



EXPLORE **THE BIBLE**®

Adults

Matthew 14–28

Daily Discipleship Guide

Spring 2026



WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

If you're an adult of a particular generation, you'll probably remember a toy called The Magic 8 Ball™. For those who aren't as familiar, this was a foolproof tool for getting answers to any questions about the future . . . sort of.

In one sense, the 8 Ball guaranteed you an answer to every question. If you asked about your future spouse or whether you were going to pass your history test, the 8 Ball had an answer. The problem was that the Magic 8 Ball carried about as much prophetic authority as a fortune cookie. At best, the answers were vague. At worst, they were irrelevant.

Then again, it was designed for entertainment. No one with a modicum of sense would entrust their future to an oversized pool ball.

Of course, human nature still longs to know what's ahead. Whether we're thinking about this life or the next, we seek clarity. We want to see what's just around the bend.

Jesus understood that. That's why He often talked with His disciples about what would happen in the short term and in the distant future. Throughout the Gospels, including Matthew's Gospel, Jesus reminded His followers that He holds the future. He is God. He loves us more than we can imagine. He remains in control, and His people can trust Him.

Jesus might not give you every answer you've ever wanted, but He has promised to give you peace for today, tomorrow, and eternity. That starts with a personal relationship with Him. If you're seeking answers to the most important questions in life, here's what you need to do . . .

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

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



SUGGESTED FOR THE WEEK OF

FEATURES

▶ Memory Verses	5
▶ Biblical Background	6
▶ Using the Daily Discipleship Guide	7
▶ Leader Helps	120

SESSIONS

MAR. 1	Session 1: Courage (Matt. 14:22-33)	8
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 121	
MAR. 8	Session 2: Real Devotion (Matt. 15:1-11,16-20)	16
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 124	
MAR. 15	Session 3: Following Jesus (Matt. 16:13-26)	24
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 127	
MAR. 22	Session 4: Glory (Matt. 17:1-13)	32
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 130	
MAR. 29	Session 5: Forgiveness (Matt. 18:21-35)	40
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 133	
APR. 5	Session 6: Our Task* (Matt. 28:1-10,16-20)	48
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 136	
APR. 12	Session 7: Eternal Life (Matt. 19:16-30)	56
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 139	
APR. 19	Session 8: Grace (Matt. 20:1-16)	64
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 142	
APR. 26	Session 9: Authority (Matt. 21:23-32)	72
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 145	
MAY 3	Session 10: Honor (Matt. 22:15-22,34-40)	80
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 148	
MAY 10	Session 11: Alert (Matt. 24:36-51)	88
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 151	
MAY 17	Session 12: Active Faith (Matt. 25:31-46)	98
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 154	
MAY 24	Session 13: Our Atonement (Matt. 26:17-30)	104
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 157	
MAY 31	Session 14: Our Savior (Matt. 27:27-31,45-54)	112
	LEADER HELPS ON PAGE 160	

*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITERS

Sam Crouch is retired after 52 years in full-time ministry and lives in Tucson, Arizona.

Michael Guyer is lead pastor of Treasuring Christ Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Leslie Hudson is a member of First Baptist Church in Dickson, Tennessee, where she is involved in the women's and music ministries and leads a high school girls Sunday school class.

Ross McLaren retired from Lifeway after 25 years and leads a multicultural LifeGroup at Brentwood (TN) Baptist Church.

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Amber Vaden
Team Leader

Mike Livingstone
Content Editor

Gia Thornburg
Production Editor

Darin Clark
Design Team Leader

Chad Hunter
Graphic Designer

Dwayne McCrary
Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

John Paul Basham
Director, Adult Ministry

Send questions/comments to
the team by email
ETB.adults@Lifeway.com
or by mail to:

Explore The Bible: Daily Discipleship Guide
200 Powell Place, Suite 100,
Brentwood, TN 37027-7707

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MEMORY VERSES



SESSION 1:

Immediately Jesus spoke to them. “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” - Matthew 14:27

SESSION 2:

“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines human commands.” - Matthew 15:8-9

SESSION 3:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” - Matthew 16:24

SESSION 4:

And a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown and were terrified. - Matthew 17:5b-6

SESSION 5:

“Shouldn’t you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” - Matthew 18:33

SESSION 6:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” - Matthew 28:19-20

SESSION 7:

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” - Matthew 19:26

SESSION 8:

“So the last will be first, and the first last.” - Matthew 20:16

SESSION 9:

For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name. - Philippians 2:9

SESSION 10:

He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command.” - Matthew 22:37-38

SESSION 11:

This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. - Matthew 24:44

SESSION 12:

“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” - Matthew 25:40

SESSION 13:

For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. - Matthew 26:28

SESSION 14:

But Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit. Suddenly, the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and the rocks were split. - Matthew 27:50-51



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

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

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

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

and resurrection, the central part of the book contains five sections of the collected teachings of Jesus. These five sections are found in chapters 5–7; 10; 13; 18; and 24–25. Each section closes with a formulaic statement, “when Jesus had finished” these teachings (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Between each of these sections of teachings, Matthew narrated the actions of Jesus in healing, casting out demons, raising the dead, and feeding thousands with only a small amount of food.

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

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

USING THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE



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

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

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

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

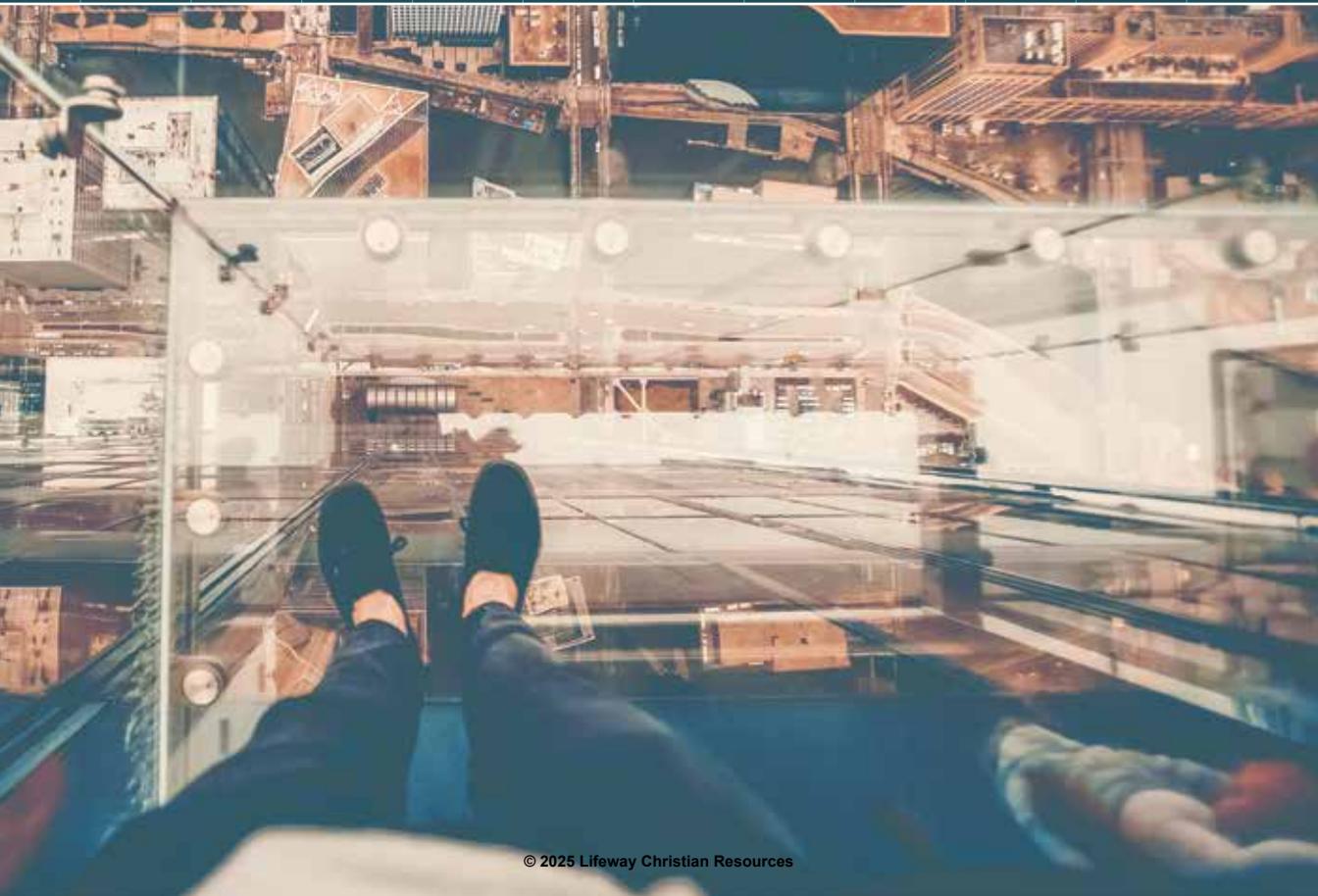


SESSION 1

Courage

MATTHEW 14:22-33

JESUS IS GREATER THAN ANYTHING WE FEAR.



Fear is a powerful foe that hinders us from progressing in life. Listen to people around you and you will hear any number of fears mentioned. Many people are terrified at the idea of public speaking. Others have fears of heights, failure, the dark, crowds, spiders, and snakes. Personal fears include injury and illness. Our fears impact our thinking, relating, and acting. Fear influences all aspects of life. Dealing with fear correctly is essential for a well-balanced life.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR BIGGEST FEARS?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Much of the opposition Jesus faced arose out of fear. The religious leaders opposed Him, in part, because they feared the wrath of Rome if there was a new “king” on the scene. They also feared they would lose power as leaders of the people.

At the close of Matthew 13, the people in Jesus’s hometown of Nazareth were overwhelmed by something they couldn’t explain—how Jesus had obtained such authority and learning. The theme of fear continued into chapter 14 with the account of Herod Antipas, a man motivated by fear.

Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great. He was a Roman appointed ruler over the provinces of Galilee and Perea. Jews hated him because he was not Jewish. His father, Herod the Great, was Idumean and his mother was a Samaritan. Antipas was denounced by John the Baptist because of his marriage to Herodias. Herodias had been the wife of Philip, half-brother to Antipas. She was also the niece of Antipas. Salome, Herodias’s daughter, tricked him into having John the Baptist beheaded.

Antipas was too motivated by fear of the opinion of others to go back on his promise to kill John.

Matthew 14:1-2 calls attention to Herod’s fear that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Herod was certain John had come back for revenge.

Following John’s death, Jesus withdrew to be alone with the disciples to sort through His response to such tragedy. This desire to be alone was interrupted by the crowds that followed. Jesus showed compassion by healing the sick late into the afternoon. The result was a hungry crowd of five thousand men, not including the women and children. Jesus miraculously fed all of them. This miracle fueled the crowd to attempt to forcibly enthrone Jesus as king (see John 6:15). Again Jesus removed Himself from the crowd by sending the disciples by boat across the lake while He sought solitude for prayer. At this point, a second miracle occurred that included overcoming the forces of nature.



22 Immediately **A** he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

23 After dismissing the crowds, he went up on the mountain **by himself to pray**. **B** Well into the night, he was there alone.

24 Meanwhile, the boat was already **some distance** **C** from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them.

25 Jesus came toward them walking on the sea **very early** **D** in the morning. **26** When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. “It’s a **ghost!**” **E** they said, and they cried out in fear.

27 Immediately Jesus spoke to them. “Have courage! **It is I.**” **F** Don’t be afraid.” **28** “Lord, **if** **G** it’s you,”

Peter answered him, “command me to come to you on the water.” **29** He said, “Come.” And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus.

30 But when he saw **the strength of the wind**, **H** he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me!” **31** Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33** Then those in the boat **worshiped him** **I** and said, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

A. After He fed the multitude, they wanted to crown Jesus king (John 6:15). So, He quickly dismissed His disciples and the crowd (Matt. 14:23).

B. Matthew emphasized that Jesus retreated to be alone with God—a common practice for Him (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:15-16; 6:12-13).

C. Literally, “many stadia.” A stadion measured about 600 feet. John 6:19 says the disciples had already rowed three or four miles, leaving them at least a mile from the far shore.

D. “Fourth watch” (KJV); Romans divided the day into four watches. The fourth watch was 3–6 a.m.

E. A spirit or possibly an angel. Since the disciples had no reference for walking on water, their conclusion would make sense in their culture.

F. Related to “I am,” God’s covenant name to Israel (Ex. 3:14). Jesus was revealing Himself as God.

G. In Greek, the conditional “if” can mean “since.” This conveys a measure of faith on Peter’s part.

H. Peter lost focus, taking his eyes off Jesus and putting them on his circumstances.

I. Worship represents the only proper response to seeing Jesus’s power and presence.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Jesus's Presence

(Matt. 14:22-27)

We can trust Jesus to walk with us in the storms of life.

- **When has Jesus's presence been especially meaningful to you?**

2. Jesus's Invitation

(Matt. 14:28-30)

When Jesus issues an invitation, we can step out with confidence knowing that He is with us.

- **What step of faith are you prayerfully considering right now?**

3. Jesus's Response

(Matt. 14:31-33)

Jesus's power should lead us to worship Him.

- **How do you tend to respond to Jesus's power when you experience it?**

Apply the Text

- **As a group, discuss various fears people face. How might the presence and power of Jesus allay those fears? Spend time in prayer giving those fears to Jesus and asking for His authoritative power to prevail over those fears.**

KEY DOCTRINE:

God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God.
(See John 1:1; Philippians 2:5-8.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Examine and reflect on similarities between two passages.

Look for similarities between the event in Matthew 14:22-33 and Matthew 8:23-27. Then look for differences between the two events. Explain why you can be certain these were two different events.

DID YOU KNOW?

An ancient fishing boat, called "the Jesus Boat" by archaeologists, was discovered in 1986 on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is dated from the first century AD and is the size and construction of boats used by fisherman like Peter and John, measuring 27 feet long, 7.5 feet wide, and 4.5 feet deep.



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

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



DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 14:22-23

Compare Matthew 14:22-23 to John 6:14-15.

The phrase “immediately he made the disciples get into the boat” sets the tone for the urgency of this moment. That urgency was brought on, according to John 6:14-15, by the fact that the crowd who had been miraculously fed was scheming how they might force Jesus to be their king and military deliverer. Quite possibly, the disciples were caught up in this fervor. Matthew used an unusually forceful verb to describe the action of Jesus as He *made* the disciples leave the scene. Jesus realized the urgency of removing them from the influence of the crowd. Therefore, He made the disciples proceed by boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The language of verse 22 reflects a reluctance on the part of the disciples to leave Jesus. Nevertheless, at His directive, they obediently set out. Jesus dismissed the crowd, ignoring their attempt to make Him king.

After dismissing the crowd, Jesus “went . . . by himself to pray.” This had been His intention before the crowd interrupted Him with requests for healing (Matt. 14:13). Jesus sought solitude after hearing the news of the death of John. Remember, while Jesus was fully God, He was also fully man and experienced the same wide range of emotions we do. Prayer was a regular part of Jesus’s life, but this was an occasion of a special need for prayer. Despite His need for rest, Jesus prayed long into the night.

When was the last time you prayed long into the night?



Day 2: Matthew 14:24-27

Highlight verse 27.

The disciples had reached a distance from land. As they rowed, “the wind was against them” and pushed them further from their destination. The Sea of Galilee was notorious for intense squalls that swept down from the mountains surrounding the lake. The severity of the storm is seen further in the words “battered by the waves,” which could be translated as the waves “tormented” the disciples.

Jesus came to them “very early in the morning.” The Greek translation sets the time as the “fourth watch,” or sometime between three and six in the morning. This meant that the disciples had probably been rowing in the storm for at least six to nine hours by the time Jesus arrived. Jesus came to the disciples for two reasons: to join them and to help them. Initially, though, His coming created a fearful panic. The panic came in the way in which He came to them: “walking on the sea.” When the disciples saw Him, they “cried out in fear.” They thought this was a ghost or a disembodied spirit. Jesus “immediately” called out to them, “Have courage, it is I.” Literally, Jesus declared, “I am,” using the divine name for God (Ex. 3:14). There was no need to “be afraid.” The disciples may not have recognized Jesus as He walked toward them among the mist and the waves, but the moment He spoke, they recognized their Master’s voice.

Which is more important—the object of faith or the amount of faith? Which did Jesus emphasize in verse 27?



Day 3: Matthew 14:28-30

Consider why Peter wanted to walk on water.

Peter called out to Jesus, “Lord, if it’s you.” The word *if* does not express uncertainty. Rather, the Greek grammar points to the meaning being “since it’s you.” We typically focus on Peter’s lack of faith in this instance (vv. 30-31). But what about the others? Peter, at least, was willing to take the risk to be like his Master and be with his Master. He knew there was safety with Jesus; without Him there was only danger.

Peter realized that he would have been unable to walk to Jesus without the permission and command of Jesus. At Peter’s request, Jesus commanded Peter to come. Jesus rewarded Peter’s devotion by inviting him to do the impossible. This was a genuine expression of Jesus’s love in response to Peter’s intense loyalty and devotion.

Peter’s faith started out strong. Initially, the water supported Peter as he walked toward Jesus. Peter soon realized the situation outside the boat was radically different than inside the boat. Quickly, he became distracted by the wind, and his faith and confidence wavered. As his doubts began to sink him, Peter cried out, “Lord, save me!” These words, “save me,” were the same words used by the disciples in the previous storm recorded in Matthew 8:25. The word *save* means to “rescue from death” or “keep alive.”

What step of faith do you need to take right now?



Day 4: Matthew 14:31-32

Reflect on Jesus’s question, “Why did you doubt?”

As soon as Peter began to sink and cried out to Jesus, Jesus “immediately” pulled him from the water. Next came a rebuke from Jesus, “why did you doubt?” The word *doubt* pictures a person being pulled in two directions. Peter had been caught between his intense loyalty and desire to be where Jesus was and do what Jesus did, and the terror of the storm and the waves. The fear of the situation won the tug-of-war and down went Peter. Jesus chastised him for having “little faith.” This was the same rebuke Jesus gave to all the disciples during the first storm narrated in Matthew 8:26. The implication of Jesus was that if Peter had not doubted, he would have continued to walk on the water.

Calm occurred the moment Peter and Jesus got into the boat. The presence of Jesus in the boat most likely calmed the storm in the hearts of the disciples as well. Not only did the wind stop, but suddenly the boat was at the shore, a goal the disciples had labored for most of the night to accomplish.

Keep in mind that these nature miracles of Jesus were not for show, but always to meet the need of the moment. In this case, it was the rescue of the disciples. This was a tangible response to a desperate situation.

In your walk with the Lord, where do you struggle with doubt? Why?



Day 5: Matthew 14:33

Focus on what this passage reveals about Jesus.

Verse 33 is the climax of this passage. The target of the whole incident was the declaration by the disciples of the deity of Jesus. The disciples “worshiped” Jesus and declared, “Truly you are the Son of God.” This chapter is the halfway point of the book of Matthew. This is the first time the disciples have declared that Jesus is the Son of God.

We are confronted, however, by the disciples’ slowness to comprehend the significance of Jesus. They experienced the calming of nature once before, they saw His miraculous healings and demon-deliverance, they participated as He miraculously fed a huge crowd of people. Yet here they are again astonished at His power and authority to overcome their fears and allay their situation. But they were more than simply amazed. They declared Jesus was worthy of worship because He was and is the Son of God. Their worship of Jesus was the remedy for their fears. They would waver again in their understanding of Jesus and His purpose on earth; yet this was a high point of these disciples following their Lord!

What was the climax of this whole incident—what Jesus did or who Jesus is? Why does that matter?

What does this passage reveal about the remedy for fear?

APPLY THE TEXT

Consider what it means to fear the Lord rather than fearing the storms and difficulties of life. How can you build “fear of the Lord” into the daily routine of your life? Take time to memorize Matthew 14:27 and use that verse in prayer when you are confronted with fear.

JOURNAL



SESSION 2

Real Devotion

MATTHEW 15:1-11,16-20

JESUS REJECTS SUPERFICIAL RELIGION.



We tend to like things that are genuine. We generally say no to knockoffs, artificial, or substitute anything. Our taste buds can discern the real thing compared to artificial sweeteners. We like the genuine. The same is true in relationships. We want friends who are genuine, not superficial. Likewise, God desires our relationship with Him and the practice of our faith to be genuine.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT YOU DEMAND TO BE GENUINE IN YOUR LIFE?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In Matthew 12, the Pharisees had challenged the disciples and Jesus over failure to keep their traditions regarding the Sabbath. In chapter 15, these religious leaders challenged the disciples and Jesus concerning their failure to keep dietary laws regarding the ceremonial cleansing of the hands.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees and scribes for their unbelief and their adherence to man-made tradition. To the crowd who had observed the interchange about dietary laws between Jesus and the Pharisees, He pointed out that what a person eats doesn't make a person unclean. Rather, uncleanness comes from within a person's heart.

The disciples were puzzled by Jesus's response to the Pharisees. They also didn't understand His answer to the crowd about what defiles a person.

After answering the disciples, Jesus, with the disciples, left Galilee and traveled into the region of Tyre and Sidon (modern-day Lebanon). He also was not ready for the final confrontation with the Jewish authorities.

Teaching still needed to be done to prepare the disciples.

It was here that a shift took place. While in Tyre, Jesus was petitioned by a Canaanite woman who wanted healing for her daughter. Jesus initially ignored the woman's plea, stating He was sent to the Jewish people. But after much persistence, Jesus granted the healing to the daughter of this Gentile woman. The implication is that Jesus extended the kingdom of God into the Gentile world.

This shift is reinforced by the narration of healing people and feeding four thousand men plus women and children in the Gentile region of the Decapolis. These two incidents portend the expansion of the kingdom of God to the Gentiles that is explored in great detail in Acts 10–28.



1 Then Jesus was approached by Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem, who asked, **2** “Why do your disciples break the **tradition of the elders?** **A** For they don’t **wash their hands** **B** when they eat.” **3** He answered them, “Why do you break **God’s commandment** **C** because of your tradition? **4** For God said: Honor your father and your mother; and, Whoever **speaks evil** **D** of father or mother must be put to death. **5** But you say, ‘Whoever tells his father or mother, “Whatever benefit you might have received from me is a **gift** **E** committed to the temple,” **6** he does not have to honor his father.’ In this way, you have **nullified** **F** the word of God because of your tradition. **7 Hypocrites!** **G** Isaiah prophesied correctly about you when he said: **8** This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. **9** They worship me **in vain,** **H** teaching as doctrines human commands.” **10** Summoning the crowd, he told them, “Listen and understand: **11** It’s not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth—this defiles a person. [. . .] **16** Do you still lack understanding?” he asked. **17** “Don’t you realize that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? **18** But what comes out of the mouth comes **from the heart,** **I** and this defiles a person. **19** For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander. **20** These are the things that defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile a person.”

A. “Age-old tradition” (NLT). Jewish oral tradition was codified in the Mishnah with instructions for various ceremonies.

B. This washing was a matter of ceremonial tradition, not personal hygiene. Jesus probably discounted this ritual along with His followers.

C. Jesus contrasted the Pharisees’ oral traditions with God’s actual laws. As He would point out, some oral traditions actually nullified God’s law.

D. “Curses” (NIV). More than disrespect, it implies wishing harm on someone or denouncing one’s relationship with someone.

E. The practice of “Corban.” Pledging resources to the temple to avoid using it to help others.

F. The oral traditions of the religious elite set aside the authority of God’s own commands.

G. Originally a neutral reference to an actor on a stage, it came to refer to duplicity or insincerity.

H. Implies emptiness, futility, folly. Teaching human ideas as God’s Word is hollow and useless.

I. The true source of human actions. Jesus emphasized the condition of our hearts apart from God’s grace. This corruption is highlighted by the list of sins in verse 19.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Broken Rules

(Matt. 15:1-6)

Honor God's laws above all other rules.

- **Why is it easy to confuse human rules with God's commands?**

2. Lip Service

(Matt. 15:7-11)

Pray for your heart to remain close to God.

- **What tempts our hearts to drift from God?**

3. Real Problem

(Matt. 15:16-20)

Reject superficial religion and focus on what matters most.

- **How do you imagine Jesus's tone? Angry? Frustrated? Compassionate? Why?**
- **How can we evaluate our hearts to prevent sinful attitudes from taking root? Why is it important to examine our hearts for sinful attitudes?**

Apply the Text

As a group, identify areas where it becomes easy in life to accept the superficial. Pinpoint the areas that are especially difficult for your group members. Discuss ways you can encourage one another to develop a deeper relationship with God that will avoid the inauthentic in your walk with God.

KEY DOCTRINE: **Salvation**

Regeneration is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Luke 13:3; John 3:3.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Take seriously all biblical commands for Christian living.

Read Matthew 15:1-6. Identify in these verses the commands based on God's Word. Identify any practices based on human tradition. Why do you think some people make man-made traditions the measure of spirituality (v. 2)? Make a list of ways you can avoid the trap of substituting human expectations for obedience to God's Word.

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 15:1-2

Consider the nature of the religious leaders' complaint.

The Pharisees were the leading religious party in Israel and were strict adherents to the law of Moses. Even more radical was their personal interpretation and application of the law. Their interpretation, or oral law as it was called, took precedent over the law given by God to Moses. Many of these Pharisees were also scribes who were learned scholars and copyists of the law. As such, they joined the Pharisees in a constant scrutiny of Jesus's every word and move.

What is prominent in this particular confrontation is that these Pharisees and scribes were "from Jerusalem." Perhaps they were sent by the Jewish Sanhedrin to check out the rumors circulating about Jesus's activity in Galilee. Because they were from Jerusalem, they would pose a greater and more serious threat to Jesus; they had greater authority than the religious leaders from Galilee.

Their complaint focused on why the disciples (and Jesus) violated the "tradition of the elders" by not performing the ceremonial washing of hands before eating. This practice was part of their man-made rules and regulations. The issue wasn't whether they washed their hands but how they did it and the exact amount of water used. The rules regarding hand washing were very precise and cumbersome.

What is a modern-day expression of "the tradition of the elders"?



Day 2: Matthew 15:3-6

Notice how Jesus set the groundwork for His response to the Pharisees.

Jesus ignored the specific criticism concerning hand washing and moved to the heart of the matter. The issue was man-made traditions versus the God-given law. He set the groundwork for His position against the superficial religion of the Pharisees by pointing to Scripture—specifically, the commandment to honor one's mother and father (Ex. 20:12). Jesus added another line from Exodus 21:17 to highlight the penalty for failure to honor one's parents. Having reminded the Pharisees of what the law said, Jesus pointed out the contradictory nature of their man-made traditions.

Corban was the dedication of money and other resources to the temple treasury to be paid upon one's death. This pledge money could not be given to anyone else. It was dedicated in advance, and the pledge could not be revoked. But the money that was pledged in corban could still be used for the benefit of the person pledging it as long as they were alive. In Jesus's example, a person could live high off his wealth, but when his indigent parents had a need, he could declare that his wealth was pledged to the temple, and he couldn't share any of it.

This selfish practice violated the command to honor one's parents. Thus, this superficial religious tradition violated both the letter and spirit of God's law given at Mount Sinai.

Why is it important to evaluate tradition in light of Scripture?



Day 3: Matthew 15:7-9

Reflect on why people are drawn to legalistic religion.

After detailing the way in which the Pharisees circumvented the law of Moses with their man-made traditions, Jesus scathingly denounced them. He called them “hypocrites,” a word that means to play act, to be a pretender, to put on a mask and act out a part. Jesus called them two-faced. To add weight to His denunciation, Jesus quoted from Isaiah (Isa. 29:13). In that passage, Isaiah denounced the people of his day for their inauthentic worship. They gave the appearance of a genuine relationship with God through their worship. In reality, they were simply going through the motions while ignoring God’s desires.

This tendency to substitute a human-based rule system for following God’s directives has always plagued mankind. Paul said the attempt to keep the law would not put a person in a right relationship with God. “For no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law” (Rom. 3:20). God’s law was designed to show us how sinful we are and how much we need a Savior. Because following God’s law perfectly is unobtainable, it was easier to create man-made rules that could be followed successfully. Keeping these traditions would provide a sense of self-satisfaction and pride. But following man-made traditions actually moved them farther from God.

