. After seeing the Spirit descend and remain on Him at His baptism, Jesus followed the Spirit’s leadership **into the wilderness**. The Jewish concept of **led up** did not mean a northerly direction, but moving to a higher elevation. The wilderness here may have been a rough, mountainous area far from towns or villages.

More difficult than the terrain was the purpose of the trek. The Spirit brought Jesus to this harsh place **to be tempted by the devil**, the enemy of God. The Bible makes it clear that God does not tempt anyone (Jas. 1:13). However God does give Satan limited permission to engage people, as with Job (Job 1:8-22).

The Father did not need to test His Son since the two are one (John 10:30). Instead, the temptation likely served as a rebuke of Satan. The devil is not some mere personification of ultimate evil. He is a real supernatural being. Having failed in his rebellion against God, Satan turned his wrath on humanity—God’s highest creation—and on His Son who was sent to be humanity’s Savior.

Jesus’s temptation also allowed Him to identify with humanity. The writer of Hebrews noted that Jesus experienced everything we experience, only without sin (Heb. 4:15). This is possible because Jesus endured Satan’s temptations, which gave us yet another example of how to live out the Christian life in a meaningful way.

(v. 2) Often, we experience spiritual challenges when we are physically weak. Jesus **fasted forty days and forty nights**. Being completely human, as well as fully divine, Jesus felt the same

physical needs we do. The term **hungry** suggests an intense craving. Having gone without food for more than a month, Jesus was famished.

(v. 3) Once Jesus reached the physical breaking point, the enemy showed up. Scripture describes Satan as our adversary (1 Pet. 5:8), the Father of lies (John 8:44), and the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10). Here, he is called **the tempter**. His purpose in temptation is to use trickery, lies, and other deceit to entice people to sin.

Satan **approached** Jesus. The term suggests more than merely coming near someone. It carries a sense of hostility and malevolence. Imagine the arrogance of accosting Christ with evil intent!

The first temptation involved commanding some **stones to become bread**. Since Jesus was hungry, the enticement to use His divine powers for immediate gratification was real, but it wasn’t purely physical. Depending on how one translates the Greek word for **if**, Satan’s proposition also subtly may have questioned Jesus’s identity as the **Son of God**. (Some translators render it “since,” which would make Satan’s statement more sarcastic than cynical.) Like a playground bully, the devil challenged Jesus to prove it.

(v. 4) Jesus could have commanded Satan to leave Him alone. Instead, He responded to the attack with the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). He appealed to Scripture: **It is written**.

Christ’s quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3 draws to mind the context for the original statement. During Israel’s wilderness wanderings, God deliberately allowed His people to experience severe hunger and then fed them with heavenly manna. His goal was to help them recognize that their lives were sustained not merely by bread, but by the very words of God.

We can rely on Scripture to find strength and resist temptation. We should read the Bible, memorize its passages, and ask God to help us apply them to our lives.



READ:

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

Direct the group to read Matthew 4:1-4 silently and to identify one word or phrase that summarizes the temptation.

EXPLAIN:

Briefly highlight Jesus's condition when the devil approached Him. Note that He had gone nearly six weeks without food. Affirm that Satan often strikes when we are weak and our defenses are more likely to be down.

SHARE:

Encourage adults to share the word or phrase they identified as they read the verses. Note that this temptation was not just a physical challenge. Emphasize that Satan was suggesting that Jesus use His power for His own satisfaction rather than trusting God to meet His needs.

RECAP:

Use this content from page 15 of the PSG to examine Jesus's use of Scripture:

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. . . . Jesus would not be lured from His allegiance to God. He affirmed loyalty to God above physical satisfaction.

ASK:

How have you found strength and encouragement in God's Word? (PSG, p. 15)

DISCUSS:

Facilitate a brief discussion about the merits of using Scripture when we face temptation. Share that Satan was not done with his temptations, and Jesus was not done relying on God's Word.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Give each adult a sheet of paper and a pencil. Encourage them to complete the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 18). After a few minutes, allow some volunteers to share their work. Spend time talking about their lists of ways Satan tempts believers today. Encourage them to use the Scriptures they identified as a way to deal with temptations each day.

Trusting God (Matt. 4:5-7)

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, **6** and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” **7** Jesus told him, “It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God.”

(v. 5) When his first temptation failed, Satan took Jesus **to the holy city** (Jerusalem). The text does not specify the manner of their movement to the site. Obviously, they did not walk into town. Satan likely used supernatural power to transport Jesus to the next place of temptation.

The tempter led Christ to **the pinnacle of the temple**. The term *pinnacle* translates a Greek word also used for “wing.” Some commentators suggest this may have been Herod’s portico. Others identify it as the peak of Solomon’s Porch on the east side of the temple. Both locations reached hundreds of feet above the floor of the Kidron Valley. The fact that crowds in the temple courtyard did not witness Jesus’s presence above them attests to the supernatural nature of this event.

(v. 6) Satan’s second temptation repeated his assault on Jesus’s identity as the **Son of God** and His trust in the Father. Again, Satan undoubtedly knew who Jesus was, just as his demons did (Matt. 8:28-29). He used this taunt to elicit a reaction from Christ and prompt Him to prove Himself. If the devil could induce Jesus to act contrary to God’s will, His actions would disqualify Him from being humanity’s Savior.

Since Jesus employed Scripture in response to the first temptation, the devil also quoted an Old Testament text, Psalm 91:11-12. This text is part of a larger psalm that describes God’s provision and protection for the person “who lives under the protection of the Most High” and those who reside “in the shadow of the Almighty” (Ps. 91:1).

In this case, Satan was saying that Jesus could do whatever He wanted and know that God would protect Him. He was encouraging Jesus to test God’s faithfulness by leaping off the pinnacle point. However, the psalmist was talking about someone who might stumble in their walk with God.

The enemy’s misuse of this passage was supposed to justify Jesus’s violation of God’s will. Satan often bends God’s Word to trick believers

into doing his bidding. We need to beware of taking Scripture passages out of context or applying them in a way that was not intended by their divine Author.

The first half of Satan’s words comprise a false application of the text. **Throw yourself down**. Again, nowhere does the psalm suggest doing so. Like the tempter’s encounter with Eve in the garden, he twists truth with his lies to beguile his victim into doubting God and acting contrary to His will (Gen. 3:1-5). Like his first temptation, Satan wanted Jesus to use His supernatural power and His relationship to the Father to perform a spectacular feat.

Some Bible scholars argue the devil was trying to detour Jesus into a short-cut around the cross. The temple courtyards would have been teeming with people. Imagine the awe onlookers might experience if they saw Jesus jump from the heights and be saved by angels! The assumption is that they would accept Him as Messiah without the agony of the crucifixion. However, Jesus’s purpose was to atone for sin, not amaze the people. And that required a sacrificial death, not a miraculous rescue.

(v. 7) As one might expect, Jesus was not fooled by Satan’s tricks. He again relied on Scripture to interpret Scripture. Christ reiterated what was **written**. He knew the passage Satan misused was not intended to justify dramatic action. Quoting the first half of Deuteronomy 6:16, He said, **Do not test the Lord your God**. We cannot behave presumptively toward God. Like Christ, we respond to His Word with faith and obedience, not distorting it to mean what we want.

We can trust God’s faithfulness without demanding miracles. God sometimes works wonders on our behalf, but He does so for His purposes, not ours. He cannot be manipulated to do our bidding.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: We can trust God's faithfulness without demanding miracles.

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 4:5-7 as adults again identify a single word or phrase that summarizes the temptation in the verses.

EXPLAIN:

Point out that scholars have different ideas about where this pinnacle of the temple might be. Note that some believe it could be the part of Solomon's Porch, which rose to more than 450 feet above the Kidron Valley. Share that others think it could have been an area known as Herod's portico, which also rose high above Kidron. Emphasize that the exact location is not as important as Satan's purpose for bringing Jesus there.

DISCUSS:

Briefly review the second temptation and allow adults to share the word or phrase they identified as the verses were read. Talk about how those terms are significant to the story.

RECAP:

Explain Satan's attempted use of Scripture and Jesus's response by highlighting this content from page 16 of the PSG:

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. . . . 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.

ASK:

What are some ways people might try to put God to the test in our culture? (PSG, p. 16)

STATE:

Jesus used another Scripture, Deuteronomy 6:16, to reject Satan's temptation. He understood the meaning of the passage that Satan was twisting, so He could respond with wisdom and the authority of God's truth. Context matters when it comes to understanding and applying God's Word in our lives. We have to be careful to avoid the temptation to twist God's Word to fit our own ideas and agendas.

Worshipping God (Matt. 4:8-11)

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9** And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me.” **10** Then Jesus told him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” **11** Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

(v. 8) Satan **again** tried to tempt Jesus into leaving the Father’s path. The scene shifted from the pinnacle of the temple **to a very high mountain**. The text does not specify the mountain’s location, but not even Mount Everest would have provided a vista from which **all the kingdoms of the world** could be seen at once.

The phrase **the devil . . . showed him** indicates that Satan supernaturally offered a vision of all the nations **and their splendor**. He did not show their squalor or suffering. Rather, he emphasized their wealth and wonders.

(v. 9) This time, the tempter did not appeal to Jesus’s identity as God’s Son or to Scripture. Instead, Satan went to the heart of his goal. The devil did not desire these kingdoms or their inhabitants. He wanted to usurp the place of the Most High God (Isa. 14:14). He offered Jesus **all these things** if Jesus would just **fall down and worship** him.

Scholars agree that Satan has some level of power over the world. He is called “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). However, God holds ultimate power over all the world and beyond.

Satan’s temptation went beyond authority. He offered Jesus a path without the cross. If Christ’s goal was building an earthly kingdom, He could have skipped the suffering and shame of Calvary. However, Jesus was committed to the kingdom of God and the salvation of the human race.

(vv. 10-11) Jesus did not argue with his adversary. He did not need to weigh Satan’s offer. He recognized the father of lies for what he was, and He also knew who He Himself was. He had the authority and used it: **Go away, Satan!**

Once more, Jesus backed up His power with Scripture: **“Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”** His declaration incorporated the heart of Deuteronomy 6:13 as well as the primary commandments of Exodus 20:2-7. The term “your God” also emphasized that He was Satan’s

God, even though the devil rebelled against God’s lordship. Rather than seeking to be worshiped, Satan should worship God—and will one day.

After this ultimate rebuke, **the devil left him**. Luke’s Gospel affirms that the devil only left Jesus for a while (Luke 4:13). While the Gospels do not share another instance of temptation, we can be sure that Satan continued his assault.

Imagine the heavenly hosts as this scene played out. The **angels** of heaven were poised to intervene at the Father’s command. Later, Jesus reminded His disciples that He could summon legions of angels to His aid (Matt. 26:53). For now, it was enough that they would **serve him**. We do not know the details of this ministry, but the angels did what they were created to do—serve the Son.

Praying Scripture

Matthew 4:10

Spend time praying Scripture using Matthew 4:10. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Ask God to help you memorize Scripture so you can reject the temptations of Satan. Thank Him for providing this powerful tool to strengthen your walk with Him.

During the session, invite adults to pray this Scripture, as well. You and the adults in your group can also take advantage of the Explore the Bible Prayer Guide. This QR code also appears on page 19 of the *Personal Study Guide*.



Prayer Guide

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



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: We must acknowledge God alone as worthy of our worship.

Direct the group to read Matthew 4:8-11 silently to identify the third temptation of Jesus and to summarize it in a single word or phrase.

RECAP:

Encourage volunteers to share their responses from the reading. Briefly discuss Satan's authority to make this offer. Summarize this content from page 17 of the PSG:

"[Satan] showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. These kingdoms represent all that Satan controlled—the governments, the economies, and world systems that God allows Satan to rule. Their splendor would represent that which was glitzy and appealing about all the worldly things these kingdoms possessed. These would be Satan's to give since he was the 'ruler of this world' (John 12:31)."

SHARE:

Remind adults that Satan was offering kingdoms that will belong to Jesus one day anyway, according to Revelation 11:15. Highlight that the real issue was not authority over kingdoms, but becoming King without the suffering of the cross.

PRAY:

Note that Jesus again used Scripture to defeat Satan. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) and encourage adults to reflect on how they can pray the truth of Matthew 4:10 using the prayer prompts on page 24 of the Leader Guide.

ASK:

What challenges our worship of God alone? How can we overcome those challenges? (PSG, p. 18)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Money

Display a \$50 or \$100 bill on a table in front of the group. Note that this is not a huge amount of money, but it does represent a few hours of hard work for many people. Ask: ***What would you give up for this money?*** Suggest things like skipping a worship service or abandoning a plan to check on a sick neighbor. Remind adults that nothing should stand in the way of our walk with Jesus. Affirm that temptations and distractions take forms other than money, but our hearts should be devoted to God completely. Challenge adults to examine their lives for anything that might be drawing their hearts away from worshiping God and serving Him only.

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 19 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *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.*

ENCOURAGE:

Emphasize that baptism is the first step of obedience after salvation and that if anyone has questions you are available to talk with them. Also, remind adults that Scripture memory is a vital tool for fighting temptation. Suggest they reflect on the first set of questions (PSG, p. 19) during the week and consider how they can encourage one another to resist temptation.

RESPOND:

Draw attention to the second set of questions on page 19 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider how they can begin memorizing Scripture more effectively. Remind them that they can start with this session's memory verse, Matthew 3:17.

PRAY:

Encourage adults to continue using **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) to pray through this session's passages. Close the session in prayer, asking God to help adults move forward in obedience and to rely on the power of Scripture each day.

AFTER THE SESSION

Email or text the group and share that you are praying for them this week. Remind them that while this session largely focused on using Scripture to fight temptation, a well-rounded Christian also uses it proactively. Consider praying Philemon 6 for the group: "I pray that your participation in the faith may become effective through knowing every good thing that is in us for the glory of Christ."

LEADER EXTRAS



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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

Titles of Christ in the Gospels

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

SON OF MAN

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

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

Jesus used the title "Son of Man" in four different ways. First, He frequently used it as a synonym for "I." Jesus was simply referring to Himself by that title (see Matt. 26:24). Second, the Son of Man is one who exercises divine authority (see Matt. 9:6). Third, the Son of Man fulfills His earthly mission through His death and resurrection (see Matt. 12:40; 17:9,12,23). Fourth, the Son

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

SON, SON OF GOD, ONLY SON

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

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

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

“He was, is, and ever will be the Son of God.”

LORD

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

CHRIST (MESSIAH)

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

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

THE WORD

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

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

SAVIOR

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

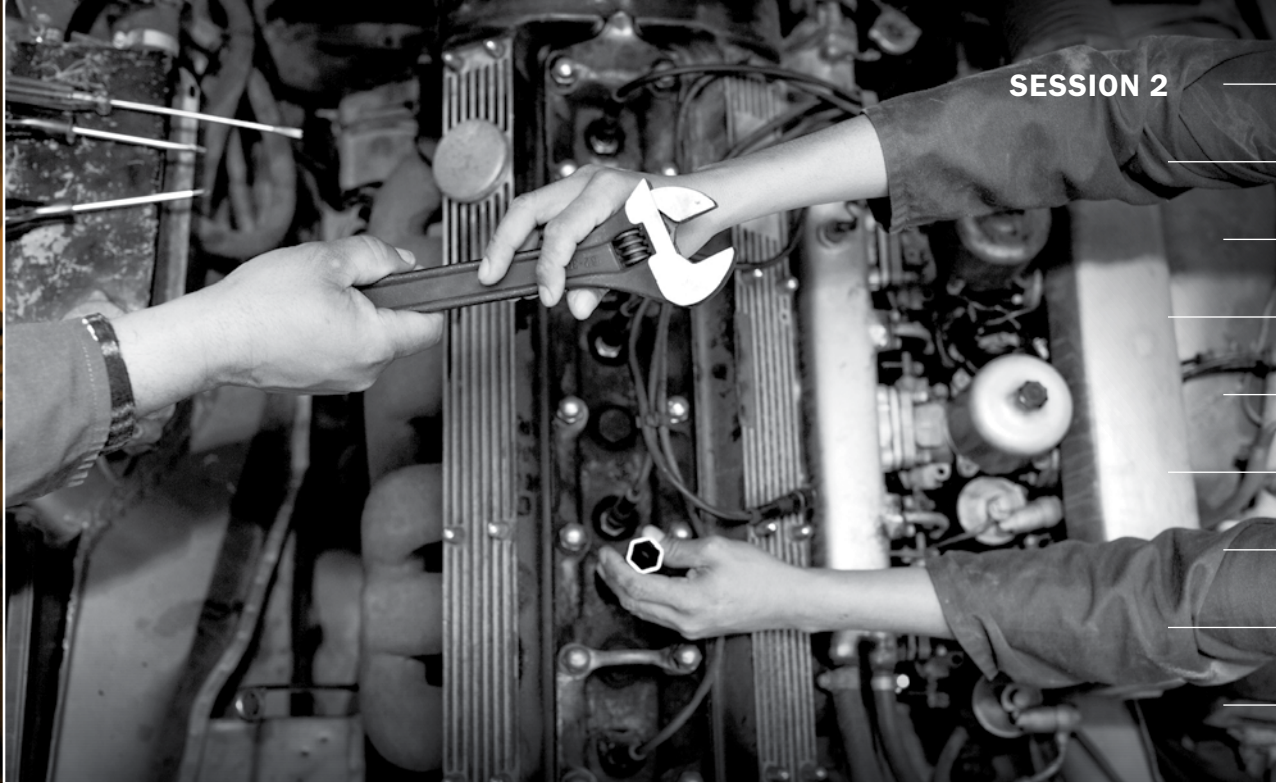
HOLY ONE OF GOD

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

SON OF DAVID

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

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



Invitation

JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 4:12-25 Memory Verse: Matthew 4:19-20

Many young people struggle with what they should do with their lives as they approach the end of high school or college. Determining a vocation and how to develop the skills necessary for it can challenge young adults with life-changing decisions—and some difficult sacrifices. Years later, as they approach middle-age, many of these same adults experience mid-life crises as their earlier dreams fail to materialize. Sometimes, they may even wonder what life might have been like if they'd chosen differently.

Life choices are best made in the context of knowing and doing God's will. Jesus calls people to follow Him. Answering Christ's invitation to discipleship positions us to continue in His will moving forward. Keeping His call firmly before us helps make daily decisions much easier. As you dig into this session, reflect on the men who answered Jesus's call and how they found purpose in Him. Consider what they gave up—and what God may be calling you to surrender. Ask God to help you know how to encourage adults to respond positively to Jesus's call to discipleship.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



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. (PSG, p. 20)

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 never did anything haphazardly. With the omniscience of His divine nature, Jesus knew exactly what He was doing and why He did it. Following His baptism and the wilderness testing, Jesus launched the next phase of His mission.

Still, Jesus's hometown did not readily receive His ministry or His message (Matt. 13:54-58). In fact, people in His hometown of Nazareth tried to kill Him (Luke 4:16-30). From there, Jesus moved to Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Though He traveled across Israel, Capernaum was His base of operations. His ministry in the region also fulfilled prophecies uttered approximately seven centuries earlier by Isaiah.

Matthew quoted Isaiah 9:1-2 (Matt. 4:15-16). In its original context, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had formed an alliance with Assyria against Judah. The invasion failed, and Assyria later turned on Israel (Ephraim), taking many people into exile. Although primarily focused on Judah, Isaiah offered hope to the North. The regions of Zebulun and Naphtali eventually would experience the light of the Messiah.

The Sea of Galilee was a large body of fresh water on the northeast corner of Israel. On its north shore, Capernaum and its surrounding villages were home to many fishermen, including two sets of brothers: Andrew and Peter, James and John. Jesus had met Andrew and Peter earlier. Andrew had heard John call Jesus the "Lamb of God." Convinced this was the Messiah, he

brought his brother, Simon, to meet the Christ (John 1:35-42).

Luke's Gospel records that Jesus later encountered Peter while He was teaching along the shore. Due to the crowd, He got into Peter's boat to speak. It was no coincidence that this was Simon's boat (Luke 5:1-11).

Matthew's account could be an abbreviated version of this encounter on Peter's boat, although some writers argue they represent two separate incidents. The primary point is that Jesus called Peter and Andrew, along with James and John, to follow Him and to "fish for people." They each left everything to accept the invitation.

These four disciples found themselves on a challenging adventure. They accompanied Jesus throughout Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and even beyond the Jordan River. They watched Jesus preach about God's kingdom, heal the sick, and perform incredible miracles. They became eyewitnesses that Jesus was the Son of God.

While thousands of people had brief encounters with Jesus, those who accepted His invitation to discipleship walked with Him daily for three years. Their lives were changed forever by their decision to follow Him. Jesus also calls you and me to come after Him.

Read Matthew 4:12-25 in your Bible. In a couple of sentences, summarize everything Jesus did in these verses, (PSG, p. 21)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) and **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19*).

ASK:

What are some jobs today where you might find apprentices? What would be some advantages to becoming an apprentice in one of those jobs? (PSG, p. 20)

INTRODUCE:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 20 of the PSG. Lead a brief discussion about the goal of an apprentice. Emphasize that apprentices gain the skills needed to perform at the same level as the master.

SAY:

Believers are called to apprentice themselves to Jesus. A more common way of saying this is that we become His disciples. It's not a commitment to take lightly because it's a commitment that lasts a lifetime.

CONTEXT:

Explain that this session picks up Matthew's description of Jesus's early ministry. Briefly review Jesus's baptism and His temptation in Session 1.

OVERVIEW:

Use **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) to locate Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Share that this city was an important economic hub on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and that Jesus's ministry in this area fulfilled prophecies spoken by Isaiah seven centuries earlier. Note that Galilee—including Capernaum—had a large Gentile population, highlighting Jesus's desire for the gospel to be shared with all people.

TRANSITION:

Galilee is also important because it was the home of Jesus's first followers. As we examine their lives, we can learn more about what it means to be Jesus's disciples.



Group Activity Option

Music

Share the lyrics of the first two verses of “Footsteps of Jesus” (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 550). Note that the lyricist, Mary Bridges Canedy Slade, was a minister's wife who helped slaves find freedom through the Underground Railroad. Point out that discipleship begins with Christ's call and requires disciples to follow Him closely. Lead the group to identify things that might hinder disciples from following Jesus as they should. Ask: **How can you overcome such obstacles?**

Starting Out (Matt. 4:12-17)

12 When he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. **13** He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. **14** This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: **15** Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. **16** The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. **17** From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

(v. 12) New ventures often involve launching new opportunities. Sometime after Jesus’s baptism, King Herod grew angry because John the Baptist publicly denounced his illegal marriage to his brother’s wife (Mark 6:14-29). Once **John had been arrested**, Jesus **withdrew into Galilee**. The term “withdrew” indicates a deliberate move away from the site of John’s ministry. Traveling back to Galilee set the stage for several foundational elements of Jesus’s ministry.

(vv. 13-14) When Jesus visited His hometown of **•Nazareth**, people violently rejected Him (Luke 4:16-31). Logic might send the Messiah to Jerusalem, the center of religious and political life. Instead, He moved to **•Capernaum**, located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. This area once had been home to the tribes of **•Zebulun** and **•Naphtali**. These tribes had fought side-by-side during the conquest of Canaan and later under the leadership of the judges (Judg. 4:6).

Jesus’s move to this region fulfilled prophecy. More than seven hundred years earlier, **Isaiah** foresaw the Messiah bringing light into the area’s spiritual darkness. The prophet knew the sad history of these tribes, but God gave him insight into what would happen when the Messiah arrived. This fulfillment of Scripture helped confirm Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God.

(v. 15) Matthew quoted Isaiah 9:1-2 which called out the **land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali**. The **road by the sea** included the route travelers would take along the Sea of Galilee. The phrase **beyond the Jordan** referred to the area west and northwest of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee.

This location made the people natural targets of Syria and, later, Assyria (2 Kings 15). Over time, many foreigners relocated in the region, making the designation **Galilee of the Gentiles** natural.

(v. 16) Isolation from the religious hub of Jerusalem resulted in these groups being tempted by Canaanite idolatries. Spiritual infidelity spread in the Northern Kingdom, leading to God’s wrath in the form of an invasion by Assyria. Israel’s subsequent capture and exile further changed the nature of the region’s population. Spiritual **darkness** aptly described the great need Isaiah foresaw as he warned the residents of the Northern Kingdom about God’s coming judgment (Isa. 7:1-9; 8:1-10, 18-22).

Within Isaiah’s warning was a message of hope. The day would come when these people would see **a great light**. Isaiah predicted the ministry of the Messiah, the “light of the world” (John 8:12). For people **living in the land of the shadow of death**, a new day offered the prospect of redemption. Although Isaiah wrote about events seven centuries in the future, he spoke as if it had already happened—**a light has dawned**.

(v. 17) That light was Jesus. **From then on** refers to the period starting with Jesus’s relocation to Capernaum. Initially, His ministry did not focus on healing or miracles. Instead, Jesus **began to preach**. He proclaimed the same two-fold message as John the Baptist: **Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near**. Repentance means more than feeling sorry for wrongdoing. It involves a change of mind and heart that leads to a change of behavior and direction.

An air of urgency surrounded Jesus’s message. With His arrival, the kingdom of heaven had come near. The kingdom was not the free geopolitical state the Jews hoped the Messiah would bring. Rather, it encompassed the lordship of Jesus over the hearts of people.

People must repent to enter God’s kingdom. This theme was not the end of the message, but the beginning. It would develop as the gospel came alive through Jesus’s life and teaching.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: People must repent to enter the Kingdom of God.

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 4:12-17 aloud while the group listens to identify the specific action that Jesus took and why.

EXAMINE:

Direct adults to create an even number of teams. Each team should have 2-3 people. Direct the teams to complete the following assignments:

- *Direct half the teams to examine Luke 3:15-20 and identify why John the Baptist was arrested. Discuss the impact John's arrest had on Jesus moving to Capernaum.*
- *Direct half the teams to examine Luke 4:20-30 and identify how Jesus was received in His hometown of Nazareth. Discuss the impact Nazareth's rejection had on Jesus moving to Capernaum.*

RECAP:

After a few minutes, allow volunteers from each set of teams to share what they discovered. Lead a brief discussion on the role each event could have had on Jesus's move to Capernaum. Summarize this information from page 22 of the PSG:

"John the Baptist had made enemies of religious leaders . . . whom he denounced as hypocrites. Therefore, they would have looked upon Jesus, the One to whom John pointed, with suspicion. Jesus's withdrawal from the region certainly was not because Jesus was afraid of the Pharisees and other religious leaders. Instead, He desired to begin His ministry without any premature confrontation with these leaders. . . . 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."

EXPLAIN:

Direct the group to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*). Note that much of Jesus's ministry occurred in Galilee. Highlight the similarities between John's message and Jesus's message. Point out that Jesus's mission didn't focus initially on miracles and healings but on preaching that pointed people to the kingdom of God.

ASK:

How can believers point people to God's kingdom?
(PSG, p. 24)

Calling Out (Matt. 4:18-22)

18 As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. **19** “Follow me,” he told them, “and I will make you fish for people.” **20** Immediately they left their nets and followed him. **21** Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, preparing their nets, and he called them. **22** Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

(v. 18) Jesus was intentional about choosing His disciples. The phrase *walking along the Sea of Galilee* does not mean Jesus was merely taking a stroll on the beach. We should recognize Jesus’s purpose in taking this particular route.

Jesus had met **Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew** following His baptism. In fact, He had already started referring to Simon as “Peter” (John 1:42). The brothers grew up in Bethsaida, near Capernaum (1:44). Later, Peter married and lived in Capernaum (Luke 4:38).

Here, Simon and Andrew were *casting a net into the sea*. As professional *fishermen*, they made their living from the sea. While Peter owned a boat, the brothers were in shallower waters, allowing Jesus to see them and call to them.

(vv. 19-20) Jesus invited Peter and Andrew to *Follow me*. This term carries the sense of leaving what one is doing in the moment. Jesus had something much more important in mind. If they would heed His call, Jesus promised, *I will make you fish for people*.

Simon and Andrew did not need an explanation. They believed Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:41). As a result, they responded *immediately*. They did not worry about their boat or fishing gear. They simply *left their nets and followed him*. For commercial fishermen, abandoning the nets meant abandoning their livelihood. Following Jesus required total trust in Him.

(v. 21) Again, Jesus did not happen upon **James and John** by accident. He purposefully sought them out. They would become known as the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). Here, they were simply identified as the sons of **Zebedee**.

Being named first, James was likely the older brother. He also would become the first of Jesus’s apostles to die as a martyr. Like all the disciples except John, answering Jesus’s call to follow Him would eventually cost James his life (Acts 12:1-2).

Notice several aspects of the brothers when Jesus *called them*. They were *in a boat*. This vessel was big enough for several men and their large nets. If this setting was the same as seen in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 5:2), the boat would have a shallow draft so they could anchor near the shore.

Second, they were with *Zebedee their father*. This second boat probably belonged to Zebedee, with James and John working with him in a family business. Third, they were busy *preparing their nets*. Jesus did not call idle men. He sought workers who would accept their tasks with diligence and commitment (Matt. 24:45-46).

(v. 22) Like Peter and Andrew, James and John did not hesitate to answer Jesus’s call. The term *immediately* means just that. Apparently, they did not even discuss their response with Zebedee. They *left the boat*, surrendering the safety of a secure job. More telling, they left *their father*. The text does not suggest that their decision created a rift in their relationship. They loved Zebedee, but Jesus presented a higher calling that surpassed loyalty to family or lifestyles.

None of these early disciples left simply to leave. They *followed* Jesus. This term implies accepting someone else as leader, submitting to a master’s will and direction. Following Jesus demands personal sacrifice. Being His disciple is not a hobby or part-time vocation. If we want to pursue Jesus, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross each day, and follow Him (Matt. 16:24).



The Twelve Disciples

Who were Jesus’s disciples? Scan this QR code to discover the names and biblical lists of the twelve disciples.

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: Following Jesus will require personal sacrifice.

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 4:18-22 aloud while the group identifies Jesus's expectations for the first disciples.

RECAP:

Invite the group to share the requirements they identified for Jesus's disciples. Direct attention to the "Did You Know?" feature (PSG, p. 25). Point out that a disciple is an "apprentice, pupil, or follower." Share this content from page 24 of the PSG to highlight how Jesus broke norms in choosing His disciples:

Typically, a promising Jewish student would choose a rabbi he wanted to attach himself to and would ask to become his disciple. . . . Jesus reversed the procedure by approaching those He wanted to be His disciples and calling them to follow Him. Also, 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.

SHARE:

Point out that abandoning nets and boats was tantamount to abandoning their occupation, while leaving a father elevated Jesus above family.

ASK:

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

(PSG, p. 26) Allow volunteers to share personal stories of how following Jesus has radically changed their lives.

PROMPT:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19) and identify it as the memory verse. Encourage the group to work on memorizing these verses this week.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Fishhook

Show adults a fishhook. Point out that fishhooks are typically used with bait to lure a fish. Note that the barb ensures the fish cannot escape. Ask: **What are some things you're "hooked" on?** Affirm that these habits can be good or bad, depending on the context. Suggest that Jesus hooked His disciples with a compelling vision and mission. Say: *They found Jesus and His gospel so compelling they could not escape His grip.* Encourage adults to consider the hooks they can use to help unbelievers connect with Jesus.

Reaching Out (Matt. 4:23-25)

23 Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. **24** Then the news about him spread throughout Syria. So they brought to him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the epileptics, and the paralytics. And he healed them. **25** Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

(v. 23) In the days that followed, Jesus traveled **all over Galilee**. Three participles describe distinct aspects of Jesus's ministry: **teaching**, **preaching**, and **healing**. The present active tense of these verb forms emphasizes their ongoing nature. This was Jesus's regular practice.