What is the attraction of a religious system based on man-made rules?



Day 4: Matthew 15:10-11

Circle the words “listen and understand.”

Apparently, the Pharisees left in disgust. Turning to the crowd, Jesus explained His condemnation of the Pharisees. The words “listen and understand” were often used to introduce something very important that was being said. *Pay attention* is what Jesus meant. With that introduction, He challenged the whole system of the oral tradition regarding dietary laws. The extensive system of ceremonial hand washing was worthless and meaningless.

The law of Moses differentiated between “clean” and “unclean.” Much of this related to good hygiene practice but also to rid Israel of the pagan influence of the Egyptian religion. Over the centuries, the oral traditions related to clean and unclean had become complex. These man-made layers to the written law were the things to which Jesus strongly objected. Jesus declared that a person wasn’t corrupted or defiled by the food put into their mouth—but by the words and thoughts that came out of their mouth. Defilement comes from what’s inside a person. As Jesus will clarify in verses 18-19, what’s in the heart comes out of the mouth. As a result, genuine purity before God isn’t about food going in; it’s defined by what we allow to rule our hearts each day.

Why is it important to examine your heart for sinful attitudes?



Day 5: Matthew 15:16-20

Compare Matthew 15:16-20 to Jeremiah 17:9-10.

Peter, as spokesman for the disciples, asked for an explanation of the parable that Jesus had given. It was not so much that the disciples didn't understand what Jesus had said. More likely, they found such a hard teaching difficult to accept.

Jesus set up a contrast between the physical and the spiritual. He told the disciples that food is only physical and does not impact the spiritual. Instead, what is eaten goes through the digestive system and "is eliminated." No matter how "clean" or "unclean" food might be, eating it does not impact a person spiritually.

The words of one's mouth reflect the condition of a person's heart. It is a person's evil attitudes, motives, and thoughts that corrupt the spiritual condition of a person.

Continuing His explanation, Jesus elaborated on the things that defile the heart—"evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander." Many of these defiling elements are contained in the sixth through ninth commandments of the Ten Commandments. Each of these outward actions arise first as a thought or an attitude of the heart. It is the heart that needs to be transformed. The way to be "clean" is to allow God to cleanse your heart.

Pray Psalms 51:10 and 139:23-24.

APPLY THE TEXT

Take time to prayerfully evaluate your life. What are some things you are substituting for a genuine relationship with God? In prayer, confess these to God. What steps can you take to ensure that your relationship with God is not becoming superficial?

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SESSION 3

Following Jesus

MATTHEW 16:13-26

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD SENT BY GOD.



The world is made up of leaders and followers. The majority are followers. As followers, it is important who we follow. History is replete with people who followed others to destruction and death. Leaders like Jim Jones of the Jonestown massacre and David Koresh of the Branch Davidian tragedy led their followers to disaster. Each of us must choose leaders wisely. Follow those who lead to life and not to death.

WHAT ARE THE TRAITS OF LEADERS YOU WANT TO FOLLOW?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Matthew 16 begins with another confrontation. Matthew introduced another group who opposed Jesus: the Sadducees. These leaders of Judaism were the wealthy aristocrats. Their political party oversaw the temple. From this group came the high priest and the high priestly family. They were the power-brokers of Judaism. They were conservative in their approach to Scripture and rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees. They sought to follow only the writings of Moses.

These Sadducees had teamed up with the Pharisees, their archenemies, to trap and eliminate Jesus. In verse 1, they asked Jesus for “a sign from heaven.” Although Jesus had performed many miraculous signs, they were not really interested. They simply wanted to get rid of Jesus.

After a scathing condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees (vv. 2-4), Jesus withdrew with the disciples to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (v. 5). Their journey would take them north to the area of Caesarea Philippi, where the events in

this week’s study take place. Thus began a new phase in the ministry of Jesus. From Caesarea Philippi, Jesus would travel south directly to Jerusalem. This move signaled the end of the Galilean ministry and the beginning of the final weeks of Jesus’s earthly life, culminating in His arrest and crucifixion in Jerusalem.

At some point on the trip to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus warned the disciples about the teachings, “the leaven” (v. 6), of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The disciples missed the intent of Jesus and thought He was chiding them for not bringing food with them for the journey. Jesus reminded them of the baskets of leftovers from the two miraculous feedings He had performed. Matthew used two different terms for “baskets” (vv. 9-10), pointing to the probability that the feeding of the five thousand (14:13-21) took place among Jews, while the feeding of the four thousand (15:32-39) took place in Gentile territory.



13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the **Son of Man A** is?” **14** They replied, “Some say **John the Baptist; B** others, **Elijah; C** still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” **15** “But you,” he asked them, “who do **you D** say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter answered, “You are **the Messiah, E** the Son of the living God.” **17** Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because **flesh and blood F** did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven. **18** And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this **rock G** I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. **19** I will give you **the keys of the kingdom H** of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.” **20** Then he gave the disciples orders to tell no one that he was the Messiah. **21** From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was **necessary I** for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. **22** Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, “Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!” **23** Jesus turned and told Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you’re not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.” **24** Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. **25** For whoever wants to **save his life J** will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it. **26** For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life?”

A. A favorite term of Jesus for Himself. The term affirms both His deity and humanity.

B. Herod Antipas had beheaded John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29). Upon hearing about Jesus, he thought John had been raised from the dead.

C. Malachi 4:5 identified Elijah as the forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus later clarified that this referred to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14).

D. The placement of “you” in the original language is emphatic, revealing Jesus’s desire for a personal response.

E. Literally “Anointed One.” This is the first time the disciples acknowledged Jesus as Messiah.

F. Jesus emphasized that Peter’s confession had a divine origin.

G. A Greek play on words with Peter’s name highlights the significant role he and his proclamation would play in church history.

H. A reference to authority. This authority is exercised in the preaching of the gospel.

I. Jesus’s death and resurrection were no accident, but central to the plan of God (Acts 2:23-24).

J. To seek your best life here on earth (cf. 16:26) is pointless if you forfeit eternal life, which can only be found in following Jesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Know the Messiah

(Matt. 16:13-20)

We cannot follow Jesus fully until we know and accept His true identity.

- **Why is it important to understand who Jesus is?**

2. Embrace His Mission

(Matt. 16:21-23)

We cannot follow Jesus fully until we accept His mission as Messiah and Savior.

- **How do we let our own agendas replace God's greater plans?**

3. Become His Disciple

(Matt. 16:24-26)

We cannot follow Jesus fully until we sacrifice our personal agendas to Him.

- **What does it mean to deny ourselves and to carry our cross?**

Apply the Text

- **Discuss in your group about the various contemporary opinions regarding Jesus. Why do you think people hold these opinions about Jesus? Ask your group members why they hold their opinion about Jesus.**

KEY DOCTRINE:

God the Son

In His substitutionary death on the cross Christ made provision for the redemption of men from sin. (See Isaiah 53:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:21.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Read, reflect on, and apply a Bible passage.

Focus on Matthew 16:24. Identify the three qualifications for becoming a true disciple of Jesus. Reflect on the meaning of each qualification by responding to these questions: What does it mean to deny oneself? What are some things that hinder me from denying myself? What does it mean to take up your cross? What does it mean to follow Jesus? For you, what is the next step in following Jesus?

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 16:13-14

Note the various opinions about Jesus.

The title “Son of Man” speaks of Jesus’s dual nature of being fully God and fully man. Jesus used it to point to His identity as God’s Messiah. He asked the disciples the question in verse 13 to sharpen their understanding of who He is.

The disciples gave a variety of answers they had heard from the crowds. John the Baptist had been executed by Herod Antipas some time before this, thus the identification that this was John the Baptist raised from the dead. The same would be true of the other names mentioned. Malachi prophesied that Elijah would appear before the coming of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5). Jeremiah, who preached judgment and was oppressed by his enemies, was also mentioned as well as one of the prophets. Obviously, the crowds were trying to comprehend who Jesus really was. He spoke for God, He performed miracles, and He rebuked the current religious establishment. Yet He had not given any indication that He would soon lead a revolution against Rome on behalf of the Jewish people.

The common belief was that one or more of these prophets would serve as a forerunner to the Messiah. Thus, the crowd most likely thought Jesus was a forerunner to the Messiah and not the Messiah Himself. They struggled to embrace Him as Messiah because He didn’t fit their profile.

Who do people today say Jesus is?



Day 2: Matthew 16:15-18

Identify the promise in verse 18.

Jesus turned to the opinion of the disciples. Peter answered on behalf of all the disciples. He acknowledged that Jesus was uniquely “the Messiah.” Peter also acknowledged that Jesus was “the Son of the living God.” The use of the definite article “the” pointed to the fact that Jesus is uniquely the Son and there is no other. Jesus called Peter “blessed” and declared that his answer was given under the Father’s inspiration.

Not all Bible students agree on the interpretation of Jesus’s statement, “on this rock I will build my church.” Following the conventional rules of Greek grammar, the words “you are Peter” immediately followed by the declaration “on this rock” would indicate that Peter is the rock. The Gospels and the first chapters of Acts point to Peter as being the recognized leader of the apostles. Peter, however, most certainly was used as a representative of all the disciples. They were the ones Jesus was training to continue the movement He had begun. While Peter and the apostles would be foundational to the church in a unique sense, Jesus is uniquely the cornerstone of the church. (See Eph. 2:20.)

The church that Jesus builds will withstand any onslaught from Satan. This is seen in the statement “the gates of Hades” cannot destroy Christ’s church. Nothing will be able to stop the growth of the church.

Who do you say Jesus is?



Day 3: Matthew 16:19-20

Identify the meaning of “the keys.”

Peter again is representative of all the disciples, and for that matter all believers. Jesus has given to the church He established the “keys” or the authority to “bind” and to “loose,” or to close and open. Note that the keys are to the “kingdom of heaven.” This, of course, represents the rule and reign of God in the hearts of men and women who are a part of God’s family.

The idea, then, of binding and loosing relates to entrance into God’s kingdom. The apostles and prophets, and for that matter all believers, open the kingdom or close the kingdom to others through witnessing and proclamation of the good news of Christ. Such action will also involve assurance of forgiveness to those who were enslaved to sin (see John 20:23).

Here is another instance Jesus gave the command to tell no one concerning His identity (Matt. 8:4; Mark 7:36; 9:9). Jesus was aware that He was part of a timetable that must play out during His time on earth. This particular moment was not the proper time for revealing Jesus’s identity as the Son of God. There would be time for that later.

What are you doing with the “keys of the kingdom”?



Day 4: Matthew 16:21-23

Circle the word “necessary” in verse 21.

“From then on . . .” This was the turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Not only is this the transition point between the Galilean ministry and the events in Jerusalem, but it is also a shift in focus for Jesus. No longer are His teachings about the kingdom and His compassionate healings the central thrust. Now Jesus’s life moved rapidly toward the real reason He came. It was “necessary” for him to suffer and be killed and then be raised from the dead.

Presumably, Peter thought he knew what was best for Jesus and took it upon himself to rebuke Jesus for speaking of His impending death. This may have arisen from Peter’s brash personality, or his supposed “authority” he had received from Jesus calling him the “rock.” Or it could have arisen out of love for Jesus and fear of the future.

Jesus rebuked Peter using very similar words of rebuke given to Satan in Matthew 4:10. Peter took the perspective of Satan in trying to keep Jesus from carrying out God’s plan of salvation. In rebuking Peter, Jesus was really, once again, rebuking Satan and denouncing this latest temptation thrown His way.

How have you let your own agenda replace God’s greater plans?



Day 5: Matthew 16:24-26

Contemplate the meaning of the paradox in verse 25.

Jesus set His face toward the suffering that awaited Him. He also knew that the path of following Him would lead many of His followers to suffer also. Those who follow Him must “deny” themselves. This points to a denunciation of self being on the throne of one’s life instead of God.

The one who follows Jesus must also “take up his cross.” The cross was an instrument of death. The follower of Christ must be ready and willing to pay any price that following Jesus might bring. It involved suffering and even the possibility of death. Many of those following Jesus would experience this all too soon.

Following Jesus involves a paradox. Through a willingness to lose his life through unconditional obedience to Christ, one will find life. The one unwilling to sacrifice all for Jesus in an effort to “save his life,” will ultimately lose the abundant and eternal life promised through Jesus. The paradox is that life comes through death and self-denial; death, on the other hand, comes to those seeking to live.

The ultimate question in life is simply this: what are we willing to “exchange” to experience life to the fullest, now and for eternity? Don’t settle for anything short of a total sell-out to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

What does it mean to deny yourself and to carry your cross?

APPLY THE TEXT

Jot down the costs of following Jesus. Then create a list of the costs of not following Jesus. Which will you choose?

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SESSION 4

Glory

MATTHEW 17:1-13

JESUS FULFILLS GOD'S MESSAGE OF HOPE FOUND IN THE LAW AND PROPHETS.



Decision making can be difficult. Often, we seek some sign that this is the right direction and the correct decision to make. Is this the right job to take? Is this the best house to buy? Is she the one for me? How do we know for certain? If we only had a sign! Wouldn't it be great if someone magically appeared to give you affirmation that what you are doing is correct? How about a sign in the sky, or a voice out of the blue?

WHAT KIND OF SIGN WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE
CONCERNING A DECISION YOU NEED TO MAKE?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Matthew 16 ends with Jesus's curious statement that some of the disciples would live to see "the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28). Most likely, He was referring to the transfiguration event in the opening verses of chapter 17. Following this event, Jesus descended the mountain with Peter, James, and John to where the other disciples were waiting. Jesus found them embroiled in confusion and frustration. This descent from the sublime experience on the mountaintop down to the chaos of the disciples' dilemma mirrors so much of life for many of us. In fact, partially arising out of this event in Jesus's life comes the common expression of going from the "mountaintop experience" down into the valley of reality.

The "valley" that the disciples faced was their inability to meet a father's request for healing his demon-possessed son (17:16). The nine disciples had failed to heal the boy, even though earlier they had been given authority to cast out demons (10:8). Speaking to the crowd as well as the disciples, Jesus condemned their unbelief (17:17).

The words of Jesus's condemnation echo a similar condemnation on the people of Israel in the wilderness (Deut. 32:5). After the healing, the nine disciples questioned Jesus: "Why couldn't we drive it out?" Jesus's answer pointed to the little faith of the disciples (Matt. 17:19-20).

Later, as the group was gathering in Galilee for the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus once again predicted His impending death (vv. 22-23). Such a statement brought great grief to the disciples. Now, instead of fighting against the idea of Jesus's approaching death, they were greatly distressed at the prospect of His death.

Matthew 17 closes with a question to Jesus concerning the temple tax. Jesus answered the question by paying the tax in a most unusual way (vv. 24-27).



Matthew 17:1-13

1 After six days **A** Jesus took **Peter, James, and his brother John** **B** and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. **2** He was **transfigured** **C** in front of them, and his face shone like the sun; his clothes became as white as the light. **3** Suddenly, **Moses and Elijah** **D** appeared to them, talking with him. **4** Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it’s good for us to be here. If you want, I will set up three **shelters** **E** here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” **5** While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and a **voice from the cloud** **F** said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!” **6** When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown and **were terrified**. **G** **7** Jesus came up, touched them, and said, “Get up; don’t be afraid.” **8** When they looked up they saw no one except Jesus alone. **9** As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” **10** So the disciples asked him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” **11** “Elijah is coming and will restore everything,” he replied. **12** “But I tell you: Elijah has **already come**, **H** and they didn’t recognize him. On the contrary, they did whatever they pleased to him. In **the same way** **I** the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” **13** Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

Key Words

A. Approximately a week after Peter’s confession of Jesus as Messiah at Caesarea Philippi.

B. Jesus’s inner circle. They were often present for significant moments in Jesus’s ministry (see Matt. 26:37; Mark 5:37).

C. “Transformed” (NLT). Jesus did not reflect the glory of God as Moses did (Ex. 34:33-35). He radiated the glory of God (John 17:5; Heb 1:3).

D. Moses represented the Law, while Elijah symbolized the Prophets. Together, they encompassed the entirety of God’s Word.

E. “Tabernacles” (KJV). Likely, booths such as the ones built during the Feast of Tabernacles.

F. This is the second time Matthew recorded God the Father affirming Jesus as His beloved Son (see Matt. 3:17).

G. Encounters with God’s glory leave people filled with fear and reverence (Isa. 6:5; Dan. 10:8-9; Rev. 1:17).

H. Malachi 4:5 was fulfilled in John the Baptist, who came “in the spirit and power” of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

I. John’s suffering and death foreshadowed the suffering and death of Jesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Transfigured

(Matt. 17:1-3)

Pray that you would see the glory of Jesus.

- **How do you imagine Peter, James, and John reacting to Jesus's transfigured appearance?**
- **Where do we see Jesus's glory revealed each day?**

2. Overshadowed

(Matt. 17:4-8)

Worship is always the appropriate response to Jesus.

- **What was Peter suggesting in verse 4? Why do you think he spoke up?**
- **What hinders our ability to hear and act on Jesus's words? What may hinder a person from taking Jesus's teachings seriously?**

3. Instructed

(Matt. 17:9-13)

Seek to know Jesus better by learning God's Word.

- **Why do you think Jesus instructed His disciples to remain silent about the transfiguration until after His resurrection?**
- **How are you making an effort to grow in your understanding of Jesus, His identity, and mission?**

Apply the Text

- **Is it possible for your group to experience the glory of Jesus in its midst? Discuss with your group. What would be the appropriate response if you did?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

The Scriptures

All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

(See Luke 24:44-46; John 5:39.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use cross references to gain a better understanding of a biblical concept.

The New Testament not only records accounts of Jesus's transfiguration but also teaches that believers likewise will experience transformation. Read the following passages and determine what each says about a believer's transformation: Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; 2 Corinthians 3:18; and Philippians 3:20-21. How and when does this transformation take place in the life of a believer? How is our transformation similar to or different from what Jesus experienced?

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 17:1-2

Compare verse 2 to Matthew 16:28.

The words “after six days” indicate the incident narrated in these verses is linked with what went before. This refers to the statement of Jesus that some of His disciples would not die until they had seen the Son of Man (Matt. 16:28). Now, a week or so later, this declaration by Jesus took place.

With Peter, James, and John, Jesus climbed a “high mountain.” This would have been a mountain near the location of Caesarea Philippi where they had been the week before. Once they reached the mountain-top, Jesus was “transfigured” before the disciples. The word *transfigured* speaks of being transformed. Matthew said that Jesus’s “face shone like the sun.” In addition, “his clothes became as white as the light.” Hebrews 1:3 talks of Jesus as being the radiance of God’s glory. Here was that glory shining through.

This transformation was like the Shekinah glory of God in the Old Testament where God appeared in the form of dazzling and blinding light. Peter later wrote about this event: “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory . . .” (2 Pet. 1:16b-17a). John also wrote of this in John 1:14, “We observed his glory.”

Where can you see Jesus’s glory revealed?



Day 2: Matthew 17:3-4

Consider the significance of the appearance of Moses and Elijah.

Moses and Elijah also appeared with Jesus before the three disciples. They were the representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Their purpose was to point to the coming Messiah. With the presence of Moses and Elijah, the affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah moved to an even higher level in the eyes of the three disciples.

Peter’s reaction was to get involved in hosting Moses and Elijah. Mark and Luke comment that Peter was at a loss for words and uttered the first thing that came to mind (Mark 9:5-6; Luke 9:33). His declaration was that it was “good for us to be here.” Most likely, Peter was indicating that it was good in the sense that he, James, and John were there to help. He was not content to observe this scene but wanted to be in the scene. Apparently, Peter didn’t grasp the significance of the conversation of Jesus with Moses and Elijah concerning His coming arrest and crucifixion (see Luke 9:31).

Peter thought that such distinguished guests needed shelter from the sun. He probably had in mind the shelters of branches and leaves used at the Feast of Tabernacles. Such a shelter might encourage these visitors to stay longer! Luke 9:33 indicates that Moses and Elijah were starting to leave when Peter spoke. Perhaps Peter hoped such a move would keep them from departing.

**How was Peter’s response commendable?
How was it inappropriate?**



Day 3: Matthew 17:5

Compare verse 5 to Matthew 3:17 and John 12:28.

Peter's suggestion was interrupted by the appearance of a "bright cloud." This is reminiscent of several Old Testament appearances of God in a cloud such as during the events of the exodus from Egypt (Ex. 13:21). The cloud "covered them" or overshadowed them, implying that it produced shade.

Out of the cloud came a voice. The word emphasizes that the volume startled the disciples. The Gospels record two other occasions when the voice of God spoke words of affirmation to Jesus (Matt. 3:17; John 12:28).

The voice heard on the mount of transfiguration served as another affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah. This verbal endorsement, the visual transformation of Jesus, and the supernatural visitation of Moses and Elijah, served as unmistakable proof that Jesus was the Messiah.

The phrase "my beloved Son" speaks of Jesus as being of the same essence and divine nature as God the Father. By speaking from the cloud, God the Father wanted the three disciples to know of Jesus's uniqueness and superiority over spiritual giants like Moses and Elijah. God instructed the disciples to listen to Jesus; that is, they were to pay attention and submit to His authority in obedience.

What is significant about the voice from the cloud?



Day 4: Matthew 17:6-9

Underline the words "don't be afraid."

The startling voice from the cloud produced fright and awe in the disciples—"they fell facedown." They were "terrified" at the supernatural sights and sounds of the experience. Mark's Gospel pointed to this fear as the reason Peter spoke without thinking (Mark 9:6).

As the terrified disciples lay with their faces to the ground, Jesus came up and "touched them." He told them, "Get up; don't be afraid." In the presence of Jesus, there was no reason to be afraid.

When the disciples stood up, everything had returned to normal. Jesus's appearance was as it used to be. Moses, Elijah, and the bright cloud were gone. They saw no one except Jesus alone. Everyone else was gone, but they still had Jesus!

"As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded" the disciples to keep what they had seen to themselves. This was the final time Jesus asked for silence about His miracles and identity. This time, however, He gave a time limit on His prohibition. They were to remain silent until "the Son of Man is raised from the dead." The experience that the three disciples had witnessed would be impossible for others to believe. This included even the other disciples. Once the miracle of the resurrection took place, the transfiguration would easily be accepted as fact. Keep in mind that this event on the mountaintop was a foreshadowing of the glory of Jesus's resurrection and second coming.

When has recognizing the presence of Jesus alleviated your fears?



Day 5: Matthew 17:10-13

Consider why the religious leaders failed to recognize what God was doing in John the Baptist and Jesus.

The presence of Elijah raised a question for the disciples. If Jesus was the Messiah, then why didn't Elijah come first, as "the scribes" said? Jesus affirmed the scribes were right about Elijah coming. The problem was that the religious leaders didn't recognize Elijah when he came. Jesus was alluding to John the Baptist. Luke 1:17 indicated that John the Baptist would "go before him [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah."

Not only did the religious leaders fail to recognize John the Baptist as the promised coming of Elijah, but they treated him harshly. "In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." The ill-treatment of John the Baptist served as a foreshadowing of the Messiah's own suffering. Jesus pointed to the death of "Elijah"—John the Baptist—as a harbinger of His own death by the Jewish leaders.

The three disciples were able to connect the dots and realize that Jesus was speaking of the coming of John the Baptist. Slowly, the disciples were growing in their understanding of Jesus, His identity, and His mission. Such an understanding, though, only heightened their sadness about the days ahead.

How are you making an effort to grow in your understanding of Jesus and His mission?

APPLY THE TEXT

How have you seen the glory of Jesus in your life? What does it mean for you to reflect His glory?

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SESSION 5

Forgiveness

MATTHEW 18:21-35

JESUS CALLS US TO FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER AS HE HAS FORGIVEN US.



“I’m sorry!” Those two words carry worlds of meaning. When a waitress uses them over and over during the thirty minutes or so that you are at her table, they often lose any meaning. But when they come from someone who has hurt you and you can sense their anguish over that hurt, those words can be liberating. Forgiving others can be difficult but is essential for good spiritual and mental well-being. Jesus calls us to forgive others as He has forgiven us.

WHY IS IT OFTEN SO DIFFICULT TO FORGIVE SOMEONE WHO HAS OFFENDED YOU?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

At the end of Matthew 17, Jesus sent Peter on a special mission. The disciples assumed Peter was once again singled out for something special (Matt. 17:27). Not only that, but Peter, James, and John had spent time with Jesus on the mountain. Motivated by jealousy, the disciples argued about who was greatest and who should be given special privileges and assignments.

The immaturity of the disciples led Jesus to teach extensively about relationships. First, He placed a small child in their midst. Referring to the child, Jesus pointed out that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was the one who, like a child, was characterized by humility. That humility would be seen in absolute dependence on the Father for grace and mercy just like a child depends on parents for nurturing in life (18:1-5).

Jesus spoke of “little ones,” by which He was speaking figuratively of those who follow Him. He gave a stern warning about causing a fellow believer to stumble. The one who caused “one of these little ones . . . to fall

away” would be better off suffering a terrible drowning than to face God’s wrath for their actions (vv. 6-9).

Jesus supported His concern for His little ones by telling a familiar story about a lost sheep among ninety-nine who did not stray. This reinforced God’s care for His little ones, showing that He was willing to do whatever was necessary to protect them (vv. 10-14).

In addition to God’s searching for them when they go astray, He gives to the community of believers—the “church” (v. 17)—the responsibility to work with straying believers to restore their relationship with God and with other believers.

Arising out of these teachings about relationships, Peter approached Jesus with a question concerning forgiving others (v. 21). The remainder of the chapter records Jesus speaking of the need for His followers to forgive one another just as God has forgiven them.



21 Then Peter approached him and asked, “Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as **seven times**?” **A 22** “I tell you, not as many as seven,” Jesus replied, “but **seventy times seven**. **B 23** For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to **settle accounts** **C** with his servants. **24** When he began to settle accounts, one who owed **ten thousand** **D** talents was brought before him. **25** Since he did not have the money to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. **26** At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything.’ **27** Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan. **28** That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him **a hundred denarii**. **E** He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, ‘Pay what you owe!’ **29** At this, his fellow servant fell down and began begging him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ **30** But he **wasn’t willing**. **F** Instead, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed. **31** When the other servants saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened. **32** Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, ‘You **wicked servant!** **G** I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. **33** Shouldn’t you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ **34** And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed. **35** So also my **heavenly Father** **H** will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister **from your heart.**” **I**

A. A biblical number of completeness. It more than doubles the Jewish tradition of three times.

B. “Seventy-seven” (ESV; NIV). Jesus went well beyond Peter’s suggestion. The exact number of times was not the point, but unlimited forgiveness fueled by repentance.

C. The parable is a picture of judgment and provides an illustration of God’s forgiveness.

D. “Ten thousand” was the highest number imaginable at that time, and a “talent” was the largest measure of currency. As a result, this debt would have been impossible to repay.

E. About one hundred days’ wages. This was much smaller than what the first man had owed the king and could have been paid back in time.

F. This was a stark contrast to the king’s response.

G. The man was not wicked because of the debt, but because of his lack of compassion.

H. The king represents how God deals with us—and what He expects from His forgiven children.

I. True forgiveness is genuine and internal, flowing from a heart transformed by God’s mercy. It is not surface-level or forced.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Question of Forgiveness

(Matt. 18:21-22)

We are not to put limits on our willingness to forgive.

- **What do you think is a reasonable number of times to forgive someone who hurts you?**
- **What kind of response do you think Peter expected from Jesus?**

2. Compassionate King

(Matt. 18:23-27)

We can know that God is compassionate and willing to forgive.

- **How do you see grace at work in these verses?**

3. Unforgiving Servant

(Matt. 18:28-35)

We are to forgive one another in the way God has forgiven us.

- **How much did the second servant owe? How does that contrast with the amount the first servant owed the king?**
- **What are some dangers of believers failing to forgive others?**

Apply the Text

As a group, consider the excuses people often give for not forgiving others. Discuss whether these excuses are valid and if they can apply to our relationships as followers of Jesus.

- **How should the experience of God's forgiveness impact how we approach fellow believers who offend us?**

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 Romans 5:6; Ephesians 2:8-10.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Compare passages to gain insight into a biblical teaching.