Jesus taught in **synagogues**. Most larger towns had such formal places of worship and instruction, and visiting rabbis often were asked to participate in services. The Bible emphasizes two characteristics of Jesus's teaching: He taught the Scriptures, not merely the interesting topics of the day; and He taught with authority, unlike other instructors of the day (Matt. 7:29).

While all of Jesus's preaching included aspects of teaching, it also included an element of persuasion. While His own words carried divine authority, He also pointed to the Old Testament Scriptures to affirm His role as Messiah and to challenge listeners' behaviors.

Jesus focused His sermons on **the kingdom**. Using tools like questions and parables, He emphasized a spiritual kingdom that was not of this world (John 18:36). Yet, He emphasized that God's kingdom was present among them through His life and ministry (Luke 17:20-21).

Jesus's ministry also involved healing **every disease and sickness**. His ministry was an expression of love and compassion (Matt. 14:14). While faith was important, Jesus also ministered to those who struggled with faith (cf. John 5:1-15). Sometimes Jesus healed with a touch; sometimes He healed with just a word (Matt. 8:3-15).

(v. 24) Good **news** travels fast, and word about Jesus reached as far as **•Syria**. In this case, Syria was not so much the nation we know today, but a region north of Capernaum. The word links reports of Jesus's healing with the actions taken by people who heard the news. Desperation moved them to action as they **brought to him all those who were afflicted**.

Matthew expanded on the term "afflicted" by describing various examples of problems. Many were **suffering from various diseases and intense pains**. He did not offer diagnoses; He simply healed whatever ailment He encountered. Anyone who has suffered intense, long-term pain can appreciate the relief Jesus provided.

People also brought the **demon-possessed** to Jesus. He had authority over evil spirits and cast them out by His Word (Matt. 8:28-32). Scripture makes a clear differentiation between physical illness and demonic possession. Jesus has power over both.

Concerned people also brought **epileptics** and **paralytics**. At the hand of Jesus, lepers were cleansed, the lame walked, the blind saw, the deaf heard, and the mute spoke. No wonder news about Him spread everywhere!

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.)

(v. 25) As one might expect, Jesus drew **large crowds**. Along with Jewish strongholds like **Jerusalem** and **Judea**, others from Gentile regions like the ten cities of **the •Decapolis** east of Galilee and **beyond the Jordan** also came. Jesus had compassion on them all because the message of the gospel is available to all. Similarly, we are called to show Jesus's love to all people so they might hear the good news of Christ and be saved.



READ:

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

Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 4:23-25 aloud while the group listens for the three primary components of His ministry.

RECAP:

Allow adults to share the three components of Jesus's ministry in these verses. Share that Matthew provided a summary of how Jesus carried out his work during the early days of His Galilean ministry. Summarize this content from pages 26-27 of the PSG to further define teaching, preaching, and healing:

"Teaching was a regular part of synagogue life as rabbis would give explanation of the Scriptures. Teaching focused on content and the discovery of truth in God's Word. . . . 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 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."

EXPLAIN:

Use information for Matthew 4:24 in the Leader Guide (p. 36) to explain the different groups Jesus healed. Note that Jesus's works drew large crowds. Use **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) to identify the regions mentioned in the verses. Emphasize that Jesus's focus remained on revealing God's kingdom and that we should make that a priority in our lives as well.

ASK:

How can believers follow Jesus's example of sharing the message of God's kingdom? (PSG, p. 28)

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Remind adults that 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?***

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 29 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *People must repent to enter the Kingdom of God.*
- *Following Jesus will require personal sacrifice.*
- *Jesus's call means following His example and ministering to others.*

REFLECT:

Direct adults to consider which statement would be hardest to apply and why. Allow a few volunteers to share their responses.

DISCUSS:

Direct attention to the second set of questions on page 29 of the PSG. Facilitate a brief discussion on what a disciple of Jesus looks like in a contemporary context. Challenge adults to spend time during the week talking with God about what their lives say to others about their commitment to Him.

MEMORIZE:

Point back to **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19). Lead the group in reading the verses two or three times aloud together. Encourage them to continue memorizing the verses this week. Remind them to be alert for opportunities God provides to be a fisher of men in the coming days.

PRAY:

Read the session's focal statement: *Jesus calls people to follow Him*. Give adults a few minutes to pray silently about how He wants them to apply the truths of this session. Close in prayer, asking God to help each adult be the hands and feet of Jesus each day.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group to provide a short list of ways they can reflect Jesus to the world. (*Examples: sacrificing personal time or resources to perform ministry, visiting and praying with people who are ill, challenging an unbeliever to turn away from their sin*) Encourage adults to be intentional about choosing one way they can put their faith into action this week.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
Explore the *Bible Adult Commentary* offers additional information and biblical insights related to the key passages.
(Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com**.)

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.



Worship the King

JESUS THE SAVIOR IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 2:1-12 Memory Verse: Matthew 2:11

Most people share a love for Christmas, but they may have different ideas of what Christmas means. If you ask the average person about the reason for the season, you may hear answers like family gatherings, gifts, delicious food, beautiful decorations, moving music, and special church services. Scrooges among us might counter with words like family conflict, extra debt, weight gain, heartburn, hard travel, and cold weather.

Honestly, both groups miss the point. They are focusing on things, while Christmas is really all about a person. They fail to see the Savior beyond all the stuff.

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, the Son of God. No matter how many times His story gets told, it never gets old. Christmas is about a child announced by angels, born in a stable, visited by shepherds, and worshiped by wise men. This child was unique—born to a young Jewish virgin through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. And this baby was born for one purpose—to live and die for you and me. He is why I love Christmas.



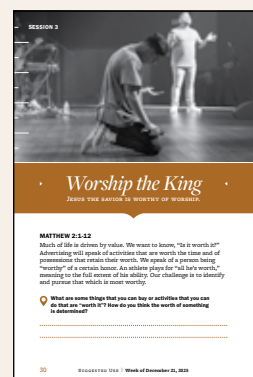
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Much of life is driven by value. We want to know, “It is worth it?” Advertising will speak of activities that are worth the time and of possessions that retain their worth. We speak of a person being “worthy” of a certain honor. An athlete plays for “all he’s worth,” meaning to the full extent of his ability. Our challenge is to identify and pursue that which is most worthy. (PSG, p. 30)

**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)

All Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16), including genealogical lists. Emphasizing Jesus’s Jewish heritage, Matthew began with Abraham and traveled through the centuries to Christ. His list includes kings and commoners, as well as four women (Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary), which was unusual for ancient genealogies.

Readers find Boaz, the son Rahab (a harlot) and the husband of Ruth (a Moabite). The prominence of Solomon makes sense, but the mention of his mother, Bathsheba, reminds us of David’s adultery and conspiracy to murder Uriah. Actually, inclusion of the good and the bad offers confidence in the authenticity of Scripture and gives us hope that Christ came to save sinners.

Matthew’s account ends with Joseph. He was the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Instead of describing Mary’s experience with the angelic annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), Matthew focused on Joseph’s story.

The term “engaged” does not fully express the relationship of Joseph and Mary. Jewish custom had two marriage ceremonies separated by a year. After the first, the couple was considered husband and wife but did not engage in marital intimacy. So, when Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant, he naturally assumed infidelity. A formal divorce was the only way their relationship could be severed according to Jewish law.

An angel intervened and assured Joseph of Mary’s faithfulness and affirmed the identity

of the child as the Son of God. These points are important as we consider today’s focal passage from Matthew 2. Matthew emphasized Jesus’s messianic role as the King of the Jews along with His position as the Son of God. He emphasized how this disturbed Herod the Great, who ruled Israel on behalf of the Romans.

In addition, wise men—possibly coming from Persia—arrived in Jerusalem looking for the new king. They had been alerted by a singular star they linked with the Messiah’s birth, suggesting they may have been astrologers. The legacy left by Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah, and a host of exiled Jews in Persia included knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. They may have known about the predicted star of Jacob (Num. 24:17) and associated that prophecy with this unique star.

Urged to seek out the child by the deceitful Herod, the wise men followed the star until it led them to the house where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were staying. By this time, the family had relocated from the stable to a guest house. Joyously, the pilgrims worshiped the child and offered special presents. Since only God should be worshiped, the fact that Jesus received the worship of humans attests to His deity. He is God the Son.

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? (PSG, p. 31)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Make extra copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*) and **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Messianic Prophecies*). Hang **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus*) on a focal wall.

INTRODUCE:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 30 of the PSG.

ASK:

What are some things that you can buy or activities that you can do that are “worth it”? How do you think the worth of something is determined? (PSG, p. 30)

CONTEXT:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*) and remind adults that the first two sessions examined the early days of Jesus’s ministry on earth. Share that this session will backtrack a couple of chapters and focus on events related to His birth.

RECAP:

Note that while Mark and Luke wrote for Gentile audiences, Matthew wrote to Jewish readers. Share the following content from page 31 of the PSG to explain how this influenced Matthew’s style and approach:

Matthew incorporated numerous Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus. Two of these Old Testament prophecies [Isa. 7:14; Micah 5:2] are found in the context for this week’s study. Matthew began his Gospel account by tracing the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, who was engaged to Mary.

EXPLAIN:

Emphasize that Matthew’s point was that Jesus is the Messiah, so He is worthy of our worship. Note that while our earthly ventures may or may not yield dividends, whole-hearted devotion and worship of Jesus is always worth the investment.

MATTHEW TIME LINE

400-300 BC	300-100 BC	100-AD 100
400-300 BC: Jesus born in Bethlehem	300-100 BC: Jesus grows up in Nazareth	100-AD 100: Jesus is crucified and buried
300-100 BC: Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist	100-AD 100: Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee	AD 100: Jesus returns to Nazareth
100-AD 100: Jesus travels to Jerusalem	AD 100: Jesus is crucified and buried	AD 100: Jesus is resurrected and ascends to heaven
AD 100: Jesus is resurrected and ascends to heaven	AD 100: Jesus is resurrected and ascends to heaven	AD 100: Jesus is resurrected and ascends to heaven

MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

Prophecy	Old Testament Prophecy	New Testament Fulfillment
Jesus is born in Bethlehem	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23
Jesus is born in Nazareth	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:23
Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist	Isaiah 40:3	Matthew 3:13-17
Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee	Isaiah 61:1	Matthew 4:23-25
Jesus is crucified and buried	Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 27:32-54
Jesus is resurrected and ascends to heaven	Psalm 118:22-23	Matthew 28:1-10

Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus

Event in Jesus's Life	Old Testament Prophecy	Fulfillment in Matthew
Jesus is born in Bethlehem	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23
Jesus is born in Nazareth	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:23
Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist	Isaiah 40:3	Matthew 3:13-17
Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee	Isaiah 61:1	Matthew 4:23-25
Jesus is crucified and buried	Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 27:32-54
Jesus is resurrected and ascends to heaven	Psalm 118:22-23	Matthew 28:1-10

Group Activity Option

Music

Play “Worthy of Worship” (*Baptist Hymnal* 2008, No. 3) by Terry W. York and invite the group to list all of the human investments required for worship. Play the song a second time and instruct the group to identify reasons those investments are warranted. Ask: **What would you add to either one of these lists?**

Seeking the King (Matt. 2:1-3)

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, **2** saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

(v. 1) Rather than having only one witness to Jesus’s life, the Holy Spirit inspired four Gospel writers. Each offers a slightly different, but accurate, view of various events. Together, they compose a panorama of insight into Christ.

Following the genealogies and Joseph’s encounter with an angel, Matthew picked up the story *after Jesus was born*. Based on Matthew 2:16, this scene could have happened a year or two following His birth, but the scene remains in **Bethlehem of •Judea**, a small village just a few miles southwest of Jerusalem.

Rather than giving a specific date, Matthew cited *the days of King Herod*. Ruling Jewish territory under the appointment of the Roman government, Herod the Great was an unpopular, but powerful, tyrant. Ruthless, he used every tactic to gain and maintain his position.

During Herod’s reign, *wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem*. Being from “the east” may mean they came from Persia. Various scholars have described them as astrologers, magicians, or sorcerers based on references to royal advisers during Daniel’s era (Dan. 2:2; 4:7). By designating them “wise men,” Matthew may have been emphasizing their scholarly wisdom.

(v. 2) Arriving in Jerusalem, they began asking about a newborn **king of the Jews**. The capital city was the natural location for someone who would be the king. The manner of their inquiry does not suggest a child born to Herod. Although he had numerous children, none was designated as his successor.

If they came from Persia, the wise men likely were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures due to Jewish influence in that region after the Babylonian exile. They probably knew about messianic prophecies, including the Messiah’s connection with the star of Jacob (Num. 24:17).

When they saw a particular star that stood out from the rest, they identified it as the new King’s star. Somehow, God helped them recognize that this star signified the Messiah, who would be

King of the Jews. The wise men were divinely led. They expected this child would be no ordinary monarch because they came *to worship him*, an act reserved for God.

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.)

(v. 3) Since the seekers were looking for a king, they may have gone directly to Herod’s palace. However, it would have been unusual for foreigners to have direct access to the king without some type of diplomatic introduction. The phrase *when King Herod heard this* suggests they began by inquiring among various priests or learned persons in the city.

In any case, Herod was **deeply disturbed**. He was not the natural heir to the Jewish throne. With roots in the Gentile region of Idumea (an area south of Judea), he had gained his position through political maneuvering. If a genuine claimant to Israel’s royal line had arrived, Herod would be greatly concerned.

The term “disturbed” connotes severe mental and emotional anguish. News of the wise men’s inquiry spread through the city, leaving **all Jerusalem** on edge. Some scholars believe the term “all Jerusalem” primarily refers to the religious community—the chief priests and scribes (see v. 4). However, it’s reasonable to take the statement as is and consider the effect an emotionally unstable Herod might have on the entire city.

We should recognize Jesus as the one, true King—not just of Jews, but of everyone. He is our Savior, Lord, and King. As such, He deserves our allegiance and obedience in context.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: We can recognize Jesus as the one, true King.

Guide the group to read Matthew 2:1-3 silently and to look for information they may not have noticed in the past.

DESCRIBE:

Direct adults to work in pairs to scan the information for verse 1 (PSG, pp. 32-33) and to record information about the wise men in the margins of their PSGs. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Messianic Prophecies*) as an additional resource. After a few minutes, allow some volunteers to share what they discovered. Use page 42 of the Leader Guide to supplement the discussion.

ASK:

How did Herod respond to the wise men's inquiries? Why?

RECAP:

Summarize the following information from page 34 of the PSG to provide more context about Herod:

“Herod ruled as king of the Jews from 37 BC to 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 his throne. To satisfy his fears, 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. 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.”

STATE:

That makes it easier to understand why all of Jerusalem was troubled when Herod was disturbed. But it didn't stop the wise men from seeking the true King of the Jews.

ASK:

In what ways is Jesus a King? (PSG, p. 34) Discuss the group's responses. Emphasize that Jesus isn't just the King of the Jews. Share that He is the King of all creation, and we are called to recognize Him as our Ruler and as the One who is worthy of all worship.

Finding the King (Matt. 2:4-8)

4 So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” **7** Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”

(v. 4) The word **Messiah** means the “Anointed One.” In terms of language, “Messiah” is the Hebrew rendering, while Greek translates *Christos* or Christ.

For his part, Herod was both informed and ignorant about the Messiah’s role. To a degree, he may have understood that “King of the Jews” referred to the Messiah. However, like many in his day, he missed the Messiah’s true, spiritual significance. Instead, the “king of the Jews” reacted to the “King of the Jews” as a threat to his power.

Herod also demonstrated a profound lack of knowledge regarding the details of messianic prophecy. To gain more information, he gathered the nation’s religious leaders, **the chief priests and scribes**. The term “chief priests” does not refer only to the High Priest, but to the leaders among the priests. “Scribes” made handwritten copies of the Scriptures. More important, they were masters of the Mosaic law who taught its meaning to the people. Herod **asked them where the Messiah would be born**. As we will see, he wanted more than an answer to give the wise men.

(vv. 5-6) The leaders told Herod that the Messiah would be born **in Bethlehem . . . of Judea**. This small village, with a name that means “house of bread,” also was the birthplace of King David. “Judea” distinguished it from another Bethlehem in northern Israel. The religious experts noted that the prophecy was **written by the prophet**, quoting part of Micah 5:2.

The scribes and priests knew the text, but they showed no interest in finding the long-awaited Christ. The reference to Micah’s prophecy was key to Matthew’s argument that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Christ because He fulfilled messianic prophecy.

As noted, Bethlehem had been the home of David, but Micah foretold the birth of a much

greater King, a Ruler who would come **out of you** and **shepherd my people**. This statement also recalls the words applied to David, “You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will be ruler over Israel” (2 Sam. 5:2). Jesus, however, would be the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His flock (John 10:11).

Scholars point out the phrases **by no means** and “shepherd my people Israel” are not verbatim quotations from Micah’s prophecy. Matthew was not saying these were part of Micah’s quotation, but rather he reported what the scribes told Herod. Scribes typically added extrapolations as part of their interpretations. This pattern does not affect the validity of the original prophecy.

(v. 7) Getting what he wanted, Herod dismissed the leaders and **secretly summoned the wise men**. He inquired about **the exact time the star appeared**. Based on Ezra’s journey four centuries earlier, a trip from Babylon could have taken four months. A trip originating in Persia would have been even longer (Ezra 7:9). The star probably appeared even earlier than that, allowing time for them to prepare for their journey. So, Jesus may have been born at least a year before the wise man arrived in Jerusalem.

(v. 8) Herod told the wise men to search **carefully** for the King in **Bethlehem**, possibly as his emissaries. They were to make sure they found the right child and then **report back** to him. True to his deceitful nature, Herod told them he wanted to **worship** the child, as well. As we see later, the king was bent on homicide, not homage.

We can know that Jesus is King because His birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Details foretold centuries earlier came to pass through His birth. Prophecies concerning the Messiah’s life, death, and resurrection also would be realized in Jesus alone.

EXPLORE Matthew 2:4-8



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

READ:

Lead the group to read Matthew 2:4-8 silently to track the next steps of Herod. Draw attention to Herod's need to fill gaps in his knowledge of Scripture.

ASK:

Why would prophecy be important to understanding who Jesus is both then and now?

SHARE:

Point out that the prophecy found in Micah 5:2 was key to Matthew's argument that Jesus was the Messiah. Direct attention **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus*). Note that the first three prophecies relate to Jesus's birth. Emphasize that we can know He is the Christ because He fulfilled messianic prophecy.

RECAP:

Summarize the following content from page 36 of the PSG to illustrate the true character and motives of Herod:

"In light of this revelation to Herod of the birthplace of this King, he hatched a terrible and murderous plot. [His] desire to know "the exact 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). . . . He certainly had no intentions of joining the wise men in worshiping the Christ child."

STATE:

Neither Herod nor the leaders were interested in finding the Messiah for the right reasons. In contrast, the wise men longed to worship the King whom God was revealing to them.

ASK:

How can you help people come to know Jesus as their King?
(PSG, p. 36)

Group Activity Option

Charades

Before the session, enlist two adults for charades. During the session, allow the adults to act out their words as the group guesses. Share that some people play a game of "spiritual charades" at Christmas. Note that, like Herod and the religious leaders, they go through the motions of honoring Jesus, but their hearts are not in it. Challenge adults to evaluate their hearts this Christmas and to ask God to help them respond with proper motives, not religious rituals.

Worshipping the King (Matt. 2:9-12)

9 After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

(v. 9) Each aspect of Jesus’s story proclaims His divine nature. The wise men came to worship the Messiah. *After hearing the king*, the wise men followed his directions and *went on their way* to complete their search.

As they traveled, they saw *the star* again. The original wording suggests a sudden reappearance, but they recognized it as the unique sign they had previously followed.

Supernaturally, the star *stopped above the place where the child was*. No typical explanations of stars fit this description. If it had been an alignment of planets, it would not have moved before them. If it had been a comet, it could not have stopped moving. But this star identified both the town of Bethlehem and the specific place where Jesus’s family was staying.

(vv. 10-11) Upon seeing the star again, the wise men reacted intensely. *They were overwhelmed with joy*. This phrase could literally be rendered “rejoiced with exceedingly greatest joy.” They did not try to explain or define the star. It was enough that divine intervention had led them to the divine child. Having given birth in the humble stable, Mary and Joseph now lived in a *house*.

The sight of *the child with Mary his mother* moved the wise men even more than the star. They immediately responded by *falling to their knees*, and *they worshiped him*. The original language describes prostration as an act of reverence. No ordinary child or king deserves worship. But, as these Gentiles fell on their faces before Jesus, they represented God’s love for the entire world.

Giving is one way we worship. The wise men *opened their treasures*. They didn’t simply offer a few baubles for the child. The phrase implies they emptied their treasure boxes and *presented him with gifts*.

Offering three types of gifts unnecessarily gives rise to the conjecture that there were three men. They gave Him *gold*, which seemed fitting for the King of the Jews. They also offered *frankincense*, a substance used in the temple and appropriate for humanity’s heavenly High Priest. Finally, without understanding its fuller meaning, they gave Him *myrrh*, a spice used in preparing bodies for burial.

(v. 12) We don’t know how long the wise men stayed or what they shared with Mary and Joseph. At the least, they stayed nearby as they were *warned in a dream not to go back to Herod*. As with Joseph who later would be alerted to danger (Matt. 2:13), the wise men understood Herod’s evil intentions.

Having fulfilled their quest, the wise men started home *by another route*. They would not risk Jesus’s life (or their own) by going back to Jerusalem.

We acknowledge Jesus as King through our worship. Perhaps we worship through our gifts, our songs, our prayers, our lives, or our service. Whatever the mode, we bow before the Lord in love and adoration as we worship Him.

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.

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: We acknowledge Jesus as King through our worship.

Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 2:9-12 as the group considers the emotions the wise men may have felt at different moments in these verses.

ASK:

What motivated the wise men's incredible sense of joy?

RECAP:

To highlight the wise men's response, summarize this content from page 37 of the PSG:

"The wise men were overwhelmed with 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."

DISCUSS:

Direct adults to work in groups of two or three to read the passage again and to identify elements of worship. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share. Highlight the passion for reaching Jesus, as well as their willingness to bow down to Him and their gifts to Him. Suggest that genuine worship involves bowing our hearts to Jesus and giving ourselves to Him.

ASK:

What gifts can you offer to Jesus as an act of worship?
(PSG, p. 38)

MEMORIZE:

Highlight Matthew 2:11 as the session's memory verse and repeat it together. Encourage adults to continue memorizing it this week. Suggest they spend time leading up to Christmas asking God to guide them toward worshiping the Savior well.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Collectibles

Prior to the session, research some valuable collectibles online. (*Examples: vinyl albums, toys, paintings, and so forth*) Show the group some photos of valuable items. Ask: **How much do you think each of these is worth?** Share the asking prices. Note that something's value may be inherent or may depend on what someone is willing to pay. Emphasize that Jesus's value is inestimable and that He is inherently worthy of our worship. Say: *His value is not based on any amount we could pay, but on the price He paid for us.*

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 39 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- 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.

STATE:

The wise men's reverence and passion provide us with a wonderful example of what it means to recognize and acknowledge the Christ—whether during the Christmas season or during any other season of the year.

GUIDE:

Direct adults to the second set of questions on page 39 of the PSG. Encourage them to share things they consider worthy or valuable. List their responses on the board. Remind them that the true message of Christmas points us to the Savior, the One whose worth is beyond measure.

REFLECT:

Encourage adults to respond to the first set of questions on page 39 of the PSG during the week. Challenge them to find ways to connect in worship with other adults as they prepare to celebrate Christmas this week and move toward the new year in the weeks to come.

PRAY:

Invite adults to offer sentence prayers, simple declarations to share their devotion to Jesus.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group to encourage them to remember the gift of Jesus, as well as anything they need to present to Him in the days to come. Suggest that such an offering might include a special offering to the church, missions, or a needy family. Point out that physical and material offerings are meaningful acts of worship, just like bowing, praying, singing, and service.

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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

First Century Bethlehem

Dennis Cole



When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, this corner of the Roman world was undergoing dramatic changes. Herod the Great served as a client king to the Caesar Augustus (Octavius), with lesser responsibility given to the regional governor, Quirinius (Luke 2:1-12). Under Herod, numerous building projects had been launched, including work at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. When completed in all of its magnificent array, the

Temple Mount would gleam as one of the largest temple complexes in the entire Roman world, larger than the entire Acropolis in Athens.

Economically, Judea was experiencing tremendous wealth and prosperity under Herod's accomplished financial and political savvy. His investments in trade, mining, and agriculture enabled him to carry out the building projects and establish a loyal network of political bureaucrats, which was important for a king known for his personal paranoia and political assassinations.

Socially and religiously, the region experienced an undercurrent of instability. In a realm known for its staunch commitment to the Jewish faith, sectarianism was becoming more and more fragmented. Beyond the temple-minded Sadducees and the Pharisees, whose focus was on the law, the Essenes, Zealots, and other groups with religious-political goals gained influence. At the same time, the common people were often neglected, creating strife between social classes.

Just a few miles south of Jerusalem sat the village suburb of Bethlehem. Though often in Jerusalem's shadow, Bethlehem boasted an illustrious past of its own. The site was first mentioned as Ephrath, just south of where Rachel died after giving birth to Benjamin (Gen. 35:19; 48:7). Salma, a grandson of Caleb, was called the father of Bethlehem (1 Chron. 2:51).

Israelite inhabitants in Bethlehem are known from the time of the judges (Judg. 17:7). Bethlehem was home to Elimelech and Naomi who

“They had to make do with what was available, preparing for the birth of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior born King of the Jews.”

went to live in Moab during a time of famine. After Elimelech and the couple’s two sons died, Naomi returned to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law Ruth. Boaz, who was also of the clan of Elimelech, became Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer in accordance with Israelite law (Lev. 25:25; Deut. 25:7-9).

In addition, Bethlehem was the hometown of David, the great-grandson of Boaz and Ruth, through Obed and Jesse. This was the line of earthly kings through which the Messiah, the ultimate King, would come.

Bethlehem, which means “house of bread,” rose to prominence after Samuel anointed David as the second king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:1-13), though the Philistines established a military outpost there while Saul was still king (2 Sam. 23:13-17). According to Micah’s prophecy concerning the Messiah (Mic. 5:2), a great ruler of timeless origin would rise from Bethlehem and shepherd God’s flock in righteousness and peace.

Micah’s prophecy was familiar to the religious leaders of Jerusalem whom Herod summoned when the wise men sought Israel’s new king (Matt. 2:1-8). Matthew recorded that the wise men found Jesus in Bethlehem (2:9-12). Later, after the wise men avoided Herod and went home another way, the king ordered the slaughter of all male children two years old and younger in Bethlehem (2:13-18). An angel told Joseph, Mary’s husband, to escape to Egypt with his family and to stay there until Herod’s death. Afterward they moved to Nazareth.

The duration of their stay in Bethlehem is unspecified, but the simple austerity of the setting of Jesus’s birth is magnified by Luke’s story (Luke 2:1-7) of the inn and the inability of Joseph and Mary to find lodging. Small towns had fewer guest rooms for travelers. Even those that could be found often did not have quality accommodations, especially for delivering a baby.



The term “manger” refers to a feeding trough, often hewn out of a block of limestone, a material that was common to Judea’s hill country. The manger might have been located in an animal quartering structure adjacent to the inn or in a nearby cave as early Christian tradition preserves.

The inn of Bethlehem is depicted by the Greek term *kataluma*, the same term Luke used in referring to the “upper room” (or “guest room”) where Jesus shared the Passover meal with His disciples (Luke 22:11). The word is used in Hellenistic literature to denote a resting place, a guest chamber in a house, or a public facility providing quarters for overnight lodging.

However, no such room was available in the guest house for Joseph and Mary. They had to make do with what was available, preparing for the birth of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior born King of the Jews.

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True Righteousness

JESUS DEFINES WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN HIS KINGDOM.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 5:13-20,43-48 Memory Verse: Matthew 5:20

God's kingdom requires true righteousness. Quoting Jesus's Model Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13), we say, "Your kingdom come" (v. 10), but what does that mean? Living in a democracy, many westerners don't resonate with kingdom concepts. But the easiest way to grasp this idea is to reflect on the next line of the prayer: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (v. 10). Living in God's kingdom means seeking and doing the King's will here on earth with the same level of instant and unreserved obedience that exists in heaven. We do so through faith in Christ.

Many times, people want to know God's will, but they try to carry it out on their own terms. They impose human values and behavior on His Word. Instead of embracing Christ's righteousness, people pursue what seems right or makes sense to them. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His followers to go beyond rituals and to live out true righteousness in Him. As you study this session, consider what it means for you to be salt and light in the world and how you can move the adults in your Bible study to submit to King Jesus by living out His plans for you each day.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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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. (PSG, p. 40)

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)

When large crowds turn up at religious events, we get excited. We post about it on social media, write about it in religious publications, and tell everyone we know. Jesus took a different approach.

As His ministry attracted people from all over Israel, He withdrew to a nearby mountain. There, He focused on equipping His followers so they could portray the way of life that should be normal for believers. What they heard was revolutionary. It upended many of their long-held beliefs about what God expected of His kingdom citizens.

In eight amazing statements that we call the Beatitudes, Jesus taught His disciples to apply an entirely different set of standards when it came to defining righteous living. Rather than repeating conventional wisdom, He shared God’s wisdom. Instead of relying on human ideas about the law, He explained God’s actual intentions for the law.

In God’s kingdom, blessed people are not necessarily the rich and powerful, but the poor in spirit. Those who mourn over sin find comfort in God’s grace and forgiveness. In the divine agenda, the humble inherit the earth and those who hunger for righteousness are filled. Jesus also taught the value of nurturing purity, making peace, and enduring persecution.

Jesus’s goal was to help people be salt and light in a needy culture. For so long, God’s people had depended on external rituals associated with the Mosaic law rather than embracing the spirit behind the law. Jesus illustrated what being

kingdom citizens meant in the practical experiences of life. He didn’t come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it by embracing a higher law, the law of love.

Previously, the average Jew thought the gold standard of righteous living was represented by the scribes and Pharisees. These religious leaders taught that righteousness came from keeping the law of Moses. Trying to protect the law, they built “hedges” of additional regulations around it. By valuing their own rituals over true righteousness, though, they created a society where people failed to know and love God—and one another.

People need to understand that murder begins with anger. Adultery is rooted in lustful thoughts. All should be avoided in God’s kingdom. Marriage and honesty are virtues to be cherished, as is conflict resolution. It’s not enough to love one’s family and friends. Godly love also extends to our enemies.

Jesus sought to help His disciples not only understand true righteousness, but also to live it out through kingdom behavior. After He returned to heaven, it would be up to them to take the kingdom message to the world—person by person, life by life. They were God’s plan for accomplishing His will on earth as it is in heaven.

Read through Matthew 5 in your Bible. Which of Jesus’s teachings about what it means to follow Him presents the greatest challenge for you? (PSG, p. 41)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13) and **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus’s Mission). Make copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Sermon on the Mount).

ASK:

Who are some social media influencers you are aware of? Are you able to identify ways that you have been impacted by these influencers? (PSG, p. 40)

DISCUSS:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 40 of the PSG. Facilitate a brief discussion about the positive or negative impact of various influences on the lives of adults.

REVIEW:

Explain that following Christmas, this session places us back into Jesus’s ministry. Allow adults to recall things they remembered from earlier sessions. Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus’s Mission). Emphasize Jesus’s commitment to the Father’s plan and the Father’s kingdom.

RECAP:

Point out that this session (and the next two) focuses on the Sermon on the Mount. Share this information from page 41 of the PSG to set the context:

Matthew 5–7 make up what is normally called the Sermon on the Mount. In many ways, this set of teachings was for the disciples only. Jesus was teaching them what it meant to follow Him. . . . He spoke of what makes His followers distinct from the rest of the world.

TRANSITION:

Examining the Sermon on the Mount offers a great opportunity to consider Jesus in the context of an influencer. He transforms His people, and He calls each of us to make a difference in the world around us. These verses from Matthew 5 will guide us in becoming positive spiritual influencers for God’s kingdom.



Group Activity Option

Music

Play “I Will Follow” by Chris Tomlin. If possible, provide the lyrics for the song. Lead adults to recall ways the song highlights Christ’s influence in one’s life. Invite them to give specific examples of how they have chosen to go, stay, move, love, and serve based on His leading. Play the song a second time and encourage the group to pray it back to God, asking Him to use today’s verses to draw them into a closer walk with Jesus.

Influence Your Culture (Matt. 5:13-16)

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. **14** You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

(v. 13) Every culture has its virtues and vices. Left to its fallen nature, human society confuses the two and begins to view ungodly attitudes and actions as acceptable behavior. Like meat in an unrefrigerated room, culture begins to spoil and stink.

Jesus taught His followers to be the **salt of the earth**. In Jesus’s day, salt was valued not only because it gave flavor to food, but also because it preserved food. In this passage, the “earth” did not refer to the physical planet or to a worldly viewpoint. Instead, it reflects human habitation and relationships. To be the salt of the earth involves protecting society from putrefying. Christians should influence culture by reflecting kingdom values.

Salt cannot accomplish its function if it loses its saltiness. Jesus noted that if **salt should lose its taste**, it could not be **made salty** again. Instead, it is useless and might as well be **thrown out**. Some scholars think the picture of salt being **trampled** referred to worthless salt being tossed out onto road beds. If believers lose their effectiveness because of sin or spiritual neglect, they will not fulfill their God-given purpose. The analogy is an illustration and doesn’t mean we can lose our salvation.

(vv. 14-15) In another analogy, Jesus called His disciples **the light of the world**. Notice, He did not say “a light in the world” but “*the* light of the world.” We are not one of many sources of illumination in a darkened culture. By revealing Christ, who is the ultimate Light of the world, we help people experience light and life in Him (John 8:12).

Such light **cannot be hidden** any more than a **city situated on a hill**. If we have the light of Christ within us, people will see it. It’s undeniable.

Similarly, lamps give light to a room. It would be foolish if someone **lights a lamp and puts it under a basket**. Doing so defeats its purpose—

and creates a fire hazard! Instead, the light is placed **on a lampstand**. Lamps in biblical days typically used olive oil held in a reservoir that fueled a wick. It was then placed on a stand to help the light reach around the room. Thus, it provided **light** for everyone **in the house**.

(v. 16) Jesus often used ordinary items or aspects of everyday life to illustrate spiritual principles. In this case, believers should not hide their faith. Like lamps on stands, Jesus said believers should **let your light shine before others**. We don’t do so to get favorable attention, but to bear witness to the Source of the light.

Christians are called to live in a way that allows people to observe our **good works** and **give glory to** our heavenly **Father**. After all, we are “his workmanship” created by God to perform good works (Eph. 2:10). Our good works don’t save us (2:8-9), but they do demonstrate the salvation we have experienced. Our works reveal God’s work in and through our lives as we strive to be His hands and feet for His glory.

By being salt and light, kingdom people make a positive impact on others. Like our heavenly Father, we should not be content to let the world around us remain as is. We should long for it to be transformed for His glory.

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.)



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

CONTEXT:

Draw attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13*). Identify the Sermon on the Mount as the first of Jesus's major discourses in Matthew. Distribute **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: The Sermon on the Mount*) for further study.

READ:

Direct a volunteer to read **Matthew 5:13-16 aloud** as the group notes words or phrases that stick out to them. Discuss the words and phrases they noted. Affirm that salt and light are the primary metaphors in the verses.

ASK:

What makes salt and light good illustrations for faith?

RECAP:

Summarize the following information (PSG, pp. 42-43) to explain the importance of salt and light in the first century:

“Salt was a valuable substance, often traded as a part of transactions for goods and services. . . . In Jesus's day, the primary use of salt was for preservation. Lacking refrigeration, salting meat was essential to preserving it. . . . Chemically it is impossible for salt to lose its salty taste, but it certainly can be “defiled.” . . . Jesus reinforced this word picture [of light] by pointing out that many towns were built on the summit or side of a hill where they were seen from a distance. They were visible by day, and the light from every home would make the cities visible at night.”

ASK:

What happens when believers serve as salt and light in the world? (PSG, p. 43)

SAY:

As salt, believers reflect God's kingdom values. As light, we reveal Christ to the world around us. By being salt and light, we point people to Jesus and bring glory to God.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Salt

Use a salt grinder to create pile of salt. Point out that when the grains are together, salt can be used as a preservative or to enhance flavor. Blow on the salt to dissipate it. Point out that when salt grains are spread out, impurities are more likely to defile it. Affirm the church's responsibility to influence culture positively, along with identifying other elements that might try to influence culture in a negative way.

Obey Your Father (Matt. 5:17-20)

17 “Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. **18** For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. **19** Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.”

(v. 17) Some of Jesus’s listeners believed that He opposed the Mosaic law. On the contrary, He asserted that He did not come to **abolish the Law or the Prophets**. By “Law” Jesus referred to the instructions God gave Moses in the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch or the Torah. “Prophets” meant the writings of the four major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) and twelve minor prophets (Hosea-Malachi). Together, these terms encompass the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Greek word translated “abolish” means to dissolve or destroy. Jesus intended neither to diminish the law or to eliminate it. Instead, His mission would **fulfill** all of God’s Word, completing it to the fullest extent. While the Jewish sacrificial system pointed to Christ’s death, His life taught the true meaning of both the law and the prophets.

(v. 18) With the word **truly**, Jesus strongly validated the authority of the Scriptures. He left no room for equivocation. One day, **heaven and earth** will **pass away**, but God’s Word will endure. Just as God is eternal, so His Word is eternal.

Jesus added that even **the smallest letter** and **stroke of a letter** in Scripture were more permanent than all of creation. We might compare it to crossing a “t” or dotting an “i.” Jesus emphasized that **all things**—even the finest points of the Word—would be **accomplished** in Him.

(v. 19) As a result, Jesus warned against violating even **the least of these commands** or leading **others to do the same**. The term **breaks** meant more than simply going against a command. It included the idea of disregarding it completely. Jesus called out sins of both commission and omission—along with those who influence other people to sin.

In contrast, Jesus said the one who is truly **great** in the **kingdom** is the one who **does and teaches** God’s ways and, by implication, encourages others to follow suit. Jesus apparently included both kinds of people among kingdom citizens, but He distinguished between their place in the kingdom and their effectiveness as teachers.



The Kingdom of God

What is the kingdom of God, and how should we live as its citizens? Scan this QR code to explore these truths.

(v. 20) Jesus criticized the way **scribes and Pharisees** portrayed God’s Word. These leaders took pride in their own **righteousness** based on the law and traditions. They thought a right relationship with God could be earned and maintained by human effort. But Jesus urged His disciples to seek a righteousness that **surpasses** legalistic dependence on man-made rules. God is not interested in ritualistic righteousness. He requires faith in Jesus.

Jesus later noted a hypocrisy between what the religious leaders said and did. He encouraged His people to respect the leaders’ position, but He warned them about imitating the leaders’ practices because they ignored the deeper meaning of God’s laws (23:3-4).

The scribes and Pharisees paid lip service to God through traditions and rituals, but their hearts lacked love for Him or others. Such a low view of God and misplaced trust inevitably prevents individuals from entering the **kingdom of heaven**. True righteousness comes through faith in Jesus, which leads us to embrace the spirit, as well as the letter, of His Word.

**READ:**

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

Read Matthew 5:17-20 aloud as the group identifies Jesus's relationship to the Law of Moses.

ASK:

When have you been accused of something that wasn't true?

RECAP:

Share this content from page 44 of the PSG to explain why Jesus emphasized His relationship to the law in verse 17:

Much of the "law" of the Pharisees was man-made traditions for which Jesus had little use. Because of His disdain for these traditions, He was accused of wanting to abolish the law. Jesus, however, told His disciples that He hadn't come to "set aside" the law. His was no movement to overthrow or destroy the Law and Prophets. . . . Instead, Jesus came for the purpose of bringing the law to its intended goal.

EXPLAIN:

Emphasize that Jesus described God's Word as eternal—just like God is eternal. Point out that because it reflects the nature of God, His Word must be obeyed. Affirm that Jesus showed us how to live out our faith in a genuine way by fulfilling the Word down to the smallest detail.

QUESTION:

How can followers of Jesus impact society? (PSG, p. 45)

MEMORIZE:

Highlight Matthew 5:20 as the session's memory verse. Emphasize our responsibility to point people to God in a way that helps them see Him as He really is.

SAY:

That doesn't happen through religious rituals. It happens through a relationship with God that transforms our relationships with others.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

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).

Love Your Enemies (Matt. 5:43-48)

43 “You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

(v. 43) Hearing radically new standards for spiritual behavior challenged Jesus’s disciples. In verses 21-48, Jesus gave specific examples to illustrate His point, including the connections between anger and murder, adultery and lust, and marriage and divorce. He also affirmed the importance of honesty and forgiveness.

Throughout these verses (including v. 43), Jesus reminded His followers of familiar sayings: **You have heard that it was said**. Yet, injunctions against murder and idolatry, as well as admonitions to **love your neighbor**, only told part of the story. In God’s kingdom, loving neighbors falls flat if one chooses to **hate your enemy**. This approach appeals to human nature, but it fails to reach the level of true righteousness.

(vv. 44-45) To introduce the kingdom’s new paradigm, Jesus underscored His own divine authority, **But I tell you**. Instead of hate, Jesus instructed His disciples to **love your enemies** and to **pray for those who persecute you**. We might claim to love our enemies, but it’s harder to pray for people who intentionally harm us. Yet, Jesus’s teaching wasn’t rooted in some vague theological theory, but from a heart that would forgive those who crucified Him.

We love our enemies because we are **children of our Father in heaven**. Loving one’s enemies does not make us God’s children but demonstrates our relationship with Him. Because we belong to Him, we act differently.

As our Creator, the Father takes an active role in the lives of all humanity. He **causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good** and **sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous**. Through what is known as God’s “common grace,” He intentionally chooses to bless every person. So, to love like He loves, we must imitate His grace. We must show love and concern for all people—even those who oppose and oppress us.

(vv. 46-47) Jesus acknowledged that it’s easier to **love those who love** us. This approach is no different than the actions of unsaved people around us. It offers no genuine **reward** in this life or the next.

As an example, Jesus pointed to **tax collectors**. These Jews were despised by their own people because they collected taxes for the Roman government, often overcharging the people and pocketing the difference. Yet, even they returned love for love. If the disciples only loved people who loved them, they were no better than those who set the lowest moral bar in that culture.

Similarly, if we **greet** (or welcome) only our **brothers and sisters**, how are we demonstrating the uniqueness of kingdom citizens? Developing loving and respectful relationships solely with people who are like us and agree with us reveals nothing **out of the ordinary**. We look like everyone else instead of embracing a life that sets us apart as God’s people and points others to Him.

This twist in teaching would have been startling for Jesus’s disciples. They lived in a context where loving friends and taking revenge on enemies was the conventional wisdom of the day. What Jesus was proposing turned everything they knew about righteous living on its head.

(v. 48) Throughout the Torah, God challenged His people to be holy because He is holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26; 21:8). Likewise, Jesus told His disciples to **be perfect . . . as your heavenly Father is perfect**. Here, the idea of perfection relates to moral qualities and behavior, but it also suggests spiritual maturity. As God sets the standard of moral maturity, we allow the Holy Spirit to work out the process of sanctification in our lives. We’ll never achieve sinless perfection, but we must not settle for less than what God expects.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Kingdom people reflect their heavenly Father by loving their enemies.

Read Matthew 5:43-48 aloud as adults consider why Jesus's words would have seemed too radical to His listeners.

ASK:

What was so revolutionary about Jesus's teaching in these verses? What makes it difficult for us today?

RECAP:

To set the context for Jesus's teaching about loving our enemies, summarize this information from page 46 of the PSG:

"The command to 'love your neighbor' is from Leviticus 19:18. The second part of Jesus's statement, 'hate your enemy,' was added by the scribes and Pharisees. Hating your enemy is easy. That is the problem with man-made traditions. No wonder the Pharisees and scribes thought they were righteous. They could keep their traditions and convince themselves they were fulfilling the demands of God's law. Jesus called His followers to a higher standard: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. This likely was startling to His hearers. The culture and traditions of the day taught the opposite."

ASK:

What are some obstacles to loving our enemies? (PSG, p. 47)

DISCUSS:

Guide adults to suggest groups that might be considered "enemies." (*Suggestions: other races, other religions, other political parties, friends or family members who have betrayed our trust, and so forth*) Record their responses on the board. Encourage adults to suggest practical ways believers can demonstrate God's love to those groups each day.

SHARE:

Explain that the Greek word for "love" used in these verses is *agape*. Note that this is a God-driven love that puts the needs of others above our own needs. Remind adults that this is the kind of love that God showed toward sinful humanity when He sent His Son to die for us.

SAY:

Living out this kind of love was unconventional—and even dangerous—in the first century. It's really no different today. If we're going to move beyond the rituals of religion and live differently from the world around us, we have to live and love radically. This is the path to developing the spiritual maturity God desires in us.

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 48 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *Kingdom people make a positive impact on the world for God's glory.*
- *Kingdom people find genuine satisfaction and purpose by keeping God's commands.*
- *Kingdom people reflect their heavenly Father by loving their enemies.*

REFLECT:

Encourage adults to consider a principle or truth that resonates with them from this session's verses. Encourage them to record that thought in the margins of their PSGs.

SAY:

Use that statement as a prayer prompt during your times with God this week. Keep it in front of you and ask God to show you how He wants you to live it out each day.

DISCUSS:

Direct attention to the second set of questions on page 48 of the PSG. Facilitate a brief discussion on ways adults can serve as a positive influence to those around them this week. Encourage them to identify and pray for opportunities to touch the life of one specific person.

PRAY:

Close in prayer. Ask God to help adults be wise as they strive to become salt and light in the world every day and to learn how to love others in a way that brings glory to Him.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group, reminding them to continue working on the memory verse for this session, Matthew 5:20. Remind adults to continue praying for opportunities to be salt and light to those around them and to look for ways to be a positive influencer the life of the person they have been praying for this week.

LEADER EXTRAS



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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

Treasure

JESUS CHANGES OUR PRIORITIES.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 6:19-34 Memory Verse: Matthew 6:33

Our priorities reveal what's important to us. The things we value are the things we treasure. They determine how we invest time as well as money. If priorities are not in line with godly values, anxiety and stress naturally result. For example, people experiencing severe poverty have different needs than those who enjoy financial security, yet both groups can end up worrying about money. The key to overcoming worry lies in prioritizing a faith relationship with God through Christ. That's a simple way of describing discipleship.

Discipleship cannot be limited to Bible study and prayer, although those disciplines are foundational. Being Christ's disciple means living out biblical principles that find their basis in trusting the Lord. If we love and trust the Father, our values will not be wrapped up in material things, but in fellowship with Christ. As you dig into this session, examine your priorities, the things you treasure most. Ask God to reveal areas where He may not have first place in your life. Consider how you can help the adults in your Bible study align their priorities with God's plans and purposes for their lives.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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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. (PSG, p. 49)

**Do you agree or disagree that misplaced priorities fuel debt?
Explain your answer.**



Understand the Context (Matthew 6:1-34)

On the mountain, Jesus's followers continued to learn what it meant to be His disciples. He taught how one's relationship with God affects everything from prayer to provision. Even their religious activities contrasted starkly with people who had religious pretensions rather than genuine faith. True disciples do not trumpet their devotion. Rather, they express their love for God and others with pure intentions and compassionate actions.

One instance involved giving to the poor. The scribes and Pharisees engaged in benevolence, but made sure people took notice and gave them credit. Jesus told His people to help others privately, with no desire for praise. Similarly, prayer is primarily a personal conversation with God, not a public display to gain attention. God sees private devotion and responds with blessings.

Jesus provided an example of how believers should pray. What we call the Lord's Prayer (or Model Prayer) is a template for communication with God (Matt. 6:9-13). It begins by acknowledging Him as our Father. While this relationship is personal, we cannot presume upon it because His name—His reputation and character—is holy and transcendent. We confess Him as King, desiring the arrival of His kingdom and submitting to His will.

In proper prayer, we can ask God to meet our daily needs. Such provision not only involves material matters, but it also includes forgiveness

for our sins. We should mirror that forgiveness in the way we treat those who sin against us. Consequentially, we can trust the Father to lead us in the right way and deliver us from the evil one.

Jesus gave one postscript to this Model Prayer. Our vertical relationship with Him must be revealed in our horizontal relationships with other people. Nothing highlights this principle more clearly than the issue of forgiveness. How can we request forgiveness from the Father when we refuse to forgive one another?

In addition to benevolence and prayer, fasting was an act of devotion corrupted by some religious leaders. They professed a form of righteousness, but they lacked its reality and power. Instead of advertising that they are fasting, Christ followers are called to do it privately. They should not seek the praise of people, but the approval of God.

If we have the foundation of a faith relationship with the Father, anxiety flees. When we prioritize Him and His rule, everything else falls into place. We don't worry about material matters because our true treasures cannot be corrupted or stolen. Our values center on trust in a loving Father who sovereignly rules over all things for His glory and our good.

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. (PSG, p. 50)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) and **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: The Sermon on the Mount*).

INTRODUCE:

Read the opening paragraph on page 49 of the PSG as adults make a mental list of their debts.

ASK:

Do you agree or disagree that misplaced priorities fuel debt? Explain your answer. (PSG, p. 49)

STATE:

Regardless of where individuals stand on the issue of debt, we can agree that humans are prone to let material possessions dominate our lives. When we do, the world steals our proper focus from God and we fail to trust Him like we should.

REVIEW:

Remind adults that this is the second of three sessions drawn from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: The Sermon on the Mount*) and direct them to scan through the content. Encourage them to share what they recall from the previous session.

CONTEXT:

Share this information from page 50 of the PSG to help set the context for Matthew 6:

In chapter 6, Jesus contrasted sincere religious activities with the insincerity of those He called "hypocrites." Jesus was speaking of motivation. The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees were motivated by selfishness and pride. They performed acts of piety for the attention and accolade of others. Jesus's followers were to engage in acts of devotion out of a desire to glorify God.

TRANSITION:

In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus touched on topics like benevolence, prayer, and fasting. The real key to living as a Christ follower in this world is trusting Him with all your heart. That's going to be the focus of this session.



Group Activity Option

Music

Direct adults to read the lyrics to "Be Thou My Vision" (*Baptist Hymnal* 2008, No. 83) silently. Draw attention to the fourth verse and lead the group to recite it together. Note that the lyrics reject earthly goods, along with the flattery of others, to focus instead on a divine inheritance. It unequivocally places faith in God as treasure. Ask: **How challenging is it to keep that perspective in everyday life?**

Possessions (Matt. 6:19-24)

19 “Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. **22** The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. **23** But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness! **24** No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

(vv. 19-20) Jesus warned His disciples not to **store up** for themselves **treasures on earth**. Scholars note the similarity of words translated as “store up” and “treasures.” Earthly treasures are always subject to loss. For example, the garments of biblical days were easy targets for a **moth** or another insect. Metal objects were destroyed by **rust**. Today, our storage units might be better, but our possessions still can be damaged by insects, rust, flood, or fire. They are temporary at best.

Everything remains vulnerable to **thieves**. The term **break in** literally means to “dig through.” Commentators note that many homes of Jesus’s day were plastered with mud, and thieves could burrow through a back wall. If we have a materialistic value system, our treasures are just as vulnerable.

Believers should place their treasures **in heaven**. In God’s presence, our spiritual wealth is secure. Of course, we don’t gather heavenly blessings by self-effort. By faith, we determine our values according to God’s kingdom. Heavenly treasures accrue as we live to glorify Him.

(v. 21) Most people assume that we invest our money in things we love. Jesus said the reverse is true. The location of our **treasure** determines the condition of our **heart**. If you want to change your heart, change what you treasure. By doing what is right, inner motivations will follow.

(vv. 22-23) Jesus used the **eye** to illustrate the importance of proper perception. Through this **lamp of the body**, we observe everything around us. But it’s important that our source of spiritual perception stays **healthy** (or clear). We maintain proper focus when we see as God sees.

Full of light does not suggest that illumination penetrates each body part. Rather, it means

that the **whole body** benefits. By seeing the road, we know where to place our feet. The sight of food enhances or suppresses the appetite and the stomach’s digestion. Every part of the body benefits from healthy eyesight.

Conversely, every body part suffers if the eye is **bad**, either through disease or damage. Jesus likened the result to being **full of darkness** rather than light. The term for “bad” can also be rendered “harmful.” The issue is not physical well-being, but keeping a spiritually healthy perspective and avoiding spiritual harm.

This passage appears in Jesus’s teaching about materialistic values versus spiritual values. In context, Jesus addressed the issue of one’s treasure and its effect on the heart. When the **light** inside us turns dark, that darkness runs **deep**. The Greek wording emphasizes the degree or extent of the darkness.

(v. 24) Jesus made it clear that we cannot **serve two masters**. Conflict between the two is irresolvable. Either we will **hate one and love the other**, or we’ll **be devoted to one and despise the other**. Jesus offered this precept as an illustration of the person who tries to follow **God** while also building a life around **money**.

Jesus was not saying that money itself is bad or that all wealthy people are evil. The full measure of Scripture reveals the virtue of proper stewardship and provides examples of wealthy people who used the resources God gave them for His glory. Here, Jesus’s emphasis was on loving God preeminently, leaving all other matters in their proper relationship to Him.

Believers should focus on heavenly treasures rather than worldly possessions. If we love God supremely, we will serve Him alone—and experience His blessings in the process.

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: Believers should focus on heavenly treasures rather than worldly possessions.

Call on three volunteers to read Matthew 6:19-21, 22-23, 24 as the group determines which of the three passages is most convicting and which is most inspiring.

DISCUSS:

Allow adults to share their responses to the three sets of verses that were read. Discuss what this passages says about wealth as well as what it *doesn't* say. Emphasize that God never condemns wealth when used properly, but He does not want us controlled by material possessions.

SHARE:

Direct attention to the “Did You Know?” feature (PSG, p. 52). Note that more than 2,300 Bible references to money and possessions prove it is an important topic.

RECAP:

Encourage adults to call out the things that destroy earthly wealth in these verses. To highlight the danger of storing up improper treasures, share this content from pages 51-52:

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.

EXPLAIN:

Use the content for verses 22-23 and 24 in the Leader Guide to highlight the significance of the eye and the choice people must make between two masters.

ASK:

How can we assess where our true devotion lies? (PSG, p. 53)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Tree Sketch

Give adults a sheet of paper and two pens of different colors. Invite them to try sketching two trees, holding the pens in different hands. After a few minutes, review their work. Note that simple tasks become harder when we try to control two sides of our body at the same time. Correlate this to Jesus's analogy of serving two masters and the inevitability of the dominant one taking control.

Worry (Matt. 6:25-30)

25 “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? **26** Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? **27** Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? **28** And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. **30** If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith?”

(v. 25) Much of our anxiety comes from focusing on the wrong issues—allowing our “eye” to be darkened and distracted. **Therefore** linked one of humanity’s natural concerns with what Jesus said earlier about values. Followers of Christ should not **worry about your life**.

Jesus was not telling the disciples to avoid planning for the future or working toward their dreams. He just urged them to avoid worrying about these matters. In fact, the Greek wording is present imperative, indicating a continuous action. Jesus didn’t just encourage His followers to remain calm. He commanded them to stop worrying now and for each day moving forward.

Worrying about physical needs is natural. In the first century, questions about what to **eat** or **drink** or what to **wear** had nothing to do with menus or fashion trends. They focused on basic needs for survival. But Jesus emphasized that human existence consists of more than **food** and **clothing**. Regardless of economic circumstances, every person should remember that life is about more than our physical stuff. We all have deep spiritual needs that will define our eternity.

(v. 26) Sitting outside, Jesus may have pointed out **birds** flying past. Regardless, He noted that birds **don’t sow or reap or gather into barns**. They totally depend on God’s provision because the **heavenly Father feeds them**. Jesus’s question about human **worth** emphasized that the Creator who feeds the birds cares for His highest creation even more because we play an active role in His redemptive plan.

(v. 27) In a nutshell, Jesus taught that worry gets you nowhere. His rhetorical question reminds us of the obvious: none of us can **add one moment to his life** through worry. Scholars point out the

Greek wording can refer to stature, as well as age. Both renderings make the same point. People may fret over controlling their lives, but worrying is futile. If anything, anxiety diminishes our quality of life.

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.)

(vv. 28-29) Jesus returned to the question about **clothes**. Just as God had fed the birds, He challenged His listeners to examine how the Father dresses **the wildflowers of the field**. Like birds can’t plant or reap, flowers can’t **labor or spin thread**. His use of humorous hyperbole proved how ridiculous it is for people to worry about things they cannot control.

In contrast, with God in control, wildflowers surpass **Solomon in all his splendor**. Solomon gained fame for his wisdom and his wealth. Yet, even on his best days, Solomon could not rival the simple beauty of a field filled with wildflowers.

(v. 30) God nurtures **the grass of the field** even though it could be **thrown into the furnace tomorrow**. Some writers believe this is a reference to using dried flowers and grass as fuel. If God cares for these temporary things of nature, how **much more** will He do for His children?

Ultimately, worry reveals a character flaw: **little faith**. It’s not that we have no faith, but that our faith is weak. We need to believe our heavenly Father loves us and will provide for us.



READ:

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

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 6:25-30 aloud. Direct half the group to count how often the word “worry” is used as the other half counts the number of questions Jesus asked.

SHARE:

Allow the “worry” group to share what they counted. Encourage adults to identify the sources of worry Jesus mentioned in the passage (*food, drink, clothes*). Emphasize that these were legitimate concerns in the first century.

RECAP:

To supplement the context, share this content from page 53 of the PSG:

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 word “worry” 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.

ASK:

What kinds of things might you be tempted to worry about—and why? (PSG, p. 55)

SHARE:

Allow the “questions” group to share what they found. Highlight that Jesus’s questions were not for information but for reflection. Point out that the examples of birds and flowers reminded His listeners that they could trust God to take care of their needs, eliminating the need for worry.

DISCUSS:

Draw attention to the “Key Doctrine” on page 54 of the PSG. Encourage adults to share how properly trusting God could have an impact on their ability to be faithful stewards of what God provides for them.

ASK:

What are practical things you can do to get through times when you have “little faith” in God?

Trust (Matt. 6:31-34)

31 “So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’
32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. **34** Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

(vv. 31-32) Since Jesus confronted worry six times in ten verses, we need to pay attention. Once again, He told His followers **don’t worry**. He reiterated His previous points about concerns for what they would **eat, drink, or wear**.

People have various triggers for worry. Family, health, finances, conflict, and many other matters overwhelm us. These fill us with fear and apprehension. Whatever our problems, Jesus commands us not to worry.

Jesus offered two reasons to avoid worrying. First, we don’t want to act like **Gentiles**. Jesus demonstrated love for all people: Jews, Gentiles, or Samaritans. In this instance, “Gentiles” was a general term for unbelievers. When we allow materialism to consume our lives, we are behaving like those who have no relationship with God.

A second reason to avoid worry rests in our **heavenly Father**. If we have a relationship with God as Father, we believe He cares for us and wants to provide for our needs. If we believe that He best understands what we **need**, we can trust Him to meet that need.

(v. 33) The best antidote for anxiety is faith-based action. Instead of worrying, we should **seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**. Notice the key components of this command. “Seek” infers more than mere desire (as in v. 32). Here, it means actively going after something to obtain it. It’s not enough to crave something; we must pursue it. The qualifier “first” refers not to the first among many interests, but to the primary, superior concern.

Also, Jesus identified a two-fold object of our search: God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness. As our Father and King, He sovereignly rules over every aspect of our lives. His benevolent reign extends to the smallest details, and we can trust Him with everything.

Seeking God’s kingdom also requires pursuing His righteousness. The apostle Paul understood the difference between righteousness based on human standards and the genuine righteousness of Christ received by faith (Phil. 3:9). Biblical righteousness involves a right relationship with God demonstrated by right behavior. Seeking God’s righteousness requires forsaking shallow attempts at religious ritual in favor of a right standing with the Father.

Praying Scripture

Matthew 6:33

Spend time praying Scripture using Matthew 6:33. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Confess times when you’ve failed to seek the kingdom first. Thank God for His grace and His willingness to provide for your needs each day.

(v. 34) Using **therefore**, Jesus linked the two truths of seeking God’s rule and trusting God’s relationship. He again admonished His followers to avoid **worry**. While guilt usually is rooted in the past, anxiety often focuses on the future. We can deal with what’s happening today because we’re living it. The fears about tomorrow’s unknowns grip our hearts. While it’s wise to plan for the future, we should never obsess over it.

In reality, **tomorrow will worry about itself**. Many things we worry about will never happen, while others may arise. Worry has no power or control either way. **Each day has enough trouble of its own**. By focusing on living for Christ, we position ourselves to trust Him with whatever happens today or tomorrow.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers can trust God to provide what they need.

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 6:31-34 aloud while the group listens for repeated words or phrases.

ASK:

Why does “tomorrow” create so much anxiety for us?

DEFINE:

Note that Jesus referred to those who grasp after food, drink, and clothing as unbelievers because He taught us to counter those concerns with daily prayer.

RECAP:

Use the content for verses 31-32 in the Leader Guide to explain the two reasons Jesus gave to avoid worry: *We don’t want to act like unbelievers, and we know we can trust God to meet our needs.* To complement the explanation, summarize this content from page 55 of the PSG:

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

PRAY:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*). Invite adults to use the pack item to pray Matthew 6:33 back to God using the “Praying Scripture” prompt on page 68 of the Leader Guide. Point out that this is also the memory verse for this session. Encourage adults to spend time memorizing it in the week to come.

ASK:

What situation do you need to entrust to God today? (PSG, p. 56). Discuss responses, reminding adults of the futility of worrying about tomorrow and the power of faithful trust in God.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

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?***

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 57 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *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.*

HIGHLIGHT:

Remind adults about the “Key Doctrine” on page 54 of the PSG. Point out that today’s passage makes it clear that God provides all of our needs from His abundant resources, so we should trust Him—not obsess over material possessions like they belong to us or worry as if He will not come through when we need Him to move in our lives.

DISCUSS:

Encourage adults to read and reflect on the second set of questions on page 57 of the PSG. Allow a few volunteers to share their struggles and practical ways to trust God with their finances. (NOTE: Be sensitive to adults who may not be comfortable sharing about their finances or talking about money in a group setting.)

PRAY:

Challenge the group to continue using **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*) to pray and meditate on Matthew 6:33. Close the session in prayer, asking God to give adults the wisdom and boldness to trust Him and to seek His kingdom as their highest priority in life.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group a text or email, directing them to think through the first set of questions on page 57 of the PSG. Encourage individuals who are comfortable to share a personal need they are facing. Commit to praying for those needs and challenge other adults to join you in praying for one another. Suggest that they be sensitive to how God may move them to be the “answer” to one of these prayers.