Compare Matthew 18:27 with verses 34-35. In verse 27 the king released and forgave his servant's huge debt. In verse 34 the king revoked his forgiveness and cast the unforgiving servant into a place of torture. Verse 35 states this is what God will do to "every one of you" unless you forgive other believers "from your heart." Reflect on the following questions: What is the danger of basing a doctrine on a parable? What other passages can you cite to indicate that a believer does not lose his or her salvation? Summarize the main point of Jesus's parable and how His warning in verse 35 should be understood.

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 18:21-22

Compare these verses to Colossians 3:13.

In verses 15-20, Jesus spoke about the situation where one believer sins against another. This raised a question in Peter's mind. He asked, "How many times must I forgive?" He wondered, what's the limit on forgiving and restoring "my brother," a fellow believer?

Peter most likely was aware of the teaching of the rabbis that forgiving three times was the limit. At an earlier point in his life, Peter may have balked at forgiving even three times. But his life was being transformed. His suggestion of forgiving "seven times" is evident of that transformation. Peter probably thought he was being generous with his suggestion.

Jesus's answer must have surprised Peter. He told Peter to forgive "seventy times seven" instead of just seven times. Some translations follow the Greek and use the number "seventy-seven." Regardless, Jesus was not calling on His followers to keep track of the number of times they offer forgiveness. Rather, He was speaking of unlimited forgiveness.

God's forgiveness is not restricted and is unlimited. That should be the way we relate to those who sin against us. Jesus reinforced this principle with a parable in verses 23-35.

How many times are you willing to forgive someone who hurts you?



Day 2: Matthew 18:23-25

Identify the meaning of "ten thousand talents."

The king in the parable represents God, and the servants represent those who are His followers. The picture of the king wanting to "settle accounts" is a picture of judgment. It was an occasion to take inventory and balance the books.

As this king began to settle accounts with his servants, he came across a servant who owed him an enormous sum of money—"ten thousand talents." A talent was a unit of measurement that equaled around 70 pounds. This would have been an inordinate amount of money in the Roman and Hebrew monetary system. While various scholars have sought to estimate the debt of this man as being in the millions of US dollars, Jesus was not attempting to set an exact amount. The Greek word for "ten thousand" was the highest number in that language and is the word from which we get our term "myriad," meaning a great number. Jesus's point is that the man owed an enormous amount that he would never be able to repay.

For the king, the only remedy was that the man, his family, and all his possessions be seized and "sold to pay the debt." Jesus was showing that those who follow Christ have a huge debt that we cannot pay—the debt of our sin against God. The result of that debt is that we deserve to suffer the consequences of such a debt.

What do these verses reveal about sin?



Day 3: Matthew 18:26-27

Underline the words “compassion,” “released,” and “forgave.”

Upon hearing the sentence from the king, the servant threw himself on the ground in penitence. This servant recognized how desperate his situation was and how bankrupt he was before the king. His only hope was the mercy of the king.

In hopes of eliciting mercy for his situation, he begged the king to “be patient.” The English word *longsuffering* loosely translates the Greek word for “patient.”

After crying out for mercy, the servant made a promise that he couldn’t possibly keep, “I will pay you everything.” His attitude was genuine, but his stated goal was impossible. In many ways, his approach mirrors that of people today who try to bargain with God and work to make things right. Such an approach is a fruitless effort at solving a problem that can’t be solved through sincerity alone. Only an undeserved pardon from the King can resolve the problem.

Only through the “compassion” of the king was this man’s debt forgiven. The word *compassion* signifies intense feelings of empathy and pity. The servant’s pleading moved the heart of the king toward forgiving the debt. As a result, the king released the servant and forgave the debt. In no way did the servant deserve this. The release and forgiveness came solely because of the compassion of the king.

How do you see grace at work in these verses?



Day 4: Matthew 18:28-31

Pay attention to how the forgiven servant became unforgiving.

Jesus introduced another servant who owed the forgiven servant a paltry amount—“a hundred denarii”—the equivalent of 100 days’ wages. This was a debt that could reasonably be paid off over time. But when the forgiven servant found this debtor, he “grabbed him” and “started choking him,” demanding immediate payment in full. The forgiven servant had become the unforgiving servant.

In a manner like the pleading of the forgiven servant in verse 26, this debtor “fell down” and begged for more time to repay the debt. Using almost the same words as the first servant, he pleaded, “Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.”

“But he wasn’t willing” points to the fact that this forgiven servant made the deliberate choice to close his heart to mercy. He who had been forgiven so much should have been able to show tenderness toward someone who owed such an insignificant amount. Keep in mind that Jesus was illustrating the need for forgiveness between fellow believers. Callous indifference in no way reflects the mercy and grace of God the Father.

Instead of forgiving, the unforgiving servant “threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed.” The indebted slave didn’t need to cry out on his own behalf. His fellow servants observed all the action. They went to the master and gave a full report of “everything that had happened.”

How should these verses change the way you relate to people?



Day 5: Matthew 18:32-35

Identify the warning in these verses.

The king boiled with anger as he summoned the unforgiving servant into his court. Notice now that the king called the servant “wicked.” The servant’s true nature had been revealed. At his very core, this man was wicked, and it showed in how he treated a fellow servant.

The king reminded the unforgiving servant of the huge debt that had been forgiven him. He asked the unforgiving servant, “Shouldn’t you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” An important principle is this: those who have received mercy must show themselves merciful to others.

The king turned the servant over, not to the jailers, but to the tormentors. The Greek word translated “jailers” here is more accurately translated “torturers.” The unforgiving servant would endure torture because of his wickedness.

As in the case of the unforgiving servant, an unwillingness to forgive others exposes the true condition of the heart as “wicked.” A person who has experienced God’s forgiveness at a deep heart level will be eager to share forgiveness with others to whom forgiveness is due. Thus, the response of Jesus to Peter’s question has returned full circle. We who have been forgiven so much—a debt we couldn’t pay—must willingly forgive others who have offended us. This is especially true with the one who is a brother or sister in Christ.

What are some dangers of believers failing to forgive others?

APPLY THE TEXT

Spend time thinking through your relationships. Who comes to mind when you think about the need to forgive? What might be the consequences of not offering forgiveness? What might be the benefits of forgiving that person?

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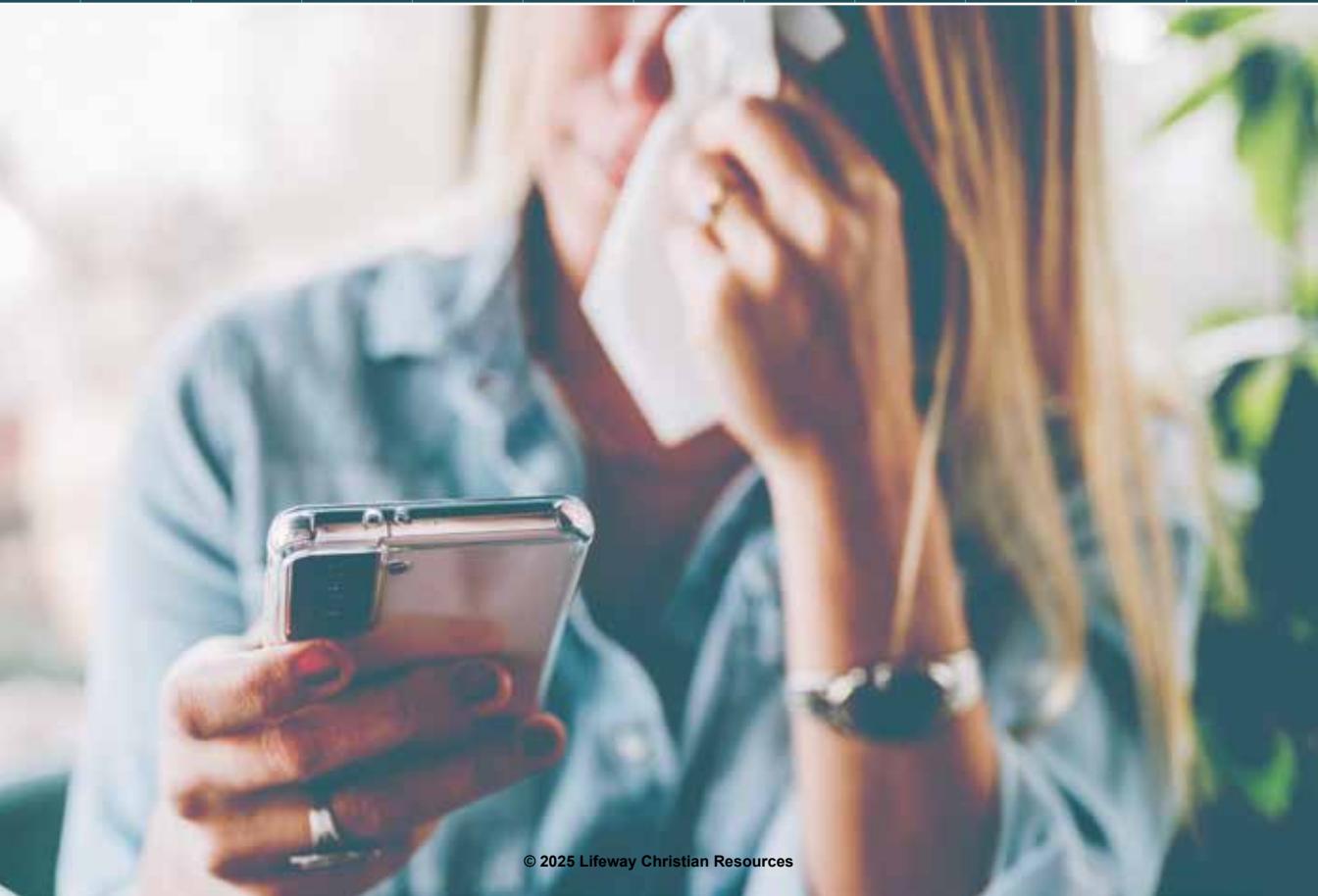


SESSION 6

Our Task

MATTHEW 28:1-10,16-20

BECAUSE JESUS ROSE FROM THE GRAVE, WE ARE TO TAKE THE GOSPEL TO ALL PEOPLE.



Most of us often remember the moments we received bad news. We probably remember where we were and what we were doing on September 11, 2001. Interestingly, sometimes we don't remember details when we receive good news. The joy of the news overshadows the specifics of how and when the news was received. This was not the case for the eyewitnesses to Jesus's resurrection. They could look back on the greatest news of all and remember vividly.

*WHY DO YOU THINK WE ARE SELECTIVE IN WHAT
WE REMEMBER AND WHAT WE FORGET?*

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The resurrection of Jesus is central to our faith as Christians. All the Old and New Testament find their fulfillment in Christ—His death and resurrection. The resurrection is crucial to the gospel message of salvation through Jesus. If Jesus had not risen, nothing would have been accomplished by His death. The resurrection is God's stamp of approval on all that Jesus did on the cross.

The resurrection is also factual. One of the most powerful testimonies in court is the word of eyewitnesses. Each of the Gospel writers in their own way highlighted the role of eyewitnesses to Jesus's resurrection. Matthew, in his account, chose to emphasize the eyewitness account of two women: Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary. In addition, Matthew's Gospel highlights the witness of the eleven disciples that met Jesus in Galilee.

The previous chapter is needed to understand some of the narrative in Matthew 28. Matthew 28:12-14 speaks of the Roman guards receiving a bribe from the Jewish priests and elders to spread the rumor

that the disciples had stolen Jesus's body from the tomb. Reaching back to Matthew 27:62-66, we learn that the Jewish leaders remembered Jesus's prediction of His resurrection. Because of that, they went to Pilate and secured Roman soldiers to guard the tomb. Matthew 28:4 indicated that these guards fainted in fear at the angels.

Later, these guards reported what had happened to the chief priests. It was at this point that they were given a bribe to spread the lie that Jesus's body had been stolen. Matthew, writing sometime around AD 63, indicated that this false story was still circulating in an attempt to deny the reality of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is central to our faith as Christians. All the Old and New Testament find their fulfillment in Christ—His death and resurrection. The resurrection is crucial to the gospel message of salvation through Jesus. If Jesus had not risen, nothing would have been accomplished by His death. The resurrection is God's stamp of approval on all that Jesus did on the cross.



Matthew 28:1-10,16-20

Key Words

1 After the **Sabbath**, **A** as the first day of the week was dawning, **Mary Magdalene** **B** and the **other Mary** **C** went to view the tomb. **2** There was a **violent earthquake**, **D** because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He **rolled back the stone** **E** and was sitting on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. **4** The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men. **5** The angel told the women, “Don’t be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here. For he has risen, **just as he said**. **F** **Come and see** **G** the place where he lay. **7** Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there.’ Listen, I have told you.” **8** So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples the news. **9** Just then Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” They came up, took hold of his feet, and **worshiped him**. **H** **10** Then Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.” [. . .] **16** The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. **18** Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. **19** Go, therefore, and **make disciples** **I** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am **with you always**, **J** to the end of the age.”

A. From sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday, a day of rest according to the law (see Ex. 20:8-11). Jesus was raised on Sunday.

B. Jesus had delivered Mary from seven demons (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2).

C. Likely the mother of James and Joseph. She also was at the cross and the burial (Matt. 27:56,61).

D. This supernatural event was caused by an angel arriving at the empty tomb.

E. Not to let Jesus out, but so His followers could look inside and see that He was risen.

F. On multiple occasions, Jesus had stated clearly that He would be crucified, buried, and raised. See Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19.

G. Eyewitness accounts of the empty tomb affirm the factual, historical nature of the resurrection.

H. Accepting worship confirmed Jesus’s deity. The disciples also worshiped Him in verse 17.

I. The primary command of the Great Commission. This is done through going, baptizing, and teaching those who believe.

J. Jesus’s power (v. 18) and His presence (v. 20) ensure that believers can fulfill His commission (v. 19).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Believe

(Matt. 28:1-7)

We can trust that Jesus is risen because the tomb was empty.

- **What obstacles might cause some people to struggle with faith in the risen Christ?**

2. Worship

(Matt. 28:8-10)

Our appropriate response to Jesus's resurrection is worship.

- **What emotions did the women experience as they went to tell the disciples about Jesus's resurrection? How did they respond to Jesus's appearing to them?**
- **How would you have responded to such an unexpected encounter with Jesus?**

3. Share

(Matt. 28:16-20)

Believers are to share the gospel with people of all nations.

- **What does this passage teach us about our role in Christ's mission?**

Apply the Text

- **Consider how your group might have responded had you met Jesus in Galilee. Would you worship or doubt? Ask each participant how their choice would impact their daily life. Discuss ways that your group can share the good news of the resurrection of Jesus with those in their world.**

KEY DOCTRINE: Evangelism and Missions

The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. (See Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8.)

BIBLE SKILL: Compare passages that share the same account.

Read Matthew 28:1-15 again and record significant points related to the resurrection. Then, read the resurrection passages in Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-52; John 20:1-22 and do the same for them. What similarities do you see in these passages? What are some differences that help you get a more complete picture of the events surrounding the resurrection?

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 28:1-4

Compare verse 2 to Matthew 27:51.

The eyewitnesses to the resurrection included the angels, the soldiers, and a group of women. Matthew identified two of the women as “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.” Mary Magdalene was the one whom Jesus delivered from demon possession (Luke 8:2). The other Mary was the mother of the disciple known as James the younger (Mark 16:1). These two women were joined by Salome, the mother of James and John (Mark 16:1). These women had prepared spices to anoint Jesus’s body. Early on Sunday they went to the tomb with the intent of finishing the burial procedures.

As they approached the tomb, a severe earthquake occurred. The cause of this earthquake was the coming of “an angel of the Lord” to roll away the stone covering the tomb’s entrance. His purpose was not just to show that the tomb was empty but also to announce that Jesus was risen.

The appearance of the angel terrified the guards who guarded the tomb. They were “so shaken by fear” that they evidently passed out from the sight. The word *shaken* is from the same root word as earthquake. These soldiers had their own earthquake! They, too, became eyewitnesses to this event and had to be paid off by the priests (28:11-15) to prevent them from telling what they had seen and heard.

**Why did the angel roll back the stone?
What convinces you of the reality of
Jesus’s resurrection?**



Day 2: Matthew 28:5-7

Compare verse 5 to Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:30; 2:10.

No doubt the women were terrified by the sight of the angel. He who spoke to them said, “Don’t be afraid.” The angel then indicated that he knew why the women were there. However, there was no body to anoint. Jesus had risen from the dead. The angel reminded the women of the words of Jesus about His coming resurrection (see Matt. 17:22-23). He verified his announcement by showing the women the empty “place where he lay.”

The angel also had a commission for them to carry out: “go quickly and tell his disciples.” They were instructed to tell the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. This meeting would be a fulfillment of the promise given by Jesus in Matthew 26:32. This upcoming appearance in Galilee was one of several appearances recorded in the Gospels. Keep in mind that Jesus continued to appear to the disciples for forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3).

Why Galilee? Perhaps Jesus wanted privacy from all the turmoil of Jerusalem. Also, Galilee was a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles. At this appearance, Jesus would give His disciples a commission to take the gospel message into all the world, to both Jews and Gentiles.

**Do you think people still look for Jesus in the
wrong places? Explain.**



Day 3: Matthew 28:8-10

Highlight the words “worshiped him.”

The angel told the women to “go quickly” (v. 7) to tell the disciples the news of the resurrection. In obedience, they departed “quickly from the tomb.” As the women ran from the tomb, they were filled with mixed emotions of “fear and great joy.” Fear because they had just experienced the supernatural—the earthquake, the angel, the empty tomb. But overriding their fear was an elation of great joy.

Matthew stated that “just then” Jesus appeared to them. “Greetings” was much like our “hello.” Imagine the scene. Suddenly, here is Jesus and He is saying to you, “Hello!” No wonder the immediate response of the women was to take “hold of his feet” in worship.

Jesus knew of both the fear and joy of the women. He told them, “Do not be afraid.” This was not a time for fear but joy. The joyful news of Jesus’s resurrection must be shared. That is why Jesus repeated the instructions of the angel to the women, “Go and tell” the disciples. Note, however, that Jesus made these instructions much more personal. He called His disciples “brothers.” His instruction to the disciples was that they should meet Him in Galilee. Jesus understood what His followers had gone through. His every word and move from this time forward would encourage, affirm, and prepare them for the assignment ahead.

What part of the resurrection story leads you to worship?



Day 4: Matthew 28:16-17

Highlight the two responses to Jesus in verse 17.

This appearance of Jesus in Galilee is unique to Matthew’s Gospel. For Matthew, Galilee was central in the story of Jesus. It was appropriate for Jesus to issue His “Great Commission” to take the good news into the whole world from this region of a mixed Jewish and Gentile population.

Who was Matthew speaking of when he says “they saw him”? Was this the eleven disciples only? Could this include the five hundred that Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians 15:6? Many scholars lean toward the five hundred believers being present on this occasion as Jesus charged His followers to spread the gospel message throughout the world.

Two responses to Jesus’s appearance are mentioned. “They worshiped” Him, but “some doubted.” The worship of Jesus no doubt took the form of bowing before Him. Over the many months spent with Jesus and culminating with the resurrection, His followers became fully convinced Jesus was God and was worthy of worship. The word *doubted* means “to hesitate.” For some in the crowd, this may have been their first glimpse of the resurrected Christ. They may have been thinking, “Is this really Jesus?” Perhaps they weren’t sure how to act in His presence.

**Are you a worshiper or a doubter?
Explain the reason for your answer.**



Day 5: Matthew 28:18-20

Identify the singular command in these verses.

Regardless of the reason for their doubts, Jesus set them at ease when He “came near” to them. He spoke concerning His “authority.” The authority of Jesus has been central in Matthew’s Gospel (for example, see Matt. 7:29). In this commission, Jesus is giving to His followers His authority to make disciples throughout the world.

Verse 19 begins with a Greek participle that says, “As you are going.” Next came the command: “make disciples” or followers of Jesus. These disciples were to come from “all nations.” This term *nations* speaks of all people groups. From all the nations these disciples were to make followers of Jesus.

Making disciples involved two actions. First, they were to baptize them. Baptism was an outward declaration that one belonged to Jesus Christ by faith in His atoning work. Second, making disciples involved “teaching them to observe” all that Jesus taught and commanded. Bringing the nations to faith was only part of the job. They would need to be nurtured in the teachings of Jesus.

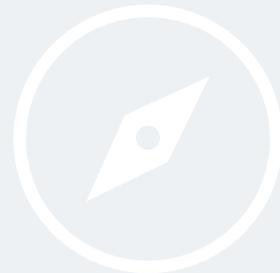
The task would not be easy. However, they would not be alone in the job. Jesus promised, “I am with you always.” The master Teacher was not abandoning them; rather, the Holy Spirit would indwell them permanently (Acts 1:8). Because of that, they were assured success.

What do these verses demand of you?

APPLY THE TEXT

While there are many proofs to the resurrection of Jesus such as the many eyewitnesses and the unexplained empty tomb, perhaps the greatest proof is the transformed lives of the disciples. Looking at your own life, is there evidence of the resurrection through the changes Jesus has made?

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SESSION 7

Eternal Life

MATTHEW 19:16-30

JESUS'S GIFT OF SALVATION DEMANDS HUMILITY AND SURRENDER.



An ideology once prevalent in America is something called the “Protestant work ethic.” In its genuine expression, a strong work ethic is a logical progression from one’s relationship with God. It is an abuse of this tradition, however, to think that work is the means of a right relationship with God rather than an expression of it. The reasoning of some people is, the harder you work, the better chance of earning God’s favor.

DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE THAT NOTHING IS FREE AND EVERYTHING WORTH HAVING MUST BE WORKED FOR? EXPLAIN.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Leaving the region of Galilee, Jesus and His followers made their way down the east bank of the Jordan River to the region of Judea (Matt. 19:1). Jesus apparently spent several weeks in this region approximately twenty to thirty miles from Jerusalem. This is the first mention in Matthew of Jesus traveling to the region of Judea. While John’s Gospel indicates Jesus traveled there frequently for various Jewish festivals, Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not mention any other visits to Jerusalem before these final weeks leading up to His crucifixion. Matthew focused solely on the Galilean ministry of Jesus until the narrative moved toward the crucifixion.

During this time, Jesus was again confronted by the Pharisees with a question designed to trap and accuse Him (v. 3). Their question concerned a law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and the legitimacy of divorce. Jesus responded by stating that God’s design from the beginning was for marriage to be a permanent relationship between a man and a woman (vv. 4-6). To this response, the Pharisees called attention to

the law of Moses, where divorce was permitted for indecency (v. 7). The definition of this indecency was an ongoing debate at that time between two leading rabbis of Judaism.

Jesus replied by pointing to the ideal—no divorce. Then He pointed to the reality—sin had hardened the heart and violated God’s perfect design. Divorce was the result, which was permissible only in cases of adultery. Jesus’s reply caused the disciples to question the feasibility of marriage. In response, He pointed out that for a select few, God’s design for them was to not marry (vv. 8-10).

Next came some parents bringing their children so that Jesus might pronounce a typical Jewish blessing on them by laying hands on them in prayer. Jesus spoke of the dependence of children as an example of the childlike humility needed by all to be a part of the kingdom of God (vv. 13-15). This thought links this humility with the proper way to enter eternal life as explained in the next verses in this chapter.



16 Just then **someone** **A** came up and asked him, “**Teacher**, **B** what good must I do to have eternal life?” **17** “Why do you ask me about what is good?” he said to him. “There is only one who is good. If you want to enter into life, keep **the commandments**.” **C** **18** “Which ones?” he asked him. Jesus answered: Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; **19** honor your father and your mother; and love your neighbor as yourself. **20** “I have kept all these,” the young man told him. “What do I still lack?” **21** “If you want to be **perfect**,” **D** Jesus said to him, “go, **sell your belongings** **E** and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” **22** When the young man heard that, he went away **grieving**, **F** because he had many possessions. **23** Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, **it will be hard** **G** for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. **24** Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” **25** When the disciples heard this, they were utterly astonished and asked, “Then who can be saved?” **26** Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but **with God** **H** all things are possible.” **27** Then Peter responded to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you. So what will there be for us?” **28** Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, in **the renewal of all things**, **I** when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **29** And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields because of my name will receive a hundred times more and will inherit eternal life. **30** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

A. Matthew said he was “young” (v. 20). Luke called him a “ruler” (Luke 18:18), possibly in the synagogue. All three Synoptic Gospels note his wealth (Matt. 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23).

B. A term of respect. Unlike the religious leaders, this man’s questions don’t appear malicious.

C. Jesus listed five commands that focus on human relationships (Ex. 20:12-16). Jesus knew the man’s true problem was with the commands that related to honoring God.

D. “Complete” (NASB). Not without sin, but mature and spiritually whole. See Matthew 5:48.

E. Not a universal command. This was a specific test of discipleship for this young man.

F. The man’s response reveals the grip that his “many possessions” had on his heart.

G. Jewish culture saw wealth as a sign of God’s blessing. As such, it was difficult to imagine the wealthy being left outside the kingdom.

H. God is the only hope for salvation, including for the wealthy.

I. The final judgment, when Jesus reigns and all things are made new (Rev. 21:1).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Unwilling

(Matt. 19:16-22)

We can affirm that eternal life cannot be achieved by human achievement.

- **What have you left behind to follow Jesus? Is there anything that hinders you from following Jesus?**
- **What are some common views on how to receive eternal life?**

2. Possible

(Matt. 19:23-26)

We can be encouraged knowing salvation is received as a gift from God.

- **Why were the disciples “utterly astonished” (v. 25)?**
- **Why was Jesus so hard on rich people?**

3. Reward

(Matt. 19:27-30)

We can know that following Jesus is worth it, no matter what it costs—the greatest reward being eternal life.

- **How would you characterize Peter’s tone with Jesus? Why?**
- **What have you left behind to follow Jesus? Is there anything that hinders you from following Jesus?**

Apply the Text

Discuss as a group the concept that everything worth having must be worked for. Consider how this may impact our approach to Christianity.

- **How might your group help others to correct their understanding of salvation by grace and not by works?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Salvation

There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. (See John 14:6; Acts 4:12.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Dig deeper into a doctrine or biblical teaching.

Compare Jesus’s teachings in Matthew 19:16-22 to Matthew 6:19-24. Identify Jesus’s statements in chapter 6 that are represented in the life of the would-be disciple in chapter 19. Reflect on the following: How might possessions become detrimental to a believers’ commitment to follow Jesus? What are some things that God might be calling you to surrender in order to follow Him?



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

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



DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 19:16-17

Think about the assumptions implied in the man's question.

Using the words “just then,” Matthew linked the visit of a young ruler to the blessing of the children. As Jesus was engaged with the children and their parents, this man ran up and knelt at Jesus's feet (see Mark 10:17). From verses 20 and 22 we learn he was young and rich.

His question was, “What good must I do to have eternal life?” From every indication this inquiry was sincere. He knew something was missing from his life.

Jesus used the occasion to point the young ruler to the only one who is good, an obvious reference to God the Father. If this young man was wondering about what good he must do to obtain eternal life, then He needed to meet the benchmark of what good really is—the standard of the holiness of God. Attempting to earn eternal life through doing good will always fall short of the One who is ultimately good.

Jesus continued to challenge this man's notion: if he wanted to measure up to God's standard, he must “keep the commandments.” Jesus was not teaching salvation by works. Instead, He wanted the young man to recognize his sinfulness. The commandments were ultimately given to show us our sinfulness.

What appears to be the man's understanding of how to receive eternal life?



Day 2: Matthew 19:18-22

Consider why Jesus told this man to sell his belongings.

Jesus's answer was not what the young man expected. Perhaps with some puzzlement, he asked Jesus, “Which ones?” For this young man, his reply was, *which ones am I not keeping?* He felt secure in his adherence to the law. Jesus responded by listing the commandments that dealt with the horizontal relationships of life—family, neighbors, and other people. These would be commandments that could be observed externally. Keeping these commandments would be very demonstrable.

The ruler replied, “I have kept all these. . . . What do I still lack?” Jesus then pinpointed the problem facing the rich young ruler. He had violated the first commandment by putting his riches first in his life. “Go, sell your belongings.” Get rid of that which stands between you and God. When he did that, He could then follow Jesus as His disciple. Only then would he have “treasure in heaven”—that is, the eternal life he sought.

The words of Jesus cut deeply into the young man, attacking him at the very core of his being. “He went away grieving,” being unwilling to part with his idol of wealth and possessions. We must willingly give up whatever stands in the way of our surrender to Jesus.