ADULT COMMENTARY



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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

The Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew

Robert Weathers

With frequency and fervency, the Scriptures teach about the coming of God's kingdom on earth. In both the Old Testament languages of Aramaic and Hebrew and in the New Testament Greek, the terms translated "kingdom" referred more to the reign and authority of the king than it did to a geographical area. So in the Bible the "kingdom of God" referred primarily to God's rule, His divine kingly authority, which had come from heaven to earth. The kingdom was not so much a geographic place as it was the reality of God in action.¹

The Gospel writers used two terms interchangeably to speak of God's kingdom. They called it "the kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of heaven" (or in some English translations, "the heavens"). These are variations of the same idea. All four Gospels use "the kingdom of God," but Matthew favored "the kingdom of heaven." While he used the designation "kingdom of God" only five times, he punctuated his Gospel with the phrase "kingdom of heaven" thirty-two times. Since "kingdom of heaven" was a typical Jewish way to "avoid the use of the name of God" when referring to God's rule, Matthew's preference for this phrase demonstrated his concern for reaching a Jewish audience with the message of Jesus.²

HOW JESUS TALKED ABOUT GOD'S KINGDOM

Exploring Jesus's use of these terms in Matthew's Gospel illuminates compelling truths about God's reign in the universe. In fact, chapters 12; 13; 16; and 19 provide keys to understanding these truths. Chapter 13 is especially significant. In that

chapter, Jesus defined the nature of God's kingdom through a series of parables. Four facts about Jesus's use of "the kingdom of God" or "heaven" emerge as we scan these chapters in Matthew.

First, the kingdom is embodied in Christ. The early Christians realized that the kingdom of God had actually arrived in Jesus Christ. As Messiah, Christ was the anticipated King. But more than that, He actually embodied the kingdom of God. He brought its mission to earth. He carried bodily the full authority of God.

Matthew recorded events through which Jesus demonstrated His regal authority. For example, when the Pharisees criticized Jesus for permitting His disciples to eat grain and for healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus proclaimed Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:8). Jesus was inaugurating the kingdom of God on earth and asserting His authority as King. Matthew clarified that the King had come by quoting a passage from Isaiah that anticipated the Messiah's arrival (Matt. 12:15-21; Isa. 42:1-4).³

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

Second, the kingdom is a call to discipleship. Jesus's coming ushered in God's kingdom. Further, it requires a response from all who encounter the

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

Not everyone would accept the demands of discipleship. Jesus used the parable of the sower and the soil to compare the ways people responded to His call to enter God's kingdom and become His followers (13:18-23).

Matthew was careful to include an explanation with this parable. Although all hear the same message of the kingdom, not all respond the same way. Only the person who is fit for the kingdom "hears and understands the word" (v. 23). That disciple will produce a great bounty for the kingdom. Under the tests of time and endurance, his profession of faith will be proven genuine.

Even Jesus's closest disciples wrestled with the demands of discipleship. Following Peter's great Christological confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus promised that His followers would be kingdom disciples and would have keys to the kingdom. The gospel message was that key to the kingdom. Their actions of "binding and loosing" would create the church on earth, which would then carry out the mission of the kingdom.⁴

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

Matthew recorded other episodes to underscore Jesus's expectations for His followers. Jesus showed that citizens of His kingdom should have the faith of a child. He also taught a rich young man that discipleship was a lifestyle that required a complete surrender to the priorities of God's kingdom (19:13-30).⁵

Third, the kingdom is a treasure that God reveals. Jesus's disciples wondered why He taught kingdom truths using parables. Jesus answered, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them" (13:11). He meant that parables have a dual purpose: to reveal and to conceal. The inability to understand stemmed from

a hardened heart, but people who were open to the truth would understand Jesus's teaching and choose to follow Him. To see that the kingdom of God has come required accepting God's perspective. God revealed this truth (16:17).⁶

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

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

Jesus taught that the final coming of the kingdom of God would be a day of judgment for those who reject Him and a day of reward for those who accept Him (16:27-28). As one scholar stated, "In a very meaningful sense the kingdom has come because Jesus has come. But in an equally meaningful sense the kingdom will come when Jesus comes. It is present. It is future."⁷

Robert Weathers is pastor of First Baptist Church, Shallotte, North Carolina. This article originally appeared in the Fall 2007 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Used with permission.

1. Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 106; G. E. Ladd, "Kingdom of Christ, God, Heaven," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 608.

2. Morris, 127-128.

3. D. A. Carson, Matthew in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 282-283; 327.

4. "Jesus' church" is not the same thing as His "kingdom." The kingdom is the reign of God. The church is the people of God who are called out through the reign of God to be on mission for Him. Therefore, the kingdom produces the church. See Carson, 369.

5. Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 218, 295-300.

6. *Ibid.*, 215.

7. Morris, 129.



Authority Acknowledged

JESUS'S WORDS HAVE AUTHORITY.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 7:15-29 Memory Verse: Matthew 7:24

Sometime along the way, authority became a four-letter word. Some historians point to the rebellious and riotous 1960s. Still others point to postmodern influences and the belief that everyone defines right and wrong for themselves. Whatever the cause, many people have a negative view of authority in any form.

People in Jesus's day lived in an atmosphere of totalitarian authority. Politically, Rome and its governors dominated regions like Israel. Spiritually, Jewish religious leaders exerted their own coercive authority. The common folks knew both were inherently false.

But Jesus's audiences heard something different. He spoke with genuine authority, unlike the Jewish teachers. In Jesus, the people found an authentic voice, a voice of true authority they could accept and follow.

As you prepare to teach this final session from the Sermon on the Mount, evaluate your own attitude toward authority—including God's authority over your life. Ask Him to help you surrender to Him and to give you the wisdom you need to guide the adults in your Bible study to acknowledge His authority in their lives.



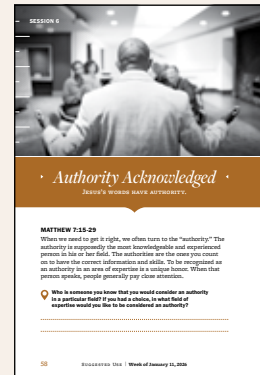
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When we need to get it right, we often turn to the “authority.” The authority is supposedly the most knowledgeable and experienced person in his or her field. The authorities are the ones you count on to have the correct information and skills. To be recognized as an authority in an area of expertise is a unique honor. When that person speaks, people generally pay close attention. (PSG, p. 58)

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 the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus progressed through topics with fluid grace. Spiritual truth flowed from His lips to eager ears ready for genuine guidance. In this final section of His message, Jesus warned the people to avoid judging one another. Instead, they should focus their attention and energy on their own culpability before God. He was not saying believers should abandon loving discernment, but they should avoid self-righteous criticism and condemnation of others. Only as people deal with their own personal sin can they nurture the humility and grace needed to correct others as Jesus did.

Jesus challenged hearers to apply biblical principles to their relationship with God and with one another. For example, we relate to God as a Father who knows and cares about our needs. Therefore, we can continually ask, seek, and knock with confidence that He hears our prayers. Because the Father loves us, He provides for us according to what is best for us.

Because we enjoy this interactive relationship with God, we should treat others in the same way. This “Golden Rule” is based not on human principles, but on the application of reciprocal love. It summarizes the intention of all the Mosaic law and the prophetic writings—in other words, the entirety of Scripture.

It’s easy to follow the wide road of human inclination rather than the narrow road of godly obedience. It’s also easy to find false prophets

who tickle our ears by advocating false teaching. This was a dangerous situation for Jesus’s listeners and remains so for us today.

Some people call Jesus “Lord,” yet they do not really know Him. As a result, true believers should beware. Without being judgmental, we are instructed to take note of the fruit produced by each person and to choose wisely the direction we follow.

Taking the various teachings of His sermon as a whole, Jesus used an analogy to illustrate how we should respond. Using familiar word pictures, He portrayed two houses with very different foundations. One house was built on solid rock, while the other stood on shifting sand. One endured the storms that beat against it; the other crashed as its foundation was swept away by the tempest. Similarly, wise believers not only hear Jesus’s teachings, but they incorporate each precept into their lives. A sound relationship with Christ informs their understanding of these principles and their application. Jesus alone is the true Rock who offers a sound foundation for life (1 Pet. 2:1-7).

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. (PSG, p. 59)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Sermon on the Mount). Gather pens or highlighters.

INTRODUCE:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 58 of the PSG.

ASK:

Who is someone you know that you would consider an authority in a particular field? If you had a choice, in what field of expertise would you like to be considered an authority? (PSG, p. 58)

STATE:

When Jesus taught, people were amazed because He had an authority they had never experienced. His words carried power, and the traditions and teachings of the religious leaders simply could not hold a candle to the kingdom principles He explained. That authority made Jesus's instructions important in the first century, but they are just as important today. We still need to hear Him and acknowledge His authority in our lives by obeying Him.

REVIEW:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Sermon on the Mount) and share that this is the third and final session drawn from the Sermon on the Mount. Invite adults to scan the handout and to share things they have learned from the previous sessions on this sermon.

TRANSITION:

This session highlights contrasting lifestyles. And it challenges us to make a choice. We can experience the joy of following God's way or face the consequences of going our own way.



Group Activity Option

Music

Prior to the session, make copies of the lyrics to “Authority” by Elevation Worship. During the session, play the song while the group follows along. Ask: **How would you describe the authority of Jesus?** Point out that Christians understand that Christ is the ultimate authority over our lives, but He also has authority over all creation. Guide the group to underline these words: *voice*, *word*, and *true*. Note that these are powerful “authority” words. Guide adults to find and circle the other words or phrases that point to Christ’s divine authority. (Examples: *prevail*, *strongholds moved*, *spirits silenced*, and *cower*) Encourage adults to look for ways Jesus’s words carried authority as they study this session’s verses.

Fruit (Matt. 7:15-20)

15 “Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. **16** You’ll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? **17** In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. **18** A good tree can’t produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19** Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** So you’ll recognize them by their fruit.”

(v. 15) Jesus understood human vulnerability. Even His followers were not exempt from the subtle seduction of false teachers. He warned them to **be on your guard**. This phrase translates a single command to be on alert continually. The danger of **false prophets** should not be underestimated. Heretics not only spoke falsehoods, but they also did it in God’s name. Their purpose was to deceive unsuspecting individuals.

One might not easily identify false prophets because they tend to look and sound good. They seem to be part of the Lord’s flock, but they are wearing **sheep’s clothing**. Outwardly, they seem genuine, but Jesus described them as **ravaging wolves**. These false teachers pursued their victims viciously, hunting susceptible prey.

(vv. 16-17) We recognize false prophets **by their fruit**. Their words and deeds must be consistent with God’s Word. Old Testament prophets had a simple test: Did what they say come true? (Deut. 18:21-22). Jesus’s caution applied not only to those who falsely claimed to prophesy what was to come, but also to those who taught false doctrine.

Like most of His illustrations, Jesus used things familiar to His audience to make a point. Here, He used a rhetorical question that highlights an evident truth: **Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles?** The obvious response was “certainly not.”

In the same way connects the illustration with its logical conclusion. **Every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit**. In Greek, the terms describing bad trees and bad fruit are slightly different. The trees are damaged by an external defect, like a disease. But the bad fruit is internally rotten, making it worthless. In its moral sense, “bad” implies harm, like spoiled fruit that makes a body sick.

Keep in mind the general nature of metaphors. Some fruit of good trees may have worms or other problems, but the basic principle remains

true. Godly people may sin on occasion, but their lifestyles will not be characterized by sin. In contrast, lost people may do good deeds on occasion, but the core of their lives is corrupt and godless.

Applied to false prophets, some genuinely godly teachers may be incorrect on occasion, but they do not intentionally deceive others. Conversely, phony prophets may say some things that appear true, but their motivation is rotten.

(vv. 18-19) Parallelism is a literary technique used for emphasis. It repeats a statement using slightly different terminology. Jesus reiterated the illustration of trees. In general, a **good tree** doesn’t yield **bad fruit**, and a **bad tree** doesn’t yield **good fruit**. We see a consistency between people and their lifestyles, as well as between spiritual leaders and their teachings.

A wise farmer understands the danger that diseased trees pose to the rest of the grove. If a tree can’t **produce good fruit**, he will **cut it down**. In Jesus’s day, such trees were **thrown into the fire** lest they infect healthy trees.

It’s important to understand that Jesus was not advocating works-based salvation in verse 19. Salvation is always a gift of God’s grace, and believers’ good works reveal His presence in their lives (Eph. 2:8-10). Instead, Jesus emphasized that no matter how good unbelievers seem on the outside, they will face judgment in the end.

(v. 20) Having admonished the disciples to beware of false prophets, Jesus again assured them that false teachers could be identified **by their fruit**. Spiritual discernment differs from self-righteous judgment and criticism. Believers have a responsibility to evaluate what people say and do to make sure it lines up with Scripture.

Similarly, believers’ lives should exhibit spiritual fruit. When others look at us, they should have no question about the health of our “tree” or the “fruit” it produces.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers' lives should exhibit spiritual fruit.

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13*). Remind adults that this session comes from the Sermon on the Mount, the first major discourse in Matthew's Gospel.

READ: **Read Matthew 7:15-20** aloud, encouraging adults to note the contrasts described in the passage.

SHARE: Allow volunteers to share the contrasts they noted in the verses. Highlight the imagery of a wolf in sheep's clothing in verse 15. Note the danger in following teachers who look good, but who view their followers as "consumables."

ASK: **What false teachings are popular in our culture?**

RECAP: To help explain the illustration of fruit used by Jesus in the passage, share this content from pages 60-61 of the PSG:

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 . . . from thornbushes" and "figs from 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 observable behaviors and attitudes they exhibit. . . . The condition of the heart is evidenced by the lifestyle produced.

ASK: **How can you tell the difference between judging someone (v. 1) and discerning fruit (v. 20)?** (PSG, p. 61)

STATE: *It's vital for Christ followers to recognize heresy. False teachers will be judged, along with anyone who follows them. While we need to be humble and loving, we can't afford to let our guard down when it comes to false teachers and false doctrine.*

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Potted Plant

Prior to the session, secure a potted plant. During the session, encourage adults to share some ideas for keeping the plant healthy, as well as signs that it might be dying. Highlight Jesus's illustration of the good trees and bad trees. Affirm that we can nurture healthy spiritual lives, but we also need to be on the lookout for false teachers that spread deception and spiritual disease.

Obedience (Matt. 7:21-23)

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ **23** Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!’”

(v. 21) After warning against false prophets, Jesus addressed the issue of false believers. Sadly, many people think they are saved because they are church members or live “good” lives. But Jesus noted that some who address Him as **Lord** will not **enter the kingdom of heaven**. This kingdom includes more than heaven in eternity. It also includes the complete rule and reign of God in our lives now.

Jesus distinguished between those who claim Him as Lord and those who actually submit to His reign. True salvation involves repentance, faith, and receiving Christ as Savior and Lord (John 1:11-12; Acts 3:19; 16:31). Genuine conversion involves obeying **the will** of the **Father**. One cannot live in rebellion against the Lord and expect a place in His eternal kingdom.

(v. 22) Most scholars believe **that day** refers to the day of the Lord when Jesus returns in power and judgment (see Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 5:2-3). This will be a time of reward for believers (2 Tim. 4:8), but terror for the lost.

Jesus described a scene in which **many** will be shocked to find themselves outside the kingdom. Earlier, Jesus urged people to enter the narrow gate of salvation because choosing the wider path leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14).

As they stand before Christ, multitudes will cry **Lord, Lord** as they plead to enter His kingdom. Without offering an exhaustive list, Jesus focused on three pleas that will be made by people who pretend to follow Him.

Some will claim to **prophesy** in Jesus’s **name**. Old Testament prophecy usually involved foretelling future events under God’s inspiration, yet false prophets spoke lies to lure God’s people away from Him (Deut. 13:1-3). Often, New Testament prophecy refers to religious teaching or preaching. Jesus addressed people who illegitimately spoke for Him.

Others claimed to **drive out demons** and work **miracles**. Doing something in Jesus’s name means claiming His authority and on His behalf.

In all three instances, people misused His name for their own purposes. Like the fake exorcists in Acts who tried to cast out demons using Jesus’s name, these people will suffer for dishonoring the Name above all names (Acts 19:13-16).

(v. 23) Jesus will **announce** unleash His judgment on these false followers. They did not have the right to use Jesus’s name because He **never knew** them. Of course, Jesus knows *about* them, since He possesses divine omniscience. But they will have no personal relationship to support their claims. They will be missing a genuine spiritual transformation that moves them from darkness to light. Jesus’s denial of these individuals means they will lack a saving relationship with Him. As a result, they would suffer the consequences.

Jesus also called them **lawbreakers**. The Greek wording emphasizes one who actively and willfully rejects God’s commands. Regardless of their protests, these imposters were determined to violate His laws. As a result, Jesus will order them to **depart** from His presence. Separation from Christ’s presence is the essence of hell. Eternal damnation involves suffering eternal torment removed from Jesus.

Believers are known by their desire to obey God’s Word. They not only make a statement of belief, but they also demonstrate genuine faith by joyfully doing God’s will.

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.)



READ:

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

Lead the group to read Matthew 7:21-23 silently and to record the emotions they experience in the margin of the PSG.

DISCUSS:

Allow a few volunteers to share what they wrote in their Personal Study Guides and why this passage raised those emotions in their hearts and minds.

ASK:

What are some situations when wearing a costume or a mask might be fun or useful? Point out that sometimes a mask is appropriate for our setting, but Jesus was calling out individuals who were wearing spiritual masks—either because they were deceived or because they wanted to deceive others.

RECAP:

To explain Jesus's words to the false followers, summarize this content from page 62 of the PSG:

“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. But religious activity can be a mask that hides a heart that is far from God. . . . These false believers will offer all types of pleas about their spirituality and good works in Jesus's name. However, they will be exposed for the counterfeits they are. Jesus emphasized that religious activities are not always synonymous with obedience. The religious activities described here were outward, showy, charismatic activities. But they were all empty substitutes for obedience in daily living.”

ASK:

What does obedience to God's Word reveal about one's relationship with God? (PSG, p. 63)

PRAY:

Emphasize that looking like a Christian—and even acting like one—is not enough. Direct attention to the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover of the PSG. Take a moment to share what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ. Encourage adults to spend a moment in silent prayer, talking with God about where they stand with Him. Lead the group in the prayer at the end of the Plan of Salvation. Let adults know that you are available to speak with anyone who prayed that prayer or would like to learn more about accepting Jesus's offer of salvation.

Wisdom (Matt. 7:24-29)

24 “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **25** The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn’t collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. **26** But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn’t act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. **27** The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash.” **28** When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, **29** because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.

(vv. 24-25) Concluding His sermon, Jesus incorporated all He had taught in a final illustrative warning. In this case, **therefore** looks back not only to the immediate statements about false prophets but also to His entire message.

Jesus contrasted two kinds of people within the larger group of **everyone who hears these words of mine**. These groups differ in how they respond to what He said. The person who **acts on them** obeys His teaching. The verb tense describes someone who doesn’t just heed Christ’s words once in a while, but constantly.

This person resembles **a wise man** who builds his residence on a foundation of **rock**. Notice the progression: He hears, then he acts. His obedient action is wise—ensuring a secure footing for his life.

But challenging circumstances afflict everyone. In Jesus’s word picture, driving **rain**, rising **rivers**, and pounding **winds** pummeled the structure. The house built on the rock did not escape a rough environment, yet **it didn’t collapse**.

This man’s house survived because it was built **on the rock**. The New Testament identifies Jesus as our Rock (1 Pet. 2:4-8). With Christ as the basis for our lives, we can live securely, regardless of circumstances.

(vv. 26-27) Sadly, others are like **a foolish man**. Jesus said this person also **hears these words of mine**, but he **doesn’t act on them**. Both builders have the advantage of Jesus’s words, but they respond very differently and experience very different results.

This foolish man **built his house on the sand**. By its nature, sand provides little stability for a structure. You can build a home on the beach because you like an oceanfront view, but you must drive the supports deep enough to reach bedrock.

Unfortunately, many people bypass the rock of Christ and build their lives on the sand of personal desires.

As with the first house, the **rain, rivers**, and **winds** battered the building. The circumstances are the same in both settings, but the result for the second house was disastrous. **It collapsed with a great crash**. When we ignore Christ, we are like this unstable house built on sand. Without Him, we are bound to collapse.

(vv. 28-29) Jesus did not specifically make the above application, but the point was clear to the **crowds** who heard Him. Scholars note that as Jesus spoke, His disciples were joined by many others who had followed Him. And, when He was done, He simply **finished** the message.

But His listeners felt the impact of His words. They were **astonished at his teaching**. The verb tense indicates an ongoing response that resonated with them long after the sermon ended. Their reaction revealed the overwhelmingly powerful effect of Jesus and His words.

The term **because** establishes the reason for the people’s response. While His words were powerful, Jesus Himself was the Source of the power. The crowds were accustomed to the secondhand reflections of **their scribes** whose instruction was based primarily on rabbinical traditions. They lacked the personal **authority** of Christ. Jesus’s teaching wasn’t just repeating precepts. It carried the potency of His person and His presence as God the Son.

Believers can stand firm on God’s Word. Placing our faith in Jesus as God the Son, we can be sure that we not only have solid principles for life, but that we also have direct access to the Person who empowers those truths.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can stand firm on God's Word.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 7:24-29 aloud as the group underlines adjectives from the verses that stand out to them.

DISCUSS: Allow volunteers to share what words they underlined and why. Note that while verses 21-23 touched people's emotions, Jesus's story about the builders appeals to people's minds. Point out that this is a hallmark of a master teacher.

ASK: **What is the primary difference between the two builders?**

RECAP: Share this content from page 63 of the PSG to help adults reflect on how their responses apply to their lives:

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.

EXPLAIN: Point out that two things were the same: Both groups heard Jesus's words and both groups experienced storms. Affirm that Jesus has given us His teachings and "storms" are going to shake our lives. Emphasize that the foundations—accepting or rejecting Jesus and His words—was what made the difference.

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion on how the crowd reacted and why. Affirm that Jesus demands a response from each person.

ASK: **Who in your circle of friends needs to hear and act on the message of the gospel?** (PSG, p. 65)

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

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

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 66 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *Believers' lives should exhibit spiritual fruit.*
- *Believers are known by their desire to obey God's Word.*
- *Believers can stand firm on God's Word.*

REFLECT:

Direct adults to read through the application points from the session again and to give themselves a ranking for each one on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being "lacking" and 5 being "perfect"). After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share which point got their highest ranking and why. Emphasize that no one is perfect, but God wants us to come to Him and allow Him to make us more like Him in each of these areas.

DISCUSS:

Encourage adults to read and discuss the first set of questions on page 66 of the PSG. As a group, make a list of ways they can encourage one another and hold one another accountable for bearing good fruit and building on a strong foundation. (Possible answers: phone calls, meet weekly in pairs, encouraging text messages, and so forth) Suggest they follow through on identifying a partner and identify one way to live out this application step.

PRAY:

Once the adults have paired off, encourage them to pray together. Close the session in prayer, asking God to teach each person how to live their faith in a genuine way every day for their good and God's glory.

AFTER THE SESSION

During the week, text or email the group the second set of questions from page 66 of the PSG. Feel free to share your greatest area of struggle and ask adults to pray for you in that area. Encourage the other adults to share and to pray for one another. Remind them to connect with their prayer partner during the week and to reach out to you if they have more questions about becoming a Christian.

LEADER BLOG



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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.



Every Life Valued

JESUS VALUES EVERY PERSON.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8 Memory Verse: Matthew 8:3

Everyone wants to enjoy their quality of life. We prepare and work hard to find meaningful jobs, build decent homes, and provide for our families. We want the health and strength to make the most of our lives. Unfortunately, some believe any life that lacks a certain level of quality holds less value than others. This low view of human life leads them to discount God's image within each person.

The Bible makes it clear that God created life—all of it. Even after humanity's fall in Eden, God still values the lives of His highest creation. Old Testament law and New Testament teaching emphasize God's love for every person, without restriction or exception. Whether it's an unborn child and an unwed mother, someone suffering mental or physical affliction, or a victim of poverty or crime, no situation takes us beyond God's love.

As you study this "Sanctity of Human Life" session, examine your attitude toward the weak and marginalized in society. Ask God to help you see others the way He sees them and to move the adults in your Bible study toward the same level of compassion and care for every person.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



You might think it would be quite 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?” If the answer is yes, then what should that look like? (PSG, p. 67)

What are some things that make people feel valued?

What might make them feel undervalued?



Understand the Context (Matthew 8:1–9:8)

Jesus lived out the values He taught. Through a series of miracles, He demonstrated compassion for every individual. These events also emphasized Jesus’s authority as Messiah. Commentators note that they portray Jesus’s power over sickness, nature, demonic spirits, and sin itself.

As Jesus came down the mountain, vast crowds desperate for hope flocked to Him. Among the first to reach Him was a leper. Outcast from society, lepers were forbidden to approach healthy individuals. Society considered them worthless, or worse. Jesus demonstrated fearless compassion as He touched the man and healed him.

In Capernaum, a Roman centurion pleaded for Jesus to heal his servant. This soldier’s humble faith became a living object lesson for the Jewish crowd. By spoken word alone, Jesus healed the man’s servant. Jesus cared for the servant and his master. He valued all equally.

Arriving at Peter’s house in Capernaum, Jesus found the disciple’s mother-in-law sick with a fever. Once Jesus healed her, she began serving those around her. People who receive Jesus’s healing naturally want to serve Him.

As word of Jesus’s ministry spread, many more people brought family and friends to Him. Christ’s healing ministry also fulfilled messianic prophecy.

As Jesus prepared to depart for the other side of the Sea of Galilee, a scribe wanted to go with Him. Jesus warned the man that following Him

meant hardship. When another would-be disciple asked permission to delay going with Him, Jesus reminded him of the cost of discipleship.

Jesus fell asleep in the boat. But the disciples were terrified by a severe storm that suddenly swept down over the water and threatened the ship. Awakened by the disciples, Jesus calmed the wind and waves. Then, He calmed their hearts and admonished them to have deeper faith.

Jesus made this trip into Gentile regions to help a pair demoniacs. The evil spirits in the men recognized Jesus as the Son of God. They knew His power and feared it. Expelling the demons, Jesus permitted them to enter a herd of pigs. The pigs stampeded over a cliff and fell into the sea. Instead of acknowledging Jesus’s power or glorifying God for the man’s deliverance, city leaders begged Jesus to leave.

Returning to Capernaum, some men brought a paralytic friend to Him. Instead of immediately healing him, Jesus pronounced the man’s sins were forgiven. Amidst irate onlookers, Jesus’s purpose in delaying the healing was to demonstrate His authority to forgive sins—a right limited to God alone. Each of these episodes revealed Jesus’s love for every person, regardless of their social standing or circumstances.

Review Matthew 8:1–9:8 in your Bible. Highlight the different ways Jesus reacted with people. What kinds of needs did He address? (PSG, p. 68)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8–9*).

READ:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 67 of the PSG.

ASK:

**What are some things that make people feel valued?
What might make them feel unvalued?** (PSG, p. 67)

CONTEXT:

Share that Jesus revealed His love and concern for all people through His teaching and His healing. Summarize this information from page 68 of the PSG to share how Matthew focused on these two aspects of Jesus's ministry:

“Matthew's Gospel is organized around two major activities of Jesus—teaching and healing. An example of that organization is found in Matthew 4:23–9:35. . . . [This passage] first gives to us a body of teaching called the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29). Next, comes the healing ministry of Jesus, beginning in 8:1.”

EXPLAIN:

Note that the miracles in chapter 8 illustrate Jesus's authority over illness, creation, demons, and even sin. Emphasize that, ultimately, the miracles revealed Jesus's heart for people.

STATE:

This session supports the sanctity of all human life. This was a principle Matthew understood because he saw Jesus value life at every turn. His Gospel also challenges us to imitate Jesus's attitude. It might be an unborn child, someone with a mental or physical illness, one marginalized by cultural stereotypes, or an elderly man or woman who needs a friend. Whatever the specifics, we are called to love them as Jesus demonstrated His love in passages like Matthew 8.



MIRACLES IN MATTHEW 8-9

Read the following passages and answer the questions that follow. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

Read of a certain number of the miracles which Jesus did at Capernaum, and then answer the questions that follow. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

Miracle	Reference
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:1-13
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:14-17
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:18-22
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:23-27
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:28-34
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:35-38
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:39-42
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:43-45
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:46-48
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:49-51
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:52-54
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:55-57
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:58-60
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:61-63
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:64-66
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:67-69
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:70-72
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:73-75
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:76-78
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:79-81
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:82-84
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:85-87
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:88-90
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:91-93
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:94-96
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:97-99
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:100-102
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:103-105
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:106-108
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:109-111
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:112-114
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:115-117
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:118-120
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:121-123
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:124-126
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:127-129
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:130-132
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:133-135
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:136-138
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:139-141
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:142-144
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:145-147
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:148-150
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:151-153
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:154-156
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:157-159
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:160-162
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:163-165
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:166-168
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:169-171
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:172-174
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:175-177
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:178-180
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:181-183
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:184-186
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:187-189
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:190-192
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:193-195
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:196-198
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:199-201
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:202-204
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:205-207
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:208-210
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:211-213
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:214-216
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:217-219
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:220-222
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:223-225
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:226-228
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:229-231
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:232-234
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:235-237
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:238-240
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:241-243
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:244-246
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:247-249
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:250-252
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:253-255
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:256-258
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:259-261
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:262-264
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:265-267
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:268-270
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:271-273
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:274-276
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:277-279
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:280-282
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:283-285
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:286-288
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:289-291
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:292-294
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:295-297
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:298-300
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:301-303
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:304-306
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:307-309
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:310-312
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:313-315
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:316-318
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:319-321
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Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:340-342
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:343-345
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:346-348
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:349-351
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Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 8:355-357
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Leprosy (Matt. 8:1-4)

1 When he came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him. **2** Right away a man with leprosy came up and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” **3** Reaching out his hand, Jesus touched him, saying, “I am willing; be made clean.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. **4** Then Jesus told him, “See that you don’t tell anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

(v. 1) Jesus values every person. From lepers to leaders, no one was beyond Christ’s love. Following His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus **came down from the mountain**. He and His followers had invested time in quiet, focused teaching. Now, Jesus recognized a time for decisive action.

Although **large crowds followed him**, He took time to meet the needs of individuals, including the outcasts or helpless. His personal attention demonstrated their worth and affirmed the sanctity of all human life.

(v. 2) Matthew noted that a **man with leprosy** approached Jesus. Undoubtedly, the crowd made way for one who had to shout “unclean” as a warning to others (Lev. 13:45). The leper’s actions were remarkable in several ways. First, lepers lived in isolation (Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2-3), forbidden to come near anyone except other lepers. But this leper **came up and knelt before** Jesus, ignoring the crowd and the social constraints.

Second, the man called Jesus **Lord**. Some scholars see this as an act of contrition, although the term was also a common greeting of respect in the first century. What he said to Jesus next affirmed his faith in Jesus’s divine ability.

In humble faith, the leper acknowledged that Jesus could **make me clean** if He was **willing**. He believed Jesus could make him well, although no known cure existed. Some argue biblical leprosy was different from Hansen’s disease, which attacks the body and can lead to deformity and even death if left untreated. Regardless of the exact nature of the man’s illness, it was serious enough that his only hope was Jesus.

(v. 3) As seen later, Jesus could heal with a word (Matt. 8:5-13; 9:6). Yet, He did something astonishing: Christ **touched him**. Imagine the gasps when Jesus placed His hand on the leper. Anyone who came into contact with an unclean person became unclean (Lev. 5:3). Society considered the man an outcast, but Jesus loved him.

The leper’s heart must have leapt as he felt Jesus’s touch and heard His words: **I am willing; be made clean**. Once Jesus issued the command, the healing occurred **immediately**, demonstrating Jesus’s power and compassion.

(v. 4) The man may have felt like shouting for joy. However, Jesus commanded him, **Don’t tell anyone**. Jesus often told people not to talk about His healing miracles because it could hinder His ability to share the message of the kingdom.

Jesus’s admonition was not intended to keep the healing a secret, but to follow the law’s procedure. To be declared clean, the man had to **show yourself to the priest**. Priests were tasked with diagnosing skin diseases and confirming the cure. The man also needed to offer **the gift that Moses commanded** (Lev. 13-15). Obediently following God’s directions would be a **testimony** to the priests and the community at large.

Jesus went out of His way to touch the untouchable. He refused to let legalistic rules or customs define His ministry. As believers, we are called to model His compassion and to affirm that every human life matters. We are called to serve as conduits of His compassion to others.

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.)

EXPLORE Matthew 8:1-4



APPLICATION POINT: We should value those whom some consider to be outcasts.

DISTRIBUTE:

Provide the group with copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8–9*) and draw attention to the healing miracles performed by Jesus.

READ:

Instruct the group to read Matthew 8:1-4 silently and to underline what the leper said and circle what Jesus did. Encourage volunteers to share what they know about leprosy.

EXPLAIN:

To provide more information on what the man's ailment might have been, share this content from page 69 of the PSG:

“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. . . . 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.

ASK:

Based on this information, why is it significant that the man approached Jesus and that Jesus touched him?

EXPLAIN:

Use information from Matthew 8:3 in the Leader Guide to highlight Jesus's compassion in touching the man and how his healing was immediate. Use content from Matthew 8:4 in the Leader Guide to explain the law's requirements to declare healing.

ASK:

Who are the outcasts in our society and what are some typical reactions to them? (PSG, p. 71)

Group Activity Option

Enlist a Doctor

Prior to the session, enlist a doctor from your group or congregation to share information about leprosy (Hansen's disease). Encourage the guest to highlight the physical issues related to the disease and how it has been treated across the years. Do some research into Old Testament guidelines for diagnosing the ailment and having oneself declared clean again.

Fever and Demon-Possession (Matt. 8:14-17)

14 Jesus went into Peter's house and saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. **15** So he touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and began to serve him. **16** When evening came, they brought to him many who were demon-possessed. He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick, **17** so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases.

(v. 14) After healing the leper and a centurion's servant (vv. 5-13), Jesus visited **Peter's house**. Some scholars claim Peter's house may have become Jesus's home after he left Nazareth. Jesus's visit occurred shortly after He came to Capernaum with his new disciples (Mark 1:21).

Entering the house, Jesus was told that Peter's **mother-in-law** was sick **with a fever**. Peter's father-in-law may have already died, leaving Peter to care for his mother-in-law. We are not given the specific nature of her illness, but it had her confined to her **bed**.

(v. 15) When Jesus **touched her hand**, the **fever left her**. As with the leper, His touch was not necessary to heal, but He knew the power of touch in expressing personal care. Unlike other healings, no words were recorded. Seeing someone in need was enough for Jesus. Seeing the Master was enough for her.

Also, the timing of her healing resembled the leper's experience. It was instantaneous. She needed no more time for recovery to regain strength. With her recovery immediate and complete, she **began to serve** the gathering. Her ministry was a loving response to a loving touch. Jesus's compassion toward her prompted service to Him.

(v. 16) News about Jesus's power quickly spread. Mark's Gospel includes an account of Jesus casting out a demon earlier in the day (Mark 1:21-28). Perhaps motivated by this incident, people came with **many who were demon-possessed**. Some scholars suggest people waited until **evening** because sundown marked the end of the Sabbath. Of course, the sheer numbers posed no problem for Jesus. He simply **drove out the spirits with a word**. His authority was absolute, even over the spirits of darkness.

It is also possible that the demonized people were brought at night because of social stigma. Family members may have waited until they could

come without the harsh stares of their neighbors. In Jesus, they found someone who valued even the most tormented persons.

Jesus also **healed all who were sick**. While some afflictions were associated with demons (Mark 9:25), illness and demonic possession were generally different problems. Jesus ministered to both groups because both groups matter to God.

(v. 17) Matthew connected Jesus's ministry to prophecy. **Isaiah** spoke about the Messiah who would take **our weaknesses** and carry **our diseases** (see Isa. 53:4). Some translations of Isaiah 53:4 use different terms, but the meanings are the same. Jesus, the Suffering Servant, was not aloof or distant. He actively experienced human suffering on our behalf, alleviating it for us.

The phrase **might be fulfilled** indicates that Jesus's completion of Scripture was not incidental. Matthew was not making a loose connection. By fulfilling messianic prophecy, Jesus again proved that He is the Messiah sent from God.

Like Jesus, we should value people in all stages and circumstances of life. From the womb to the grave, God loves each person and so should we.

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.

EXPLORE Matthew 8:14-17



APPLICATION POINT: We should value people of all stages in life.

READ: Read Matthew 8:14-17 as the group identifies the actions of Jesus and those he healed.

SAY:

The individuals healed in this passage also would be considered persons of little reputation or held in low regard.

RECAP:

To emphasize how Jesus's care and compassion continued to shatter the norms established by society, summarize the following content from page 71 of the PSG.

"In addition to the leper's healing, chapter 8 records the healings of a Roman centurion's servant and Peter's mother-in-law. Matthew's narrative of these healings illustrates Jesus's compassion toward those who might have been considered second-class citizens in Jewish society. Certainly, the leper was an outcast. The servant of a Gentile centurion would be considered to have little value as a person. The same would be true for his master, the centurion. Finally, Peter's mother-in-law belonged to another category of second-class people in that society—women."

EXAMINE:

Divide the group into an even number of teams. Each team should have two or three people. Give them the following directions:

- *Instruct half the groups to read and reflect on Matthew 8:16. Discuss why individuals brought people at night and how Jesus responded to those brought to Him.*
- *Instruct half the groups to read and reflect on Matthew 8:17. Discuss the significance of Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah.*

EXPLAIN:

After a few minutes, allow the teams to report on their work. Highlight how Matthew was proving Jesus's role as the Messiah through both the authority of miraculous healings and the fulfillment of prophecy.

ASK:

In what ways can we show that we value the most vulnerable members of society? How do these verses in Matthew provide a model for us? (PSG, p. 73)

Paralysis (Matt. 9:1-8)

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

(v. 1) Jesus cares for the few as well as the many. After ministering to multitudes, He departed for the Gentile region of the Gadarenes. There, Jesus delivered two demon-possessed men. City leaders were not amazed at Jesus’s power or grateful the men were freed. They only wanted Jesus to leave.

Jesus did not argue. His mission was to help the two men. That task accomplished, He **crossed over** in a boat and returned to **his own town**, meaning Capernaum.

(v. 2) Other passages suggest several days passed before the next event (see Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). Jesus was teaching in the house when a small group of men brought **a paralytic lying on a stretcher** to Him. They broke up the roof to let the man down to Jesus because a crowd blocked the entrance (Mark 2:4; Luke 5:19). Some scholars suggest this was Peter’s house.

Jesus saw **their faith**. Each of them believed Jesus could heal the man, and they were not going to let this opportunity pass. They went to incredible lengths to reach Jesus.

In response, Jesus urged him to **have courage**. By calling him **son**, Jesus used a term of affection. Instead of immediately healing the man, Jesus focused on his spiritual condition: **your sins are forgiven**. While he came for physical healing, Jesus saw and met a much greater need.

(vv. 3-4) Matthew noted that some **scribes** were present. When these teachers of the law heard Jesus forgiving sins, they believed He was **blaspheming**. Blasphemy involves an offense against the person, character, name, or privilege of God; and Jews considered it a serious violation of the law. In fact, it was a capital offense (Lev. 24:16).

Instead of addressing Jesus directly, the teachers spoke to **themselves**. This phrase could be rendered “among themselves,” but the context

suggests an internal conversation. For whatever reason, they only judged Jesus in their hearts and minds, not with spoken words.

Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus confronted them and questioned the **evil** in their **hearts**. On the surface, the scribes seemed to have a legitimate objection since only God can forgive sins. Their problem was they didn’t understand the divine nature of the One who spoke.

(vv. 5-7) Jesus answered the question that was never asked out loud with a question of His own. He wanted to know if it was easier to say **your sins are forgiven** or **get up and walk**. Scholars see this reasoning as typical Hebrew argumentation from the easy to the difficult. Anyone could claim to forgive sins, since no one could determine externally if sins were forgiven. However, if Jesus attempted to heal the man by commanding him to stand and walk, success or failure would be immediately apparent.

Jesus proved His **authority to forgive sins** by healing the man. Using the messianic title **Son of Man** (Dan. 7:13-14), He highlighted both His humanity and His deity (Matt. 24:27; 25:31). Without effort, the man **got up and went home**. Jesus had affirmed His authority over both physical and spiritual sickness.

(v. 8) The **crowds** were **awestruck**. This emotion combines elements of wonder and reverence. Unlike the scribes, they **gave glory to God** for what they had seen. However, they assumed God had bestowed this authority on Jesus simply as a man, not as the Messiah.

We should value those with physical handicaps. While we can’t heal like Jesus, we can help hurting people as He did. We can show compassion to all who need to see Jesus through us.

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: We should care for and value persons with physical handicaps.

Direct the group to read Matthew 9:1-8 silently and to identify the various attitudes displayed. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to list the different people mentioned in the passage and the attitude or emotion that best describes each one. Record responses on the board.

CONTEXT:

Enlist two adults to read accounts from Mark 2:4 and Luke 5:19. Discuss similarities and differences in the narratives. Highlight the men's faith in tearing up the roof to help their friend. Share that many scholars believe this was Peter's house.

EXAMINE:

Why do you think Jesus addressed spiritual needs before He addressed physical needs? (PSG, p. 75)

RECAP:

Note that the religious leaders had a different response. Read this content from page 74 of the PSG to explain their reaction:

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 was perceiving their thoughts. He denounced their unbelief and objections as coming from the evil in their hearts.

STATE:

Jesus proved His authority to forgive sins by demonstrating His authority to heal physical disabilities. As God, He has the power to do both. And He is willing to meet every need because He cares about every human life.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Crutches

Show the group a set of crutches. Encourage them to share times when they had to use crutches to get around. Ask: ***What if needing crutches somehow meant we were second class citizens?*** Emphasize that physical problems, regardless of their nature, do not diminish the value every person has in the sight of God. Highlight Jesus's willingness to reach out to all kinds of people with all kinds of problems. Challenge the group to look for ways to be Jesus's hands and feet by following His example and by affirming the value of every human life through their words and actions.

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 76 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *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.*

REFLECT:

Refer back to the list of people and groups recorded on the board from Matthew 9:1-8 (Leader Guide, p. 91). Lead a brief discussion about how each person or group resembles our contemporary culture's attitude toward human life.

GUIDE:

Create a list of those in your community who might be considered outcasts or of lesser value as directed in the first set of questions on page 76 of the PSG. Plan a group project that will allow adults to minister to these individuals in a meaningful way. Suggest they reflect on the second set of questions from page 76 of the PSG during the week.

PRAY:

Close the session in prayer, thanking God for the gift of each human life. Ask Him to impress that value on the heart of each person as they seek ways to serve as His hands and feet in the world.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group, encouraging them to do some deeper soul searching as they consider the sanctity of human life. Remind them to read and reflect on the second set of questions on page 76 of the PSG. Also, urge them to pray about the group project idea from the “Challenge” activities. Let them know that you are praying for them as they seek to become more like Jesus in the area of honoring the sanctity of all human life.

LEADER EXTRAS



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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

The Sanctity of Human Life

Bob Bunn

On January 13, 1984, President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation supporting what he dubbed “the sanctity of human life.” Pointing to the deaths of millions of unborn children through legalized abortion, Reagan noted that Americans were “poorer not simply for lives not led and for contributions not made, but also for the erosion of our sense of worth and dignity of every individual.”¹

In response, Reagan proclaimed Sunday, January 22 of that year—the 11th anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion—“National Sanctity of Human Life Day.” He issued similar proclamations for the third Sunday of January in each of his remaining years in office, as have several of his successors in the White House.

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

In its article on “The Family,” the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000) states that “children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord.”³ Later, in the article on

“The Christian and Social Order,” it also makes a broader appeal for the universal value of each human life, especially those who cannot defend themselves: “We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.”⁴

Today, Christians from a variety of backgrounds recognize the importance of protecting the sanctity of human life. Not only is it a matter of life and death for unborn children, but it also underscores the larger truth that all human life is sacred—from the womb to the grave.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Our English word “sanctity” can be traced to the Latin word *sanctus*, which basically means “sacred.” So, by definition the sanctity of human life considers every life “sacred” or “set apart” by God for His purposes and plans. And, honestly, that’s exactly what we see in the Scriptures when it comes to the lives of human beings.

We are told that starting with Adam and Eve, human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). While scholars and theologians have debated the precise meaning and implications of the *imago dei* (“image of God”), three things are certain. First, it is unique to humanity. No other aspect of the created order is said to be formed by God’s hand in God’s image. Second, the image of God is a universal trait of each human. All of us—even those who choose to reject God’s

mercy and grace—bear His image. Finally, the image of God gives every human being value and purpose. Our lives have meaning because we reflect Him.

In the Psalms, we see that the *imago dei* places humans a little lower than God and that we are crowned “with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). We can look over all the Lord has made and realize that God has given us authority as His stewards to rule over His creation (8:6-8).

Plus, we are “remarkably and wondrously made” by the very hand of God (139:14). He “knit” (a word that implies protection and security in Hebrew)⁵ us in our mother’s womb, and nothing in our lives is hidden from Him (139:13,15). This is how our Creator sees us, and it underscores our responsibility to view others through the lens of the sanctity of human life.

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

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

WHAT IT MEANS

As noted, the momentum of Sanctity of Human Life Sunday began with a presidential proclamation regarding the unborn. It served as a clarion call to encourage believers to protect the most vulnerable members of society and to take a bold stand against the evils of abortion.

That remains a central theme in the fight to recognize the sanctity of all human life. But, if we believe God calls us to value and protect every person He has created, believers must consider

expanding their definition of the sanctity of human life beyond the single issue of abortion.

In the Old Testament, God sent His people into exile for two primary reasons: idolatry and injustice toward those who could not defend themselves. Today, we don’t have to look far to see how oppression of the helpless and hopeless continues to raise its ugly head. Some discount the value of the elderly, especially those who can no longer actively contribute to society. Racial strife, economic injustice, physical disabilities, and mental illness leave many on the fringes of society.

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

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

Jesus affirmed the sanctity of all human life through His words and actions. He remains the best template for our lives and ministries as well. His example reminds us, as C.S. Lewis stated, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”⁶

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

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

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

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

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

5 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5526.htm>

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



Mercy Extended

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

Scripture Passage: Matthew 9:10-19,23-26 Memory Verse: Matthew 9:12

Jesus said that people who have been forgiven the most love more freely (Luke 7:36-47). We love Him because of His mercy toward us and the length to which He went to bestow mercy and forgiveness. The song “Just as I Am” touches hearts made tender by Jesus’s willingness to take us as we are and mercifully make of us something different, something better. The more we recognize our sin, the more we are grateful for the One who said to a paralytic and to us, “Your sins are forgiven” (Matt. 9:2).

Jesus demonstrated mercy by healing the sick, raising the dead, and delivering persons afflicted by demons. Perhaps more of us identify with His grace in the calling of an ostracized tax collector—and then joining the forgiven publican and his friends for a meal. When Christ saves us and calls us, He changes us and uses us as we follow Him.

As you prepare to lead this session from Matthew 9, take time to reflect on the mercy God has shown you. Ask Him to help you embrace that mercy and to help you use it as fuel for your ministry to others. Also, pray for adults in your Bible study who may be struggling to accept God and the mercy He offers so freely.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week’s study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



Suffering is everywhere. Hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and wildfires 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. (PSG, p. 77)

In what ways can we show mercy in our everyday encounters?



Understand the Context (Matthew 9:9-38)

Matthew's Gospel included his personal testimony. Referring to him as Levi, Mark and Luke also relate the publican's calling (Luke 5:27-29; Mark 2:14), but Matthew made it personal. This was part of his story. It was set in the context of Jesus's miraculous ministry; but for him, no miracle was as big as the change in his life through the grace of Christ. He responded to Jesus's invitation to discipleship much like the four fishermen of Galilee—immediately leaving his past to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:18-22; Luke 5:28).

Afterward, Matthew hosted a meal so his friends could meet Jesus. The Pharisees who witnessed this episode scorned Jesus for hanging around "sinners." Jesus rebuked these self-righteous hypocrites for their lack of love, reminding them He had come for people just like Matthew. They lacked mercy because they felt no need for forgiveness themselves.

Even disciples of John the Baptist did not fully understand Jesus's way of doing things. Ironically identifying themselves with the Pharisees, they questioned why Jesus and His disciples did not engage in public fasts. Like them, we need to be reminded of the deeper spiritual truths concerning Jesus's relationship with His followers.

These two encounters are sandwiched between more accounts of Jesus's merciful ministry toward desperate people seeking His help. One man was a leader of the local synagogue. He was not worried about Jesus's eating companions

or His fasting habits. His daughter was dying, and he needed a miracle. So, Jesus accompanied the frantic father on another mission of mercy. Arriving at the man's home, Jesus raised his daughter to life, demonstrating His authority over life—and even death itself.

Though they could not see what took place, two blind men heard Jesus was in the area. Also desperate, they called out to Him for mercy. Professing faith in His ability to heal them was akin to belief in Him as Messiah. He quietly healed them, not wanting publicity that would create unnecessary distractions. Overwhelmed at receiving their sight so suddenly, the men ignored Jesus's request and told everyone they met about His merciful miracle.

Later, a demon-possessed man was brought to Jesus. Without hesitation or conversation, Jesus cast out the evil spirit, enabling the mute man to speak. This sequence of events caused most people to praise God. However, the same Pharisees who challenged Jesus's previous acts of mercy again scorned Him and attributed His power to Satan rather than to God. When we forget our need of mercy, we join the ranks of those who love the trappings of religion, all while denying the power and love of God.

Review Matthew 9:10-19, 23-26 in your Bible. Summarize and contrast the attitudes of the Pharisees to the compassionate attitude of Jesus. (PSG, p. 78)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 5** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 9:12) and **Pack Item 1** (Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 12** (Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8–9).

INTRODUCE:

Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph (PSG, p. 77). Encourage one or two volunteers to share words that come to mind when they hear “mercy.” Share this definition found on page 1081 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015): “one’s consideration of the condition and needs of his fellowman.” Share that our mercy toward others is rooted in God’s mercy toward us.

ASK:

In what ways can we show mercy in our everyday encounters? (PSG, p. 77)

SHARE:

Remind adults that the group has been studying the Gospel of Matthew. Note that to this point, Matthew had not mentioned himself, even though he was one of Jesus’s early disciples. Summarize this information from page 78 of the PSG to highlight how Matthew revealed himself in today’s passages:

“The writer of the Gospel gives us a personal glimpse into his own calling to be a disciple. While Mark and Luke also record the calling of Matthew, in those two Gospels he is called Levi, which was his Hebrew name. Matthew was his Greek name. He was a tax collector for the Roman government. . . . No doubt Matthew included the story of his calling to point to the fact that Jesus extended grace even to those considered to be outcasts.”

TRANSITION:

After calling Matthew, Jesus also attended a banquet with “sinners.” As we study today’s verses, focus on how Jesus showed mercy and how He wants us to follow His example.



MIRACLES IN MATTHEW 8-9	
MIRACLES	REFERENCE
Healing a leper	Matthew 8:1-4
Healing a centurion's servant	Matthew 8:5-13
Healing a man with an unclean spirit	Matthew 9:1-13
Healing a man with a withered hand	Matthew 9:33-34
Healing a blind man	Matthew 9:35-38
Healing a paralytic	Matthew 9:9-13
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 9:14-15
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 9:16-17
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 9:18-19
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 9:20-21
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 9:22-23
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 9:24-25
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 9:26-27
Healing a man with a demon	Matthew 9:28-29

Group Activity Option

Music

Share the lyrics to “Rescue the Perishing” (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 357). Explain that the hymn was written by Fanny Crosby, a prolific writer of the 19th century. Note that she was also blind from her infancy. Encourage adults to discuss how her blindness may have helped her develop the kind of mercy reflected in this song. Share that Crosby wrote thousands of hymns, including many that remain popular today. Ask: **How does God use suffering to develop our mercy?** Lead adults in singing the first verse of “Rescue the Perishing” together.

Jesus's Mission (Matt. 9:10-13)

10 While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. **11** When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” **12** Now when he heard this, he said, “It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. **13** Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

After Jesus healed the paralytic, He went for a walk. This was not a casual walk-about. He knew exactly where He was going. Matthew was sitting at his station, collecting taxes on transactions from fishing vessels and other boats bringing cargo to port. When Jesus called him, Matthew asked no questions. He simply rose, left everything behind, and followed Jesus (Luke 5:27-28).

(v. 10) When we experience Christ’s mercy, we want others to know Him. Matthew invited his friends and colleagues to share a meal at his house with **Jesus and his disciples**. Although the text mentions **the house**, Mark’s account specifies this was Matthew’s home (Mark 2:15). This dinner likely was served a low **table** with couches or pillows on which people were **reclining** while they ate.

Matthew’s acquaintances were **tax collectors** and other people considered **sinners** by religious establishment. Whether because of Matthew’s popularity or Jesus’s fame, **many** of these social outcasts **came to eat** with Him. We can follow Matthew’s example by using hospitality to reach our friends for Christ.

(v. 11) We don’t fully understand how **the Pharisees saw this**. Given their disdain for such “sinners,” they would not have followed Jesus into Matthew’s house. Some commentators argue they observed the dinner from the courtyard through an open window. Others interpret “saw” in the sense of “I see what happened here.”

Instead of confronting Jesus directly, the Pharisees **asked his disciples** why Jesus was present. In their view, upright persons did not socialize with such people. Tax collectors were ostracized not only because they worked for Rome, but also because many were dishonest.

Ritual separation from unsavory people was expected, especially for a spiritual teacher. Like guilt by association, His presence suggested to the Pharisees that He was also a sinner.

(v. 12) **Heard this** could mean Jesus was listening to what was said in the moment. It also might refer to a later report from the disciples. Using a metaphorical analogy, Jesus said **those who are well** don’t **need a doctor**. In general, the **sick** are the ones who seek out doctors. Around Matthew’s table, many of the guests were spiritually ill, and Jesus is the Great Physician.

(v. 13) If Jesus was responding to the Pharisees, His statement to **go and learn** was a rebuke. If He addressed the disciples, this was a teachable moment. Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6, emphasizing **mercy** over **sacrifice**. Pharisees thought their religious duty involved following rabbinic rituals. Both the Pharisees and the disciples needed to learn that God is more interested in repentance and forgiveness than man-made rules.

Jesus declared He had not come **to call the righteous, but sinners**. By “righteous,” Jesus meant people who considered themselves to be righteous, even though they were sinners like everyone else. In referencing “sinners,” Jesus was not offering criticism or condemnation. These people understood their need of forgiveness. They came to Jesus because He offered mercy.

We can trust that Jesus came to offer salvation to sinners. Each of us lands in that category (Rom. 3:23). Contrite and repentant, we can receive mercy and forgiveness through Christ.

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.)

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: We can trust that Jesus came to offer salvation to sinners.

Read Matthew 9:10-13 aloud, directing adults to underline the direct quotes in this passage.

CONTEXT:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*). Point out the village of Capernaum. Remind adults that this was the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Note that Matthew also worked as a tax collector by the Sea of Galilee.

SAY:

After he accepted Jesus's call to discipleship, Matthew immediately reached out to his friends. Despite the social stigma attached to tax collectors and other "sinners," Jesus attended a banquet at Matthew's house. This drew the attention—and the contempt—of the religious elite.

ASK:

What does it mean that Jesus was a "friend of sinners"? (PSG, p. 79)

RECAP:

Highlight the Pharisees negative response. Encourage adults to consider why they approached the disciples instead of Jesus. Use this information from page 80 of the PSG to explain the Lord's response to His critics.

Jesus was aware of the intent of the Pharisees but refused to take the bait. Instead, He answered the question directly by quoting a well-known proverb of the day. The proverb stated that it is sick people who need a doctor. . . . Jesus, 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.

DISCUSS:

Direct adults to read the Key Doctrine (PSG, p. 80). Highlight this phrase: "Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship." Lead a brief discussion on how Jesus's words affirm the Key Doctrine. Point out Jesus's quote of Hosea 6:6 and why He would emphasize mercy above sacrificial laws.

ASK:

How would you summarize what Jesus came to do? (PSG, p. 81) Point out **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 9:12*). Note that this is the memory verse for this session. Encourage adults to reflect on this verse and to ask God to help them learn how to show mercy and lead people toward the Great Physician.

Jesus's Work (Matt. 9:14-17)

14 Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" **15** Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. **16** No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse. **17** And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

(v. 14) Pharisees were not the only ones questioning Jesus's actions. **John's disciples** also asked Him to explain Himself. They were followers of John the Baptist, who had been put in prison by Herod Antipas. The term **then** does not mean immediately after the encounter at Matthew's house, but shortly afterward.

Like the **Pharisees**, John's disciples practiced strict religious disciplines. It's ironic that John's followers included themselves with the Pharisees. They noted how they would **fast often**, not only during national days of fasting, but also as a regular spiritual regimen. John's followers couldn't understand why Jesus's followers did not observe similar practices.

Some writers link their inquiry to Jesus's participation at Matthew's dinner. Possibly, the celebration at Matthew's house occurred on a day normally set aside for fasting. Alternatively, they could have observed that the disciples' general pattern of life did not include fasting rituals. Some commentators suggest they questioned why Jesus's disciples didn't join them in fasting because John was imprisoned.

(v. 15) Jesus did not rebuke John's disciples. Fasting is a good practice when used correctly. Instead, He taught them using three analogies. First, He noted that **wedding guests** are not **sad while the groom is with them**. Weddings are a cause for celebration, not mourning. The groom represented Jesus and the wedding guests referred to His followers. While they were together, it was appropriate that they rejoiced.

However, **the time will come when the groom will be taken away**. The term "taken" connotes being led away involuntarily. Neither Jesus's disciples nor John's followers understood that He was referring to His death on the cross.

At that time, **they will fast**. Like John's disciples who grieved over John's imprisonment, Jesus's disciples would mourn for Him. The metaphor could also include Jesus's departure back to heaven when the disciples would no longer enjoy His physical presence.

(v. 16) Jesus's second analogy involved repairing clothing. An **old garment** often developed holes from wear and tear. But **no one patches** the hole with **unshrunk cloth**. Such cloth was often made from wool and needed to be washed before being applied so it would shrink to its permanent size. Without the shrinking, the cloth **pulls away** from the old garment and makes the **tear worse**.

Trying to incorporate the old trappings of ritualistic religion with the fresh spirit of Christ damages both. In some ways, John's disciples had been trying to follow the teachings of John while clinging to the rituals of the scribes and Pharisees. They didn't yet comprehend the totally new relationship with God that Jesus made possible. Mixing the new and the old was detrimental to both.

(v. 17) Similarly, **no one puts new wine into old wineskins**. Wineskins were made from animal skins that grew hard and brittle over time. Fresh wine would ferment, creating gases that would expand and cause the **skins** to **burst**. Consequently, both are lost as the **wine spills out** and the **skins are ruined**. Like the analogy of the new and old cloth, this illustration showed the problem of trying to combine the old and the new. People knew to **put new wine into fresh wineskins**. In the same way, the new covenant of Christ needed a fresh container—the church.

We can rejoice in the truth that salvation is not based on religious works or rituals. We have the living Spirit of God filling us as we trust Christ by faith and follow Him.

EXPLORE Matthew 9:14-17



READ:

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

Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 9:14-17 as adults identify the images Jesus used to make His point.

CONTEXT:

Use information from Matthew 9:14 in the Leader Guide to identify John the Baptist's disciples. Briefly discuss how their question differed from the criticism of the religious leaders.

EXAMINE:

Divide the group into at least three teams and give each team one of the following assignments. (For larger groups, more than one team can look at the same set of verses. For smaller groups, an individual can be a team.)

- **Team 1:** *Examine the content for Matthew 9:14-15 on pages 81-82 of the PSG. Identify the illustration Jesus used and what He was emphasizing with the metaphor.*
- **Team 2:** *Examine the content for Matthew 9:16 on page 82 of the PSG. Identify the illustration Jesus used and what He was emphasizing with the metaphor.*
- **Team 3:** *Examine the content for Matthew 9:17 on page 82 of the PSG. Identify the illustration Jesus used and what He was emphasizing with the metaphor.*

DISCUSS:

Allow teams to share what they learned. Supplement the discussion with information from page 100 in the Leader Guide.

SAY:

Jesus never rejected fasting as a spiritual discipline, but He did emphasize a new approach to living in relationship with God. And this new approach stood in stark contrast to both the legalism of the Pharisees and the austerity of John's followers.

ASK:

What does Jesus offer that religion does not? (PSG, p. 83)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Home Furnishings

Gather a poster and glue sticks. Bring magazines and newspaper ads featuring home furnishings (sofas, tables, chairs, and so forth). Include photos of broken or damaged furniture. Direct the group to design and decorate a living room using the photos. Once the project is completed, note that the broken furniture wasn't used because the new furniture was better. Point out that the transformation into new life through Christ is much the same. The former things just do not fit in with the new, including old habits or ways of doing things. Apply this truth to the metaphors Jesus used in Matthew 9:14-17.

Jesus's Compassion (Matt. 9:18-19)

18 As he was telling them these things, suddenly one of the leaders came and knelt down before him, saying, “My daughter just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” **19** So Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him.

(v. 18) Most of us do not appreciate interruptions. We dislike intrusions into our conversations or our well-planned days. But Jesus never saw people as interruptions, especially when those interactions involved a dire need.

In the moment, Jesus was teaching the disciples of John some important truths about who He was and why He had come. But, **as he was telling them these things**, someone pushed through the crowd to get to Him. The intrusion came **suddenly**. In fact, the Greek wording suggests a measure of surprise, calling attention to something important happening without warning.

The newcomer was **one of the leaders** in the local synagogue. Mark's Gospel reveals that his name was Jairus (Mark 5:22).

Synagogues were local assemblies of Jews that emerged after the destruction of the original temple and the people's deportation to Babylon. Synagogues were not places of sacrifice, but focused on teaching and worship. While most synagogues had a chief ruler, a group of lay elders also helped fill administrative positions. The general term “one of” suggests that Jairus was among this larger group of elders.

With no concern for what others might think, he humbly **knelt down before** Jesus. This influential man displayed faith by coming to Jesus and pleading for his **daughter** who had **just died**. This phrase can refer to something that had just happened or was about to happen. Matthew compressed the longer narratives of Mark and Luke (Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:40-56). In any case, Jairus didn't think of himself as a leader of the synagogue, but a father whose child had only one hope—Jesus.

Hope and faith flowed from Jairus's lips as he spoke. The conjunction **but** contrasts the girl's helpless condition against the leader's faith in Jesus. He confessed publicly that if Jesus would **lay your hand on her**, the girl would **live**.

This was an extraordinary statement. People witnessing this encounter would know the truth about Jesus and the validity of Jairus's belief

based on what happened next. Jairus wasn't worried about such matters. Any risk was worth taking for his child.

(v. 19) All eyes were on Jesus. The word **so** linked what just happened with what followed. Moved by Jairus's faith and humility, Jesus went into action. During the exchange with John's disciples, Jesus likely sat in the manner of rabbinical teachers. Now, however, the time for sitting was past. **Jesus and his disciples got up and followed** Jairus to his home.

Amazingly, there is no indication of hurry or anxiety. In fact, Jesus actually stopped to help a woman with a long-term bleeding disorder (Matt. 9:20-22). Also, unconcerned with cultural or religious prohibitions, this woman touched the hem of Jesus's garment. When she timidly explained what she did and why, Jesus assured her that her faith had made her whole.

Apparently, Jairus did not object when Jesus delayed their journey to heal the woman. It is possible that his faith allowed him to commit the entire situation into Jesus's control. We can cast our cares on Him because He cares more for us than we could ever imagine (see 1 Pet. 5:7).