What are some reasons people choose to not follow Jesus today?



Day 3: Matthew 19:23-24

Consider the reasons rich people would find it harder to follow Jesus.

The idea that riches could be a barrier to entering the “kingdom of heaven” flew in the face of the beliefs of the Jews in Jesus’s day. They looked on the rich as closer to God because of His obvious blessing on them. To say, as Jesus did, that the poor are closer to the kingdom than the wealthy was most surprising. That startlement will be seen in the disciple’s reaction in verse 25.

Jesus reinforced His statement with a hyperbole, speaking of a camel passing through the “eye of a needle.” The camel, of course, was the largest animal seen by the Jewish people in that day. The eye of a needle would reflect perhaps the smallest opening present in that day. The picture of the camel trying to fit through the tiny opening of a needle would have produced laughter among Jesus’s hearers. Impossible, they thought. That would be the precise reaction Jesus desired. It would also be impossible for someone who substituted wealth for a relationship with God “to enter the kingdom of God.”

Why is it harder for rich people to follow Jesus?



Day 4: Matthew 19:25-26

Identify the reason for the disciples’ astonishment.

The disciples “were utterly astonished” because Jesus’s statement here was in direct contradiction to the traditions of Judaism that intimated that a person’s wealth gave evidence of God’s favor. Wealthy Jews often thought they could purchase a more favored position with God through their gifts to the temple or through the giving of alms to the poor. Jesus, however, taught something very different.

Based on Jesus’s statement that the rich would not enter the kingdom of heaven, it would appear that no one could be saved. If the rich who were blessed with God’s favor could scarcely be saved, what hope was there for the rest of humanity?

In His answer to the question from the disciples, Jesus implied that the disciples were right: there is no way for anyone to be saved on their own effort. “With man this is impossible.” Wealth or poverty didn’t matter. Only God can bring salvation to a person, for with Him “all things are possible.” Salvation and entrance into the kingdom of God is dependent on God and God alone.

How would you answer the disciples’ question, “Then who can be saved?”



Day 5: Matthew 19:27-30

Meditate on the meaning of verse 30.

Jesus had told the rich young man that he would have treasures in heaven if he abandoned his earthly riches. Speaking on behalf of the other disciples, Peter wanted to know if that promise applied to them. They had “left everything” to follow Jesus. “So what [reward] will there be for us?”

Peter’s question in verse 27 may seem crass and greedy. But coupled with the previous question (v. 25), it suggests not a sense of entitlement but rather a concern over what would or would not await them in eternity. Certainly, Jesus did not chastise Peter for asking. Instead, He spoke concerning the coming age of glory when God makes all things new (Rev. 21:5). It will also be a day when Jesus will sit “on his glorious throne.” Jesus answered Peter’s question by pointing to His promise that they will be honored and rewarded because they left everything to follow Him.

Jesus next included all those who make Him their priority. They, too, will be rewarded. Everyone who forsakes everything and everyone “because of my name” will be rewarded “a hundred times more.” The reward of a hundred times more speaks of a reward that is out of proportion to what is sacrificed. It will be much more than is expected. This reward may be referring to rewards both now and in eternity. Those who give up houses and lands, relationships and riches, for His sake will receive more than they give up.

Is there anything that hinders you from following Jesus? If so, are you willing to leave it behind?

APPLY THE TEXT

Write a brief paragraph outlining the things you have given up to follow Jesus. How do you think Jesus would evaluate that paragraph?

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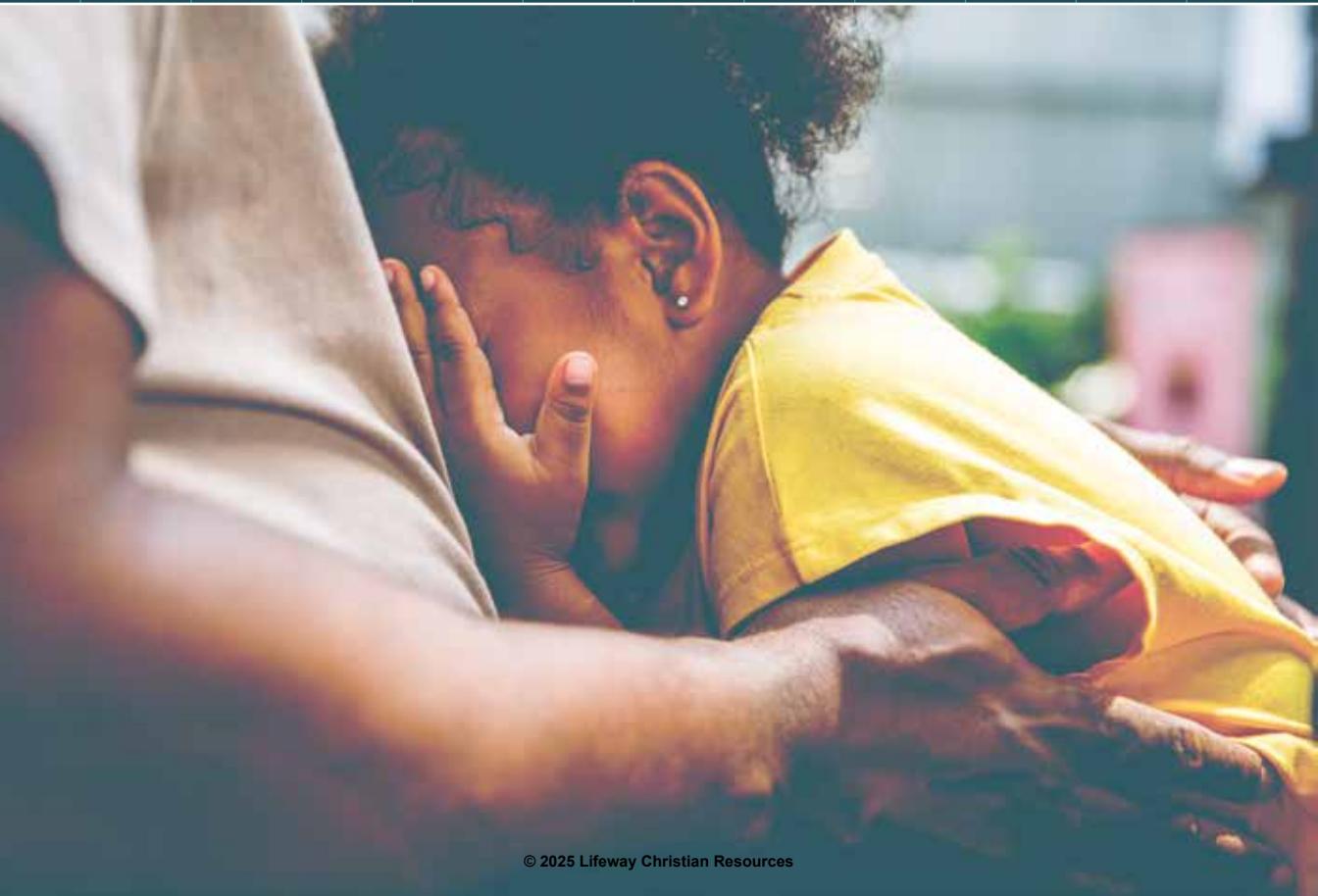


SESSION 8

Grace

MATTHEW 20:1-16

JESUS OFFERS GRACE TO ALL PEOPLE.



Everybody wants to be treated fairly. We become resentful when we perceive we have not received equal treatment. “Unfair,” we cry. “He got a bigger piece of cake!” “Her bonus was larger than mine, and I did most of the work.” We always want what we think we deserve. Yet life often is unfair. Life never levels the playing field for all those participating. Some are treated better, others are pushed down, but all suffer under the inequalities of life.

WHY DO YOU THINK WE PERCEIVE LIFE AS BEING CONTINUALLY UNFAIR?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The parable in Matthew 20:1-16 is the capstone of the larger section of teaching found in 19:16–20:16. This sequence of events and teachings began with the inquiry of the rich young ruler. It continued with a discussion between Jesus and the disciples concerning the rewards of following Jesus.

To illustrate the truths concerning eternal life and eternal rewards, Jesus shared the parable that begins chapter 20. What is profound about this section is the reversal of all that might be expected from a human perspective. The rich young ruler expected to hear steps he could take to gain eternal life. The people of Jesus’s day expected the rich would be treated differently than the poor. The disciples were surprised at Jesus’s teaching about the impossibility of the rich entering the kingdom of heaven. Jesus turned all those expectations on their ear.

God’s ways are not man’s way. Eternal life is not earned by doing, riches are not a sign of God’s favor, and they don’t buy entrance into the kingdom of God. In this parable,

Jesus taught His followers that God’s graciousness toward humanity is based on His love and not on human effort.

Following the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Jesus again spoke to the disciples about His coming death. This is the third time in Matthew’s Gospel that Jesus spoke explicitly about the crucifixion (see also 16:21; 17:22-23).

Jesus continually spoke of greatness in the kingdom of God (for example, see Matt. 18:1-4). Even so, the rivalry among the disciples continued. One glaring example of this is found in 20:20-28, where James and John enlisted the help of their mother to petition Jesus to elevate the rank of her two sons over the other disciples. Such open jockeying for position must have brought Jesus much grief.



Matthew 20:1-16

1 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a **landowner**^A who went out **early in the morning**^B to hire workers for his **vineyard**. **2** After agreeing with the workers on **one denarius**,^D he sent them into his vineyard for the day. **3** When he went out about nine in the morning, he saw others standing in the **marketplace**^E doing nothing. **4** He said to them, ‘You also go into my vineyard, and I’ll give you whatever is right.’ So off they went. **5** About noon and about three, he went out again and did the same thing. **6** Then about **five**^F he went and found others standing around and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?’ **7** ‘Because no one hired us,’ they said to him. ‘You also go into my vineyard,’ he told them. **8** When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his foreman, ‘Call the workers and give them their pay, **starting with the last**^G and ending with the first.’ **9** When those who were hired about five came, they each received one denarius. **10** So when the first ones came, they **assumed**^H they would get more, but they also received a denarius each. **11** When they received it, they began to complain to the landowner: **12** ‘These last men put in one hour, and you made them equal to us who bore the burden of the day’s work and the burning heat.’ **13** He replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I’m doing you **no wrong**.^I Didn’t you agree with me on a denarius? **14** Take what’s yours and go. I want to give this last man the same as I gave you. **15** Don’t I have the right to do what I want with what is mine? Are you jealous because I’m **generous**?’^J **16** So the last will be first, and the first last.”

Key Words

A. In this parable, the landowner represents God.

B. Around 6 a.m., the start of a typical 12-hour Jewish workday.

C. Often in Scripture, vineyards symbolize the nation of Israel (Isa. 5:1-7).

D. A typical day’s wage. This would have been considered fair compensation for a day’s work in the vineyard.

E. Day laborers would gather in the market and wait to be hired. This landowner made several trips to the marketplace to enlist workers.

F. These workers would put in only one hour of work, in contrast to others who had been in the vineyard for nearly twelve hours.

G. The law demanded workers be paid at the end of the day. Jesus used paying the men in reverse order to establish the main point of His parable.

H. It would be natural for the early workers to expect more than those who worked only an hour.

I. While the landowner’s pay may have been surprising, it was fair. He lived up to their agreement.

J. The landowner had the right to do what he chose with his own resources. His generosity to those hired at 5 p.m. reflects God’s grace and generosity in offering salvation to everyone.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Workers Hired

(Matt. 20:1-7)

We can trust God to always do what is right.

- **What is the significance of the detail about the landowner and workers agreeing on the amount of pay?**

2. Equally Paid

(Matt. 20:8-12)

We should be thankful God gives us more than we deserve.

- **Do you think what each worker received was fair? Why or why not?**
- **How do people today question God's fairness? How do some view His just nature?**

3. Grace Exemplified

(Matt. 20:13-16)

We should never cease to be amazed by God's grace.

- **Were the all-day workers justified in their complaints about their wages? Why or why not?**
- **What does this parable teach us about comparing ourselves to others?**

Apply the Text

Discuss in your group what you believe to be the main lesson of Jesus's parable of the vineyard workers.

- **How should it impact the way we evaluate ourselves in relation to others? How does it impact the way we relate to others?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

God

God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. (See Isaiah 40:25; Matthew 6:9.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use Bible study resources to gain more insight into a passage.

Read articles on "vineyards" and "denarius" from a Bible dictionary. Record significant insights you gain as you consider what you read in light of this session's focal passages. In addition, consider what made the setting of Jesus's parable (hiring day-laborers to work in a vineyard) so effective for the audience He was addressing?

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 20:1-4

Pay attention to the agreement between the landowner and workers in verse 2.

Once again, Jesus explained what life in the kingdom of God is like, using a short story with a central theme. The “landowner” in this parable is representative of God Himself. This landowner arose “early in the morning” to hire the workers needed to work the vineyard. Early morning would be around 6 a.m.

By beginning this parable with the word “for,” Jesus was linking this story back to Matthew 19:30 and the discussion of the rewards of the disciple. This parable is illustrating the statement that “many who are first will be last, and the last first.” The parable is bookended by that statement (Matt. 19:30; 20:16).

An agreement was reached with these laborers for “one denarius.” This was an equitable amount for a full day’s wage. Having agreed to the wages, these laborers were sent into the vineyard. The landowner was back at the marketplace around nine o’clock.

The landowner enlisted these men to work in his vineyard as well and told them, “I’ll give you whatever is right.” The implication was that they would receive pay for about nine hours of work, from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

What is the significance of the detail about the landowner and workers agreeing on the amount of pay?



Day 2: Matthew 20:5-7

Note the times at which the landowner hired more workers.

The landowner hired more day laborers around noon and around three. The text says he “did the same thing”—that is, he promised to give them whatever was right. Again, these workers expected to be paid partially for the hours worked.

Finally, the landowner went back to the marketplace around five o’clock, where he discovered still more men standing around hoping to be hired. Perhaps by now they had almost given up for the day since no one had hired them. The benevolent landowner asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?” Perhaps they had arrived late or were in an area of the marketplace where those hiring had not observed them. They could have been the least desirable of workers and had been passed over. Once again, the landowner sent them into the vineyard to work the final hour of the day. No doubt they realistically expected to earn an hour’s wage.

Note again, the agreed-upon wage at the beginning of the day was one denarius. Each group of workers hired assumed that they would receive a portion of a denarius for the time they worked.

Give thanks that God always does what is right.



Day 3: Matthew 20:8-9

Compare verse 8 to Matthew 19:30 and 20:16.

The law specified that day laborers were to be paid at the end of each day they worked (Deut. 24:15). What is interesting is the order of payment. The landowner directed the foreman to start with the last of those hired and end with the first group.

As far as the foreman and laborers were concerned, the order didn't matter, as long as each laborer received what was coming to them. For the landowner (and for the intent of Jesus's parable) the order did matter. This rhetorical device of reversing the order set up the amazing contrast of treatment of each group. The reversal of order served as a clue that the hearers were in for a surprise ending. This reversal is the point where the parable connected to Jesus's statement in Matthew 19:30 (and 20:16) that the first shall be last and the last first.

All the laborers, regardless of when they were hired, "received one denarius." Those who were hired last received a full denarius—twelve times what they were expecting. There is a tremendous truth here about God the Father. He doesn't give us what we deserve!

Obviously, the payment made to those hired at the five o'clock hour was made in the presence of all those hired. Expectations arose for the others, thinking that maybe they would receive proportionately more than was contracted. They all eagerly awaited their bonus. But such was not the case.

Spend time in prayer, thanking God that He doesn't give us what we deserve.



Day 4: Matthew 20:10-12

Note the complaint of the laborers hired first.

No mention was made by Jesus of those hired at three, noon, or nine o'clock. Instead, He skipped to the climactic portion of the story and spoke of the initial hired laborers. "They assumed" they would receive more. They were expecting "fair" treatment since they had worked more and should receive twelve times what the last group received. But they, too, received a denarius. Incensed, they demanded equality. They had worked more and believed they should be paid for their work. But the landowner paid each group as he had promised (see vv. 4,5,7). He did not renege on any agreement.

The laborers hired first began to complain as they recounted the details of their day-long labor in the sun. The others labored far less and in the cool of the evening. As these first-hires compared themselves to the others, their anger only deepened. Their whole perception was that they had been treated unjustly.

In compassion, the landowner had not given each man what he deserved but what they needed. For some, this would be over and above what they deserved. From a human standpoint, those first hired had the right to complain. From a divine standpoint, the ways of God as pictured here are completely different from our ways.

How do people today question God's fairness?

How do some view His just nature?



Day 5: Matthew 20:13-16

Take note of how the landowner was both fair and generous.

One person emerged as the spokesman of this group of complainers. To him, the landowner spoke directly: “Friend, I’m doing you no wrong.” They were out of line with their grumbling. There was nothing unfair about this. The landowner was not in their debt because they worked longer and harder than others. If the landowner chose to act out of compassion toward those last hired, that was his prerogative. He was not acting unjustly; instead, the complainers were “jealous” of the payment others received. Their complaints didn’t arise from some vaulted sense of justice but from sheer greed and jealousy based on their faulty expectations.

Jesus’s desire was that the disciples realize participation in the kingdom of heaven is not based on human effort, with those who work the hardest expecting the biggest reward in glory. Entrance into the kingdom is based on the benevolence of God, pictured here as the landowner. He deals with us according to grace.

We should be grateful that God doesn’t give us what we deserve. Instead, He deals with us in mercy and grace. What we all deserve is God’s judgment. Instead, God gives us grace. Through this parable, Jesus taught that God’s justice (fairness) and His generosity are not mutually exclusive. He is both.

What does this parable teach us about comparing ourselves to others?

APPLY THE TEXT

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very often, how often do you feel you must earn God’s love by doing right things and thinking right thoughts? Contemplate in prayer that God’s love for us is based on what He has done for us and not what we do for Him.

JOURNAL



SESSION 9

Authority

MATTHEW 21:23-32

JESUS HOLDS ALL AUTHORITY, AND THOSE WHO REJECT HIM WILL BE CONDEMNED.



Steady erosion can eventually undermine a foundation, resulting in destruction. In the same way, erosion of respect for authority can undermine an institution, a business, a government, or a country. Authority is the right to influence or command another. The weight of authority is eroding in our society. Fewer and fewer people respect or even recognize authority. Many actively reject established authorities.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF REJECTING ESTABLISHED AUTHORITY?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Matthew 21 moves into the final week of Jesus's ministry before His crucifixion. Much of the action recorded by Matthew in chapters 21–22 occurred in the temple. The week began with Jesus entering Jerusalem to the shouts of praise from the crowd of pilgrims entering the city for the Feast of Passover. Once inside Jerusalem, Jesus moved into the temple precinct. Here began a series of confrontations with the religious leaders who opposed Jesus.

The first confrontation began in the outer courts of the temple (the Court of the Gentiles) when Jesus cleansed the temple of the money changers and sacrificial animal sellers. Because so many of the worshipers during the Passover Festival were from out of town, for convenience's sake the priests had set up selling points in the outer court so that pilgrims could buy their sacrificial animals. Also, they would need to have the exact coinage to buy these animals and pay the temple tax. This had to be the coinage of the temple, so those from foreign lands would need to exchange foreign currency with the coin of the temple. This action

and the triumphal entry led the priests and scribes to challenge Jesus when the children in the temple precinct began singing His praises.

The next confrontation occurred the following morning with the unusual act of Jesus cursing a fig tree. The fig tree had long represented the nation of Israel, and Jesus was symbolically condemning the nation for their lack of the fruit of repentance and faith. This led immediately to a challenge by the religious leaders to Jesus's authority as recorded in the passage for today's study.

Matthew 21 closes with another parable that brought indictment on the leadership of Israel for their rejection of Jesus as God's Messiah. The rejection of Jesus would grow stronger and stronger throughout the week.



23 When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching and said, “By what authority are you doing **these things**? **A** Who gave you this **authority**?” **B** **24** Jesus answered them, “I will also ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. **25** Did **John’s baptism** **C** come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” They discussed it among themselves, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ **26** But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we’re **afraid of the crowd**, **D** because everyone considers John to be a prophet.” **27** So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. **28** “What do you think? **A man had two sons**. **E** He went to the first and said, ‘My son, go work in the vineyard today.’ **29** He answered, ‘I don’t want to,’ but later he **changed his mind** **F** and went. **30** Then the man went to the other and said the same thing. ‘I will, sir,’ he answered, but he didn’t go. **31** Which of the two **did his father’s will**?” **G** They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God **before you**. **H** **32** For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and **you didn’t believe him**. **I** Tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; but you, when you saw it, didn’t even change your minds then and believe him.”

A. Possibly Jesus’s teaching, but more likely the cleansing of the temple in Matthew 21:12-13.

B. To the religious leaders, Jesus lacked the credentials and rabbinical training to teach this way, especially in the temple.

C. John’s ministry was popular with the people but despised by the religious elite. Jesus challenged them to identify the “origin” of John’s work.

D. The religious leaders cared more about human opinion than God’s opinion.

E. While He refused to respond directly, Jesus would use this parable to answer the leaders’ question and affirm His authority.

F. “Repented” (KJV). The Greek implies regret. A changed heart led to changed behavior.

G. Obedience is the primary indication of one’s genuine relationship with God (John 14:15).

H. Another way to affirm that the last will be first (Matt. 19:30; 20:16). God honors those who obey Him, not those going through the motions.

I. Jesus answered his own question (v. 25) by calling out the leaders’ disdain for John and his message. Their lack of belief would keep them out of the kingdom.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Authority Challenged

(Matt. 21:23-27)

We can expect some to oppose or reject Jesus's authority.

- **What were the chief priests and elders trying to accomplish by interrogating Jesus?**
- **For what reasons do people not accept Jesus's authority?**

2. Authority Recognized

(Matt. 21:28-32)

We demonstrate our acceptance of Jesus's authority by our obedience to Him.

- **Practically speaking, what does it look like to recognize Jesus's authority?**

Apply the Text

As a group, discuss the consequences of rejecting Jesus's authority.

- **What steps might each of your group take to ensure they recognize and respect Jesus's authority?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

God

To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. (See 1 Peter 1:15-17; Hebrews 12:28-29.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about people in the Bible.

Using a Bible dictionary, collect information on the following topics: the chief priests, the elders, tax collectors, and prostitutes in first-century Israel. Reflect on the role each played in Jesus's ministry. How did each one impact Jesus's message and ministry? Spend time in prayer asking God to help you understand Jesus's work more clearly and to relate to people in a way that reflects His character.

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 21:23

Note the trap the religious leaders set for Jesus.

Jesus was confronted by the “chief priests and the elders” as He arrived at the temple. They questioned His right to do what He had done the day before. Jesus was not officially recognized as a rabbi. He had not gone through the training and ordination to be recognized as a rabbi. Because of this, they asked, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you” the right to throw the merchants and money exchangers out of the temple precinct?

Jesus was aware of the trap being set for Him. If He told them the truth that His authority came from His heavenly Father, they would accuse Him of blasphemy. This was not the first time these men had questioned His authority. On other occasions He had told them that He spoke for His Father and that His power to do miracles came from His Father (see John 5:17-18). They saw the authority with which He healed. These religious leaders could not deny the miracles of Jesus but had attributed them to the power of Satan. They also heard the authority in His teachings. They simply refused to acknowledge Jesus’s authority.

Jesus didn’t need the permission of men to carry out His purpose on this earth. His authority came from God, and nothing would detour Him from accomplishing the Father’s will.

For what reasons do people not accept Jesus’s authority?



Day 2: Matthew 21:24-27

Note how Jesus responded to the religious leaders.

Jesus answered their question with one of His own. With His question concerning the source of “John’s baptism,” Jesus laid His own trap for these leaders. They did not recognize the divine authority of John; therefore, Jesus knew they would not recognize His own authority. Not only had they rejected John, but they had rejected John’s testimony concerning Jesus (John 1:29,34). What was the source of John’s baptism—was it from “heaven” or from “human origin”? John’s baptism stood for the entire ministry of John. If John’s ministry was from God, then equally true is the fact that Jesus’s authority also came from God.

The chief priests and elders could say how they truly felt about John’s ministry, but then they would suffer the wrath of the crowd for that opinion. Or they could admit that John was a prophet with divine authority, and by association, admit that Jesus had the authority of God on His own ministry. Either way, they would come out the loser. Because of that they responded, “We don’t know.” It wasn’t that they didn’t know, they just refused to admit the truth.

The pattern of the Jewish religious leaders was to deny and attack anything that didn’t line up with their man-made rules. They weren’t interested in truth. For these religious leaders, it was all about maintaining power.

Which do you think has the greater appeal to most people—truth or power? Why?



Day 3: Matthew 21:28-30

Identify who each son in the parable represents.

Jesus told a parable that served as an indictment against these religious leaders. Using a familiar pattern, He spoke of a superior figure giving directions to subordinates. In this case, it was a father and his two sons. What is key for interpretation here is that these two were related—they were sons and brothers. Jesus was equating both sons to the Jewish people. This was a parable about the response to Jesus by the people of Israel, including the religious leaders.

The “vineyard” was symbolic of Israel. Both sons were given the direction, “go work in the vineyard today.” Each son responded in a vastly different way. The first son responded to the father with the words, “I don’t want to.” Later, however, this son “changed his mind” and went to work in the vineyard. This son is later linked with “tax collectors and prostitutes” (v. 32). These were the spiritual outcasts of Judaism. They found themselves outside of the orthodox religion of Judaism. However, they were the ones who responded in obedience to the gospel message Jesus brought.

The second son said, “I will” but then “didn’t go.” This son represented the religious leaders of Israel. Although they claimed to be called by God to tend His vineyard of Israel, they had failed miserably. Jesus had denounced their hypocrisy throughout His ministry. Because of their failings in recognizing God’s Messiah, the entire nation of Israel failed.

What kinds of people today are represented by the two sons in the parable?



Day 4: Matthew 21:31

Consider the shock when the religious leaders heard Jesus’s accusation in verse 31.

Jesus brought the issue to a head with His next question: “Which of the two did his father’s will?” On the surface, this would appear to be teaching that actions speak louder than words. But that was not the aim of Jesus in this parable.

When the religious leaders answered by saying “the first” carried out his father’s will, they indicted themselves for their response to John’s message and subsequently to Jesus’s ministry. Jesus compared the response of the religious leaders to His ministry with that of “tax collectors and prostitutes.” These groups of people would be the last that the religious elite would expect to be a part of the “kingdom of God.” Tax collectors were considered to be traitors to the Jewish people. Prostitutes represented those who were without any morals whatsoever. For Jesus to compare these two groups to the religious leaders would be an extreme affront to these leaders.

Jesus told them that these outcasts would enter God’s kingdom “before you.” This does not necessarily imply that these leaders would eventually make it into God’s kingdom. The phrase “before you” could be translated “instead of you.” Simply stated, unless the priests and elders changed their thinking about the Messiah, they would be left behind.

How does this verse prompt you to pray?



Day 5: Matthew 21:32

Compare verse 32 to Matthew 9:10-17.

The discussion returned once again to John the Baptist and his baptism. Although the religious leaders would not acknowledge the authority of John's ministry, Jesus did. He exclaimed that "John came to you in the way of righteousness." That is, John's preaching set forth the way in which a person is made right before God: repentance and belief. Not only did John point to the way of righteousness, but he illustrated it with righteous living.

Jesus had endorsed John and his ministry earlier: "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared" (Matt. 11:11). The outcasts of Jewish society, the "tax collectors and prostitutes," accepted his teachings and baptism. These religious leaders did not. They had checked him out ("when you saw it") but rejected John and his baptism (see John 1:19-25). As a result, they stood condemned and under God's judgment.

Practically speaking, what does it look like to recognize Jesus's authority?

APPLY THE TEXT

Intrinsic authority comes from innate qualities in a person, such as the authority belonging to God because He is sovereign Lord. Delegated authority arises from a commission given to someone by a person with intrinsic authority. Based on this, why is obedience to Jesus absolutely essential? Who might be some delegated authorities in your life?

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SESSION 10

Honor

MATTHEW 22:15-22,34-40

BELIEVERS' HIGHEST CALLING IS TO HONOR GOD IN EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR LIVES.