Praying Scripture

Matthew 9:18-19

Spend time praying Scripture using Matthew 9:18-19. Read the verses, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in these verses?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Bow your heart in worship and reverence. Tell God about your deepest needs and humbly ask Him to bring healing and help. Thank Him for caring and for giving you the strength and faith you need to trust Him.



READ:

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

Direct the group to read Matthew 9:18-19 silently and to reflect on how they feel about interruptions in their lives. Allow adults to share how they respond to interruptions.

SAY:

Some interruptions might seem minor, while others seem to come at the absolute worst times. When we're in the middle of something we consider important or we've finally gotten a measure of momentum, interruptions can test our patience.

CONTEXT:

Remind adults that Jesus had been teaching the disciples of John more about who He is and why He had come. Affirm that this was important for them to understand. Share that, as He was sharing these truths, a synagogue leader named Jairus interrupted His teaching time with a plea for his daughter's life.

ASK:

How would you have responded to such an interruption?

RECAP:

Emphasize that Jesus did not see this as an interruption, but as a chance to demonstrate mercy to a family in need. Share this content from pages 83-84 of the PSG to highlight Jairus's need and Jesus's response:

In putting the life of his daughter in Jesus's hands, this leader was bucking the religious establishment of which he himself was a part. He turned to the only one who could give life back to his little girl. . . . With compassion, Jesus rose to accompany this grieving father to his home. Jesus knew that, sometimes, interruptions are divine appointments. The disciples also followed, and according to Mark, "a large crowd was following and pressing against him" (Mark 5:24).

ASK:

Why should we take our concerns to Jesus? (PSG, p. 83)

PRAY:

Invite adults to pray Matthew 9:18-19 back to God using the "Praying Scripture" prompt on page 102 of the Leader Guide. Remind adults that Jairus came to Jesus with boldness and humility. Affirm that Jesus still longs to act on our behalf when we come to Him. Challenge adults to continue reflecting on the questions from the "Praying Scripture" prompt as they speak these verses back to God during the week.

Jesus's Power (Matt. 9:23-26)

23 When Jesus came to the leader's house, he saw the flute players and a crowd lamenting loudly. **24** "Leave," he said, "because the girl is not dead but asleep." And they laughed at him. **25** After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. **26** Then news of this spread throughout that whole area.

(v. 23) Hope can quickly melt into despair until faith intervenes. Parallel accounts of this story in other Gospels reveal that, soon after Jesus healed the woman with the blood disorder, word came from Jairus's home that the child had indeed died. But Jesus quickly reassured the distraught father that everything would be all right (Mark 5:35-36; Luke 8:49-50).

Moving on, Jesus **came to the leader's house**. He had delayed along the way to minister to the woman whose long-term illness was healed, yet Jesus arrived at exactly the right moment. It's never a matter of *if* Jesus will come, but only **when** He will arrive. Jesus is always on time.

At the leader's home, Jesus encountered **flute players**. Jewish mourning customs in Jesus's day included more than a typical gathering of family and friends. Hired musicians and professional mourners were normal parts of the setting. Even poor families followed this custom, though they might only be able to afford a small number.

Jesus also observed a **crowd lamenting loudly**. Funerals in any culture are emotional, but funerals in the ancient Middle East were especially so. Unlike the subdued atmosphere of western funerals, individuals in that context freely expressed strong feelings of loss. The death of a child was especially heartbreaking.

(v. 24) Upon His arrival, Jesus told the gathering to **leave**. Their presence must have been distressing to Jairus who came with the expectation that Jesus would raise his daughter to life. Jesus insisted that Jairus's daughter was not **dead**, but merely **asleep**. We should not interpret this "sleep" as evidence for a type of soul-sleep after death. Like His friend Lazarus, Jesus used the word asleep to mean death (John 11:11-13). He knew that He was about to raise her up, so she was not dead permanently.

The people merely **laughed at him**. This term describes continuous scoffing and boisterous derision. Death had been pronounced. The mourners were present. For this newcomer to

assert the child was merely asleep seemed like complete foolishness. Of course, the crowd didn't realize they were in the presence of the One who holds life and death in His hand.

(v. 25) Since the **crowd** would not follow Jesus's instructions voluntarily, He had them **put outside**. The original language more fully portrays the apparent force needed to make them leave. They were a distraction and were detrimental to the faith of the girl's parents. They might scoff at Jesus, but they ultimately could not stand against His authority.

Jesus was already in the house, so **went in** means that He entered the room where the child's body lay. Other Gospel accounts reveal that He only allowed the girl's parents and three of His disciples (Peter, James, and John) to accompany Him into the room (Mark 5:40; Luke 8:51).

In the room, Jesus **took her by the hand** and told her to rise (Luke 8:54). Immediately, she **got up** as her spirit returned to her (Luke 8:55). The phrase "got up" implies more than being raised from an incapacitated state. It described Jesus bringing her back from the dead. He restored life to her body.

(v. 26) Although Jesus instructed the parents not to tell anyone what had happened (Luke 8:56), word **spread throughout the whole area**. Jesus's fame included healing the sick and driving out demons, but this was the first time He had raised the dead. This miracle demonstrated He held ultimate power over life and death. If a healed leper or a delivered demoniac got the people's attention, a dead girl's resurrection was awe-inspiring.

We can trust that Jesus has the power to transform lives. Just as He turned a father's heart-rending grief to unspeakable joy, even so He can transform our grief over sin into the joy of forgiveness and salvation.



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

READ:

Guide the group to read Matthew 9:23-26 silently and to circle words or phrases that stick out to them. Allow a few volunteers to share what they circled and why.

EXPLAIN:

Distribute copies **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8–9*). Highlight that “Healing the woman with a bleeding condition” occurred within the verses that describe “Raising Jairus’s daughter from the dead.” Note that again we see an interruption that wasn’t an interruption for Jesus.

RECAP:

Encourage adults to share their thoughts on the musicians and mourners at Jairus’s house. Summarize this content from page 84 of the PSG to explain the commotion and Jesus’s response:

“Arriving at the house, Jesus discovered the flute players and a crowd lamenting loudly. These were professional mourners. Their presence indicated that enough time had passed since the daughter had died to summon them. . . . The words “put outside” [v. 25] implies 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.”

ASK:

How does it impact your faith when you read of Jesus’s miracles and power? (PSG, p. 85)

STATE:

Jesus demonstrated mercy through both His words and His touch. He always makes time for His people when they are in need. He helped the woman with the bleeding condition, and He helped Jairus’s family. He will help us, as well.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Use a concordance to find references to fasting in the Bible. Read the article about fasting in a Bible dictionary. Ask: **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. Ask: **How can you incorporate the discipline of fasting into your life?**

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 86 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *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.*

REFLECT:

Direct attention back to **Pack Item 5** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 9:12). Note that while Jesus remains the Great Physician, He often uses His people as His hands and feet for ministry. Encourage adults to meditate on this memory verse during the week and to look for opportunities to live out the Apply the Text points listed above.

DISCUSS:

Encourage the group to examine the first set of questions on page 86 of the PSG. As a group, list groups of people who may be in need. Challenge the group to consider ways they can help meet those needs for God's glory. Remind them that they are called to follow Jesus's example of mercy.

PRAY:

Read Matthew 9:18-19 aloud, along with the questions from the "Praying Scripture" prompt. Urge the group to continue using these verses in their prayer time this week and to bring their needs to Jesus with boldness and humility. Close the session in prayer.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group during the week to remind them of Jesus's mercy toward them and their call to show mercy toward others. Encourage them to read and reflect on the second set of questions from page 86 of the PSG. Challenge them to ask God to help them reflect His character through mercy and compassion as He leads them.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
Explore the Bible Adult Commentary
 offers additional information and biblical
 insights related to the key passages.
 (Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com**.)

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.



Loyalty Tested

JESUS IS WORTH EVERYTHING.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 10:16-20,26-34 Memory Verse: Matthew 10:28

Many people have bought a car, house, or other big-ticket item only to discover later that it needed repairs that drove up the overall cost. Looking at it, they might shake their heads and say, “It wasn’t worth it.” Buyer’s remorse applies to time and effort as well as to money. Sometimes you pour yourself into a project with little to show for it afterwards. Again, you sigh and say, “It just wasn’t worth it.”

Only one investment never leaves one unsatisfied: a relationship with Jesus Christ. He always exceeds expectations. Make no mistake . . . following Jesus is costly. Nevertheless, at the end of the day—and at the end of life—Christ followers can say without hesitation, “Jesus is worth everything.” Like Paul, we even are willing to experience the loss of all things for the “surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

As you dig into the verses for this session, consider the sacrifices you have made for Jesus. Commit yourself to surrendering even more for Him and His kingdom. Ask Him to give you wisdom as you share these truths with the adults in your Bible study.



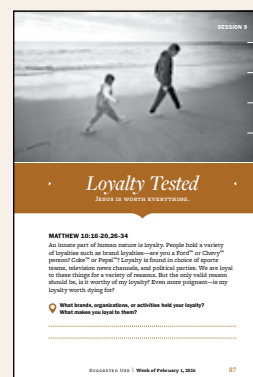
Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week’s study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



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? (PSG, p. 87)

**What brands, organizations, or activities hold your loyalty?
What makes you loyal to them?**



Understand the Context (Matthew 10:1-42)

Jesus's ministry was well established before He sent His apostles out on their own. They had heard Him interact with individuals and crowds. They watched Him heal the sick and raise the dead. They understood how He responded to critics. They knew better than to try this work in their own ability or authority. The word *apostle* simply means "one who is sent." It contains no inherent authority other than that given by the One who did the sending.

We may be surprised that even Judas the betrayer was temporarily invested with power to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. Jesus gave Judas every opportunity to break through temptation and be true to Him. If seeing Jesus's miraculous ministry was not enough, actually participating in it should have been overwhelming. Yet, from Judas to Peter, each of the apostles eventually failed to one degree or another. While Peter and others found repentance and redemption, Judas fell into despair and disaster.

As Jesus sent the apostles to minister in the towns and villages along the way, He gave them detailed instructions about how to behave and what to expect. Theirs would be a faith ministry, depending on the Lord to provide for them through the people to whom they ministered.

Still, their work was not a profit-making operation. They had received these abilities freely and offered service the same way.

Ministry in Christ's name is not without risk. Jesus told the apostles that they should expect persecution just as their Master had been opposed. Some people they encountered would be overtly hostile. Still, they weren't to respond in kind. They had to be wise while remaining humble as they dealt with those who would not hesitate to harm them. God would give them the words to say and the grace to say them well. Only by reflecting the spirit of Christ could they represent Him through this ministry.

In spite of dangers, the apostles were to be fearless because of the One they represented and the message they bore. As they testified of Him, He promised to testify about their faithfulness before the Father. At this point, the apostles would not have understood Jesus's reference to taking up their cross to follow Him. Later, the day would come when they could look back at His cross and remember this saying.

Work on behalf of Christ is not without reward, even though these men served without expectation for recompense. Whether a welcome or a reward, whoever serves Him faithfully will ever say, "Jesus is worth it all."

Read Matthew 10:1-42 in your Bible. What warnings did Jesus give His disciples? What promises did He make to them? (PSG, p. 88)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Hang **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: Matthew Time Line) and **Pack Item 13** (Handout: The Disciples in History).

ASK:

What brands, organizations, or activities hold your loyalty? What makes you loyal to them? (PSG, p. 87)

INTRODUCE:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 87 of the PSG. Note that genuine loyalty often requires making a sacrifice of some kind.

SHARE:

Draw attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13). Explain that this session focuses on Jesus's words to His disciples in Matthew 10. Point out that this chapter is identified as the Lord's second discourse on the outline.

CONTEXT:

To set the stage for this study, summarize this content from Understand the Context (PSG, p. 88):

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

TRANSITION:

Jesus wanted His followers to experience both the joys and the struggles of representing Him in the world. While all of them (except Judas) would help spread the news of God's kingdom after Jesus went back to heaven, this was their first taste of that kind of ministry. By examining Jesus's instruction to them, we can get a better idea of what He expects of us and how we can continue sharing His message with the world today.



Group Activity Option

Music

Play “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” (Baptist Hymnal 2008, No. 434) and share the lyrics in print for the group. Lead a brief discussion with adults about how loyalty is defined in this hymn. Note that it suggests an unwavering commitment to Jesus that will go against the grain and endure hardships as necessary. Ask: **When you began following Christ, did you think about the cost? Why or why not?**

Snakes and Doves (Matt. 10:16-20)

16 “Look, I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves. **17** Beware of them, because they will hand you over to local courts and flog you in their synagogues. **18** You will even be brought before governors and kings because of me, to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles. **19** But when they hand you over, don’t worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, **20** because it isn’t you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you.”

(v. 16) Serving Christ is rarely easy. In fact, it can be dangerous. Jesus prepared His disciples for their mission by warning them about what they would encounter and promising that they would be equipped. He used the word **look**, which can also be rendered “behold,” to emphasize what He was saying.

Jesus also used a series of word pictures to describe what they were about to experience. They were not going out on their own initiative. He was **sending** them. They went with His blessing and authority. He knew the hostile environments they would face and wanted them to be ready. They would be like **sheep among wolves**. Because of this truth, Jesus’s followers should be **shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves**.

Being “shrewd” did not mean being cunning. The apostles should be insightful as they worked among people who might harm them. At the same time, they were to be “innocent.” The term connotes a sense of sincerity and integrity.

(v. 17) Jesus’s followers should **beware** of certain people who hated them. This warning did not imply fear, but careful attention. Christians should expect opposition but trust God to walk with us through those challenges.

Jesus’s message looked further than the disciples’ immediate mission. A time would come when opponents would deliver them to **local courts** for punishment. The wording carries the idea of betrayal. Jesus warned that even families would reject them and betray them (v. 21).

Enemies would **flog** them in the **synagogues**. Some scholars, however, interpret “synagogues” as referring to assemblies where judgment and punishment were rendered. Both possibilities reveal the hypocrisy of these religious leaders.

(v. 18) Jesus prophesied they even would face **governors and kings** on His account. Looking back, we can see how this prediction came true

in the lives of Peter, John, and others. The apostle Paul even stood before the emperor in Rome.

Such severe situations would allow the disciples to **bear witness** for Christ. These common men could not walk up to palace doors with a gospel tract in hand. Only as prisoners could they gain access to the highest levels of government. Through their ordeals, they would preach to Jewish officials and leaders of **the Gentiles**.

(v. 19) The question was not *if* their enemies would persecute them, but **when**. Suffering for Christ’s sake is inevitable. When the Twelve experienced this persecution, they could depend on God to empower them. They should not **worry** about what they should say. God would provide His words **at that hour**. Anxiety vanishes in the light of our faith in God’s promise.

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.)

(v. 20) The disciples could stand with confident authority because the **Spirit** would be **speaking through** them. This did not mean their response to accusations was equivalent to inspired Scripture. Rather, they could depend on the Holy Spirit for the words to say as a testimony for Christ.

Loyalty to Jesus may mean we encounter hostility to the gospel. We may not suffer like some believers around the world. Nevertheless, we should be prepared to stay faithful to Christ regardless of hostile opposition.



CONTEXT:

APPLICATION POINT: Loyalty to Jesus may mean we encounter hostility to the gospel.

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*). Point out that the events in Matthew 10 would have taken place between AD 29-33.

READ:

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 10:16-20 aloud as adults write their own paraphrases of Jesus's instructions to His disciples in the margin of the PSG.

EXPLAIN:

Talk about the group's responses. Provide copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: The Disciples in History*) and briefly highlight each disciple. Note that Jesus had big plans for them, but this was their first taste of personal ministry. Share that Jesus wanted them to be well-prepared for this new adventure.

RECAP:

To underscore the significance of shrewdness and innocence, direct attention to this content from page 89 of the PSG:

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

ASK:

Why are both shrewdness and innocence necessary qualities for Christ's witnesses? (PSG, p. 90)

SAY:

Jesus's words described what His disciples would face as they spread across Galilee, as well as what they would experience sharing the gospel around the world after He returned to heaven. He never watered down the danger, but He did emphasize the opportunities they would get to share His message. They would stand before governors and kings for God's glory because they were willing to suffer.

EMPHASIZE:

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 10:19-20. Highlight the promise that Jesus made related to the Holy Spirit. Affirm that allowing the Spirit to lead us allows us to see needs more clearly and to share Jesus with confidence and boldness. Challenge adults to ask God for a greater sensitivity to the Spirit's guidance in their lives.

Sparrows and Hairs (Matt. 10:26-31)

26 “Therefore, don’t be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known. **27** What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops. **28** Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. **29** Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. **30** But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. **31** So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

(vv. 26-27) Fear sometimes paralyzes people from following Christ openly. Jesus encouraged His apostles not to **be afraid** of their adversaries because the truth ultimately will be brought to light. Jesus emphasized His point by using Hebrew parallelism that repeats an idea with slightly different wording. What is **covered** will be **uncovered**, and what is **hidden** will be **made known**. Wrongdoing by the enemies of Christ will be exposed and believers will be vindicated.

Christ’s messengers should courageously share His message to the world. Again, Jesus employed parallelism for emphasis. What He told them **in the dark**, they should talk about **in the light**. What they heard **in a whisper**, they should **proclaim on the housetops**. This statement does not mean Jesus was sharing secrets, though He did address His disciples in private at times. Instead, He used these metaphors to encourage boldness in proclaiming His gospel.

(v. 28) Hearing Jesus’s cautions, the Twelve naturally might have been afraid for their safety. In time, many of them suffered violent deaths, but Jesus urged them not to **fear those who kill the body**. Those enemies can’t **kill the soul**. The spiritual part of each human endures beyond physical death, and believers are promised an eternal reward after this life ends—a reward that can’t be taken away.

So, believers should care more about the One who can **destroy both soul and body in hell**. *Destroy* does not infer annihilation in which a soul ceases to exist, and *hell* indicates an eternal state of anguish in a literal place of torment. These combine to prove eternal judgment is real. God alone is our true Judge. With proper reverence for Him, we need not fear anyone else.

(vv. 29-30) As in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:25-26), Jesus used birds to remind us of the Father’s care. Using a rhetorical question, Jesus asked, **Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny?** The word “penny” describes a Roman coin of small value. Despite having relatively little value, Jesus noted that God still knows and cares when one of these birds **falls to the ground**. Consider the enormity of that statement: Not one of the billions of birds dies outside of God’s plan and control.

Jesus reiterated the previous point with another parallel statement about the **hairs of your head**. God has **counted** each of them. The issue here is not whether a person has a full head of hair or is balding. Rather, both illustrations emphasize that seemingly insignificant things that people take for granted (like birds and hair) matter to God. This has implications for His people as they face hostile opposition.

(v. 31) Combining the two illustrations, Jesus used a familiar Hebrew technique of reasoning that moved from the smaller to the greater. The little word **so** links the previous ideas to the conclusion. If God concerns Himself with birds and hairs, He certainly cares for His children. As a result, Jesus again encouraged His followers **don’t be afraid**. The Greek verb form can be understood as “Don’t bring fear on yourself” or “Don’t let fear come upon you.” Believers don’t have to be bound by fear. We can stand with courage—not because of anything inherent to us, but because God values us.

Believers should not fear those who oppose the truth of the gospel. As we are sent out by God, we are under His authority and protection. Nothing can happen to us that our Father does not permit.

**READ:**

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

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 10:26-31 aloud while the group counts the number of times Jesus said not to fear.

IDENTIFY:

Highlight the following contrasts Jesus drew in verses 26-28:

- Covered/Uncovered
- Known/Unknown
- Dark/Light
- Whisper/Proclaim

RECAP:

Summarize this content from pages 91-92 of the PSG to explain the contrasts more fully:

“Jesus wanted His disciples to know that regardless of what they were going through, they could rest assured that in the day of judgment all the deeds and motives of all people will be ‘uncovered’ and ‘made known.’ Those who suffered for Jesus would be duly rewarded for their faithfulness under persecution. But these words of Jesus could also be instructions to take the words that He spoke privately to His disciples and make them publicly known so that others will become followers of Christ. . . . They had been in private instruction, but the time had arrived for the open proclamation of the kingdom of God.”

ASK:

What is the connection between fearing God and not fearing man? (PSG, p. 93)

STATE:

The images of the sparrows and the hairs are really a call to boldness. They emphasize God’s care and sovereignty. Because He is with us, we don’t have to fear anyone or anything that stands against us as we follow His plans.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

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.

Peace and Swords (Matt. 10:32-34)

32 “Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. **33** But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven. **34** Don’t assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

(v. 32) The transitional word **therefore** links Jesus’s previous words with what followed. After sharing some harsh truths about their mission, He also offered a promise and a warning depending on how they responded. His words applied not only to the Twelve, but to everyone who claims His name. Christ spoke through the centuries to you and me today.

First, Jesus addressed whoever **will acknowledge me before others**. To **acknowledge** involves more than simply saying, “I know Him.” Trustworthy individuals hold nothing back, personally and publicly professing their loyalty to Christ. Baptism is one way believers openly identify with Christ, but true believers also share Jesus with others. In addition, we are not only called to acknowledge Jesus verbally, but also to point others toward Him through lifestyles that reflect His life and teachings.

Jesus promised to **acknowledge** such people **before my Father in heaven**. When we link our lives to Christ on earth, He claims us as His own at the throne of God. This pledge should encourage the most timid believer to proclaim Jesus as Savior and Lord with confidence.

(v. 33) Jesus knew the disciples might be tempted to remain quiet when they faced open hostility. Like Joseph of Arimathea prior to Christ’s crucifixion, fear of others might lead them to be secret disciples (John 19:38). Jesus, however, referred to people who go further and reject Him outrightly. Some translations render the term **denies** as “disowns.”

The idea of denying contains several important factors. First, the word **whoever** means any non-believer can fall into this sin. Next, “denies” means more than what Peter did on the night before Jesus’s crucifixion (Matt. 26:69-75). Peter’s moment of weakness was followed by repentance and restoration. But Jesus was speaking of a deeper rejection. The word implies a base refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ and one’s Savior.

Third, **me** involves a personal rejection of Jesus. Finally, **before others** reflects the public nature of this rejection. It suggests the desire to receive the favor of other people is stronger and more valuable than experiencing the favor of God.

The penalty for denying Christ is to be denied by Him **before my Father in heaven**. The cost of rejection stands in direct contrast to the reward of loyalty. Rejecting Jesus in this world results in being rejected by Him in the next.

One day people will give an account at the throne of God. His response will be based solely on what they chose to do with Jesus Christ in this life. Standing before God, it will be too late to change their minds and claim Christ.

(v. 34) Jesus’s summation might seem perplexing to some. He warned His followers not to **assume** that His mission was to **bring peace on the earth**. Of course, Jesus is the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). He also promised to give the disciples His peace (John 14:27). In this verse, however, Jesus referred to the effect of people’s attitudes toward Him. Because His followers love Him so and His enemies hate Him with a similar passion, conflict and division are inevitable.

The **sword** represented this division. Jesus is the dividing line of human history. People who reject Christ also reject whoever follows Him. Even families can be divided over Jesus (see Matt. 10:35-36). Some of Jesus’s listeners would find themselves not only alienated from unbelieving family members, but they also might be betrayed into the hands of hostile authorities. Christ’s disciples must be willing to choose Him over every other claim, including those closest to them (Matt. 10:37).

Loyalty to Jesus is more important than any other loyalty. Following Him now means being with Him in heaven. We should be faithful to Him regardless of the cost.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Loyalty to Jesus is more important than any other loyalty.

Direct the group to read Matthew 10:32-34 silently and to circle the verbs or phrases that are repeated in each verse.

ASK:

Based upon your reading of this passage, why would secret allegiance to Christ be impossible?

SHARE:

Encourage adults to elaborate on their responses. Point out that proclaiming Jesus to the world isn't just a good idea. Explain that Jesus actually tied it to our identity as His people. Note that we can share Jesus boldly with others because we know that He is our advocate before the Father (1 John 2:1).

ASK:

What are some ways you can acknowledge Christ before others? (PSG, p. 95)

RECAP:

Affirm that rejecting Him comes with its own consequences. Summarize the following content from page 94 of the PSG:

“Those who honor Jesus will be honored by Christ before the very throne of God. . . . 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.”

SAY:

In many ways, Jesus is the most polarizing person in human history. This means those who follow Him will face hostile opposition from those who hate Him. But while He cannot promise peace every moment of our lives here on earth, He does promise eternal blessing and peace to all who demonstrate loyalty to Him as residents of His kingdom.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Team Jersey

Display a jersey that shows your loyalty to a sports team. Share the back story of what drew you to that team and what keeps you loyal. Point out that your allegiance has persevered even when it was hard, such as during a losing season or a frustrating loss. Remind the group that these loyalties often become part of our identities. Emphasize that while some affect us in small ways, our identity in Christ should take precedence over everything else in our lives. Ask: ***How do you show your loyalty to Christ?***

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 96 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *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.*

REFLECT:

Group the adults into teams of three or four and give each team a sheet of paper and pen. Direct them to write the word “loyal” down the side of the paper in the form of an acrostic. Instruct the teams to use the letters in the word to identify specific ways believers can show loyalty to Christ on a daily basis. After a few minutes, allow a volunteer from each team to share their work. Write their responses on the board.

DISCUSS:

Encourage the group to consider the first set of questions on page 96 of the PSG. Using the idea on the board, lead a brief discussion on how the adults can hold one another accountable for living out their loyalty to Jesus in meaningful ways. Remind them that believers are called to encourage one another toward good works in love.

CLOSE:

Close the session in prayer, asking God to help each adult know how to stand firm in the face of persecution. Thank the Lord that nothing happens in the lives of His children outside of His sovereign care and protection.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group during the week and encourage them to look for opportunities to take a stand for Jesus, even when it might be difficult. Encourage them to read and reflect on the second set of questions on page 96 of the PSG. Suggest they rate their current level of loyalty to Jesus and to pray for His wisdom and guidance as they seek to become more loyal to Him each day.

LEADER BLOG



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Confronting Doubts

JESUS DEMANDS DECISION.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 11:1-6,16-24 Memory Verse: Matthew 11:5-6

Doubts and decisions don't go well together. Whether in business or the military, people want leaders who are decisive. Yet, we often struggle with decisions as questions flood our minds. Often, we're not debating the merits or truth of a matter. Rather, we're doubting ourselves. Have we considered all the possibilities? Is this the right thing to do or merely what we want to do? What will happen if we make the commitment or if we do not?

Jesus demands a decision to trust and follow Him. He understands human frailty, but He does not humor our doubts. Instead, He helps us overcome them. Ultimately, each person must decide if we believe that Jesus is who He claims to be. If so, we have to determine if we are willing to deny ourselves, take up the cross of self-denial, and follow Him. We choose the commitment of discipleship.

As you prepare to lead this session, recall the commitment you have made to Jesus. Renew that commitment if it's grown cold. Ask God to help you know how to guide the adults in your Bible study toward their own commitment to Him.



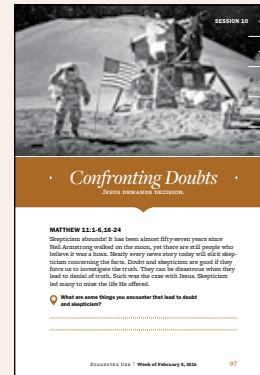
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Skepticism abounds! It has been almost fifty-seven years since Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, yet there are still people who believe it was a hoax. Nearly every news story today will elicit skepticism concerning the facts. Doubt and skepticism 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. (PSG, p. 97)

What are some things you encounter that lead to doubt and skepticism?



Understand the Context (Matthew 11:1-30)

Doubts often creep in from the least expected sources. John the Baptist had testified that Jesus was the Messiah. Some of his followers became disciples of Jesus after John pointed Him out as the Lamb of God. Yet, after being imprisoned for speaking against Herod's immoral behavior, John needed reassurance. Was Jesus indeed the One? Should they keep looking? As Jesus went about the towns preaching the gospel of the kingdom, John sent messengers to question Him.

Jesus did not rebuke John or the messengers. He gently pointed out what they had witnessed as He ministered. Sick people were healed. Dead people were raised. Poor people heard the gospel. Jesus's miracles should be testimony enough for John. His record should satisfy our doubts as well.

Turning His attention to the people watching this encounter, Jesus affirmed John and his ministry. The crowds had not sought John in the wilderness because He looked nice or spoke well. They went because he was a prophet. In fact, if they could receive it, John fulfilled the prophecies about the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

Jesus knew the fickleness of human nature. Some of the people listening to Him had criticized John for his strange behavior. They wanted a prophet, but they couldn't understand John's rugged self-denial.

In contrast, Jesus's lifestyle was more normal. He ate in their homes and shared their company. But they complained about Him as well. The problem was not John or Jesus. The problem was people who rejected the message and the messengers of God.

We tend to want validation by prophets who look and sound more like ourselves. We often want them to tell us what we want to hear. And we want to make God in our image rather than being remade to reflect Him.

Considering the cities where He spent the most time and performed the most miracles, Jesus issued stern warnings. Places like Capernaum and Bethsaida should have been bastions of belief. Instead, the people's doubts led them toward destruction. Rather than repenting and following Jesus, most sought the benefit of His power without accepting His authority.

Turning His face toward heaven, Jesus offered thanks to the Father who revealed gospel truth to the innocent while hiding it from those who were self-satisfied. Looking again to the crowd, He invited those who were tired, needy, and weary to come to Him. He was humble, but no man was bolder. He was lowly, but no man was stronger. By yoking themselves to Him, they would find rest for their souls.

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? (PSG, p. 98)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display Pack Item 1 (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*), Pack Item 3 (*Poster: Jesus's Mission*), and Pack Item 6 (*Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus*).

INTRODUCE:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 97 of the PSG.

ASK:

What are some things you encounter that lead to doubt and skepticism? (PSG, p. 97)

EXPLAIN:

Suggest that doubt and skepticism may be very natural and even necessary responses when we are confronted with new ideas or decisions. Note that, even as believers, we might experience times when we are tempted to doubt Jesus in one way or another.

SHARE:

Point out **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Jesus's Mission*) and remind the group of why Jesus came to earth. Explain that while He fulfilled His role perfectly, even those who knew Him best had questions about Him. Share that today's session examines the doubts of one of these people and how Jesus responded in love and truth.

TRANSITION:

By examining what Matthew had to say about Jesus and His response to skepticism and doubt, we can learn how to respond to our own doubts—and the doubts of those around us.



Group Activity Option

Music

Play “We Believe” by Newsboys and share the printed lyrics. Lead the group to identify the theme of the song. Guide the group to circle the words and phrases that express doubt. Invite the group to also identify significant words and phrases that allude to faith. Ask: **Why would a song that emphasizes belief also allude to doubt?** Affirm that it is possible for believers to question Jesus at times in their lives. If you are comfortable, share a time when you have doubted Jesus in one way or another and how you overcame those doubts. Guide the group to look up Mark 9:24 for further insight into how belief and doubt tend to mirror each other.

Uncertainty (Matt. 11:1-6)

1 When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns. **2** Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples **3** and asked him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” **4** Jesus replied to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: **5** The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news, **6** and blessed is the one who isn’t offended by me.”

(v. 1) After *giving instructions to his twelve disciples*, Jesus *moved on* to a new location. He followed their preparation by going into *their towns* to *teach and preach*. The phrase “their towns” referred either to the hometowns of the disciples or possibly the towns where they were sent to minister.

The text distinguishes between Jesus’s teaching and His preaching. His teaching involved instruction, while His preaching exhorted people to accept and act upon the message of God’s kingdom. Jesus wanted the people to know God’s truth confidently and obey it without reservation.

(v. 2) *Now when* introduced Jesus’s dialogue with the *disciples* of John the Baptist. This exchange occurred while John was *in prison*. Herod arrested John because the prophet did what prophets do. He declared God’s judgment against an immoral king (Matt. 14:3-4).

Although imprisoned, John could interact with his followers. Possibly through them, John *heard . . . what the Christ was doing*. However he learned about Jesus’s ministry, John *sent a message* to Jesus *through his disciples*.