For years in schools across America, the day began with the Pledge of Allegiance. Children were taught to honor the American flag and the nation it represented. That is one of many allegiances in life. We give honor to any number of causes and people. The critical issue is how we select what we give honor to. Allegiance to wrong things leads to potential disaster. Allegiance to honorable things can result in more joy and fulfillment in life. Choose wisely.

WHAT IS YOUR HIGHEST ALLEGIANCE IN LIFE?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders had been brewing for months. With the cleansing of the temple (Matt. 21:12-13), it had reached a boiling point. What followed would be several more days of confrontation with the chief priests and elders. The thrust of the confrontation centered around Jesus's authority and the rejection of His authority by the religious elite.

In His indictment of the establishment, Jesus had used three parables to teach about the kingdom of God. The first will be last, Jesus had said. In saying that, He was pointing to the fact that those who seemed to be farthest from the kingdom of heaven would enter the kingdom and the religious leaders would not.

The first two of these parables are in Matthew 21. The third one begins chapter 22. This final parable (vv. 1-14) pictured a wedding feast where those invited declined the invitation by treating violently the ones who had delivered it. The result was devastating to those invited. Their failure resulted in

the invitation being extended to all who would come. This parable continues the theme of those who might be considered outside of the kingdom actually entering the kingdom.

Matthew's Gospel is full of triplets—groupings of threes to form his narrative, whether it is three parables, three healings, and now, three questions from three different groups opposing him. These will be the Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees, and finally a Pharisee. Each of the three questions was designed to trap Jesus, but He adeptly handled each question to the amazement of the crowds. Teeing off from these questions, Jesus questioned the leaders concerning David's assertion that the Messiah was his Lord. This section closes with a long condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23. Jesus warned the disciples and the crowd to avoid the hypocrisy of these leaders as He pronounced a series of woes on them for their wickedness.



15 Then the **Pharisees** **A** went and plotted how to trap him by what he said. **16** So they sent their disciples to him, along with the **Herodians**. **B** “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are truthful and teach truthfully the **way of God**. **C** You don’t care what anyone thinks nor do you show **partiality**. **D** **17** Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to **pay taxes to Caesar** **E** or not?” **18** Perceiving their malicious intent, Jesus said, “Why are you testing me, hypocrites? **19** Show me the coin used for the tax.” They brought him a denarius. **20** “Whose **image and inscription** **F** is this?” he asked them. **21** “Caesar’s,” they said to him. Then he said to them, “**Give**, **G** then, to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” **22** When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away. [. . .] **34** When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the **Sadducees**, **H** they came together. **35** And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him: **36** “Teacher, which command in the law is **the greatest**?” **I** **37** He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. **38** This is the greatest and most important command. **39** The **second is like it**: **J** Love your neighbor as yourself. **40** **All the Law and the Prophets** **K** depend on these two commands.”

A. Pharisees focused on keeping the law and the oral traditions more than on political issues.

B. Jews who were loyal to Herod Antipas. The Herodians likely viewed Jesus as a political, not religious, threat.

C. The ethical demands of God’s law, similar to “the way of righteousness” (Matt. 21:32).

D. Jesus was not influenced by popular opinion.

E. Probably an annual one-denarius tax paid by all men and women who were not Roman citizens.

F. The denarius had an image of the emperor on one side and the inscription of “God and High Priest” on the other.

G. To give what is rightfully due. Caesar was due the tax, but that did not diminish one’s ability to honor and worship God.

H. The wealthy, priestly class. Sadducees were more political and controlled the temple.

I. Jewish scholars often debated how to rank commands in the law.

J. Quoting Leviticus 19:18, Jesus placed loving your neighbor alongside loving God. One cannot love God without loving neighbors (1 John 4:20).

K. The entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures rests on the foundation of loving God and loving others.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Government Authority

(Matt. 22:15-22)

We are called to submit to government officials and laws.

- **What does it look like to honor our government in today's culture?**

2. God's Authority

(Matt. 22:34-40)

We are to honor God exclusively as the one true God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

- **Why do you think Jesus gave the lawyer two commands instead of just one?**
- **What's at the heart of this command to love other people? What does this demonstrate?**

Apply the Text

Discuss with your Bible study group various ways followers of Jesus can demonstrate their allegiance to God.

KEY DOCTRINE:

The Christian and the Social Order

Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. (See Romans 13:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:1-2.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a Bible passage.

In Matthew 22:17-21, Jesus spoke about giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. Compare this to Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7; and 1 Peter 2:13-17. Based on all these passages, write a description of the Christian's responsibilities toward government.

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 22:15-17

Compare verse 15 to Luke 20:20.

This begins a section in which Jesus was questioned by three groups, all attempting to trick Him into saying something that could be used to arrest Him. He had just condemned the religious leaders with a series of three parables. Verse 15 says “then”—arising out of Jesus’s rebuke—the Pharisees plotted how they might “trap him.”

Since the intent of this encounter was to trick Jesus, the Pharisees, who would be identifiable by their clothing, sent their disciples to do their dirty work. They were joined by the Herodians, a group of loyalists to Herod’s family. These unlikely allies normally would be oceans apart, yet they worked together in trying to get Jesus to speak against either the Mosaic law or the Roman rule in Israel.

The confrontation began with flattery, then the question: should we “pay taxes to Caesar or not?” This tax was resented by the Jews because it represented Roman occupation. The idea of paying tribute to Rome was incredibly distasteful. If Jesus declared that the hated tax should be paid, this would bring the ire of the crowds and the loss of popularity among the people. If Jesus denounced the tax, it would bring the wrath of Rome (represented by the Herodians), and Jesus could be accused of treason by the Roman government. This was a trap with no apparent way to win.

How is Matthew 22:15-17 connected to 21:23-27?



Day 2: Matthew 22:18-20

Underline “malicious intent” and “hypocrites.”

Jesus saw their “malicious intent” and rebuked them as “hypocrites.” *Hypocrite* was a theater term that referred to a play actor; it could also refer to an impersonator or pretender. It was apparent what they were trying to do.

Roman taxes were required to be paid with Roman coins bearing the emperor’s image on the coin. In response to Jesus’s request, they gave Him a “denarius.” While the tax was not a huge amount of money (a day’s wage), the idea of the tax itself was repugnant to the Jewish people. Add to that the fact that the coin needed to pay the tax had the image of Caesar and his inscription on it. The Mosaic law forbid the use of graven images, giving double offense to the whole situation.

Quite possibly the coin given to Jesus was minted by the current emperor, Tiberius Caesar. The inscription on that coin included the emperor’s face and, on the backside, a picture of him sitting on a throne. In the image of the throne, Caesar was wearing a priestly robe. The inscription read “God and High Priest.” While this was highly offensive to the Jews, this was not the focus of Jesus’s attention. Turning to His critics, He asked, “whose image and inscription is this?” In asking this question, Jesus had turned the tables on those seeking to entrap Him.

What does verse 18 reveal about Jesus?



Day 3: Matthew 22:21-22

Consider why the leaders were “amazed” (v. 22).

The antagonists readily answered Jesus’s question by stating that the image and inscription was Caesar’s. They were confident they had trapped Jesus and waited for His next reply. What came next was not what was expected. “Give . . . to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When Jesus said *give*, He used a word that meant “give up, or give back,” meaning render to Caesar and to God what is rightfully due to them.

In stating this, Jesus recognized the legitimate responsibility of His followers to be obedient to the government, which includes paying lawful taxes. (See also Rom. 13:6.) We must not forget the second part of Jesus’s response: we are to give to God the things that are God’s. While believers are to give the government taxes that are due, their ultimate duty is to honor God, the Creator and Giver of all things. Jesus will spell out in the next section what allegiance or honor to God looks like.

Jesus’s response caught everyone by surprise: “they were amazed.” That amazement no doubt involved two things: the clever way Jesus had avoided their trap and the deeply profound answer Jesus had given.

What are the things you are to give to God?



Day 4: Matthew 22:34-36

Compare verse 35 to verse 18.

After the question about paying taxes, Jesus was approached by the Sadducees with a question about the resurrection (vv. 23-33). The Sadducees were the wealthy aristocrats of Judaism and included those who served as the chief priests. They did not believe in supernatural things like angels, demons, and the resurrection.

Next the “Pharisees . . . came together” for a second try at trapping Jesus. This time the Pharisees themselves confronted Jesus; there would be no more sending their disciples. Their spokesman is identified as an “expert in the law,” or a scribe and teacher of the law who was perhaps the most learned among the gathered Pharisees. He posed a question to Jesus “to test him.”

His question was one of theology: “Which command in the law is the greatest?” This was an age-old debate among the rabbis. The rabbis taught that Moses had received 613 laws on Mount Sinai. Could they be boiled down to the most important ones? A scheme had been created that labeled some laws as “heavier,” meaning they were a higher priority. Some were not as critical and were called the “lighter” laws. In Psalm 15, David boiled the essential laws down to eleven. Isaiah pared them down to six (Isa. 33:15-16), while the prophet Micah got them down to three things required by God (Mic. 6:8). Finally, both Amos and Habakkuk boiled them down to one central command (Amos 5:4; Hab. 2:4).

How is it possible to be an “expert” in Scripture yet miss the One to whom it points?



Day 5: Matthew 22:37-40

Compare these verses to Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5. In these verses is wrapped up how God's people are to honor Him and show allegiance to Him. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." The word *heart* includes our affections. *Soul* speaks of all our life surrendered to God and His service. *Mind* speaks of our intellect and thinking capacity. These words describe giving God our ultimate allegiance to honor Him.

Jesus proclaimed that loving God wholeheartedly was the "greatest and most important" of all the commandments. However, Jesus wasn't finished. The Mosaic law is symbolically represented by the "two tablets" of the law—the first four commandments deal with the vertical relationship with God, while the last six commandments relate to horizontal relationships with others. Because of this, Jesus said, there was one more command that was essential. "The second is like it," meaning a commandment that is equally important. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

All other laws come from these two. What had initially started as a question about the priority of government versus religion ended in an emphasis on honoring and loving God completely and demonstrating His love to others.

How are you loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind?

How are you loving your neighbor as yourself?

APPLY THE TEXT

Consider the relationships, entertainments, activities, and the things you are focused on in your life. How is God honored in the various aspects of your life? Identify a next step you might take in one of those areas to honor God more.

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SESSION 11

Alert

MATTHEW 24:36-51

JESUS IS COMING BACK.



Many people are curious—perhaps fearful—about the end of the world. Everyone from the preppers and survivalists to the skeptic finds the prospect of the end of the world to be a fascinating subject. We read books and watch movies that portray the final days of the planet. Doomsday theories abound. People in general want to know the when, how, who, and what regarding the end of the age. In that, we are not too far removed from Jesus’s first disciples.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD THAT
MOST FASCINATES OR FRIGHTENS YOU?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

After the confrontations in the temple in Matthew 21–23, Jesus left the temple never to return again. As He left, He spoke of the coming destruction of both the temple and Jerusalem (23:37–39).

Chapter 24 begins with the disciples marveling over the magnificence of the temple. Jesus informed them that the temple would be destroyed. His disciples asked when this would happen and what signs would signal His return and the end of the age.

Jesus’s response prompted what is known as the Olivet Discourse, an extended teaching given on the Mount of Olives found in Matthew 24–25. Not every scholar agrees on the meaning of Jesus’s teachings. A good rule of thumb is to always let the context guide the interpretation. With that in mind, consider that the disciples asked two questions of Jesus: when would the temple be destroyed, and what signs will signal His coming and the end of time? A valid approach, then, would be to understand that Jesus was answering these questions.

In verses 4–14, Jesus described events that would occur before His return. These events could be misinterpreted as signs that Jesus’s coming was near. Jesus told the disciples to not be deceived by false messiahs. As a part of this warning, Jesus told them they would suffer persecution “because of my name” (v. 9). He challenged them to stand firm during these days.

Jesus spoke specifically of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (vv. 15–28). Some, however, see these verses as being a prophecy concerning the tribulation or a period of great distress.

In verse 29, the Olivet Discourse shifted to the question regarding Jesus’s return and the end of the age. This discussion continues to the end of the chapter. The bottom line is that the follower of Jesus is to be alert for His coming again. We do not know when. What can be known is that Jesus will return!



36 “Now concerning that **day and hour** **A** no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except **the Father alone**. **B** **37** As the **days of Noah** **C** were, so the coming of the **Son of Man** **D** will be. **38** For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark. **39** They didn’t know until the flood came and swept them all away. This is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be. **40** Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. **41** Two women will be grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left. **42** Therefore **be alert**, **E** since you don’t know what day your Lord is coming. **43** But know this: If the **homeowner** **F** had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into. **44** This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. **45** Who then is a **faithful and wise servant**, **G** whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time? **46** Blessed is that servant whom the master finds doing his job when he comes. **47** Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. **48** But if that wicked servant says in his heart, ‘My master is **delayed**,’ **H** **49** and starts to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with drunkards, **50** that servant’s master will come on a day he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know. **51** He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**.” **I**

A. The timing of Jesus’s return is unknown. This makes any speculation on our part an exercise in futility.

B. The unknown timing reveals Jesus’s voluntary limitation of His divine attributes during His incarnation (see Phil 2:6-8).

C. The timing of Jesus’s second coming is like the arrival of the flood (Gen. 6–7). In Noah’s day, people were going about their business, ignoring the warnings of God’s judgment (Matt. 24:38-39).

D. Taken from Daniel 7, this term reflects both Jesus’s full humanity and His full deity.

E. The best way to be prepared for Jesus’s return is to live with consistent faithfulness.

F. The threat of a robbery would keep the owner of a house alert. Likewise, the assurance of Jesus’s return should keep His people alert and active.

G. The first servant provides a picture of what faithfulness to God looks like as we wait for Jesus’s return.

H. The “wicked servant” used the master’s delay as an excuse to sin. Likewise, many use Jesus’s delay to deny His return, though it really demonstrates grace on His part (2 Pet. 3:9).

I. Pictures the remorse and anguish of an eternity separated from God in hell.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. An Unknown Hour

(Matt. 24:36-41)

We can be certain that Jesus will one day return.

- **What do we learn about God's plans for Jesus's return in these verses?**
- **How do the two illustrations given help us better understand the nature of Jesus's return?**

2. Be Alert

(Matt. 24:42-44)

Believers should be ready for Christ's return.

- **What does it mean to be ready for Jesus's return? Why is it important to be ready?**

3. Be Faithful

(Matt. 24:45-51)

Believers are to remain faithful while we await Christ's return, stewarding well the resources God has given us.

- **How are you preparing yourself for Jesus's return?**

Apply the Text

As a group, consider how often we tend to be like the wicked servant as we allow the things of life to distract us from anticipating Christ's return.

- **What are some ways your group can assist each other in staying alert?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Last Things

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 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; Revelation 1:7.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use cross references to learn more about a word or phrase.

In Matthew 24:51, Jesus used the expression "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Examine these other passages where Jesus used the phrase: Matthew 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 25:30; and Luke 13:28. Observe the context and setting of these passages. Write a summary of what the expression refers to and why it should be a warning to all.

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 24:36-41

Consider why Jesus made reference to the time Noah.

Because no one knows the time of Christ's return, any attempt to speculate and calculate it is a waste of time. Instead, preparedness is the proper response to the fact that Jesus will return. Jesus challenged His followers to be ready because His return could happen at any time.

Jesus used the account of Noah and the flood to point to the need to be ready. When the flood arrived, the wicked were engaged in the normal activities of life—"eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." Nothing was wrong with these activities. But they had given no thought beyond the immediate. Such will be the coming again of Jesus. Everyone will be impacted, and no one will be exempt from the events surrounding His return. As those in Noah's day, people will ignore warnings and obvious signs of Christ's return and be unprepared to meet Him.

Jesus further illustrated His point with illustrations from daily life. The pictures are of two men working in a field and two women milling grain. "One will be taken and one left." The point is there will be a separation of the wicked from the righteous.

What do you learn about Jesus's return in these verses?



Day 2: Matthew 24:42-44

Circle the phrases "be alert" and "be ready."

Because no one can know the day when the "Lord is coming," Christ's followers are to "be alert." We need to live with the expectation that it could happen at any moment.

Jesus used another illustration—the homeowner and a thief. The idea of Jesus's return being like a thief coming at an unknown time became a common metaphor for the early church as they anticipated Jesus's coming. It is used in the New Testament seven times to describe this event (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2,4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

Verse 44 summarizes the entire warning to be ready. Constant watchfulness is essential because Jesus's return will be "at an hour you do not expect." The command is not just to be alert or stay awake but to also "be ready."

While these verses challenge believers to be constantly watching and expecting Christ's return, they also serve as a strong notice to us not to attempt to pinpoint the date of His return. Jesus said, "No one knows," and "it will happen when least expected!"

If Jesus said it is not possible to know the time of His coming, why do people keep trying to predict the date of His return?

What does it mean to be ready for Jesus's return?

How can you know if you are ready?



Day 3: Matthew 24:45-47

Note what the “blessed” servant was doing.

Jesus told a parable contrasting two responses to the absence of the master of a household. The implication based on the second half of the parable is that the master was away for an extended period. The servant who was found “doing his job” when the master returned was applauded by Jesus. The word “blessed” is a word that can mean “congratulations” or “how fortunate” is this person. It is the same word used in Matthew 5:3-11 in the Beatitudes. Note that this servant wasn’t sitting idly waiting for the master to return. He was busy doing the job he had been given to do. This applies to Christians today. We are not to be idly waiting for Christ’s return but are to be engaged in the commission He has given us—to make disciples of the nations.

Jesus emphasized the truth He was teaching with the words “truly I tell you.” These words mean: pay attention! Because of the loyal servant’s continued diligence in carrying out his assignment, the master promoted him out of his temporary assignment into a permanent position of responsibility. That promotion most likely was to the position of “steward” of the household since he was “put . . . in charge of all” the master’s possessions. He now had the permanent responsibility to watch over and use wisely all that the master possessed. It was a position of great accountability and great prestige.

**The servant was found “doing his job.”
What is your God-given job?**



Day 4: Matthew 24:48-50

Reflect on the significance of the words “in his heart” (v. 48).

Next came the contrast. What if the servant did just the opposite? What if he didn’t take his responsibility seriously? What might be the outcome?

In this part of the parable, the servant is labeled as “that wicked servant.” He reasoned “in his heart” that his master was “delayed.” The word *delayed* carries the idea of being away for a long time. Thinking that he had plenty of time, he began to mistreat those under his authority. Not only did he fail to care for those in his charge, but he neglected other duties by partying “with drunkards.” His attitude was a reckless disdain for the fact that the master could return at any moment.

In Jesus’s parable, this servant does not represent a follower of Christ. If this parable represents two different servants, Jesus could well be setting up a contrast between a true follower of Christ who is faithful and alert for the return of his Lord, and an unbeliever who has no saving relationship with Him and scoffs at the idea of His return.

Just like the thief who comes at an hour when he is not expected, so the “servant’s master will come” when least expected. Again, Jesus spoke of both an unexpected day and an unexpected hour. This sudden return applies, of course, to the faithful and wise servant, as well as the wicked servant. One was ready for his return, the other was not.

How would your life change if you knew Jesus was returning tomorrow?



Day 5: Matthew 24:51

Compare Matthew 24:51 to 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

Verse 51 focuses on the punishment of the wicked servant. Jesus said the master would “assign him a place with the hypocrites.” Matthew’s Gospel often speaks of Jesus condemning hypocrites. (See Matt. 6:2,5,16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13-29.) Jesus used this term to refer to the religious such as the scribes and Pharisees who appeared pure and pious but who were instead corrupt in their judgmental self-righteousness.

The punishment will be severe: “He will cut him to pieces.” To be cut to pieces means to cut a person in two; this punishment was applied in the ancient world (see Heb. 11:37). This terminology is only used elsewhere in Scripture for the dismemberment of sacrificial animals. The picture is that of a terrible end for those who fail to be alert.

Further, the place of confinement would involve “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The weeping signified sorrow and regret; the gnashing of teeth represented frustration and furor. In Matthew 8:12, Jesus identified this place of anguish and suffering as the eternal destination of the wicked. It seems reasonable to assume that the evil servant’s suffering on earth provides a hint to the intensity of eternal suffering for those who reject Christ.

How might verse 51 change the way we pray for others?

APPLY THE TEXT

Think through your typical day. What activities do you engage in that assist you in remaining faithful as you await Christ’s return? How can you enhance those activities in your daily schedule? Are there other actions you can take to stay alert?

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SESSION 12

Active Faith

MATTHEW 25:31-46

THE WAY WE TREAT JESUS'S FOLLOWERS REVEALS THE NATURE
OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.



Annual performance reviews can create both anticipation and anxiety. Many employees experience this year after year. In most cases, managers have a metric or checklist by which they evaluate your work performance. In some unfortunate cases, an employee has no clue what the criterion will be for the review. It is helpful to know the benchmarks we are striving for as we carry out our daily responsibilities.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF KNOWING THE CRITERIA BY WHICH YOU WILL BE EVALUATED? WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES OF NOT KNOWING?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Chapter 25 continues Jesus's Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25). He spoke about the preparation needed in anticipation of His return. Beginning in Matthew 24:45, Jesus told three parables about preparedness. The first contrasted the actions of a wise, sensible servant with the actions of a wicked servant while the master was away (24:45-51).

The second parable (25:1-13) concerned ten virgins who were part of a wedding celebration. The word *virgin* here refers to young women of marriageable age. Their job was to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding feast. However, the bridegroom was delayed for some unexplained reason. When he finally arrived at an unexpected hour—midnight—these ladies roused from sleep. At that point it was discovered that five of them had prepared their lamps with plenty of oil. The prepared virgins accompanied the bridegroom to the feast. The unprepared ones failed to be ready and lacked enough oil to light the bridegroom's way to the marriage feast. They had to go

buy oil, then found themselves locked out of the feast. This was a clear warning that we must always be ready.

The third parable in the Olivet Discourse tells of a master and servants (vv. 14-30). Once again, the master was absent. The time of his return was unknown. He entrusted three of his servants with sums of money. Two wise servants faithfully carried out their duties by investing and earning profit on the master's money. The third servant was driven by fear of the master. As a result, he failed to seize the opportunity to increase the money placed in his stewardship. When the master returned, the first two servants were rewarded for their wisdom. The fearful servant was punished for allowing fear to paralyze him. This servant's penalty corresponds to that of the wicked servant in 24:51. The bottom line is that we are to be prepared and faithfully carrying out the work given to us by our Master.



31 “When the Son of Man comes **in his glory**, **A** and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. **32 All the nations** **B** will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates **the sheep from the goats**. **C** **33** He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left. **34** Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom **prepared for you** **D** from the foundation of the world. **35** ‘For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; **36** I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.’ **37** Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? **38** When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you? **39** When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?’ **40** And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, **whatever you did** **E** for one of the **least of these** **F** brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ **41** Then he will also say to those on the left, ‘Depart from me, you who are **cursed**, **G** into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! **42** For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; **43** I was a stranger and you didn’t take me in; I was naked and you didn’t clothe me, sick and in prison and you didn’t take care of me.’ **44** Then they too will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison, and not help you?’ **45** Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ **46** And they will go away into **eternal punishment**, **H** but the righteous into eternal life.”

A. At the incarnation, Jesus came in humility. At His second coming, He will come in power and majesty (Matt. 16:27; 24:30).

B. Jesus’s authority has no limits. Every person from every nation and every generation is subject to Him (see Isa. 66:18; Joel 3:2).

C. The sheep symbolize the righteous, while the goats are the unrighteous.

D. While Jesus told His followers to be prepared, He also noted what God had prepared for them. This reward was not spur of the moment, but something made ready from eternity past.

E. The ministry of the sheep was not theoretical. They proved their faith by taking action. This genuine faith based on action is the standard by which the King will judge.

F. Followers of Jesus who are in need, dealing with persecution, or experiencing abuse. These are His “brothers and sisters,” and Jesus shares their suffering.

G. While the sheep (believers) are blessed for their actions, the goats (unbelievers) are condemned for their apathy.

H. Jesus said this “eternal fire” initially was designed for Satan and his demons (v. 41). This stands in stark contrast to the eternal blessings enjoyed by the righteous.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Judge

(Matt. 25:31-33)

We should live our lives knowing we will stand before Jesus one day.

- **What do these verses teach about Jesus's role in the final judgment?**
- **What is the significance of the right hand and the left hand?**

2. The Righteous

(Matt. 25:34-40)

We demonstrate our love for God when we minister to other believers.

- **What evidence distinguishes between a righteous and unrighteous person?**
- **What obstacles prevent us from ministering to the needs of others?**

3. The Faithless

(Matt. 25:41-46)

We should recognize that unbelievers will be eternally separated from God and will face everlasting punishment.

- **What are the contrasts between verses 34-40 and 41-46?**
- **What prevents some people in our culture from believing the biblical teaching about hell and eternal life?**

Apply the Text

Within your group, create a list of acts of compassion that you as a group and as individuals have carried out.

- **How do these acts of compassion reflect the condition of your heart?**

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 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 21:8.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Respond emotionally to a principle of doctrine.

Read Matthew 13:40-43,49-50; 18:7-9; and 25:41,46 and record your thoughts about the eternal destiny of the lost. What is their prospect? How is it described? How long will it last? Is there any reprieve? How should knowing the destiny of the lost impel believers to share the gospel with others? Spend time talking to God about your level of concern for the lost and how you can see them the way He sees them.

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 25:31-33

Underline the words “he will separate them.”

While these verses are preceded by parables about Jesus’s return, the account described in 25:31-46 is not a parable. It is a prophecy about the coming time when Jesus will sit in judgment. “Son of Man” is taken from the messianic prophecy in Daniel 7:13. The words *glory* and *glorious* speak of Jesus’s heavenly splendor, majesty, and radiance. In this picture, the Son of Man is sitting on His throne to bring judgment. The word translated “nations” can mean either people groups or Gentiles. The word case in the Greek implies that it is here referring to individuals rather than nations.

The identity of the ones standing before the throne is impacted by how one interprets the phrase “these brothers and sisters of mine” in verse 40. One interpretation is that these “brothers and sisters” are the down-and-out, the social outcasts, the marginalized. Those around the throne will be judged by how they treated these vulnerable members of society. Another interpretation identifies “these brothers and sisters” as followers of Christ.

These people will be separated “one from another.” This separation will occur at the judgment. The basis for this separation will be plainly stated in the following verses.

What do these verses teach about Jesus’s role in the final judgment?



Day 2: Matthew 25:34-36

Notice the recipient of the actions in these verses.

The one identified as the Son of Man and sitting on a throne (v. 31) is now called “the King.” John 5:27 explains that the Father has given His Son the authority to judge, and here Christ demonstrated the power to exercise that right.

The “right” side of a throne was seen as the place of honor. To those put in this place of honor, Jesus says “come,” meaning come to the reward “prepared” for you. Jesus said this group was “blessed by my Father.” Their reward will be a “kingdom” where the righteous will live and reign with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12). The reason for the reward is introduced by the word “for” (v. 35). The rewards were based on their actions of ministering to the King. In each case, the King was the recipient of the care they had given.

A note of caution and clarification is necessary at this point. Although these righteous ones were applauded for their acts of compassion, these acts did not earn them the reward of the kingdom. This account is not teaching a salvation by works. The clear teaching of the New Testament is that no one can merit or earn God’s gracious gift of salvation. Salvation comes by the grace of God through Christ’s achievement on the cross. These actions of compassion by the righteous ones were the outflow and evidence of a right relationship with God (see Eph. 2:8-10).

What are the implications of Jesus being “the King”?



Day 3: Matthew 25:37-40

Identify the “brothers and sisters of mine.”

Jesus used the word “righteous” to identify the sheep. They expressed great surprise that their acts of compassion were done for the King. Their question is understandable, “When did we have opportunity to do this?” The surprise of the righteous points to the fact that their deeds of compassion were carried out selflessly.

The key to understanding the identity of “these brothers and sisters of mine” may be found in the phrase “the least of these.” This phrase has appeared in Matthew’s Gospel several times as an identifier for followers of Jesus (see Matt. 10:42; 18:6,10,14). In Matthew 12:50, Jesus identified those who followed Him as disciples and did the will of the Father as “my brother and sister and mother.” Thus, these acts of compassion were ways in which the righteous responded to followers of Jesus. Some Bible scholars see these least ones as Christian missionaries and evangelists. Therefore, the response of the righteous was a positive response to the gospel message. The basis, then, for inheriting the kingdom was an acceptance of the good news of Jesus. Out of that relationship with Christ, these righteous ones ministered to the needs of others and, in doing so, they were caring for Jesus as well.

What evidence distinguishes between a righteous and unrighteous person?

What prevents you from ministering to the needs of others?



Day 4: Matthew 25:41-45

Note the similarities and differences between these verses and verses 34-40.

Once again, the King made a pronouncement. This time, however, it was a condemnation of those who had been separated from the righteous. The words of this condemnation mirror the words spoken in verse 34. However, instead of “come,” the King said “depart from me.” Instead of “blessed,” they were “cursed.” Instead of a kingdom prepared, there was “eternal fire prepared.”

Notice that this fire was not prepared from the foundation of the world (compare v. 41 to v. 34). Eternal punishment was not part of God’s original plan. It was put in place after the rebellion against God by both the fallen angels and sinful mankind. In addition, the wicked enter this eternal punishment of their own choice by their rejection of Jesus.

The King read the indictment against these wicked ones for their indifference to “the least of these.” This group lacked compassion for others as a result of their rejection of the message of Jesus. By their failure to love and serve the least of these, the wicked ones revealed their rejection of Jesus and His gift of salvation. The bad fruit of their life spoke to the bad condition of their heart.

Those who did not show compassion expressed surprise as they were confronted with their failure to do so. These actions are the same as those expressed in verses 37-39 but are listed in shortened form.

How does James 2:14-19 shed light on these verses?



Day 5: Matthew 25:46

Compare verse 46 to Revelation 20:7-15.

Verse 46 sets forth the eternal contrast between the two groups. Separation was not just for the purposes of judgment in the moment. It determined judgment for eternity. The ones who failed to trust in Christ and demonstrate that through serving others were sent away “into eternal punishment.” In verse 41, Jesus said that they were cast into “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!” For the righteous, their final destination is that of “eternal life.” As *eternal life* speaks of life that will last for eternity, so the words *eternal punishment* speak of punishment that lasts eternally.

Earlier in Matthew’s Gospel, John the Baptist had declared that God’s wrath was coming. Those who face that wrath “will burn with fire that never goes out” (3:7-12). This theme continues throughout Matthew. At the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated that those who did not obey His words would face destruction (7:13-27). In His parables on the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said that those who cause evil will be thrown “into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (13:42,50). After telling Peter that he should forgive seventy times seven (18:22), Jesus said that God the Father would be angry and show no mercy to those who refuse to forgive a brother or sister from the heart (vv. 32-35).

What prevents some people from believing the biblical teaching about hell and eternal life?

APPLY THE TEXT

Spend time evaluating how much you show compassion and ministry to others. Consider ways you can engage in acts of compassion this week. Analyze your motive for wanting to extend merciful treatment to others.

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SESSION 13

Our Atonement

MATTHEW 26:17-30

JESUS CAME TO DIE ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS.



None of us knows the precise time and date of our death. We do know, however, that death is a certainty for all. Consider this scenario: you know the exact day of your impending death, but no one else knows. You throw a dinner party for your family and friends, knowing this will be the last meal you will have with them. What emotions do you think you would experience if this scenario played out in reality?

*HOW DOES DEATH SOMETIMES SHARPEN OUR FOCUS ON
THE THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER IN LIFE?*

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The extensive narrative of confrontation in Jerusalem that began in chapter 21 reaches its conclusion with the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. Matthew 26:1-46 sets the stage by recounting several preparatory events leading to the arrest and the beginning of the trials of Jesus. Each incident plays an important part in the preparation for Jesus's atoning death. The events in chapter 26 are not necessarily presented in chronological order. For instance, the narrative of the woman anointing Jesus's body with costly perfume in verses 6-13 took place on Saturday evening according to John's Gospel. John also identified this woman as Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha (see John 12:1-3).

Matthew began chapter 26 with the fourth prediction of Jesus's death (see also 16:21; 17:9,12,22-23; 20:18-19; 26:2). With the mention of His impending death, Jesus gave a clue as to the time these events took place. Passover began on Thursday evening at sundown. Therefore, Jesus most likely spoke these words on Tuesday, the same day of His Olivet Discourse (chaps. 24-25).

Also on that day, or perhaps a day earlier, the chief priests met to initiate Jesus's arrest (26:3-5). Sometime that afternoon, while Jesus spoke of end times under the olive trees on the Mount of Olives, Judas the betrayer sold Him out (vv. 14-16).

Sometime on Thursday, Jesus sent John and Peter to prepare for the Passover celebration (see Luke 22:8). Following the Passover meal, Jesus returned to the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, where He spent an agonizing time in prayer as He faced the coming event of the crucifixion (vv. 36-46).

During the short journey to the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, Jesus predicted the denial of Peter (vv. 30-35). The fulfillment of this prediction would take place following Jesus's arrest while Jesus was undergoing an informal trial before Caiaphas, the high priest (vv. 69-75).



17 On the first day of **Unleavened Bread** **A** the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the **Passover**?” **B** **18** “Go into the city to a certain man,” he said, “and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: **My time is near**; **C** I am celebrating the Passover at your place with my disciples.’” **19** So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. **20** When evening came, he was reclining at the table with the Twelve. **21** While they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” **22** Deeply distressed, each one began to say to him, “Surely not I, Lord?” **23** He replied, “The one who dipped his hand with me in the bowl—he will betray me. **24** The Son of Man will go just **as it is written** **D** about him, but **woe** **E** to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for him if he had not been born.” **25** Judas, his betrayer, replied, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” “You have said it,” he told him. **26** As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take and eat it; **this is my body**.” **F** **27** Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, “Drink from it, all of you. **28** For this is **my blood of the covenant**, **G** which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. **29** But I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until **that day** **H** when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” **30** After singing a hymn, they went out to the **Mount of Olives**. **I**

A. The first of three annual feasts commemorating Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. (See Ex. 23:15; Deut. 16:16.)

B. By Jesus’s day, this feast was a part of Unleavened Bread. It recalls how God spared Israel through the blood of lambs in Egypt.

C. His impending betrayal and crucifixion. Jesus also referred to this as His “hour” (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

D. A reminder that Jesus’s sufferings were foretold in the Old Testament (see Isa. 52–53; Ps. 22).

E. Judgment (see also Matt. 11:21; 18:7; 23:13-16). While Jesus’s death was ordained by God, Judas was accountable for his actions.

F. Jesus established the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. The bread represents His body. Luke added that His body was “given for you” (22:19).

G. The wine in the cup represents His blood, which initiated a new covenant between God and His people (see Jer. 31:31-34).

H. Jesus established God’s kingdom at His first coming. It will be completed when He returns.

I. A hill just east of Jerusalem. This was the site of Gethsemane, where Jesus would be betrayed by Judas and arrested.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Coming Betrayal

(Matt. 26:17-25)

Believers must recognize their own capacity to betray Jesus.

- **How did the disciples respond to Jesus's announcement of betrayal? How do you think He felt in that moment?**
- **What can we do to resist becoming immune to the dangers of sin?**

2. Coming Atonement

(Matt. 26:26-30)

We find forgiveness by accepting Jesus's death as the payment for our sins.

- **What was the significance of the Passover meal?**
- **How did the meal connect to Jesus's mission?**
- **Why is it important for believers to remember Jesus's sacrifice on the cross?**

Apply the Text

According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, Christians are to approach the Lord's Supper with care and examination. Discuss with your group some helpful approaches to using the Lord's Supper observance for personal examination. Share ways to prepare for participating in the Lord's Supper that have been meaningful for members of your group.

KEY DOCTRINE:

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming. (See 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23-29.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Compare multiple passages to get a better understanding of a biblical truth.

Compare Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Consider what each passage teaches about the Lord's Supper. What makes the passages unique? What elements did each writer seem to emphasize in their description? How did the writers encourage us to reflect on the past and look to the future? Which Gospel writer did Paul follow more closely?

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 26:17-20

Compare these verses to Mark 14:12-16.

The week known as Holy Week reached Thursday, the “first day of Unleavened Bread.” This was the designation for an eight-day festival that began with the Passover and continued for seven days after Passover. The terms *Unleavened Bread* and *Passover* were used interchangeably to speak of this festival remembering the event that began the exodus from Egypt.

“Preparations” for eating the Passover meal included buying the various items needed for the meal. Jesus’s divine knowledge enabled Him to give His disciples very specific instructions about where they were to make preparations. The cryptic instructions in verse 18 likely were designed to hide the location of the Passover meal from Judas, who may have jumped at the chance to pass on its location to the soldiers of the chief priests. Judas, just like the other nine disciples, would not know the location of the upper room until they entered the room with Jesus.

Preparing the Passover involved leading the animal into the temple precinct through the Nicanor gates. Here a priest would cut the throat of the lamb, allowing its blood to flow out into a bowl and then poured it at the base of the altar. Peter and John would then carry the carcass of the sheep on two staves to the house where the upper room was located and roast it for the Passover meal.

What is the significance of Jesus saying, “My time is near”?



Day 2: Matthew 26:21-24

Note how Jesus again demonstrated His divine knowledge of a future event.

While Jesus had spoken several times about His upcoming arrest and crucifixion, this was the first time He mentioned a traitor among His followers. Eleven of the disciples were devastated by the statement. Each began to say, “Surely not I, Lord?” Each disciple was hoping for a negative answer from Jesus: “No, you are not the one.”

The Passover meal included several instances when each participant would dip a piece of unleavened bread in the bowl on the table. Even so, Jesus assured them that only one of them would betray Him. What made this statement even more devastating was the fact that in that culture, sharing a meal with someone was an expression of friendship.

While the impending death of Jesus was the fulfillment of both prophecy and the plan of God, the actions of Judas arose from his own willful choice. There is no conflict between God’s sovereign will and Judas’s free will. Jesus was not a victim of some political process but the center of God’s plan for the salvation of humanity. Judas was not merely a pawn in God’s plan but someone who acted out of his own decisions and perhaps flawed thinking. Because of this, Judas would suffer the consequences for his decision.

What is the significance of the phrase, “just as it is written about him,” in verse 24?



Day 3: Matthew 26:25

Consider the motives of Judas.

Notice how Judas's question to Jesus was similar to that of the other disciples with one exception. Instead of calling Jesus *Lord*, as in verse 22, Judas called Him "Rabbi." In the Gospel of Matthew none of the other disciples ever called Jesus *Rabbi*. This was a term used by others as they addressed Jesus. The title indicated distance and formality rather than intimacy and familiarity (see 23:7-8). This perhaps points to the fact that Judas no longer was a part of these men who followed so closely to Jesus.

There is much speculation on the motives of Judas for his willingness to turn Jesus over to the chief priests. John's Gospel tells us Judas was a thief (John 12:6), and Judas's earlier question to the chief priests reveals that part of his motivation was greed (Matt. 26:15). No doubt, however, there was more to Judas's thinking than just greed. Was there an attempt to force Jesus's hand and make Him begin His revolution against Rome? Was this His attempt to bring in a literal kingdom on earth? Maybe, thought Judas, if Jesus was backed into a corner, He would lash out against His foes and take His rightful place as a religious and political leader.

Jesus's statement, "You have said it," could mean, "Those are your words, not mine." Or, it could indicate agreement. Regardless, Jesus knew what Judas was about to do, and in all probability, Judas knew that Jesus knew.

Verse 25 reminds us that we cannot hide our true intentions from Jesus. Why is this important?



Day 4: Matthew 26:26-27

Reflect on the fact that Jesus gave thanks while knowing what the cup represented.

The Passover meal included prayers, blessings, and sharing a variety of dishes with different meanings. One of those dishes was the *matzah* bread, a flat, unleavened piece of bread that represented the bread eaten in haste in Egypt as the Israelites prepared to flee. Jesus broke and gave this bread to each disciple with the instructions to "take and eat." With this action, Jesus changed the meaning of this bread. The breaking of the bread pointed to His death. No longer was this a reminder of the exodus event; now it would serve as a reminder of Christ's atoning death.

Four cups of wine were used in the Passover ceremony. "After giving thanks," Jesus gave one of these cups to the disciples with the instructions to "drink from it." Most likely this was the third cup of the Passover, called the cup of redemption. This was based on the promise in Exodus 6:7 that God would redeem His people from slavery. Jesus transformed this cup into the cup of remembrance. Instead of a cup that looked forward to a promised redemption, the cup became a remembrance of Jesus's sacrifice that paid for our redemption.

Jesus called this cup "my blood of the covenant." God's covenants in the Old Testament were ratified through blood sacrifices. In the death of Jesus, a new covenant was instituted through His blood, giving a new pathway to a right relationship with God.

Thank Jesus for the sacrifice of His body and His blood.



Day 5: Matthew 26:28-30

Identify the purpose of Jesus's sacrificial death.

Verse 28 is perhaps the watershed verse in the Gospel of Matthew. This statement from Jesus—“my blood . . . is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”—is the reason behind everything narrated in this Gospel. Jesus came for one purpose. Everything He taught, all He endured from His enemies, led to this purpose of shedding His blood so that sins could be forgiven. This was done for many. This includes all who place their trust in Him.

Jesus's words “but I tell you” were spoken emphatically to emphasize the statement to follow. In this statement about not drinking “from this fruit of the vine from now on,” Jesus was speaking of His departure from this earth. He also spoke of drinking it “new with you in my Father's kingdom.” This was a word of hope. His death would not be the end. He would return to bring in the Father's kingdom. This statement of Jesus was both a looking back in remembrance of His sacrificial death for the sins of the world and a looking forward to His return and the establishment of His earthly kingdom.

As Jesus and the disciples concluded the celebration, a final psalm was sung, most likely Psalm 118. As they finished, Jesus and His disciples returned to the area on the “Mount of Olives” where they had spent much time during the final week (see Luke 21:37).

If Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins, why do you think many believers continue to struggle with guilt?

APPLY THE TEXT

While we will never know the mind of Judas as he betrayed Jesus, we can know our own mind. How might you be tempted to betray Jesus and deny Him as Peter did? What steps might you take to eliminate these false steps from your life?

JOURNAL



SESSION 14

Our Savior

MATTHEW 27:27-31,45-54

JESUS ENDURED THE CROSS SO THAT WE MIGHT HAVE ACCESS TO GOD.



Biographers will spend hundreds of pages describing the life of their subjects, but generally limit the pages about their death to just a few. For example, the three-volume biography of Winston Churchill, *The Last Lion*, by William Manchester and Paul Reid devotes 2,622 pages to Churchill's life and only three to his death. This is not the case with the Gospel of Matthew's account of Jesus. Jesus's death was central, and Matthew devoted seven chapters out of twenty-eight to chronicle the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus.

WHAT DOES THE AMOUNT OF SPACE DEVOTED TO JESUS'S DEATH TELL YOU ABOUT ITS IMPORTANCE? WHY DO YOU THINK IT'S IMPORTANT?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

With the transition between Matthew 26 and 27, the ordeal of Jesus's arrest and trial shifted from Thursday to Friday. During the night, Jesus endured an illegal trial. Jewish law prohibited nighttime trials. In addition, most likely the entire Sanhedrin was not present. This, too, made the trial illegal. At daybreak, another hasty trial finalized charges against Jesus. Initially, Jesus was charged with blasphemy. No doubt, discussion was held concerning what charges to present to the Roman procurator that would prompt the death penalty. Once those charges were agreed upon, Jesus was taken to Pilate for the trial intended to end in His death.

In the meantime, Judas was filled with remorse and returned the money. Only Matthew includes that Judas committed suicide by hanging himself. Luke mentioned it in the book of Acts (Acts 1:18-19).

The priests who violated the law in trying Jesus were sticklers for the law concerning the returned money. Tainted money could not be used for temple purposes.

The priests chose to use the money to buy a plot of ground for a pauper's cemetery.

Next came the trial before the Roman procurator, Pilate, who alone could order an execution. Three charges were brought against Jesus: misleading the nation, refusing to pay taxes, and claiming to be a king (Luke 23:2). These political charges could result in the death penalty. After much wrangling with the Sanhedrin, Pilate finally condemned Jesus to death. Jesus was mocked, tortured by the soldiers, and led away to be crucified.

Matthew initially focused on those around the cross. Not until the end of the crucifixion scene does Matthew turn attention to Jesus and His final moments.

Chapter 27 closes with the burial of Jesus in a borrowed tomb. Although the disciples seem to have forgotten Jesus's promise to rise the third day, the religious leaders had not. They set a guard to prevent anyone from stealing the body. The sealing and guarding of the tomb in the end served as proof to Jesus's resurrection.



27 Then the **governor's soldiers** **A** took Jesus into the governor's residence and gathered the whole company around him. **28** They stripped him and **dressed him** **B** in a scarlet robe. **29** They twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and placed a staff in his right hand. And they knelt down before him and mocked him: "Hail, **king of the Jews!**" **C** **30** Then they spat on him, took the staff, and kept hitting him on the head. **31** After they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him. [. . .] **45** From noon until three in the afternoon, **darkness** **D** came over the whole land. **46** About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "**Elí, Elí, lemá sabach-tháni?**" **E** that is, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" **47** When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling for **Elijah.**" **F** **48** Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and offered him a drink. **49** But the rest said, "Let's see if Elijah comes to save him." **50** But Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and **gave up his spirit.** **G** **51** Suddenly, the **curtain of the sanctuary** **H** was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. **53** And they came out of the tombs after his resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many. **54** When the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was the **Son of God!**" **I**

A. This cohort of Roman soldiers could have been as large as six hundred men.

B. To humiliate Jesus, the soldiers used a robe, a crown of thorns, and a staff (vv. 28-29). Each was a parody of royal trappings.

C. The Romans used the title as a joke. Yet, it was true in a way they didn't know (Matt. 27:11,42).

D. Darkness in the middle of the day. Many scholars compare it to the darkness of God's judgment against Egypt (Ex. 10:21-23).

E. See Psalm 22:1. Jesus's words are quoted in Aramaic. His cry expresses the isolation He felt as sin separated Him from His Father.

F. Some in the crowd thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to rescue Him. Legend stated that Elijah could come to aid those who were suffering.

G. Idiom for physical death. Jesus maintained control, even to the moment of His passing.

H. This thick curtain limited access to the holy of holies. This, along with an earthquake and the raising of the dead (vv. 51-53), were additional supernatural signs.

I. The centurion's confession mirrored that of the disciples (Matt. 16:16) and foreshadowed the gospel being received by both Jews and Gentiles.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Mocked

(Matt. 27:27-31)

Jesus's willingness to endure the shame and humiliation of crucifixion leads us to humble surrender and praise.

- **What emotions does this passage evoke in you?**

2. Forsaken

(Matt. 27:45-49)

We can be confident in knowing that Jesus's death was part of God's redemptive plan.

- **How does Jesus's cry on the cross point to the greatness of our sin?**

3. Son of God

(Matt. 27:50-54)

The crucifixion of Jesus calls for the response of faith.

- **What evidence from the day's events might be used to help others recognize that Jesus was the Son of God?**

Apply the Text

As a group, make a list of things people do to try to get into heaven.

- **Why is each one a dead end? How do the events that occurred as Jesus was on the cross validate that all the work required for salvation has already been accomplished?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Salvation

Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior. (See John 1:12-13; Titus 2:14.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Examine an Old Testament passage to better understand a New Testament truth.

Of Jesus's seven cries from the cross, the only one Matthew recorded was Jesus's quote from Psalm 22:1. Psalm 22 is a messianic psalm that predicted much of what Jesus suffered on the cross. Read and reflect on Psalm 22. Why are these messianic prophecies so important today? Use what you learned from Psalm 22 as a cross reference for deeper study into Matthew 27:33-50; Mark 15:22-37; Luke 23:33-48; and John 19:17-37.

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 27:27-31

Compare verse 29 to *Philippians 2:10-11* and *Revelation 19:16*.

The “whole company” of the “governor’s soldiers” was six hundred strong. They would have accompanied Pilate from his residence in Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea. They all joined in mocking Jesus. Picking up on the charge against Jesus that He claimed to be the King of the Jews, they stripped Him of His clothing, and put “a scarlet robe” on Him. This robe was an outer garment a soldier used to keep warm as he stood guard.

Adding to the mockery of the robe, the soldiers fashioned a crown out of a thorn bush. The design was a copy of the wreath worn by the Caesar on special occasions. Pictures of this wreath are engraved on Roman coins. This fake crown was then pressed into Jesus’s head.

A further symbol of mockery was a “staff” or flimsy reed they placed in His hand as a make-shift scepter. With this they began verbally abusing Him and crying out “Hail, king of the Jews!” The whole scene was designed to humiliate.

More atrocities followed as the soldiers “spat on” Jesus and continued “hitting him on the head” with the staff. Jesus had predicted these things would happen (Matt. 20:19). All of this happened in addition to the severe flogging (27:26). Punishment by flogging was brutal in and of itself.

Thank Jesus for what He was willing to endure on your behalf that day.



Day 2: Matthew 27:45-46

Reflect on the meaning of Jesus’s cry in verse 46.

In verse 45, Matthew’s focus turned to the last three hours of Jesus’s life. Around noon the sky became unnaturally dark. This was reminiscent of the darkness in Egypt during the first deliverance of God’s people (Ex. 10:22-23).

Matthew makes no mention of when the crucifixion began. Based on information from Mark 15:25, it was probably at the third hour of the day, or nine in the morning. Verse 46 narrates the final hour or so of Jesus’s life. While the other Gospels record more final words of Jesus, Matthew records only one. In a loud voice, He cried out in Aramaic these words taken from Psalm 22:1: “*Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni.*” This was a cry of despair that God had forsaken Him. Translated, this cry meant “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” This cry is at the same time a poignant plea and a strange declaration.

How could it be that God abandoned Jesus? God is holy and cannot look on sin. He turned away from Jesus bearing the sin of all the world and of all time on the cross. This is a deep look at the extreme seriousness of sin and its ultimate results. Not only does sin separate us from God (Isa. 59:2), but sin also separated God the Father from God the Son.

How does Jesus’s cry on the cross point to the greatness of your sin?



Day 3: Matthew 27:47-49

Compare verse 47 to Malachi 4:5.

Jesus's words were misunderstood by some surrounding the cross. When He called out *Eli*, He was speaking of God. But some at the cross thought He was calling out for Elijah the prophet. The Aramaic word for "God" (*Eli*, v. 46) sounds similar to the name "Elijah." Based on the prophecy in Malachi 4:5 that Elijah would return before the day of the Lord, some thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to rescue Him.

In response, someone again offered Him vinegar or cheap wine that served to quench thirst and lessen the pain. Jesus had refused the drink earlier (v. 34). The sour wine offered at the beginning of the crucifixion was mixed with some type of narcotic to ease the pain of the cross. Matthew called this additive "gall" or "bile." Mark called it "myrrh," while Luke and John speak only of "sour wine." Whether this was the same wine offered in verse 48 is not known. Soldiers often had a supply of sour wine for their own re-hydration. This may be what was offered to Jesus. This entire incident echoes the words of messianic Psalm 69:21: "Instead, they gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

The onlookers misunderstood Jesus's cry from the cross. In what ways do people still misunderstand what Jesus did on the cross?



Day 4: Matthew 27:50-51

Note the symbolism of the curtain being torn from top to bottom.

Once again, Jesus cried out with a "loud voice" (also in v. 46). Jesus did not die with a whimper. Most who were crucified would grow weaker with their voices barely audible, but Jesus "cried out" loudly. He was not defeated but in full control of His senses. His task was complete. John's Gospel indicates what Jesus cried out: "It is finished" (John 19:30).

With that cry, Jesus "gave up his spirit." This statement parallels Jesus's words from Luke 23:46: "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." When the spiritual battle was complete—the sins of the world were atoned for—Jesus voluntarily gave up His spirit to His Father (see John 10:18).

A second phenomenal act of God while Jesus was on the cross was the tearing of "the curtain of the sanctuary." This curtain separated the holy place from the holy of holies and was a symbol of separation (Ex. 26:31-33). The curtain in Herod's temple was reportedly almost twenty-one inches thick. For such a curtain to be split from "top to bottom" could only be an act of God. Symbolically, the barrier between Holy God and unholy humanity was removed by the death of Jesus (Heb. 4:16).

Coinciding with the curtain being torn in two was a violent earthquake. This earthquake evidently was the force behind another supernatural occurrence at the time of Jesus's death, the opening of the graves of a select group of people.

What evidence in these verses indicates that Jesus was still in control?



Day 5: Matthew 27:52-54

Highlight the centurion's confession.

Obviously, the earthquake opened tombs. Though the tombs were opened during the earthquake, this select group of saints did not come from their tombs until “after [Jesus’s] resurrection.” They then appeared in Jerusalem. While Matthew doesn’t tell us what happened to these people, we can only speculate that eventually they were taken to heaven.

What was significant about a select few being raised because of the death of Jesus? We can only surmise. Sin ultimately is the thing that brought death into the world. The power of sin and death were broken through the crucifixion of Jesus. Had God not limited such resurrections, might all those enchained by death have risen as well? That is a testimony to the power of the cross and the resurrection!

Matthew focused next on several witnesses around the cross, specifically a Roman “centurion and those with him.” A centurion was a commander of one hundred soldiers. He, and others with him, were “keeping watch” over the entire proceedings. They were eyewitnesses to the “things that had happened.” This would have included the darkness, the manner of Jesus’s death, and the earthquake. It is possible that news of the torn temple curtain had already begun to spread throughout Jerusalem. All these events pointed to the truth that Jesus was “the Son of God.”

How do all the events of this day point to Jesus’s identity?

APPLY THE TEXT

What can you personally take away from the account of Jesus’s death on the cross? How should that impact your life every day? Are there truths you discovered that you should share with someone else?

JOURNAL



LEADER HELPS

Using the Daily Discipleship Guide to Lead a Bible Study Group

The *Daily Discipleship Guide* was created for the purpose of building disciples. As the leader of the group, you play a major role. You can build disciples through the group Bible study time, encouraging daily Bible engagement, facilitating smaller groups, and apprenticing future leaders.

Building Disciples through the Group Time

Leading the group Bible study time is the most direct way you will build disciples. Each week, you will introduce the group to the Bible passage, examine the key message in that passage, challenge the group to act on that passage, and encourage them to reflect more deeply in the week that follows.

Building Disciples by Encouraging Daily Bible Engagement

Encourage your group to engage with the Bible daily. For example, learn to comfortably ask if group members are studying the Bible. You may want to use a statement instead of a question, such as, “I hope you took a look at the Day 3 activity for this week.” Let them know that you are using the Daily Exploration section as well. Set the standard. From time to time, demonstrate how to use the section, guiding them through Day 1 as a group. Consider calling on pre-enlisted volunteers to share with the group what they are learning and how they are using the Daily Exploration section.

As teachers, we have taken on the responsibility of encouraging everyone on our ministry list (class roll, membership list, etc.) to engage daily in Bible study. We can’t make them do it, but we can provide them with a tool and encourage them to use it.

Building Disciples through Smaller Groups

Talk It Out is designed for smaller groups of three to four people to meet weekly. The goal of the smaller groups is simple: holding ourselves and others accountable for living a Christ-honoring life. Lead the group to form their own initial groups of three by gender (men’s smaller groups and women’s smaller groups). This tends to work better than assigning groups. You may want to encourage the groups to form based on neighborhoods or proximity to work. As the Bible study group grows, you may need to reorganize the smaller groups, but try not to regroup too often so that trust can be built within each smaller group.



Courage

Session 1 • Matthew 14:22-33



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee*) and **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Peter in Matthew's Gospel*). Print one copy of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) for each adult in your group.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 9.

ASK: What do you consider to be your biggest fears? (p. 9) Allow adults to share their responses. Discuss how fears change over time, highlighting the difference between things we fear as children and things we fear as adults.

SAY: *Regardless of what forms the fears take, they are still very real. And they have the potential to throw our lives into chaos.*

CONTEXT: Point out that today's session focuses on how Jesus helps His people face their fears and respond in faith. Highlight this information from **Understand the Context** to share background for this session:

- “Following John’s death, Jesus withdrew to be alone with the disciples to sort through His response to such tragedy. This desire to be alone was interrupted by the crowds that followed. Jesus showed compassion

by healing the sick late into the afternoon. The result was a hungry crowd of five thousand men, not including the women and children. Jesus miraculously fed all of them.” (p. 9)

TRANSITION: *As you reflect on today's verses, let your fears come to the forefront of your heart and mind. Intentionally face those fears as you study what Jesus did in this passage.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

OVERVIEW: Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee*) to set the geographic focus for the upcoming sessions.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 14:22-27 aloud as the group notes words that stick out to them from the verses. Encourage adults to talk about how the crowd might have felt at being sent home and how the disciples felt being sent out on the lake by Jesus.