(v. 3) John’s query was curious: *Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?* The phrase “one who is to come” referred to the Messiah. John had identified Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:29-36), and some scholars believe imprisonment caused him to waver. However, his knowledge of Jesus’s ministry was based on his followers’ reports. They may have been biased because Christ’s ministry was so different from John’s work (Matt. 9:14).

(vv. 4-5) Jesus’s response demonstrated His respect for John. Instead of rebuking John’s followers, He merely *replied* to them, a term without strong emotions. Jesus told them to *report to*

John what they heard and saw from Jesus. Some interpreters translate this phrase as “tell John.” Some writers suggest this includes what Jesus taught as well as the wonders He performed.

Jesus’s works involved miraculous healing, such as restoring eyesight to *the blind* and strength to *the lame*. People with *leprosy are cleansed*, and those who were *deaf* could hear again. Beyond that, He did what no healer had done: *the dead are raised* (Matt. 9:18-26). These acts fulfilled messianic prophecies, such as Isaiah 29:18-19 and 35:5-6. Even more important, *the poor* were hearing the *good news* of God’s kingdom. Taking this message to the oppressed and downtrodden also fulfilled messianic prophecy (Isa. 61:1).

(v. 6) Almost as an epilogue, Jesus added a personal word for John and his disciples: *Blessed is the one who isn’t offended by me*. “Blessed” can be rendered as “happy.” Some commentators think John’s imprisonment led him to succumb to the popular notion that the Messiah should be a political liberator. If this were true, John might be *offended* that Jesus’s work did not extend to freeing him from prison.

However, this view is doubtful since John previously told his followers Jesus was greater (John 1:30). Later, when John’s disciples reported that more people were following Jesus, John replied that Jesus must increase while he (John) must decrease (3:23-30).

The term “offended” also can be rendered “scandalized” or “embarrassed.” Rather than being disappointed by Him, happy (blessed) individuals see in Jesus the fulfillment of their hopes for the Messiah. We may experience honest doubts about Jesus, but confessing those doubts to God is a step toward genuine faith and affirming the truth (16:13).

EXPLORE Matthew 11:1-6



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

READ:

Guide the group to read Matthew 11:1-6 silently and to reflect on why John and his disciples might have had doubts about Jesus.

CONTEXT:

Allow adults to share their thoughts about John's doubt. Note that John's ministry had diminished. Share that he had been arrested and imprisoned for taking a stand against Herod.

SAY:

For some reason, John felt the need to question Jesus. He may have been seeking some measure of reassurance in prison. He also may have reflected the first-century understanding that the Messiah would drive out Rome and reestablish David's kingdom. He might have wondered why Jesus hadn't set him free. Regardless of the reasons, it's a good reminder that even Jesus's most loyal followers can have doubts at times.

DISCUSS:

Refer the group to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus's Mission). Allow adults to share how this description of Jesus's mission aligns with His own description in verses 4-5. Point out that while John's ministry was waning, Jesus was upending religious tradition and His disciples were beginning to replicate His work.

ASK:

How would John have understood Jesus's reply in verses 4-5 based on his knowledge of the Old Testament? (PSG, p. 101)

RECAP:

To supplement the conversation, share this content from page 100 of the PSG:

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."

REVIEW:

Refer to **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus) and highlight the preaching and healing ministries on the chart. Mention that Jesus's response also resembles the Messiah's "job description" in Isaiah 61:1-3.

TRANSITION:

It is one thing to have doubts. The key is knowing how to respond to those doubts. Jesus's response encourages us to bring our questions to Him and to ground ourselves in His words and actions.

Cynicism (Matt. 11:16-19)

16 “To what should I compare this generation? It’s like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children: **17** We played the flute for you, but you didn’t dance; we sang a lament, but you didn’t mourn! **18** For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ **19** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

(vv. 16-17) After speaking to John’s disciples, Jesus turned to the crowds and expressed His high regard for John the Baptist and his ministry (vv. 7-15). He reminded them that they had sought John because He was a true prophet of God. In fact, John had fulfilled Old Testament prophecy about the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah (Mal. 3:1).

Jesus understood the cynical nature of human beings. So, He offered a broad, rhetorical question: **To what should I compare this generation?** While Jesus likely was referring to His contemporary population of Israel, His remarks could apply to any generation.

They were like **children sitting in the marketplaces**. In most towns, the market was not just a place to buy food and goods. It was the center of the community. While adults bargained over purchases, the children sat or played. Jesus compared this generation to children who would **call out to other children**, asking them to join in their games.

In this case, nothing the hypothetical group did seemed to satisfy the others. If one group **played the flute**, the others refused to **dance**. This metaphor describes a merry scene of music, possibly like a wedding. If the joyful music got no response, they **sang a lament**, a song of sorrow as at a funeral. Yet, the other children **didn’t mourn**. Children’s games often imitate scenes observed in the lives of adults. This scene wasn’t intended to portray an actual wedding or funeral, but a pretend one.

(vv. 18-19) Jesus’s purpose in the short analogy was to show the cynicism of the general population. John the Baptist lived an ascetic lifestyle, **neither eating nor drinking**. This statement did not mean that John never ate or drank anything, but he did live the life of a Nazirite, drinking neither wine or strong drink (Luke 1:15).

Living primarily in isolation, his garments included a coarse and crude camels’ hair coat and a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4). These were not the actions of a normal person in society. While many people came to John’s baptism, many others simply dismissed him as having **a demon**.

In contrast, **the Son of Man came eating and drinking**. The title “Son of Man” was understood by most Jews as referring to the Messiah. Though used in the third person, it’s clear Jesus was speaking of Himself. Again, the phrase “eating and drinking” does not suggest that Jesus was a **glutton and a drunkard**. Unlike John, He merely joined in normal social engagements.

The problem for the critics had nothing to do with how much Jesus ate or drank. Instead, it was about the company He kept. Jesus was a **friend of tax collectors and sinners**. He socialized with them, and that raised serious questions in the minds of those devoted to the first-century Jewish religious establishment.

Using a proverb, Jesus judged this cynical attitude by noting **wisdom is vindicated by her deeds**. “Vindicated” means to show something is correct. In this case, genuine wisdom is revealed by what it produces. Some scholars read this statement as indicating that the truth of a matter is known by the facts seen in life.

We are to be sensitive to the truth that God sometimes works in ways that contradict our expectations. Instead of being cynical about matters we don’t understand, we need to be open to learning and applying biblical truth.

**READ:**

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

Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 11:16-19 as adults compare Jesus's ministry and John the Baptist's ministry.

ASK:

What primary complaints did people have about John and Jesus? Why?

EXPLAIN:

Summarize this content from page 102 in the PSG for more context:

"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. . . . Inevitably there would be a child or two who refused to play. . . . With this comparison, Jesus set up the hearers for the condemnation He was about to bring. . . . John and Jesus lived contrasting lifestyles. Yet neither approach was acceptable to those who were skeptical of both men. They resented John's austerity and call for repentance. . . . For the critics, Jesus wasn't strict enough in following the traditions of Judaism."

ASK:

How do people's preconceived notions about God cause them to miss what He is doing? (PSG, p. 103)

TRANSITION:

In God's design, John's asceticism and Jesus's liberty were both appropriate. Each followed the path God had for them. Believers have to be careful to avoid the trap of cynicism, thinking that "one size fits all" when living out our faith.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Collector's Item

Bring a collector's item, such as an old coin or book, to show the group. Suggest that the collector's item is authentic and valuable because of its age or rarity. Direct adults to raise their hands if they believe your claim. Tell the group that the item has a legendary reputation for wielding a magic power. Again, direct them to raise their hands if they believe that claim. Ask: ***Would you change your mind if you saw a demonstration of that power?*** Affirm that humans are cynical by nature. Highlight Jesus's comment that true wisdom can be discerned by how people live each day. Discuss how showing wisdom can disarm the arguments of cynics who question Jesus as Messiah.

Denial (Matt. 11:20-24)

20 Then he proceeded to denounce the towns where most of his miracles were done, because they did not repent: **21** “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. **22** But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. **23** And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. **24** But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

(v. 20) People who constantly doubt the truth about Christ ultimately deny Him altogether. In this case, some of those people lived in **towns where most of his miracles were done**. Jesus **proceeded to denounce** these places and their non-believing residents.

The word “denounce” suggests a strong reprimand. Instead of praising God for Jesus’s miracles, the people cynically dismissed Him and refused to **repent**. Those who refuse to turn from their sin are already under condemnation for their lack of faith in Christ (John 3:18-19).

(v. 21) Using a strong expression of grief (**woe**), Jesus compared Jewish towns like **•Chorazin** and **•Bethsaida** to Gentile cities like **•Tyre and •Sidon**. Jesus performed **miracles** in the first pair of cities. The four Gospels do not mention much about Chorazin, but its proximity to Bethsaida and Capernaum suggests its residents also witnessed Jesus’s miracles. The residents should have believed and repented readily.

In contrast, Tyre and Sidon were rich, coastal trade centers in Phoenicia, but they were spiritually impoverished. Isaiah and other prophets had foretold their ruin because of their haughty idolatry (Isa. 23:1-5; Ezek. 26:1-4ff). Yet, Jesus said these Gentiles would have **repented in sackcloth and ashes** if they had seen the wonders performed around Chorazin and Bethsaida. People put on sackcloth, a coarse uncomfortable cloth, as a sign of mourning or grief. As they wailed, they often tossed ashes over their heads.

(v. 22) Jesus warned about the coming **day of judgment**. Sometimes termed “the day of the Lord,” this phrase described final reckoning before God’s throne (1 John 4:17; Rev. 20:11-15). Prophets described it as a harsh punishment for unbelievers (Zeph. 1:15; Jer. 46:10).

Jesus said it would be **more tolerable** for those who had not seen His glory. This does not mean they will somehow be pardoned. Rather, it suggests degrees of punishment.

(vv. 23-24) Even **Capernaum** would face stricter judgment. As the largest village on the Sea of Galilee’s northern coast, Capernaum was a major trade center. But the people apparently thought they should be **exalted to heaven**, a euphemism for the highest praise.

Instead, Jesus said unbelievers would **go down to •Hades**. **Hades** referred to the place of the dead where unbelievers are tormented (Luke 16:23). Despite seeing Jesus’s **miracles**, the people had not repented. As in verse 21, the word for “miracles” also can be rendered “power.”

Jesus compared Capernaum to **•Sodom**. Perhaps no city was considered more wicked than Sodom. Yet, the evil residents of that infamous city **would have remained until today** if they had seen what the residents of Capernaum saw. On that judgment day, punishment would be **more tolerable** for Sodom than for Capernaum.

Take seriously the fact that all people will bear responsibility for how they respond to Jesus. We have no excuse for not following Him in faith.

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.)

**READ:**

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

Direct the group to stand and read Matthew 11:20-24 aloud together. Suggest they recite the passage with the emotion they think Jesus shared.

CONTEXT:

Point to **Pack Item 1** (Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee). Note Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum are on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Point out that Jesus was calling out cities where residents had seen Him work miracles. Affirm that this privilege came with great responsibility to demonstrate faith, a responsibility that many residents failed to embrace.

RECAP:

To highlight unbelief in these cities, share the following content from page 104 of the PSG and highlight the contrast:

Jesus indicted [Bethsaida and Chorazin] 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. . . . [For Capernaum], Sodom was the example. Throughout the Old Testament, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah served as the prime example of wickedness before God.

ASK:

Jesus pronounced a warning to the cities that had the greater opportunities to witness His miracles. How does this warning apply to you? (PSG, p. 105)

CHALLENGE:

Note that the application point for these verses warns us to take seriously the fact that all people will bear responsibility for how they respond to Jesus. Encourage adults to consider if their understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done for them needs an adjustment.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

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?***

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 106 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *We may experience honest doubts, but confessing our doubts to God is a step toward genuine faith.*
- *We are to be sensitive to the fact that God sometimes works in ways that contradict our expectations.*
- *Take seriously the fact that all people will bear responsibility for how they respond to Jesus.*

REFLECT:

Encourage the group to think about which of the following represents the greatest challenge for them: doubts about Jesus, being sensitive to God's work, or accepting the responsibilities of our walk with Jesus. Spend a few minutes discussing their responses and why they made those choices.

DISCUSS:

Direct adults to read silently the first set of questions on page 106 of the PSG and to identify reasons believers might struggle with doubts about Jesus. After a few minutes, lead a brief discussion about their answers. Allow them to suggest ways they can support one another without alienation or condemnation of honest questions.

PRAY:

Invite adults to take a few minutes to pray silently about any doubts or struggles they might be facing. After a minute or so, encourage them to pray for the person on their left and right. Close the session in prayer, asking God to give adults the courage to face their doubts and to seek ways to demonstrate their faith in genuine ways this week.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group and assure them that you are praying for any struggles they may be having. Invite them to send you a personal message describing their struggles if appropriate. Encourage them to read and reflect on the second set of questions on page 106 of the PSG. Affirm that you are willing to help them connect with a mentor who can walk with them.

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Rejecting Legalism

JESUS OFFERS MERCY, NOT RELIGIOUS RULES.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 12:1-14 Memory Verse: Matthew 12:8

Legalism and license stand at opposite poles of the same problem: hypocrisy. In the biblical context, legalism requires strict adherence to the letter of the Mosaic law and rabbinical traditions with little or no regard for God's royal law of love (Jas. 2:8-9). At the other end of the spectrum, license uses opposition to legalism as an excuse for self-indulgence. Both reveal hypocrisy: the first because breaking one law means breaking them all (2:10) and the second because people simply want the freedom to sin without consequence. Hypocrisy involves both being something you're not and demanding of others what you excuse in yourself (Matt. 23:1-4). Not all Pharisees in Jesus's day were hypocrites, and they weren't the only hypocrites in Israel. But Jesus did condemn them for a hypocrisy that held others accountable to the law while ignoring their own responsibilities to God.

As you study Jesus's encounter with the religious leaders in Matthew 12, examine your own heart for hypocritical attitudes. Confess those to God and consider sharing what you have learned with the adults in your Bible study. Encourage them to confess and reject legalism in their hearts as well.



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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. (PSG, p. 107)

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)

Conflict between opposing values is inevitable. Pharisees believed individuals were made right with God through strict adherence to the law of Moses and the traditions of the rabbis. In contrast to their legalism, Jesus revealed God's mercy.

Matthew 12 records several clashes between Jesus and the Pharisees. The first revealed the Pharisees' confusion about traditions. Following Jesus through a grainfield, they observed His disciples plucking and eating some grain. Jewish custom allowed this, but they were bothered because it was happening on a Sabbath. In their view, the disciples were "harvesting" grain, which violated the prohibition against working on the holy day. Jesus responded by calling out the Pharisees' preference for rituals over mercy.

Next, the leaders brought a man with a deformed hand to Jesus in the synagogue. Seizing a teachable moment, Christ used this opportunity as an object lesson for God's mercy. By healing the man on the Sabbath, He demonstrated His divine power and love. Ironically, the Pharisees who condemned His mercy on the Sabbath had no problem plotting His murder on the Sabbath.

Afterward, Jesus continued healing people in fulfillment of messianic prophecy (Isa. 42:1-4). He also cast out a demon who had caused a man to be blind and mute. Onlookers wondered if He was the Messiah. Rather than glorifying God for the miracle, the Pharisees cynically said Jesus cast out demons by satanic power.

Jesus again exposed their hypocrisy, noting that Satan would not act against his own evil spirits. In addition, followers of the Pharisees claimed to be able to exorcise demons, yet the Pharisees thought their power was genuine. The Pharisees were on dangerous ground. They were attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil. They were so focused on Jesus's "sin" that they overlooked the unforgivable nature of their own blasphemy.

To justify themselves, the religious leaders demanded that Jesus offer a sign to support His authority. Of course, this ignored the amazing miracles Jesus had performed already.

The truth was that they would not accept any sign. Jesus prophesied the ultimate sign, referring to Himself as the Son of Man and predicting His own death and resurrection. However, when this prophecy came true, these leaders denied that as well. When people don't want to believe, nothing will satisfy them.

Later, hearing His family wanted to speak to Him, Jesus declared that every person who accepted the will of the Father was a member of His family. True believers in Christ don't seek excuses to do what they want. They trust and obey the Word and will of God.

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? (PSG, p. 108)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus's Mission) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel) and **Pack Item 14** (Handout: Legalism Worksheet).

INTRODUCE:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 107 of the PSG.

ASK:

What situation can you think of where laws and regulations were administered when mercy might have been a better approach? (PSG, p. 107)

SAY:

We have laws to protect us and to keep our society secure. Parents make rules for the benefit of everyone living in the house. Teachers establish rules in classrooms so students can learn without distractions. But, in every setting, we need to leave room for mercy and grace—not just the letter of the law.

EXAMINE:

Explain that only focusing on the letter of the law without accounting for grace and mercy is called “legalism.” Note that legalism is not just a social challenge but a spiritual one. Summarize this information from page 127 of the Leader Guide to provide more insight into hypocrisy and legalism.

“Hypocrisy involves both being something you’re not and demanding of others what you excuse in yourself (Matt. 23:1-4). Not all Pharisees in Jesus’s day were hypocrites, and they weren’t the only hypocrites in Israel. But Jesus did condemn them for a hypocrisy that held others accountable to the law while ignoring their own responsibilities to God.”

TRANSITION:

In this session, we’ll examine how Jesus responded to hypocrisy in the form of legalism and discover why we must be aware of the dangers it presents in our lives.



Group Activity Option

Music

Play “I Am Free” by Newsboys and encourage the group to write down the phrase(s) that most resonate with them. Ask: **What do you most value about the freedom that Christ gives?** Point out that the power of the song is its message that Jesus sets us free from the bondage of sin. Ask: **How could the song remind us that we are freed from spiritual legalism?** Note that we are freed from the law in order to serve Christ with all our hearts.

Religious Rules (Matt. 12:1-2)

1 At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. **2** When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.”

(v. 1) Confusing tradition for Scripture is not a new problem. The Pharisees of Jesus’s day made the same mistake. One example occurred as **Jesus passed through the grainfields**. Walking through fields was not unusual. Roads were not as well-defined as they are today. People often followed paths through local fields without harming the crops.

This incident occurred **at that time**, meaning after the preceding events. Some commentators reason that the time was in the spring, perhaps following the Passover. Regardless of the season, Jesus’s disciples **were hungry**. Following accepted custom, they started to **pick and eat some heads of grain**. Rather than a full meal, the handfuls of grain were more like a snack on a short journey.

This activity was not considered stealing. It was a common practice of compassion and hospitality (Deut. 23:25). While using a sickle to harvest another person’s field would be a crime, taking a few handfuls of grain was permitted. While trespassing or stealing weren’t issues, the fact that it was happening **on the Sabbath** would raise questions in the minds of some.

(v. 2) The **Pharisees** must have been following Jesus since they **saw this** and confronted Him. Later verses suggest the group was on the way to the synagogue. Instead of preparing their hearts for Sabbath services, though, the Pharisees were judgmental. Jesus knew what was happening, but the religious leaders felt the need to call special attention to the “problem.” To them, the disciples were participating in activity **not lawful to do on the Sabbath**.

Apparently, Jesus was not personally involved in taking or eating the grain. Still, the Pharisees attacked Him by condemning **your disciples**. They felt Jesus should have instructed them according to rabbinical traditions.

Instead of adhering to Scripture, the Pharisees tried to conform people’s activities to their own ideas of what was right and wrong. By “not lawful,” they did not mean it was breaking

civil laws, but religious traditions. The fourth commandment set apart the seventh day for rest, worship, and remembrance (Ex. 20:8-10; Lev. 23:1-3; Deut. 5:12-14). By not working on the Sabbath, people honored God who rested from His creative work on the seventh day (Gen. 2:1-3). It also recalled how God brought His people out of bondage into a land of rest (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:15).

Mosaic law forbade harvesting or reaping on the Sabbath (Ex. 34:21), but rabbinical traditions listed another thirty-nine prohibitions that served as a “hedge of protection.” These man-made religious rules were not part of God’s commands. Instead, they reflected human application of the law. Although the disciples only plucked a little grain by hand, the Pharisees viewed this as a kind of harvesting and, as such, was contrary to their understanding of the law.

The Pharisees’ real problem was a critical spirit. Their external adherence to traditions showed a lack of appreciation for God’s written Word and an ignorance regarding His walking Word (John 1:1). Their attitude revealed a harsh spirit that was contrary to the Scripture they supposedly were defending.

We should avoid judging others based on their adherence to a religious tradition or practice. Believers should be kindhearted toward others as we follow God’s Word. While we must not violate our own consciences, we have to acknowledge that God is the ultimate Judge of what honors Him. Our ideas about righteousness only matter if they align with His Word.

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.)



READ:

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

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 12:1-2 as the group considers why the Pharisees saw a violation of the law.

CONTEXT:

Encourage one or two volunteers to share what they know about the Sabbath in Scripture. Summarize this content from page 109 of the PSG to offer more explanation:

“‘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 passed through the grainfields.”

EXPLAIN:

Enlist a volunteer to read the “Did You Know?” feature on page 109 of the PSG. Highlight the lengths Jewish religious leaders went to “protect” the Mosaic law. Point out that, according to the law, the disciples were permitted to pick some grain in the fields and eat it. Emphasize that the Pharisees’ problem was rooted in their own interpretations and tradition, not anything God actually intended for the law.

ASK:

What role should religious tradition play in the practice of our faith? (PSG, p. 110)

DISCUSS:

Direct adults to suggest important traditions believers still observe today and record their ideas on the board. Lead a brief discussion on the origins of those traditions. Note that traditions that don’t come directly from Scripture aren’t necessarily bad.

SAY:

We just have to be careful about letting our human traditions take priority over what God has clearly revealed in His Word. And we have to make sure that we don’t use our own standards to judge the righteousness or sinfulness of others.

Something Greater (Matt. 12:3-8)

3 He said to them, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry: **4** how he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence—which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests? **5** Or haven’t you read in the law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent? **6** I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. **7** If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. **8** For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

(vv. 3-4) In answering the Pharisees’ attacks, Jesus relied on Scripture, reminding these Old Testament scholars about an incident from the life of **David** (1 Sam. 21:1-6). Before becoming king, David was hunted by a jealous Saul. On the run, David and his men had trouble finding food and, like Jesus’s disciples, **were hungry**. A short distance from Jerusalem, David came to Nob where the tabernacle was located.

At the **house of God**, David asked Ahimelech, the priest, for some bread. Only the **bread of the Presence** was available. This bread, set on a table in the Holy Place represented God’s presence among the twelve tribes of Israel. Only **priests** were allowed to eat it (Lev. 24:5-9), so it was **not lawful** for David and his followers to eat this bread. Yet they ate it without consequence.

(vv. 5-6) Jesus also reminded the Pharisees that the very **law** they were upholding allowed **priests** to **violate the Sabbath**. The wording includes the seventh day, as well as special **Sabbath days** observed during holy feasts. In their temple service, priests labored on these Sabbath days, but were not considered guilty.

Neither illustration specifically applied to the disciples’ situation, but Jesus was addressing a larger principle. The Pharisees had seen Jesus demonstrate His power. Now, He plainly told them **something greater than the temple is here**.

(v. 7) The Pharisees had **condemned** the disciples because, despite all their training, they did not comprehend the Scriptures. **I desire mercy and not sacrifice** comes from Hosea 6:6 and was not a repudiation of the sacrificial system. Jesus’s death on the cross was the culmination of sacrificial atonement for which the temple sacrifices were but a picture (Heb. 9). God considers mercy greater than sacrifices because mercy reflects His heart.

(v. 8) Jesus asserted that **the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath**. Jesus often referred to Himself by the messianic title “Son of Man.” As God the Son, He rules over all things, including the Sabbath. Mark’s Gospel helps by including Jesus’s saying, “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The disciples needed no excuse or forgiveness. Jesus declared them innocent (v. 7) because He best understood the Sabbath’s true purpose.

The Sabbath was a way for people to rest and worship God. But if our hearts are filled with His love, we will serve Him by serving others.

Praying Scripture

Matthew 12:7-8

Spend time praying Scripture using Matthew 12:7-8. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in these verses?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Ask God to teach you what it means to show mercy. Seek His forgiveness for the times you’ve cared more about being “right” than kind.

During the session, invite adults to pray this Scripture, as well. You and the adults in your group can also take advantage of the Explore the Bible Prayer Guide. This QR code also appears on page 65 of the *Personal Study Guide*.



Prayer Guide

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

**READ:**

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

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 12:3-8 aloud while adults determine how Jesus countered the Pharisees' criticisms.

ASK:

What can we learn from Jesus's response?

EXPLAIN:

Point out that Jesus's opponents had spent their lives studying the Scriptures, but Jesus used the Scriptures they knew so well to prove they were wrong. Note the importance of a solid understanding of the Bible.

RECAP:

Use the commentary on page 132 of the Leader Guide to examine Jesus's illustrations. Share this content from pages 111-112 of the PSG to highlight Jesus's statement:

Jesus concluded His two illustrations with a startling claim: "something greater than the temple is here." Jesus's authority was greater than that of the temple. The implication was that His authority superseded the authority and the traditions of the Pharisees. Such a statement would have greatly angered the religious leaders. . . . Yet, by His very nature as the Son of God, Jesus is greater than man-made laws.

ASK:

What do these verses teach us about Jesus and His expectations of His followers? (PSG, p. 113)

PRAY:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*). Encourage adults to pray Matthew 12:7-8 using the prayer prompts on page 132 of the Leader Guide. Remind them that God calls His people to respond with mercy and love, not judgment and criticism.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Fruit

Show adults a piece of fruit and a slice of bread. Note that the fruit can remind us that God kept Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of life, while bread reminds us that Jesus defended His disciples when they picked grain on the Sabbath. Ask: ***In one story, eating was not okay, but in the other story it was. Why?*** Lead the group to discern the difference between God's rules and man-made traditions. Emphasize that Jesus brought the argument back to the truth of Scripture.

Compassionate Response (Matt. 12:9-14)

9 Moving on from there, he entered their synagogue. **10** There he saw a man who had a shriveled hand, and in order to accuse him they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” **11** He replied to them, “Who among you, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn’t take hold of it and lift it out? **12** A person is worth far more than a sheep; so it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath.” **13** Then he told the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out, and it was restored, as good as the other. **14** But the Pharisees went out and plotted against him, how they might kill him.

(v. 9) *Moving on*, Jesus concluded the discussion and headed to the **synagogue**. The pronoun **their** likely referred to the Pharisees. Jesus habitually attended Sabbath worship at whatever synagogue was nearby. He likely chose this place purposefully. He knew a need, an opportunity, and a challenge was ahead.



The Synagogue

The synagogue played a central role in the lives of first-century Jews. Scan here to view a reconstruction of a typical synagogue.

(v. 10) At the synagogue, Jesus **saw a man who had a shriveled hand**. The man’s condition was not an immediate emergency, but Jesus embraced this opportunity to show the mercy He had been teaching. Meanwhile, the Pharisees were seeking a reason to **accuse him**. The Greek wording can suggest civil matters, but here it was another reference to religious law. Some writers suspect the Pharisees made sure the man was present so they could trap Jesus.

The religious leaders asked Jesus a loaded question: **Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?** His earlier instructions about the Sabbath did not satisfy them. Like picking grain, they equated healing with work, which was prohibited on the Sabbath. If Jesus said, “Yes,” they could accuse Him of violating the law. If He said, “No,” they could question His teachings about mercy.

(v. 11) Jesus answered the question with a question. If one of their animals fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, would they **take hold of it and lift it out?** The implied answer was “yes,” so their silence was no surprise. He phrased the

proposition in a way that proved they would violate their own Sabbath rules for livestock. The Pharisees wanted to put Jesus into a theological corner but found themselves trapped instead.

(v. 12) Jesus further revealed their hypocrisy by emphasizing that **a person is worth far more than a sheep**. So, if it was acceptable to rescue their animal, God would not be offended by helping another human being. When all is said and done, **it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath**. In his Gospel, Mark added that Jesus was angered by the Pharisees’ cold and manipulative hearts (Mark 3:5).

(v. 13) Having answered the question, Jesus commanded the man to **stretch out your hand**. The man may have felt uncomfortable being the center of attention, and obeying Jesus could have turned the Pharisees against Him. So, he had a choice to make.

He chose to be healed by Jesus. When the man **stretched it out**, his hand **was restored**. When Jesus heals, He does so absolutely.

(v. 14) The **Pharisees** responded with murderous intent after they **went out** of the synagogue. Instead of praising God, they **plotted against** Jesus. Some commentators interpret this to say they wanted to arrest Jesus. However, the term **kill** literally means “to destroy or ruin.” Their goal was no longer to embarrass Him or simply prove that He was wrong. He had threatened their authority and their way of life. As a result, they were convinced that He deserved to die.

We must seek to make our priorities and practices consistent with what God values most. The Lord’s love and mercy isn’t limited to days on a calendar. Every moment is the right moment to be His hands and feet in the world. And if we truly love Him, we will desire to live accordingly.



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

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 12:9-14 aloud while the group listens for indications that the Pharisees had shifted from being spectating critics to active opponents.

EXAMINE:

Encourage adults to work in teams of two or three to review and discuss the content for verses 9-10 on pages 113-114 of the PSG. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share things that stuck out to them from the verses.

EXPLAIN:

Point out that the Pharisees who confronted Jesus in the fields were probably leaders in this synagogue. Note that some scholars believe they used the man as a “set up” in order to accuse Jesus of breaking the Mosaic law.

ASK:

How might the authority of Jesus be perceived as a threat? (PSG, p. 115)

RECAP:

Note that Jesus turned the tables on the religious leaders. Use this content from page 114 of the PSG to show how Jesus revealed the Pharisees’ legalistic and hypocritical hearts:

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. . . . In theory, every Pharisee would agree with that statement. In the reality of this situation, though, the Pharisees were so filled with hatred for Jesus that they would be more inclined to help the sheep and ignore the man who needed healing.

EXPLAIN:

Point out that instead of accepting the truth, the Pharisees rejected Jesus’s message. Note the irony of condemning Jesus for doing good on the Sabbath, yet plotting evil against Him on the same day. Affirm that legalism and hypocrisy can lead to devastating and dehumanizing attitudes and actions.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

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?***

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 116 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *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.*

REFLECT:

Encourage a few volunteers to paraphrase these statements and to identify ways they can put them into practice each day.

REFLECT:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Legalism Worksheet*). Allow adults to work in teams of three or four to reflect on how legalism shows up in our world and how the Bible responds to those efforts. Allow each team to report on their work. Remind adults that legalism is rooted in hypocrisy and inevitably erodes our compassion for others.

DISCUSS:

Direct attention to the first set of questions on page 116 of the PSG. Encourage adults to be sensitive to the needs of others and to seek opportunities to show mercy instead of criticism.

PRAY:

Remind the group of Matthew 12:7-8 and **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*). Urge them to continue praying these verses back to God during the week. Close the session in prayer.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group a text or an email encouraging them to continue thinking through the content on **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Legalism Worksheet*). Suggest they read and reflect on the second set of questions from page 116 of the PSG as they seek God's help in rooting out their own legalistic and hypocritical tendencies. Assure them that you are praying for them as they work through these issues in their lives.

ADULT COMMENTARY



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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

The Parables of Jesus



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

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

PARABLES AND TEACHING

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

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

PARABLES AND DAILY LIFE

Jesus was the keenest of observers about daily life. He drew lessons from farmers sowing in the field, from village customs about weddings, from shepherds and sheep, from banquets, and so much more. Recall that His audiences often were simple, uneducated people such as fishermen, farmers, and villagers. They could grasp His

“Jesus used good storytelling to project divine truths about redemption, the kingdom of God, and ethical values.”

lessons easily about an unjust judge or a friend who knocked on a neighbor’s door at midnight. Jesus used good storytelling to project divine truths about redemption, the kingdom of God, and ethical values.