EXAMINE: Enlist a volunteer to read **Did You Know?** on page 11. Remind adults that many of Jesus's disciples were experienced fishermen who probably had dealt with storms on the Sea of Galilee before. Share the following:

- **(14:24-25)** The word “battered” sometimes referred to torture or great distress. The disciples were struggling against the natural elements. By this point they probably were wet, cold, and exhausted. They also had been rowing for several hours. Jesus had dismissed them around sundown and now it was nearing sunrise. The wording suggests between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. That’s when “Jesus came toward them walking on the sea.”
- **(14:27)** “It is I” relates to the divine name (“I Am”) in Exodus 3:14. Thus, along with walking on the sea (Matt. 14:25), Jesus also claimed equality with God by using the divine name for Himself.

ASK: When has Jesus’s presence been especially meaningful to you? (p. 11)

READ: Invite the group to read silently Matthew 14:28-30, instructing them to consider carefully how they hear Peter’s voice as he speaks to Jesus.

ENGAGE: Encourage a few volunteers to describe Peter’s emotions, both before he left the boat and once he began to sink. Highlight these truths:

- **(14:28)** The conditional statement “if it’s you” could be read as a statement of uncertainty, perhaps even doubt. But Matthew used the Greek conditional form that assumes the truth of the statement. Thus Peter’s words could be rendered, “Lord, since it’s you.”

SAY: *Once Peter’s faith was overcome by fear, he began to sink. But he was smart enough*

to cry out to Jesus. The same Lord who called him out of the boat would rescue him from the waves.

DISCUSS: Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Peter in Matthew’s Gospel) and explain that the group will see Peter show up several times in Matthew 14–28. Point out Peter walking on the water on the chart. Share that Peter’s act of courage and faith are mentioned only in Matthew’s Gospel. Encourage volunteers to share how Peter’s actions in these verses challenge them to trust Jesus more.

ASK: What step of faith are you prayerfully considering right now? (p. 11)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 14:31-33 aloud as the group carefully listens for what caused the storm to calm. Point out that the storm was not rebuked by Jesus in this instance; rather, it simply stopped when Jesus and Peter got into the boat.

RECAP: Summarize the following and engage adults in responding with their own insight:

- **(14:32)** “Calm occurred the moment Peter and Jesus got into the boat. The presence of Jesus in the boat most likely calmed the storm in the hearts of the disciples as well. Not only did the wind stop, but suddenly the boat was at the shore, a goal the disciples had labored for most of the night to accomplish. . . . These nature miracles of Jesus were not for show, but always to meet the need of the moment. In this case, it was the rescue of the disciples. This was a tangible response to a desperate situation.” (p. 14, Day Four)

ASK: How do you tend to respond to Jesus's power when you experience it? (p. 11)

PRAY: Highlight Jesus's words to Peter in verse 31. Challenge adults to consider the measure of their own faith and the strengths of their doubts. Encourage adults to scan the QR code for the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** (p. 11). Invite them to follow the prompts in the prayer guide and to pray Matthew 14:31 back to God.

DISCUSS: Direct attention to the Summary Statement for this session: *Jesus is greater than anything we fear* (p. 8). Allow adults to share how they see that truth revealed in today's passage. Point out that we can be sure that Jesus is in control and can calm any storm we face. Challenge adults to demonstrate Peter's courage by stepping out of their "boat" and to refuse to let the "winds" distract them from what Jesus is doing in their lives.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- We can trust Jesus to walk with us in the storms of life.
- When Jesus issues an invitation, we can step out with confidence knowing that He is with us.
- Jesus's power should lead us to worship Him.

HIGHLIGHT: Allow adults to share which of these statements provide the greatest encouragement for them today.

DISCUSS: Direct half the group to read and reflect on the **Apply the Text** question on page 11. After a few minutes, review responses. Talk about how the responses should shape their prayers and their daily walk with Jesus.

REFLECT: Help adults remember that Jesus is Lord of every storm and that no struggle is outside of His power and authority. Say: *As we walk toward Jesus in our storms, we can believe He has the power to get us where we need to be.* Challenge the group to reflect on God's faithfulness each day as a way to gain courage and establish hope for the future.

PRAY: Remind adults to use **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) as a way to pray the truths of today's session back to God. Invite adults to pray silently for the people beside them, specifically that they would know Jesus is with them in their storms.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send a text or email to the group reminding them of the truths of this session. Note that there are hundreds of verses that urge us to reject fear. Suggest they choose one verse to reflect on this week and to share that with the group.



Real Devotion

Session 2 • Matthew 15:1-11,16-20



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Make copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Traditions of the Elders*).

ASK: What are some things that you demand to be genuine in your life? (p. 17)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 17. Highlight the importance of genuine relationships, especially when it comes to one's relationship with God.

ASK: What are some things that can make our relationship with God superficial?

EXPLAIN: Point out that, in Jesus's day, religious leaders had added so much to God's laws that it was hard to know what was true and what was legalism. Highlight this content from **Understand the Context** to provide additional context:

- “In Matthew 12, the Pharisees had challenged the disciples and Jesus over failure to keep their traditions regarding the Sabbath. In chapter 15, these religious leaders challenged the disciples and Jesus concerning their failure to keep dietary laws regarding the ceremonial cleansing

of the hands. Jesus condemned the Pharisees and scribes for their unbelief and their adherence to man-made tradition. . . . [Jesus] pointed out that what a person eats doesn't make a person unclean. Rather, uncleanness comes from within a person's heart.” (p. 17)

TRANSITION: *Over time, the Jewish religious leaders began focusing on their man-made rendition of God's genuine law. Today, we'll consider Jesus's definition of true religion.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 15:1-6 aloud as the group listens for why Jesus was being reprimanded by the Jewish leaders.

CONTEXT: Point out **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Note that this encounter took place in Galilee, though the leaders had come from Jerusalem. Share this to help identify Jesus's opponents:

- **(15:1)** “Pharisee” means “separatist.” Pharisees were proud of their rigorous keeping of both the written law of Moses and an oral law passed down over time. The primary stress of the Pharisees was on ritual purity, Sabbath observance, and tithing. Scribes were “experts in the law”

(Luke 11:45-46,52; 14:3) and “teachers of the law” (Luke 5:17; Acts 5:34). They not only copied the law, but they also taught their interpretation of God’s Word. Some scribes were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were scribes.

DISCUSS: Give each learner a copy of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Traditions of the Elders*). Allow adults a few minutes to scan the article. Facilitate a discussion on the difference between man-made traditions and God’s Word.

- **(15:2)** “The tradition of the elders” refers to hundreds of laws and practices the Pharisees and their scribes had added over the centuries since the Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity. They considered them to be as equally authoritative as the original law of Moses. Failure to “wash their hands” before eating was not just about hygiene, but about ritual purity.

SHARE: Emphasize that Jesus had little use for man-made rules, so He pointed out the hypocrisy of His accusers. Use content from page 21 (Day 2) to explain the practice of Corban and how the leaders were encouraging people to break God’s laws.

ASK: Why is it easy to confuse human rules with God’s commands? (p. 19)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 15:7-11 aloud, instructing the group to listen for Jesus’s complaints against the Jewish religious authorities.

SHARE: Explain that the Greek word for “hypocrites” relates to an actor who puts on

a mask to play a role. As a group, consider why this term appropriately described the Pharisees and scribes. Briefly discuss how Isaiah’s prophecy supported Jesus’s criticism:

- “Isaiah denounced the people of his day for their inauthentic worship. They gave the appearance of a genuine relationship with God through their worship. In reality, they were simply going through the motions while ignoring God’s desires.” (p. 22, Day 3)

GUIDE: Note that Jesus turned His attention to the crowd and explained that moral purity begins with the heart. Highlight that what goes into a person’s mouth (like food) has no real impact on spiritual health. Instead, we have to be careful about what goes into our hearts because that is what reveals our spiritual condition, whether we are loyal to God’s Word or drifting farther from Him.

ASK: What tempts our hearts to drift from God? (p. 19)

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 15:16-20 silently, imagining Jesus’s voice as He spoke these words.

ASK: How do you imagine Jesus’s tone? Angry? Frustrated? Compassionate? Why? (p. 19)

EXPLAIN: Point out that Jesus’s disciples approached Him in verses 12-15, concerned that He had offended the Pharisees. Share that Jesus pointed out that they were “blind guides” (v. 14) who led people astray. Note that when Peter asked Jesus to explain His teaching, he revealed that he’d missed the point.

CONTRAST: Summarize the following content to reveal how Jesus contrasted the physical body with the spiritual one:

- **(15:17-18)** Jesus was not merely describing the process of digestion. His point was that this natural, physiological process has no impact on a person's relationship with God. Verse 17 explains the first part of Jesus's statement in verse 11, while verse 18 explains the second part of verse 11.

HIGHLIGHT: Write the word *heart* on the board. Encourage adults to share different ways we use the word "heart" in our culture. Direct them to read Matthew 15:18-20 again silently. Lead a brief discussion on how Jesus was using "heart" as He spoke to His followers. Affirm that the heart is the core of our spiritual lives, so we need to take seriously what we allow to take root in our hearts as believers.

ASK: How can we evaluate our hearts to prevent sinful attitudes from taking root? Why is it important to examine our hearts for sinful attitudes? (p. 19)

SAY: *Jesus was pointing His disciples to the most important element: a heart turned to God. No amount of outward obedience or acts of piety can replace a genuine heart of worship and love. If we want to follow Jesus in a genuine way, we have to reject superficial religion the way He did.*

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- Honor God's laws above all other rules.
- Pray for your heart to remain close to God.
- Reject superficial religion and focus on what matters most.

REVIEW: Invite adults to share which is the most difficult for them to obey in genuine faith. Challenge them to spend time in prayer this week reviewing the list and asking God to fill in the gaps they experience in their lives.

DISCUSS: Direct the group to the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 19. Invite them to share ways they can encourage other believers toward a deeper relationship with God.

ENCOURAGE: Remind the group to use the **Daily Exploration** on pages 21-23 to dig deeper into God's Word this week.

PRAY: Close the session in prayer, inviting God to help adults honor Him above every other standard. Urge the group to identify ways they can reject superficial religion so God can give them pure hearts as they draw close to Him.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group a text or email to let them know you are praying for them and suggest they share any prayer requests they might have with you. Add a prayer that they will grow in their devotion to Jesus.



Following Jesus

Session 3 • Matthew 16:13-26



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee*) and **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Make copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Why Caesarea Philippi?*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 25. Stress that we all must follow someone at certain points: our teachers, bosses, traffic enforcers, and others.

ASK: What are the traits of leaders you want to follow? (p. 25)

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Explain that Matthew 16 continues to move toward the close of Jesus's ministry in Galilee.

RECAP: Summarize the following from **Understand the Context** to describe the setting for today's passage:

- “Jesus withdrew with the disciples to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (v. 5). Their journey would take them north to the area of Caesarea Philippi, where the events in this week's study take place. Thus began a new phase in the ministry of Jesus. From Caesarea Philippi, Jesus would travel south

directly to Jerusalem. This move signaled the end of the Galilean ministry and the beginning of the final weeks of Jesus's earthly life, culminating in His arrest and crucifixion in Jerusalem.” (p. 25)

TRANSITION: *In today's passage, Jesus focused on what His disciples believed about Him. The question of who Jesus is remains the key question for every person who claims to have faith in Jesus.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 16:13-20 aloud as they imagine being in the group of disciples, carefully considering the words of Jesus.

DISCUSS: Allow volunteers to suggest ways people view Jesus today. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Why Caesarea Philippi?*). Encourage adults to scan the article and to underline key thoughts. Discuss what made this city a significant backdrop for Jesus's conversation with His disciples.

RECAP: Share this as you encourage adults to reflect on Peter's response to Jesus:

- **(16:16)** *Peter gave a double answer. “Messiah” referred to the “Anointed One” whom God had promised to send.*

Peter acknowledged that Jesus was uniquely the Messiah; there is one and only one Messiah. Peter also acknowledged that Jesus was the “Son of the living God.” The use of the definite article “the” pointed to the fact that Jesus is uniquely the Son and there is no other.

ASK: Why is it important to understand who Jesus is? (p. 27)

EXPLAIN: Point out that Jesus pointed to Peter as a representative for all the disciples in receiving the keys to bind and loose things in heaven. Share that this foreshadowed their role in leading people toward the kingdom once Jesus established His church in Acts 2. Note that since the disciples did not have a full grasp of what it meant for Jesus to be Messiah, He ordered them to remain silent for the time being.

READ: Invite two volunteers to read Matthew 16:21-23 aloud, one reading Peter’s words and one reading Jesus’s response.

DISCUSS: Encourage adults to share what they believe motivated Peter to contradict Jesus’s words. Facilitate a brief discussion on ways people might mistake their own wisdom for God’s plans and purposes in life.

RECAP: Summarize this information from page 30 (Day 4) to help adults consider Peter’s motives:

- “Presumably, Peter thought he knew what was best for Jesus and took it upon himself to rebuke Jesus for speaking of His impending death. This may have arisen from Peter’s brash personality, or

his supposed ‘authority’ he had received from Jesus calling him the ‘rock.’ Or it could have arisen out of love for Jesus and fear of the future.”

ASK: How do we let our own agendas replace God’s greater plans? (p. 27)

SHARE: Point out that the literal meaning of Satan is “adversary” or “opponent.” Explain that Jesus wasn’t saying Peter was under demonic influence, but that he was standing in opposition to God’s divine plan for the salvation of the world. Share a time in your own life when you felt like Peter: ready to “correct” God on His plan because it wasn’t going the way you imagined or expected. Help adults see their own Peter-like tendencies, wanting to take control rather than trusting Jesus.

SAY: *Peter was a good leader, and His faith in Jesus was grounded in truth. But he hadn’t yet realized what would be involved in truly following Jesus. He didn’t realize at this point that it would cost him everything. Jesus needed Peter to recognize that his own plan was not God’s plan.*



Three Predictions

Jesus foretold His death three times in Matthew’s Gospel. Scan this QR code to learn more about His journey to the cross.

READ: Instruct adults to read Matthew 16:24-26 silently, inserting their own names throughout the verses.

DISCUSS: How does making the passage personal by inserting your own name affect the meaning for you?

EXAMINE: Direct adults to identify the three qualifications for a true disciple of Jesus (v. 24). Encourage them to reflect on each qualification by responding to these questions:

- **What hinders people from denying themselves?**
- **How does the image of a cross today differ from how crosses were understood by Jesus’s audience?**
- **Why is simply holding an orthodox view of Jesus not enough in the Christian life?**

ASK: What does it mean to deny ourselves and to carry our cross? (p. 27)

RECAP: Note that Jesus explained more about why discipleship is important. Share the following to help adults better understand Jesus’s teaching:

- *Jesus pictured a person gaining all that the world has to offer in riches, fame, security, and pleasure. Tragically none of this will rescue them at the end of life. Death and judgment will not be delayed by the accumulations of life. The ultimate question in life is simply this: what are we willing to exchange to experience life to the fullest, now and for eternity?*

CHALLENGE: Urge adults to reflect on what they may be holding that distracts them from complete devotion to God.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week’s Bible passage:

- We cannot follow Jesus fully until we know and accept His true identity.
- We cannot follow Jesus fully until we accept His mission as Messiah and Savior.
- We cannot follow Jesus fully until we sacrifice our personal agendas to Him.

REFLECT: Invite adults to look back through the direct quotes of Jesus in today’s passage. Encourage them to share how they see the summary points from this lesson revealed in these statements from the Lord. Highlight the value of living out each one.

DISCUSS: Invite a volunteer to read aloud the **Apply the Text** questions on page 27. Review the various ways people in the world view Jesus and how that differs from what we find in the Bible.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help each person know Him for who He is and to follow Him without reservation.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group a text or email during the week. Challenge adults to consider how their personal worship time can move them toward knowing Jesus better and following Him sacrificially.

Glory

Session 4 • Matthew 17:1-13



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *Peter in Matthew's Gospel*). Make copies of **Pack Item 12** (Handout: *The Mount of Transfiguration*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 33.

ASK: What kind of sign would you like to receive concerning a decision you need to make? (p. 33)

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion on why decisions can be hard to make at times. Share a situation in which you desperately needed a voice from a cloud or a message in the sky telling you what to do—and how you responded when it didn't come. Allow a few volunteers to share their stories.

SAY: *As humans, we approach decisions in a lot of different ways. Some of us make decisions quickly and confidently. Others of us put off making decisions until absolutely necessary. And then many of us take our cues from other people, letting their decisions shape our decisions.*

CONTEXT: Affirm that waiting around for a sign or a voice from heaven is rarely the best approach, but in Matthew 17 Peter, James,

and John received a special sign from Jesus that was impossible to ignore.

TRANSITION: *As we study the disciples' "mountaintop experience," let's consider how we can see Jesus as the fulfillment of everything the Law and the Prophets predicted—and how that offers hope to all who believe in Him.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 17:1-3 as the group imagines what the disciples felt walking up the mountain.

ASK: How do you imagine Peter, James, and John reacting to Jesus's transfigured appearance? (p. 35)

DISCUSS: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 12** (Handout: *The Mount of Transfiguration*). Encourage adults to scan the article. Highlight Matthew's description of how Jesus's appearance changed. Note that Jesus had said some of His disciples would experience His glory (Matt. 16:28).

CLARIFY: Point out that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. Summarize the following:

- **(17:3)** Moses, the great Old Testament lawgiver, and Elijah, the great Old

Testament prophet, represented the law and the prophets. In the New Testament, the Scriptures were sometimes called “the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12; Rom. 3:21). Moses and Elijah together represented a way of saying that the whole of the Old Testament revelation found its fulfillment in Jesus.

ASK: Where do we see Jesus’s glory revealed each day? (p. 35)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 17:4-8 aloud as the group underlines words that stick out to them from the verses. Allow a few volunteers to share the words they highlighted and to explain why those words resonate with them.

ENGAGE: Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Peter in Matthew’s Gospel*). Point out Peter’s role in previous sessions. Note that he once again played a role in this account.

ASK: What was Peter suggesting in verse 4? Why do you think he spoke up? (p. 35)

RECAP: Discuss responses and provide more insight into Peter’s words:

- “Mark and Luke comment that Peter was at a loss for words and uttered the first thing that came to mind (Mark 9:5-6; Luke 9:33). His declaration was that it was ‘good for us to be here.’ Most likely, Peter was indicating that it was good in the sense that he, James, and John were there to help. He was not content to observe this scene but wanted to be in the scene. Apparently, Peter didn’t grasp the significance of the conversation of

Jesus with Moses and Elijah concerning His coming arrest and crucifixion (see Luke 9:31).” (p. 37, Day Two)

SAY: *As Peter talked, God stepped into the conversation. In a scene reminiscent of His actions at Mount Sinai, the Father spoke from a bright cloud. And, as He had at Jesus’s baptism, God affirmed Christ as both His Son and as One in whom He was pleased. His final command was to listen to Jesus. Instead of talking without thinking, the disciples were challenged to see Jesus for who He really is and to respond appropriately.*

ASK: What hinders our ability to hear and act on Jesus’s words? What may hinder a person from taking Jesus’s teachings seriously? (p. 35)

CHALLENGE: Note that once the cloud moved away, the disciples saw only Jesus standing there. Emphasize that while the experience made a huge impact on their lives, the presence of Jesus is really what mattered. Urge adults to consider changes they might need to make to focus on Jesus first and foremost in their lives each day.

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 17:9-13 silently, carefully noting the discussion between Jesus and His disciples.

ASK: Why do you think Jesus instructed His disciples to remain silent about the transfiguration until after His resurrection? (p. 35)

EXPLAIN: Point out that the other disciples almost certainly would not believe

the account; however, after He was raised from the dead, this story would be easier to accept and would help them see God's plan to send His only Son.

RECAP: Draw attention to the disciples' question about Elijah. Explain the connection between Elijah and John the Baptist.

- **(17:11-12)** The disciples recalled that the scribes taught that Elijah must come first before the Messiah's arrival. These experts of the Mosaic law based their beliefs on Malachi's prophecy (Mal. 4:5-6). According to Malachi, Elijah would help usher the day of the Lord when evil would be judged and proper order would be restored. Since Elijah had just appeared on the mountain, Peter, James, and John may have wondered if they were on the cusp of the Messianic Age. Jesus affirmed the scribes were right about Elijah coming. The problem was that the religious leaders didn't recognize Elijah when he came.

SHARE: Read Matthew 17:13 again for the group. Emphasize that the disciples were beginning to grasp some important things Jesus was trying to teach them. Encourage adults to consider how they can grow in their knowledge of Jesus.

ASK: How are you making an effort to grow in your understanding of Jesus, His identity, and mission? (p. 35)

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- Pray that you would see the glory of Jesus.
- Worship is always the appropriate response to Jesus.
- Seek to know Jesus better by learning God's Word.

REFLECT: Invite adults to determine which of these statements will be the greatest challenge for them this week.

ASK: Have you ever prayed to see God's glory? How do you feel about asking that of God?

DISCUSS: Read aloud the **Apply the Text** questions from page 35. Encourage volunteers to share where they have seen God's glory revealed in their lives. Lead a brief discussion about how God's glory should lead us to know Him better and to worship Him more.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking Jesus to show His glory in the lives of each adult. Invite God to speak through times in His Word and through our corporate worship experiences.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group an email or text during the week. Prompt them to engage with God's truth on their own even outside of the group time. Encourage individuals to share any truths that are revealed through their quiet times this week. Remind them that Peter, James, and John were called to listen to Jesus's voice and to focus on His presence.

Forgiveness

Session 5 • Matthew 18:21-35



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*) and **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*).

ASK: Why is it often so difficult to forgive someone who has offended you? (p. 41)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 41. Stress that forgiveness sometimes comes easily, but it often remains a struggle—even for believers.

IDENTIFY: Direct adults to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*), pointing out that the study is drawn from Jesus’s fourth major discourse in Matthew’s Gospel. Summarize this content from **Understand the Context** (p. 41) to provide background for this discourse:

- “The immaturity of the disciples led Jesus to teach extensively about relationships. First, He placed a small child in their midst. Referring to the child, Jesus pointed out that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was the one who, like a child, was characterized by humility. . . . Jesus spoke of ‘little ones,’ by which He was speaking figuratively of those who follow Him.

He gave a stern warning about causing a fellow believer to stumble. The one who caused ‘one of these little ones . . . to fall away’ would be better off suffering a terrible drowning than to face God’s wrath for their actions (vv. 6-9).”

TRANSITION: *Believers are called to demonstrate humility and to care for one another. Those are kingdom values. Another important kingdom value is forgiveness. As we study this session, remember that we should forgive as Jesus forgives. Look for ways to apply that forgiveness in practical ways each day.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 18:21-22** as the group reflects on the significance of “seven.”

ASK: What do you think is a reasonable number of times to forgive someone who hurts you? (p. 43)

RECAP: Share that the phrase “Peter approached” (v. 21) links Peter’s question about forgiveness to Jesus’s previous teaching about relationships in verses 1-20.

ASK: What kind of response do you think Peter expected from Jesus? (p. 43)

- **(18:21)** Peter’s proposal actually went beyond first-century rabbinic teaching, which held that individuals only needed to forgive repeated offenses three times. Peter more than doubled this total, increasing it to the number of perfection—seven times. Peter likely saw this as a generous and gracious expansion on conventional wisdom. But Jesus’s response didn’t give Peter a new number to count. It gave him a new theology to live out.

PRAY: Emphasize that knowing about forgiveness means nothing without practicing it. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*) to each adult—or invite them to scan the QR code for the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** (p. 11). Lead in a time of prayer, thanking God for His gracious forgiveness and asking Him for help in demonstrating forgiveness without keeping track.

INTRODUCE: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*). Give an overview of the information and encourage them to read and reflect on it during the week in light of the many parables Jesus taught.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Jesus’s parable in Matthew 18:23-27 as the group records in the margin of their DDG what sticks out to them about the kingdom of God from this parable.

EXAMINE: Draw a three-column chart on the board with the following headings: *King*, *King’s Servant*, and *Other Servant*. Encourage adults to work in teams of two or three to

identify characteristics of the king and his servant in verses 23-27. After a few minutes, discuss their insights. Record their responses under the appropriate columns.

INFORM: Emphasize the desperate situation of the servant:

- **(18:23-24)** The king “wanted to settle accounts with his servants.” This means he had made up his mind that it was time for a day of reckoning. The servant—possibly a high official, like a governor or treasurer—was being called in to answer for his actions, along with other servants to the king. As it turned out the servant owed the king “ten thousand talents.” A talent was a measure of weight amounting to between 75 and 100 pounds. “Ten thousand” represents the highest number the Greek language could express in one word. The debt was a huge sum and impossible for the servant to repay. Throughout the parable, Jesus emphasized the servant’s inability to pay the debt.

ASK: How do you see grace at work in these verses? (p. 43)

TRANSITION: *Mercy and compassion are the only reasons the servant wasn’t punished; in no way did he earn it or deserve it. As humans, we deserve to suffer the consequences of our debt to God, but He made a way for us to find forgiveness through Jesus. As Jesus would soon show, that forgiveness should transform our lives.*

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 18:28-35 silently, picturing the scene as it is described in the passage.

ASK: How much did the second servant owe? How does that contrast with the amount the first servant owed the king? (p. 43)

RECAP: Summarize the following to provide more insight into the debt the second man owed:

- **(18:28-30)** The servant who had been forgiven a huge debt went out from the king's presence and found one of his "fellow servants." *Found* may hint that he was searching for him. A "hundred denarii" was not a small sum since one denarius equaled an average laborer's daily pay. But compared to his own ten thousand talents of debt, it was a paltry sum. "But he wasn't willing" (v. 30) points to the fact that this forgiven servant made the deliberate choice to close his heart to mercy.

ASK: What are some dangers of believers failing to forgive others? (p. 43)

DISCUSS: Allow adults to share their responses. Lead a brief discussion related to the master's response. Remind adults that a believer who refuses to forgive cannot lose their salvation, but it will damage their fellowship with God and others.

FOCUS: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 18:33 aloud. Explain that this is this week's memory verse and poses a great question to ponder throughout this week.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- We are not to put limits on our willingness to forgive.
- We can know that God is compassionate and willing to forgive.
- We are to forgive one another in the way God has forgiven us.

DISCUSS: Challenge adults to consider which statement resonates most deeply with their own struggle to forgive.

ASK: Enlist a volunteer to read aloud the **Apply the Text** question on page 43. Be ready to share your own reasons for not forgiving another person. Stress that forgiveness is required and that relationships suffer when mercy and compassion are missing from the equation.

PRAY: Encourage adults to read and respond silently to the **Apply the Text** questions on page 47. Challenge them to pray for the people they have listed and for the relationships that are suffering from a lack of forgiveness. Close in prayer.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send an email or text to the group this week encouraging them to continue praying about relationships that need forgiveness. If the Lord leads you to forgive someone this week, share that with the group as appropriate. Encourage adults to continue using the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** to reflect on this week's passage.

Our Task

Session 6 • Matthew 28:1-10,16-20



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*) and **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 28:19-20a*).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 49. Highlight September 11, 2001, and allow adults to share where they were on that day. Encourage the group to identify other significant cultural events people might remember in the same way. (*Examples: a celebrity dying, a space shuttle disaster, a hurricane or tornado strike*)

ASK: Why do you think we are selective in what we remember and what we forget? (p. 49)

CONTEXT: To set the context for this session, highlight this information from **Understand the Context:**

- “The resurrection is crucial to the gospel message of salvation through Jesus. If Jesus had not risen, nothing would have been accomplished by His death. The resurrection is God’s stamp of approval on all that Jesus did on the cross. The resurrection is also factual. One of the most powerful testimonies in court is the word of eyewitnesses. Each of the Gospel writers in their own way highlighted the role

of eyewitnesses to Jesus’s resurrection. Matthew . . . chose to emphasize the eyewitness account of two women: Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary.” (p. 49)

TRANSITION: *We know that Easter is a special day for Christians. Today, we’ll consider how the resurrection should change our lives each and every day.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 28:1-7 aloud as adults highlight words that describe the sights, sounds, and emotions.