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

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

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

PARABLES ON GOD’S NATURE

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

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

THEMES OF THE PARABLES

Though Jesus did not follow a consistent theme in His teachings through parables, He did address some of the major subjects of His ministry through these stories. He dealt with the relation of the old covenant with the new covenant in parables of the barren fig tree and the great feast. His lessons on prayer were highlighted by the parables of the friend who knocked at midnight and the unjust judge. Stewardship was another important theme as portrayed by the stories of the unjust steward and the rich fool.

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

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF PARABLES

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

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

This article was adapted from *The Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), pp. 406-407. Used with permission.



Judgment Coming

FAITH IN JESUS DETERMINES OUR ETERNAL DESTINY.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 Memory Verse: Matthew 13:40

We always think we can get away with it—that secret sin lying undiscovered. Perhaps it occurred in private or far enough away from home where we think no one knows us. The problem with “successful” sin is we think we can continue doing it. So, we keep on until judgment finally arrives in one form or another.

Nobody who sins thinks he or she will be caught. We think we’re pretty smart. Who’s to know? Well, God does. Scripture says we all have sinned and fallen short of His standard (Rom. 3:23). It declares the result of sin is death, which includes separation from God now and in eternity. The Bible is clear: Judgment is coming. Accountability is inevitable. The good news is that God’s free gift is eternal life through Jesus (Rom. 6:23). As we repent of sin and place our faith in Christ, we receive forgiveness from sin and eternal life with Christ (John 3:16-18; Acts 3:19).

As you study the parables of Jesus in this final session from Matthew 1-13, ask God to help you identify and confess any sins you might be holding in your heart. Also, consider how you can share God’s plan of salvation during this designated evangelism session.



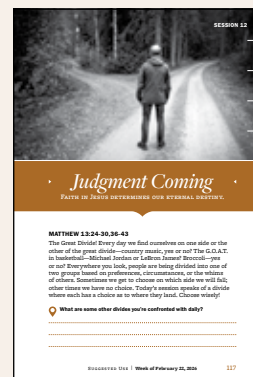
Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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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! (PSG, p. 117)

What are some other divides you’re confronted with daily?



Understand the Context (Matthew 13:1-58)

Everyone loves a good story, but Jesus’s parables were more than interesting tales. Fulfilling Psalm 78:2, they challenged His listeners’ hearts and minds with truths about God’s kingdom. Crowds following Jesus didn’t just want to see His miracles. They also wanted to hear Him teach. In this scene, so many came that He had to speak from a boat while the people stood on the shore.

When His disciples asked about the parables, Jesus both explained them and shared why He used them. Some in the crowds did not understand because they were not interested in biblical truth. Others comprehended the teaching, but didn’t apply it to their lives. Jesus used a parable to illustrate this point.

In one familiar parable, Jesus compared people’s hearts to different soils. The seed and the farmer sowing are the same for each soil, but the results depended on the condition of the ground. Jesus explained how some people have hard hearts while others are shallow. Still more are hampered by worldliness. Some, though, are good soil, receiving the seed and yielding an increase.

Another parable compared the kingdom to a field that yielded both wheat and weeds. Early on, it was hard to tell them apart. But in time, the weeds became apparent, and the workers could cut them down and burn them up. The good wheat, representing believers, was gathered for the farmer’s use. This principle of separating the good from the bad also is seen in a

parable describing fish caught in a net. The bad fish were cast aside while the good fish were gathered in. Both parables point to a coming judgment in which believers are blessed while those who reject Christ experience eternal punishment.

Another pair of parables illustrate how God’s kingdom appears to be small and insignificant. The kingdom may seem as tiny as a mustard seed, but it grows strong and mighty. Similarly, the kingdom can act like a little yeast that makes a small lump of dough rise into a delicious loaf.

Two other parables also point to a single application. In one, a treasure found in a field motivates the excited discoverer to sell everything and buy that field for the prize. In the second story, a merchant finds a single pearl of great value. He too sells everything he owns so he can obtain that one priceless object. Both stories emphasize the invaluable nature of God’s kingdom.

Unfortunately, not everyone was thrilled about Jesus’s teaching. As He spoke in His home synagogue at Nazareth, residents wondered how this could be the carpenter’s son, the boy they had watched grow up. Jesus knew a prophet never lacks honor except among those who think they know Him best.

Read Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 in your Bible.
What spiritual truth do you think Jesus was illustrating with this parable? (PSG, p. 118)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee) and **Pack Item 7** (Poster: Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13).

READ:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 117 of the PSG.

ASK:

What are some other divides you find yourself confronted with daily? (PSG, p. 117) Discuss responses. Point out that some divisions are harmless, like pulling for a sports team or choosing a flavor of ice cream. Note that the impact of other choices is much more serious.

REVIEW:

Share that today's session focuses on our most important choice: accepting or rejecting Jesus. Remind adults that Jesus had confronted religious leaders in Matthew 12, and they were ready to kill Him. Note that in Matthew 13, Jesus used parables to further highlight this division.

CONTEXT:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 7** (Poster: Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13) and briefly review each parable. To provide more context, share this content from page 118 of the PSG:

The Greek word translated "parable" means "to lay or place something alongside of." A parable lays something alongside something else for comparison or contrast. . . . Matthew 13 contains eight parables that relate truths concerning the kingdom of God. In several of them we find an explanation of the growing divide between those who follow Jesus and those who resist Him.

TRANSITION:

As we work through these parables, reflect on your walk with Jesus. If you've been putting off a relationship with Him, today is the perfect day to cross the divide. If you are standing with Christ, consider how you can become a more effective "kingdom citizen" and point others to Him.



Group Activity Option

Music

Play "Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling" (Baptist Hymnal 2008, No. 414). Point out that "Softly and Tenderly" is well known and well-loved as a traditional hymn of invitation, encouraging individuals to accept Christ. Suggest that the hymn has been so effective because of its poignant, simple appeal encouraging listeners to accept Christ. Ask: **How do these lyrics underscore what's at stake in this decision?**

Wheat or Weeds (Matt. 13:24-30)

24 He presented another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. **25** But while people were sleeping, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and left. **26** When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared. **27** The landowner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Master, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?’ **28** ‘An enemy did this,’ he told them. ‘So, do you want us to go and pull them up?’ the servants asked him. **29** ‘No,’ he said. ‘When you pull up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat with them. **30** Let both grow together until the harvest. At harvest time I’ll tell the reapers: Gather the weeds first and tie them in bundles to burn them, but collect the wheat in my barn.’”

(vv. 24-25) As the Master Teacher, Jesus used stories known as parables to connect His listeners with spiritual truth. With an agricultural illustration, He shared **another parable** that His listeners could grasp. “Parable” translates a term that means “laid alongside.” These stories set an everyday occurrence (like farming) alongside a spiritual truth to illustrate the point.

Like other parables in Matthew 13, this one illustrates **the kingdom of heaven**. Matthew used the phrase “kingdom of heaven” while Mark and Luke preferred “kingdom of God.” Both terms apply to the reign of God now and in the future.

In this parable, a farmer **sowed good seed in his field**. “His field” indicates that this man owned the field. Meanwhile, “sowing” emphasizes his labor, and “good seed” points to his quality investment.

However, the landowner had an **enemy**. Using the pronoun **his** specifies how the devil is the personal enemy of Christ. Just like Satan, this enemy came when individuals were **sleeping** or had their guard down. He **sowed weeds among the wheat**. The strategy was to mix a counterfeit product among the good seed.

(v. 26) No one noticed what had happened until the **plants sprouted**. As expected, the good seed **produced grain**. But the **weeds also appeared**. The Greek wording describes a kind of wild grass that resembles wheat in the early stages of growth. Similarly, godly and ungodly people populate the same community. They may look similar on the outside; but, in time, each one manifests its true nature (1 John 3:10).

(vv. 27-28) When the weeds were discovered, the **servants** notified the landowner. Notice they acknowledged the landowner as their Master. The field belonged to him, and he had sown **good seed**. All should have proceeded well.

Naturally, they had a question: **Where did the weeds come from?** Since the landowner planted good seed in good soil, the source of weeds was obvious: **an enemy did this**. Like the weeds among the wheat, one of Satan’s strategies involves substituting imitations for the real thing. Fake doctrine. Fake pleasures. Fake believers.

The servants’ immediate response was to **pull them up**. As with their previous interactions with the landowner, they posed their ideas in the form of questions. Sometimes, well intentioned believers come up with solutions to problems without considering the Master’s will or His wisdom. We need to seek God’s direction before acting.

(vv. 29-30) The landowner wisely knew the dangers of acting prematurely, so he told them to wait. He didn’t want them to **uproot the wheat** accidentally while attempting to **pull up the weeds**.

Our Lord is more patient than we are. The landowner told the servants to wait **until the harvest**. Judgment would come in its time. When the proper season arrived, the ones doing the reaping could **gather the weeds** and **tie them in bundles to burn**. Believers will also be gathered; but unlike the **wheat** collected into a **barn**, they will dwell in the Master’s house forever (John 14:2).

We must examine our own faith as we wait for Jesus’s return. True believers need not fear judgment. The righteous Judge will grant them rewards just as He imposes the penalty of sin on those who do not believe (2 Tim. 4:8).

**CONTEXT:**

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

Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*). Point out that initially Jesus was sitting by the sea (Matt. 13:1). Point out Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and suggest that this area could have been the setting for Matthew 13.

READ:

Guide the group to listen as you read Matthew 13:24-30 aloud. Encourage them to jot down key points and characters in the margin of the PSG.

DISCUSS:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 7** (*Poster: Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13*). Highlight "The Wheat and the Weeds." Encourage adults to summarize the plot of the parable. Discuss what each element might represent. Enlist a volunteer to read the "Did You Know?" feature (PSG, p. 120). Talk about why one group might have sown weeds in the fields of someone else. Highlight the distinction between believers (wheat) and unbelievers (weeds).

ASK:

Is it always possible to distinguish sincere believers from insincere believers? How? (PSG, p. 121)

RECAP:

To dig deeper into the parable, share this information from pages 119-120 of the PSG:

The Greek word for "weeds" 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.

STATE:

While the landowner directed his servants to wait until the harvest to pull anything up, he had definite plans for each kind of plant in his field. Eventually, the weeds would be tied up and burned, while the genuine wheat would be protected and used for his benefit. Likewise, those who reject Christ can expect punishment from Him, while true believers will enter God's presence. The important thing is not how we look, but how we respond to God.

Jesus or the Devil (Matt. 13:36-39)

36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” **37** He replied, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; **38** the field is the world; and the good seed—these are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, **39** and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.”

(v. 36) Spiritual curiosity is one characteristic of believers. Nobody among the **crowds** asked Jesus for an explanation of His parables. Only later did **his disciples** seek answers. The **house** is the same one mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Away from the crowd, Jesus’s disciples **approached him**. They took the initiative in learning more. They wanted a better understanding of what the stories meant, so they asked Jesus to **explain** the **parable of the weeds**. To their credit, they had been listening; and, to their credit, they came to Jesus with their questions.

(v. 37) As noted, parables compare something familiar with a spiritual truth. In this case, the **one who sows the good seed**, the landowner, was **the Son of Man**. Jesus often used this messianic title when referring to Himself. While on the earth, Jesus sowed kingdom seed wherever He went. When He returned to heaven, He appointed His disciples with the task of being His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Through the centuries, each generation of believers bears the commission to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20). At each point, Christ is the One producing the results.

(v. 38) The **field** signifies **the world**. “World” can have several meanings. Here, it applies to the world population. The **good seed** represented the **children of the kingdom**. Christ’s gospel was never intended for just one people group. His followers should be working throughout the world, encouraging people to respond to His message of salvation. This application differs from the parable of the sower, where the seed is God’s Word. Here, it represents the results of the Word in the lives of those who accept Christ.

In contrast, the **weeds** correspond to the **children of the evil one**. Many mistakenly believe that everyone is a child of God. While we all are God’s creation and carry His image (Gen. 1:26-27), only those who are born again through faith in

Jesus become God’s children. When Jesus confronted His adversaries who claimed Abraham as their father, He said they were actually children of the devil (John 8:39-44). This does not mean the devil was involved in procreation, but that they were the result of Satan’s work.

Some writers suggest the parable of the wheat and weeds addresses the presence of genuine and false believers in the church. It is true that some in the church profess Christ but have never truly surrendered to Him by faith. However, Jesus identified the field as the world at large, not the church. It is best to interpret the elements of the parable as Jesus described them.

(v. 39) The **enemy** was **the devil**. Whenever we encounter evil in the world, we need to identify the correct adversary. The enemy (Satan) **sowed** corrupt seed that resulted in weeds (children of the evil one). Each person has to make the choice between trusting Christ as Savior and continuing in sin. Putting off the response to Christ means risking eternity without Jesus, without God, and without hope (Eph. 2:12).

Jesus promised a **harvest** at the **end of the age**. This phrase refers to Christ’s return and the final judgment of the world. Looking forward to the end times does not minimize the immediate judgment that occurs at death, but it does remind us that judgment awaits everyone at some point. Jesus identified the **harvesters** as **angels** who participate in the gathering.

We need to recognize that not all who claim a relationship with Jesus are genuine believers. Churches need to exercise discernment in receiving and disciplining members. Proper counseling can help ensure individuals joining a church have truly repented of sin and received Christ by faith. If members exhibit habitual sin, proper church discipline can encourage true Christians to repent (see Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-12; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 2 Thess. 3:14-15).



READ:

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

Lead the group to listen as you read Matthew 13:36-39 aloud and to identify the symbols in the parable.

DISCUSS:

Remind adults what each element in the parable symbolizes. Allow volunteers to share why it is important to understand these symbols. Affirm that the disciples recognized this as they heard Jesus teach, so they came to Him later looking for answers to their spiritual questions.

ASK:

Why would Satan want to sow “weeds” in the world?

EXPLAIN:

Instruct a volunteer to read John 10:10 aloud. Point out that while Satan is a defeated enemy, he is still powerful, and his main goal is to create chaos and disorder in the world. Remind adults that God created everything “good” in Genesis 1, and Satan has been working to corrupt that goodness ever since.

RECAP:

Direct attention to the “harvest” at the end of time. Use this content from page 122 of the PSG to highlight how the wheat and weeds will be separated:

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.

ASK:

What is the church’s responsibility regarding the “weeds” sown by the devil? (PSG, p. 123)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Gold

Prior to the session, locate an online video that teaches individuals how to pan for gold. During the session, show the video to the group. Highlight that “panners” must sift what they gather. Say: *Through this sifting process, one can get rid of extraneous material and locate the valuable gold.* Suggest that this process resembles the way unbelievers will one day be distinguished from true believers. Emphasize the truth that Jesus promised judgment and that the standard for distinguishing believers from unbelievers is what each did with God’s offer of salvation.

Heaven or Hell (Matt. 13:40-43)

40 “Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. **41** The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness. **42** They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **43** Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom. Let anyone who has ears listen.”

(v. 40) Jesus concluded with a warning and a promise. **End of the age** refers to the final era before Christ’s judgment. It will be delightful for saints but terrifying for non-believers. Jesus compared the destiny of the lost to the **weeds** that were **gathered and burned in the fire**. Many people don’t like to think about the graphic images in this analogy, but ignoring the truth can lead to greater harm for unbelievers.

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.)

(v. 41) As **the Son of Man**, Jesus will one day **send out his angels** into the world. Angels have numerous functions in Scripture. They serve as messengers (Luke 1:26-38), warriors (2 Kings 19:35), protectors (Ps. 34:7), ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14), and more. Here, they carry out Christ’s judgment. Notice they are “His” angels. He has the sovereign authority to send them out to accomplish His will.

At Christ’s command, angels will **gather from his kingdom** all unbelievers. This does not suggest that unbelievers are part of God’s kingdom in the same way as believers. Instead, Jesus emphasized His rule over all the world. The Greek wording for “gather” means to pluck, just like the weeds were plucked from among the wheat.

Those gathered are described in two ways: those who **cause sin** and those **guilty of lawlessness**. These terms do not identify distinct kinds of sinners but jointly describe the extent of their transgression. The Greek wording

expresses continual action and indicates that they lead others into evil. Their actions not only violate God’s commandments but demonstrate disregard and disdain for it.

(v. 42) The angels will **throw them into the blazing furnace**. Judgment involves a forceful act of casting unbelievers into this terrible place. The furnace portrays a lake of fire prepared originally for Satan and his followers (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10-15). This torment is a real place with real suffering, as seen in the anguish of **weeping and gnashing of teeth**.

God does not delight in sending anyone to hell. That’s why He took the ultimate step of sending His only Son to die in our place (John 3:14-18). Those who accept Him as Savior will not perish, but they will have eternal life. Unfortunately, many will reject Him and spend eternity experiencing His wrath.

(v. 43) Once the unrighteous are removed, genuine Christ followers **will shine like the sun**. They won’t be righteous because they kept certain rules but because they entered **their Father’s kingdom**. The phrase “their Father” emphasizes the personal relationship they have with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Each day of believers’ lives can be spent in close fellowship with their heavenly Father. At death, each person who receives Jesus as Savior goes immediately into His presence (John 1:12; 2 Cor. 5:8). Ultimately, they will enjoy the Lord’s presence alongside believers who are alive at Christ’s return (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Jesus urged the disciples’ to pay attention to His words: **Let anyone who has ears listen**. They needed to take what He had said with utmost seriousness. Likewise, we can trust that Jesus will have the final word and that He will judge righteously. His death and resurrection provided atonement for sin.



READ:

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

Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 13:40-43 as adults consider additional images or phrases that capture their attention.

DISCUSS:

Allow adults to share what resonates with them. Highlight the word picture created by the burning weeds and discuss the implications for both believers and unbelievers. Highlight Matthew 13:40 as the session's memory verse and repeat it aloud together.

RECAP:

Point out the human response to separation from God for eternity. Share this content from page 124 of the PSG to emphasize the reality of hell and its terrors:

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

ASK:

Does knowing there will be a final judgment with eternal consequences bring you comfort or concern?
(PSG, p. 125)

SHARE:

Briefly walk through the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover of the PSG. Point out that each session during this quarter has highlighted Jesus as Messiah and Savior. Challenge adults who have not accepted His offer of salvation to talk with you or another trusted leader about becoming a Christ follower and avoiding the coming judgment.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

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

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 126 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *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.*

DISCUSS:

On the board, list the images Jesus used in the parable (*wheat, weeds, enemy, landowner, harvest, and so forth*). Allow adults to explain what each image symbolizes and why that image is important. Direct attention to the summary statement for this session: *Faith in Jesus determines our eternal destiny*. Encourage the group to discuss the statement and share what God might be saying to them through that truth.

REFLECT:

Direct attention to the second set of questions on page 126 of the PSG. Challenge adults to reflect silently on the fruit from their own lives and how they can point others toward Jesus more effectively.

PRAY:

Close the session in prayer, asking God to help each adult move deeper in their relationship with Him, including those who may be reaching out to Him for the first time. Pray that the group will have discernment as they act as wheat and seek to minister to weeds before Jesus comes back.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send a text or email to the group, encouraging them to read and reflect on the first set of questions on page 126 of the PSG. Also remind them that you are available to talk with anyone who wants to know more about becoming a follower of Jesus. Share that the group will be starting a series of studies on the second half of Matthew's Gospel (chaps. 14–28) during the next session.

LEADER BLOG



Discover helpful tips for using and getting the most from your Adult Explore the Bible resources at goExploreTheBible.com/blog.

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

Explaining Salvation to an Adult

G. Dwayne McCrary



One of the striking realities about the four Gospels is that they were written using simple Greek, the everyday words and grammar used in the markets, yet they are far from simple. For example, John talked about the Word existing before creation and then that same Word taking on flesh in the creation He formed.

Like other Gospel writers, John used simple words to explain a deep teaching. When we are in conversation with an adult about salvation, we need to follow this example of using simple terms to explain a profound truth.

Let's think about the critical items we need to explain using some simple terms to do so.

IDEA 1: WE ARE NOT RIGHT WITH GOD.

Everyone has disobeyed God in some way. The Holy Spirit makes a person aware of his or her sin and spiritual need (John 16:8-11). Each person must reach a point where they realize something has got to change, a turning away from sin and trusting ourselves, hating what God hates and the things that separate us from Him. (See Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 9:1-6; 2 Cor. 7:10.)

The change in direction (what the Bible calls “repentance”) is driven by a conviction of personal sin that separates an individual from God and causes that person to be held accountable to face God’s judgment (John 16:8; Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Heb. 9:27; 1 John 1:9). This realization can be summed up in the word “Admit.” We admit to God that we are a sinner and repent, turning away from our sin.

IDEA 2: GOD LOVES ME AND WILL FORGIVE ME IF I REPENT AND BELIEVE.

God has taken the initiative to demonstrate His love for each person by sending His Son,

“When Christ is Lord, as God transforms them, believers submit to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.”

Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins. Three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 4:12; Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 1:7a; 1 Pet. 3:18). Jesus died, taking what we were due as our substitute. We can respond to that love with repentance through faith in Jesus (John 3:16; 10:10; Eph. 2:8-9).

The emphasis here is “Believe.” By faith (belief), we receive Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin.

IDEA 3:
JESUS MAKES ME RIGHT WITH GOD.

This forgiveness is not automatic. Each person must express an act of faith in Jesus Christ—an action of the will and the mind to the facts of the work of Christ. Inwardly, they must believe, or trust, Him (Acts 20:21; Rom. 1:17; 1 John 1:9). Outwardly, confession of this faith in Christ as Savior and Lord is an external expression of an internal experience (Matt. 16:24; Rom. 10:9-10).

The moment a person expresses his or her faith, Jesus becomes that person’s Savior and that person is made right before God. The Bible calls this being “justified” (Rom. 4:1-3). God forgives all a person’s sins and removes them “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12). Nothing else is needed. The person is now a believer, a disciple of Jesus Christ, baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

New believers are like newborn babies who need to grow up (1 Pet. 2:2-3). New believers are to be transformed into the image of Christ. When Christ is Lord, as God transforms them, believers submit to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

This third idea is best understood in terms of “Confess.” We confess our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.



These three ideas of admitting, believing, and confessing are included in the information found on the inside front cover of the *Adult Explore the Bible* resources. We may use a few different words for variety, but the core ideas are there.

This information is included on the inside front cover so you can easily share it with a person who has questions. Every time leaders open their Leader Guides, they have access to a clear, Bible-based plan for sharing the gospel with adults in their Bible studies. And every time we give a person a copy of the *Personal Study Guide* or *Daily Discipleship Guide*, we are giving them, in part, a gospel tract that uses simple terms to explain profound truth.

Historically, Bible study has been grounded in sharing the gospel with the lost. Leaders need to emphasize that aspect each week, and these resources provide tools to make leading adults toward the Savior possible.

G. Dwayne McCrary serves as the manager for Adult Ongoing Bible Studies at Lifeway.

LEADER PACK IDEAS

Pack Item 1

Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee
Sessions 1-12

Locate a map that highlights the region of Galilee in the first century, including key places where Jesus traveled and ministered in Matthew 1-13.

Pack Item 2

Poster: Outline of Matthew 1-13
Sessions 1-12

Refer to page 9 of the PSG to create a poster that outlines Matthew 1-13.

Pack Item 3

Poster: Jesus's Mission
Sessions 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11

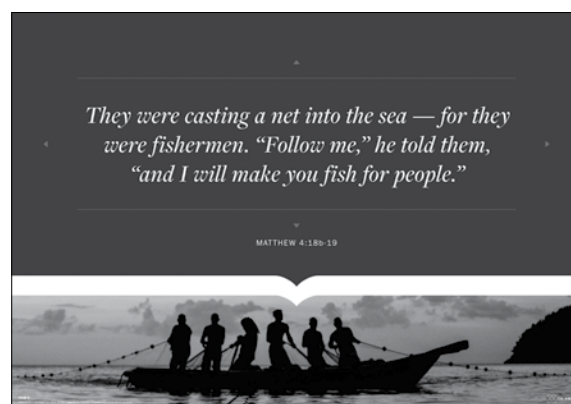
Create a poster that describes Jesus's work and mission on earth using "God the Son," Article II.B. from the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000).

Pack Item 4

Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19
Session 2

Create a poster with the text of Matthew 4:18b-19:

They were casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. "Follow me," he told them, "and I will make you fish for people."



Pack Item 5

Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 9:12
Session 8

Create a poster with the text of Matthew 9:12:


"It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick."

Examples from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.
The Pack is available for purchase at goExploreTheBible.com.

Pack Item 6

Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus
Sessions 10-12

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a poster that highlights the prophecies Jesus fulfilled in the Gospel of Matthew. Include the event, the Old Testament prophetic reference, and the New Testament fulfillment reference.



Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus

One evidence that Jesus is the Messiah is the way He fulfilled messianic prophecies from the Old Testament. Below is a list of several prophecies Jesus fulfilled in Matthew 1-13. Jesus pointed to fulfilled prophecy to assure a struggling John the Baptist that He really is the Christ (Matt. 11:1-6).

EVENT IN JESUS'S LIFE	OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCE	FULFILLMENT IN MATTHEW
Virgin birth	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:18, 22-23
Birth in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:4-6
Refugee years in Egypt	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:14-15
Raised in Nazareth	Isaiah 11:1	Matthew 2:23
Preaching in Galilee	Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:12-16
Healing ministry	Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:16-17
Avoiding unwarranted attention	Isaiah 42:1-4	Matthew 12:16-21
Teaching in parables	Psalms 78:2	Matthew 13:34-35

Pack Item 7

Poster: Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13
Session 12

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a poster that highlights Jesus's parables in Matthew 13. Note the name of the parable, the references, and the truth Jesus was teaching for each story.

Pack Item 8

Handout: Matthew Time Line
Sessions 1-12

Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events related to the Gospel of Matthew. Include both biblical and non-biblical historical references for context.

Pack Item 9

Handout: Praying Scripture in
Matthew's Gospel
Sessions 1-12

Create a handout to help adults pray through key Scriptures in the Gospel of Matthew. Provide the following prompts:

- Session/Verse
- General thoughts from the passage
- What does this passage teach you about God and His character?
- How is God leading you to respond to what He is showing you about Himself?
- Written prayer based on the passage

Pack Item 10

Handout: Messianic Prophecies

Session 3

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a poster that highlights the messianic prophecies fulfilled in Matthew's birth narrative (chaps. 1–2). Also include prophecies drawn from Luke 2–3.

Pack Item 11

Handout: The Sermon on the Mount
Sessions 4-6

Use a commentary, Bible handbook, or other source to create a handout that describes the divisions and key points of Jesus's sermon in Matthew 5-7.

Pack Item 12

Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8-9
Sessions 7-8

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a chart that highlights the miracles Jesus performed in Matthew 8–9. Note the miracle and its reference.

Pack Item 13

Handout: The Disciples in History

Session 9

Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or other resource, create a handout that provides biographical information for Jesus's twelve disciples, including their ministry after Jesus returned to heaven.

Pack Item 14

Handout: Legalism Worksheet
Session 11

Create a two-column chart for an application activity. Label one column “How People Try to Earn Salvation” and the other column “The Biblical Response to those Actions.” Challenge adults to list ways people rely on good works, along with biblical truths that refute those efforts.

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Examples from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.
The Pack is available for purchase at **goExploreTheBible.com**.

COMING **NEXT QUARTER**



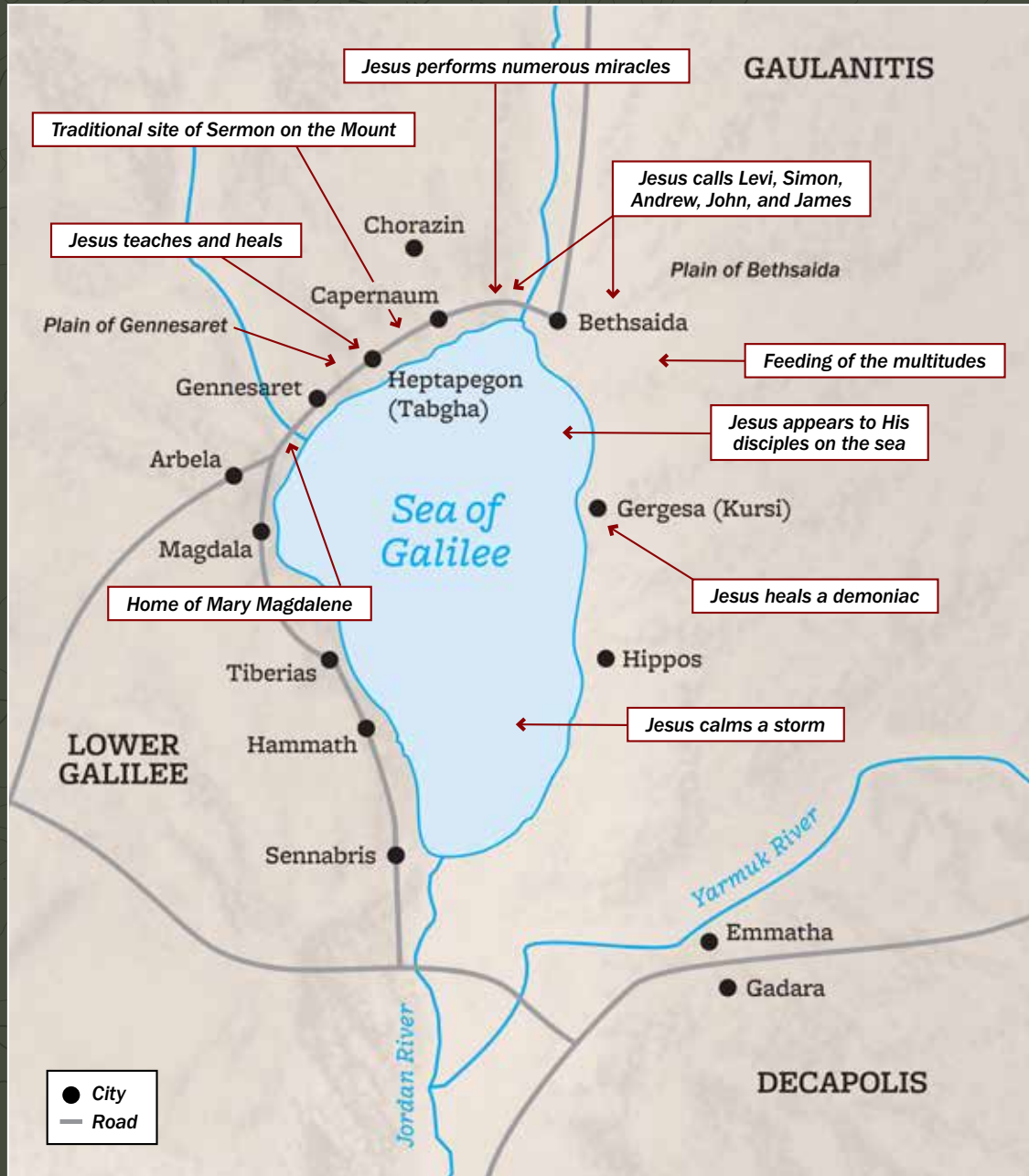
MATTHEW 14–28

- 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

“You will seek me and find me when you search for me
with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee



"Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee" is taken from the *Holman Bible Atlas* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1998), p.221. Used with permission.

MATTHEW 1-13

When high school and college students are interested in a certain career path, they often shadow an expert in that field for a day or two. It gives them a better feel for the job's requirements and a clearer understanding of what will be expected. They learn what to do by watching the example of one who's walked that path already. For Christ followers, we have no greater example than what we see in the life of Jesus. By listening to His words and watching His actions, we learn the do's and don'ts of living out our faith. As you study Matthew 1-13, you'll get a firsthand account of what it's like to walk with Jesus each day—and learn what it means to become a citizen of God's kingdom.

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