RECAP: Encourage adults to share what they know about Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Provide additional background:

- **(28:1)** Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are identified at Jesus’s crucifixion and burial (Matt. 27:56,61), as well as the empty tomb. Luke recorded that Jesus had cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene, and she began to follow Him and His disciples (Luke 8:2). The “other Mary” was the mother of James and Joseph (see Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40,47; 16:1; Luke 24:10) and was also among the women who accompanied Jesus

from Galilee to Jerusalem. Aside from the crucifixion/resurrection accounts, we have no additional information about her.

EXAMINE: Organize adults into three teams with the assignments below. After a few minutes, allow each team to share what they discussed.

- **Team 1:** Identify the information provided by the angel in verses 5-6 and why it's important.
- **Team 2:** Identify the invitation extended by the angel in verse 6 and why it's important.
- **Team 3:** Identify the instructions given by the angel in verse 7 and why they are important.

TRANSITION: *The encounter with the angel was shocking for the women. But it was only a prelude to a more amazing encounter to come.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 28:8-10 aloud as adults consider carefully what worship looked like in this moment.

ASK: What emotions did the women experience as they went to tell the disciples about Jesus's resurrection? How did they respond to Jesus's appearing? (p. 51)

ENGAGE: Point out the phrases “quickly,” “with fear and great joy,” and “ran” in verse 8. Note that these terms reveal the women's mixed emotions even as they obeyed the angel's directions.

ASK: How would you have responded to such an unexpected encounter with Jesus? (p. 51)

RECAP: Discuss responses, adding the following insights regarding the women's worship:

- **(28:9)** From the angel's message, the women would not have expected to see the risen Lord until they were back in Galilee, so this encounter came suddenly and as a total surprise. Jesus's “Greetings!” was a common way to say “Hello” in first-century Jewish culture. Apparently, even while the women were still a little distance from Jesus, they recognized Him. So, when “they came up” to Him they “took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.” These two actions were significant, especially when taken together. For the women to grasp Jesus's feet, they needed to bow before Him. So the words not only emphasize an act of homage, but they also affirm that Jesus was physically present.

SHARE: Highlight the term “brothers” in verse 10. Point out that this is the first time in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus used this familial term for His disciples. Note that everything was changing in light of the resurrection, including the way Jesus's followers would know Him and relate to Him.

READ: Direct adults to read Matthew 28:16-20 silently and to note what they see as the themes in the verses. After a few minutes, discuss responses. Note that these verses are known as Jesus's Great Commission to His followers.

EXPLAIN: Direct adults to **Pack item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 28:19-20a). Summarize the following to highlight the message of the Great Commission:

- **(28:19-20)** The term *nations* speaks of all people groups everywhere. “Make disciples” is the main verb and thus the emphasis of the commission. Making disciples involved two actions. “Baptizing” and “teaching” are the means by which disciples are made.

ASK: What does this passage teach us about our role in Christ’s mission? (p. 51)

SHARE: *This is a huge task. But we don’t carry it out on our own. In addition to our brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus promised His power (v. 18) and His presence (v. 20). He has provided all we need to carry out His work until “the end of the age.”*

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week’s Bible passage:

- We can trust that Jesus is risen because the tomb was empty.
- Our appropriate response to Jesus’s resurrection is worship.
- Believers are to share the gospel with people of all nations.

CHALLENGE: Challenge adults to consider how each of these points should be a foundational element of our faith, not only at Easter but as we walk through life.

DISCUSS: Invite a volunteer to read aloud the **Apply the Text** question on page 51. Provide your own responses and allow volunteers to share their answers. Record ideas for sharing the gospel with others on the board and challenge adults to follow up on one of these ideas with someone they know this week.

REFLECT: Draw attention to **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 28:19-20a). Remind adults that the power of Jesus’s resurrection is the power that equips us to share the gospel with others. Challenge them to ask God to reveal His power through them this week.

PRAY: Briefly share the **Apply the Text** question on page 55. Emphasize the power of a transformed life. Allow adults a few minutes to talk with God quietly about how they can live out His resurrection each day. Close the session in prayer.

AFTER THE SESSION

During the week, reach out to the group with an email or text. Encourage them to take time to notice “empty” things this week: an empty bird’s nest, an empty school bus, or even an empty house. Invite them to take a photo of what they see and to share it with your group. Challenge adults to use these spaces to help them focus on Jesus’s empty tomb.

Eternal Life

Session 7 • Matthew 19:16-30



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Make copies of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Greatness in the Kingdom*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 57. Engage adults to share some of the things they learned about work as they were growing up.

ASK: Do you agree or disagree that nothing is free and everything worth having must be worked for? Explain. (p. 57)

INFORM: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Greatness in the Kingdom*) to each person in the group. Encourage adults to scan the article silently and to note insights about how ancient Israelites defined greatness.

CONTEXT: Share that after another heated confrontation with religious leaders, Jesus took time to bless a group of children. Draw attention to the following from **Understand the Context** to explain why Jesus allowed the children to come to Him:

- “Jesus spoke of the dependence of children as an example of the childlike humility needed by all to be a part of the kingdom of God. . . . This thought links

this humility with the proper way to enter eternal life as explained in the next verses in this chapter.” (p. 57)

ASK: How is childlike humility different from our cultural understanding of a strong work ethic?

TRANSITION: *Matthew connected being like a child (Matt. 19:13-15) to our focal passage about the young man looking for eternal life. As we study this walking object lesson, consider what eternal life means to you and how you can demonstrate your relationship with God in practical ways each day.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXPLAIN: Direct adults to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Point out that the events in today’s session took place as Jesus’s ministry turned back toward Jerusalem.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 19:16-22 aloud as the group considers the man’s motivation for coming to Jesus.

ASK: What was the significance of this man’s question?

ENLIGHTEN: Share the following to explain the “why” behind the man’s questions about eternal life:

- **(19:16)** From all indications this man’s question was sincere. What is surprising is the fact that this wealthy young man would admit he lacked eternal life. He knew something was missing from his life. He was eager to fix his emptiness. Here was a young man seeking hope for this life and for life after death.

ASK: What are some common views on how to receive eternal life? (p. 59)

SHARE: *This man thought he had it all together. He claimed to keep all the commands, including those focused on our “horizontal” relationships with others. But Jesus cut through the man’s delusions. He revealed some gaps in the man’s understanding of what it means to keep the law. More important, He pinpointed the man’s biggest failure: allowing his stuff to become his god. None of us can fill God’s spot in our lives with material possessions. We can’t earn salvation, and we can’t earn a meaningful relationship with Him.*

INTRODUCE: Remind the group that a crowd (Matt. 19:2) and the disciples (19:13) were with Jesus during the encounter with the young man. Explain that, in the next verses, we see that even Jesus’s closest followers were flabbergasted by the scene.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 19:23-26 aloud as adults listen carefully for the reaction of the disciples.

ASK: Why were the disciples “utterly astonished” (v. 25)? (p. 59)

EXPLAIN: Note that Jesus reinforced His statement with a hyperbole of a camel passing through the eye of a needle. Point out that the picture of a large camel trying to fit through such a tiny opening would have seemed impossible. Share that, in essence, Jesus was saying squeezing a camel through a needle and a rich man getting into the kingdom both required acts of God.

RECAP: Explain why the disciples were shocked by Jesus’s words:

- “Jesus’s statement here was in direct contradiction to the traditions of Judaism that intimated that a person’s wealth gave evidence of God’s favor. Wealthy Jews often thought they could purchase a more favored position with God through their gifts to the temple or through the giving of alms to the poor. Jesus, however, taught something very different. . . . Wealth or poverty didn’t matter. Only God can bring salvation to a person, for with Him all things are possible. Salvation and entrance into the kingdom of God is dependent on God and God alone.” (p. 62, Day 4)

ASK: Why was Jesus so hard on rich people? (p. 59)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 19:27-30 aloud as the rest of the group considers the tone of Peter’s words and Jesus’s response.

ASK: How would you characterize Peter’s tone with Jesus? Why? (p. 59)

SHARE: Acknowledge that Peter’s statement and question sounds greedy or self-serving. Remind adults that he probably was trying to process what Jesus was saying. Note that he may have been confused and wondered how the sacrifices he and the other disciples had made fit into Jesus’s bigger plan.



The Synoptic Gospels

Learn more about how the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke offer a unified, yet distinct, portrait of Jesus’s life and ministry.

ASK: What have you left behind to follow Jesus? Is there anything that hinders you from following Jesus? (p. 59)

RECAP: Note that Jesus did not chastise Peter, but pointed him beyond worldly rewards toward eternity. Highlight what Jesus promised:

- “The reward of a hundred times more speaks of a reward that is out of proportion to what is sacrificed. It will be much more than is expected. This reward may be referring to rewards both now and in eternity. Those who give up houses and lands, relationships and riches, for His sake will receive more than they give up.” (p. 63, Day 5)

EXAMINE: Guide adults through the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover. Explain that the young man walked away from Jesus because he wasn’t willing to accept Him as Lord and Savior. Urge adults to consider

where they stand with Jesus and let them know that you will be available to speak with anyone who has questions about a relationship with Jesus.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week’s Bible passage:

- We can affirm that eternal life cannot be achieved by human achievement.
- We can be encouraged knowing salvation is received as a gift from God.
- We can know that following Jesus is worth it, no matter what it costs—the greatest reward being eternal life.

ASK: How are you trying to “do good” as a way to please the Lord? How has today’s study pointed you toward a different standard for your relationship with God?

DISCUSS: Direct adults to read the **Apply the Text** question on page 59. Remind adults that, while hard work is noble and good in many areas of life, it’s not a way to connect with God. Challenge the group to consider how to receive salvation and God’s daily blessings as His gift of grace, not as a payment for hard work.

AFTER THE SESSION

This week, spend time praying for each adult, especially those who may need to speak with you about the Plan of Salvation. Text or call each person, thanking them for being in the group and offering to pray for them.

Grace

Session 8 • Matthew 20:1-16



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Parables of Jesus*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*) and **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 65. Stress the sentence “We always want what we think we deserve” by re-reading it.

ASK: Why do you think we perceive life as being continually unfair? (p. 65)

CONTEXT: Point out **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Parables of Jesus*). Introduce this lesson by explaining that Jesus often used parables to help people grasp spiritual truths. Summarize the following from **Understand the Context** to highlight the events leading up to this study:

- “The parable in Matthew 20:1-16 is the capstone of the larger section of teaching found in 19:16–20:16. This sequence of events and teachings began with the inquiry of the rich young ruler. It continued with a discussion between Jesus and the disciples concerning the rewards of following Jesus. To illustrate the truths concerning eternal life and eternal rewards, Jesus shared the parable that begins chapter 20. What is

profound about this section is the reversal of all that might be expected from a human perspective. . . . The people of Jesus’s day expected the rich would be treated differently than the poor. The disciples were surprised at Jesus’s teaching about the impossibility of the rich entering the kingdom of heaven. Jesus turned all these expectations on their ear.” (p. 65)

TRANSITION: *Last week, we learned that no one gets to heaven based on their position or possessions. Today’s passage emphasizes God’s goodness and grace as He offers salvation to all.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

SHARE: Explain that today’s passage is about a kingdom, God’s eternal kingdom. Hand out copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*). Encourage adults to list all the kingdoms that had ruled the promised land since the exile in 586 BC.

SAY: *The Jews had been subject to many kingdoms in their history. In Jesus’s day, the Romans were in charge. But God’s kingdom would be nothing like those.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 20:1-7 aloud as the group considers the details of Jesus’s parable.

DISCUSS: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*). Lead a brief discussion on how the principles in the article can be applied to this parable.

ASK: What is the significance of the detail about the landowner and workers agreeing on the amount of pay? (p. 67)

ENLIGHTEN: Walk through each of the times the landowner hired a new group of workers. Relate this insight into the landowner's actions and motives:

- **(20:3-7)** The landowner was filled with compassion for these laborers who desperately needed to work each day. It wasn't so much that more workers were required. Instead, this was a benevolent landowner giving to these workers what they desperately needed. He promised to give them whatever is right.

HIGHLIGHT: Affirm that the landowner promised to give each group what was right. Share that since the landowner represents God, we can trust Him to always do what is right in every situation.

READ: Instruct adults to read Matthew 20:8-12 silently, considering the tone of the workers.

EXPLAIN: *Jesus's parable reached a turning point in these verses. Everyone received a denarius, but those who had been out for twelve hours felt shortchanged by the landowner.*

ASK: Do you think what each worker received was fair? Why or why not? (p. 67)

ENGAGE: Summarize the following context to highlight the tensions felt by the other workers.

- “No mention was made by Jesus of those hired at three, noon, or nine o'clock. Instead, He skipped to the climactic portion of the story and spoke of the initial hired laborers. They assumed they would receive more. They were expecting ‘fair’ treatment, since they had worked more. . . . But they, too, received a denarius. Incensed, they demanded equality.” (p. 70, Day 4)

SHARE: Remind adults that the landowner symbolizes God. So, the story reflects how some might complain about God's fairness, even when it comes to including people into His kingdom.

ASK: How do people today question God's fairness? How do some view His just nature? (p. 67)

REFLECT: Enlist a volunteer to read the Key Doctrine (p. 67). Give adults a few moments of silence to reflect on areas where they might be tempted to think God is unfair—and how they should respond to those feelings.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 20:13-16 aloud as adults focus on the landowner's response to the angry workers.

ASK: Were the all-day workers justified in their complaints about their wages? Why or why not? (p. 67)

RECAP: Highlight the legal and moral arguments to provide more background:

- **(20:15)** The landowner pointed out, “I’m doing you no wrong.” That’s because he had paid these workers the amount they had agreed on in verse 2. The owner’s rhetorical question, “Didn’t you agree with me on a denarius?” expected a “yes” answer. The workers had agreed to that amount, and the owner had paid that amount. There was no injustice. The landowner also pointed out that this was a matter of generosity, not a matter of legal obligation. As the owner of the vineyard and the one who hired the workers, he could do as he pleased with his money. The workers could not question either the owner’s legal obligations or his moral rights.

ASK: What does this parable teach us about comparing ourselves to others? (p. 67)

EXPLAIN: *In sharing the parable, Jesus emphasized that entrance into the kingdom of God is an act of His mercy and grace. We cannot earn it, and we don’t deserve it. The Master provides freely for those who are willing to accept His offer. We have no right to take His grace for granted or to question who He demonstrates that mercy toward.*

REFLECT: Write the application statement for these verses on the board: *We should never cease to be amazed by God’s grace.* Encourage adults to spend a few moments silently reflecting on God’s grace in their lives and confessing ways they have lost their awe for what He has done for them.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week’s Bible passage:

- We can trust God to always do what is right.
- We should be thankful God gives us more than we deserve.
- We should never cease to be amazed by God’s grace.

REVIEW: Read the statements aloud, stressing “can” and “should” in each one. At the end of each statement, encourage adults to suggest practical ways they can apply these principles to their lives each day. Point out the **Apply the Text** question on page 67. Urge adults to adopt some of these ideas for living out God’s grace and generosity before the world.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help adults contemplate God’s love and blessings in their lives. As adults leave, challenge them to share with at least one person this week how God has been gracious to them.

AFTER THE SESSION

During the week, send the group a text or email, urging them to reflect on God’s grace regularly. Remind them to share His grace with someone who needs to know about it this week. If you personally experience a moment when life seems unfair, reflect on the truths of this week’s focal passage. Be prepared to share that intentional mindset change with the group.



Authority

Session 9 • Matthew 21:23-32



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) and **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*).

ASK: What are the results of rejecting established authority? (p. 73) Discuss the responses.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 73. Encourage adults to identify authority figures in their lives. Draw their attention back to the opening question. Allow them to share how rejecting authority carries different consequences depending on the authority being rejected.

SHARE: *As followers of Christ, we believe He holds ultimate authority in our lives. But even the best of us still might be tempted to question that authority at times. We can be like the religious leaders in the verses leading up to our focal passage for this session.*

CONTEXT: Summarize this information from **Understand the Context** (p. 73) to set the stage for today's focal passage:

- "Matthew 21 moves into the final week of Jesus's ministry before His crucifixion.

Much of the action recorded by Matthew in chapters 21-22 occurred in the temple. The week began with Jesus entering Jerusalem to the shouts of praise from the crowd of pilgrims entering the city for the Feast of Passover. Once inside Jerusalem, Jesus moved into the temple precinct. Here began a series of confrontations with the religious leaders who opposed Jesus."

TRANSITION: *As we study today's verses, let's examine our hearts. Let's determine how we tend to respond to Jesus's authority in our lives and surrender areas we've been holding back from Him.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

BACKGROUND: Show adults **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee*). Point out that Jesus had moved out of Galilee and had arrived in Jerusalem to the south.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 21:23-27 aloud as the group counts how many times the word "authority" is used.

ASK: What were the chief priests and elders trying to accomplish by interrogating Jesus? (p. 75)

EXPLAIN: Point out that Jesus had created a stir during the “triumphal entry” and when He had cleansed the temple. Note that He represented a threat to the religious leaders’ power, so they questioned His authority.

- **(21:23)** Their questions were designed to put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. If He said His authority came from God, He would be charged with blasphemy (see Matt. 9:3; 26:59-66). If He responded that His authority was from another source, they would argue endlessly about its legitimacy.
- **(21:25-26)** Jesus shifted the focus from Himself to John the Baptist: “Did John’s baptism come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” John’s baptism represented all of John’s prophetic ministry. Jesus set up a contrast between divine mission and human origin. Of course, the proper response (“from heaven”) would have affirmed Jesus’s own authority and led to another uncomfortable question: “Why didn’t you believe him?” The second option (“human origin”) risked the crowd’s anger since the people saw John as a prophet. Ironically, the leaders were “afraid of the crowd” they supposedly represented. Indeed, Luke 20:6 states that they were afraid the people might stone them.

ASK: For what reasons do people not accept Jesus’s authority? (p. 75)

EXPLAIN: *The leaders ended up affirming Jesus’s authority through their silence. Since Jesus and John shared the same Source of authority (God), the prophetic authority of*

both was valid. The leaders fell into the very trap they had hoped to set for Jesus.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 21:28-32 aloud as the group notes the responses of the sons.

DISCUSS: State that after the confrontation with the religious leaders, Jesus told three parables (Matt. 21:28-32; 21:33-46; 22:1-14). Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*) and remind adults of the basic principles of explaining parables. Lead a brief discussion on the characters in this parable and what they represent. Highlight the role of obedience—not just in words, but in actions.

EXPLAIN: Affirm the role of submission to Jesus’s authority in entering the kingdom of God:

- **(21:32)** Although John’s message was a call to repentance (3:1-12), these religious leaders probably thought it did not apply to them. The phrase “the way of righteousness” was a Hebrew way of referring to God’s will or His directed path. The chief priests and elders “didn’t believe” John’s message. The “tax collectors and prostitutes did believe” John’s message. Along with Gentiles and lepers, most Jews saw tax collectors and prostitutes as the worst society had to offer. They recognized that John was the forerunner of the long-awaited Messiah. The religious leaders failed to see how John’s message was drawing even the socially outcast to believe and repent. In their pride and self-righteousness, the religious elite didn’t change their minds and believe in John.

They failed to follow the example of the first son, who recognized his father's authority and allowed his mind to be changed. Instead, like the second son, they knew what was expected and said all the right things; but they failed to do what the father had asked. By what authority had Jesus been doing these things? What was the authority behind John's ministry and message? It came from God the Father. Such a truth called for nothing short of radical obedience.

ASK: Practically speaking, what does it look like to recognize Jesus's authority? (p. 75)

REFLECT: Invite adults to scan the QR code for the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** (p. 59). Lead them in praying this session's memory verse, Philippians 2:9, back to God. As an alternative, distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*).

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- We can expect some to oppose or reject Jesus's authority.
- We demonstrate our acceptance of Jesus's authority by our obedience to Him.

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion about where adults see people rejecting Jesus's authority in our culture. Remind them of the responses to the question, "*Practically speaking, what does it look like to recognize Jesus's authority?*" (p. 75). Challenge them

to find ways to demonstrate the authority of Jesus as they go through their days.

DISCUSS: Enlist a volunteer to read the **Apply the Text** question on page 75 aloud: **What steps might each of your group take to ensure they recognize and respect Jesus's authority?** Encourage adults to take time this week to assess Jesus's authority in their own lives and to remember that their example will serve to guide others to do the same. Suggest they read and reflect on the **Apply the Text** questions on page 79 during the week ahead.

PRAY: Allow the group a time of silent confession, inviting adults to speak with God about how they embrace His authority and any changes that need to be made. Close the session in prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to let each person see where and how He would guide them as they take steps into deeper obedience and surrender to Jesus's authority.

AFTER THE SESSION

During the week, text or email the adults in your Bible study. Remind them of Jesus's question from Matthew 21:31: "Which of the two did his father's will?" Encourage them to consider their own willingness to yield their focus and authority to God. Suggest they continue using the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** to reflect on God's truth as they dig into His Word each day.

Honor

Session 10 • Matthew 22:15-22,34-40



ENGAGE

PREPARE: On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outline of Matthew 14–28*) and **Pack Item 6** (Poster: *Loving God, Loving Others*).

ASK: What is your highest allegiance in life? (p. 81)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 81. Point out that we don't use the word "allegiance" in everyday speech, but we should carefully consider who or what holds our allegiance as believers.

IDENTIFY: Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Point out that, beginning in Matthew 21, Jesus entered Jerusalem and essentially stayed there until His crucifixion. Share that today's passage in Matthew 22 took place on the Tuesday after His "triumphal entry" and examines the balance between our allegiance to God and human authorities, including the government.

CONTEXT: Summarize the following content from **Understand the Context** to provide more background for the session:

- "The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders had been brewing for months. With the cleansing of the

temple (Matt. 21:12-13), it had reached a boiling point. What followed would be several more days of confrontation with the chief priests and elders. The thrust of the confrontation centered around Jesus's authority and the rejection of His authority by the religious elite." (p. 81)

TRANSITION: *The Jewish leaders already had tried to trap Jesus and failed. In today's passage, we'll see how Jesus taught the Jews—and us—to honor both God and human leaders properly.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 22:15-22 aloud as the group considers the challenge Jesus faced and how He navigated the Herodians' question.

ASK: What does it look like to honor our government in today's culture? (p. 83)

BIBLE SKILL: Direct adults to work in groups of two or three to complete the **Bible Skill** activity (p. 83). Point out that Jesus spoke about giving Caesar his due and giving God what He deserves. Instruct the adults to compare Matthew 22:17-21 to Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7; and 1 Peter 2:13-17. Encourage them to write a description of the Christian's responsibilities toward

government based on these verses. Allow the groups to share their descriptions.

RECAP: To summarize a Christian response to government, enlist a volunteer to read the **Key Doctrine** (p. 83). Highlight this content to provide more background:

- **(22:19-21)** Since the coin carried Caesar’s image, it belonged to him. So Jesus stated, “Give, then, to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” The Greek word Jesus used means to “return” or “restore” what rightfully belongs to Caesar. Then Jesus reminded them of their greater obligation—giving to God the things that are God’s. They needed to give themselves fully to God since they bore His image (Gen. 1:27-28) and belonged to Him (Ps. 24:1). Caesar could claim their money, but God held a higher claim on their lives.

EXPLAIN: Emphasize that Jesus saw through His opponents’ trap and explained that His followers should be obedient to both government and God. His words here created a foundation on which believers continue to build their understanding of the relationship between our faith and the government.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 22:34-40 aloud as the group considers the test presented by the lawyer.

ASK: Why do you think Jesus gave the lawyer two commands instead of just one? (p. 83)

EXPLAIN: Summarize the following content to explain the significance of this question and Jesus’s response:

- **(22:36)** The question of “which command in the law is the greatest?” was hotly debated in rabbinic circles. Realizing some commands were more important than others, the rabbis divided them into categories. Within the weightier group, various rabbis proposed different commandments as the greatest. Perhaps this expert believed he knew the answer and was prepared to debate Jesus.
- **(22:37-38)** The expert and the crowd probably expected Jesus to quote one of the Ten Commandments. However, He pointed to the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-5). Every pious Jew repeated these words twice a day—morning and evening. They also posted them on their doorposts and placed copies of them in their phylacteries (6:8). Jesus’s answer focused on love for “the Lord your God.” Such love is not mere sentimentality or emotion, but absolute devotion. Jesus named two of the three items of Deuteronomy 6:5—“all your heart . . . all your soul”—but added “all your mind” in place of “strength.” In biblical terms, the heart includes both the intellect and emotions, while the soul refers to one’s essential being. The mind is the seat of the will that defines action. These terms alluded to the entire person. This is why “all” is repeated with each term. To be sure, the expert understood what “greatest” meant, but Jesus added “most important” to emphasize this command’s priority.

ASK: What’s at the heart of this command to love other people? What does this demonstrate? (p. 83)

SAY: *Jesus identified these two commands as the greatest and most important because all other laws spring from them. We can't really love God fully without loving our neighbors, and we can't love our neighbors fully without loving God. Every aspect of living a healthy Christian life that honors God can be traced to our ability to obey these two commands.*

APPLY: Direct adults to **Pack Item 6** (Poster: *Loving God, Loving Others*). Lead adults to identify ways they can love God with their entire being and love their neighbors as themselves. Encourage the group to find ways to demonstrate these actions as they step into the “real world” this week.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- We are called to submit to government officials and laws.
- We are to honor God exclusively as the one true God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

ASK: Which is more difficult to honor in your own life: God or the government? Which love is most difficult to demonstrate: love for God or love for your neighbor?

DISCUSS: Lead adults in a brief discussion of the **Apply the Text** activity on page 83. Point back to **Pack Item 6** (Poster: *Loving God, Loving Others*). Remind them that loving God includes loving our neighbors—and Jesus defined a neighbor as any other human we meet (Luke 10:25-37).

CHALLENGE: Call attention to the **Apply the Text** question on page 87. Emphasize that God calls His people to honor Him in every aspect of their lives. Encourage them to spend time during the week talking with God about what areas they might be holding back and how they can surrender those areas to Him for His glory.

PRAY: Encourage adults to pray in pairs. Instruct one adult in each pair to pray that God would empower both adults to honor Him in every aspect of life. Instruct the second adult to pray for government leaders. Close with a prayer for your group.

AFTER THE SESSION

This week, consider how you have seen the adults in your group honor God with their lives. Send a text or email to each individual, acknowledging how they have revealed what it means to honor God. Thank them for the example set for others. Send another text or email to the whole group, challenging them to continue looking for ways to apply what they listed on **Pack Item 6** (Poster: *Loving God, Loving Others*).

Alert

Session 11 • Matthew 24:36-51



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*) and **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Parables of Jesus*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 89.

ASK: What is it about the end of the world that most fascinates or frightens you? (p. 89)

DISCUSS: Encourage the group to suggest movies, books, television shows, and other popular media that centers on the end of the world. Lead a brief discussion on how those feed our desire to know more about the end times. Affirm that it's human nature to want "inside information" on the last days.

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Point out that today's session comes from Matthew 24. Summarize the following information from **Understand the Context** to provide context for today's focal passage:

- "Chapter 24 begins with the disciples marveling over the magnificence of the temple. Jesus informed them that the temple would be destroyed. His disciples asked when this would happen and what

signs would signal His return and the end of the age. Jesus's response prompted what is known as the Olivet Discourse, an extended teaching given on the Mount of Olives found in Matthew 24–25." (p. 89)

SHARE: Point to **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Parables of Jesus*). Note that Jesus's parable of the fig tree (Matt. 24:32-35) leads into today's focal passage.

SAY: *This parable challenges believers to remain vigilant for the return of Jesus. That will continue to be Jesus's theme in the verses we study today.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Matthew 24:36-41** aloud as the group listens for details about Jesus's second coming.

ASK: What do we learn about God's plans for Jesus's return in these verses? (p. 91)

EXPLAIN: Stress the primary teaching of this parable:

- *Implied in the disciples' question about signs of Jesus's coming was the question, "When?" The answer, according to Jesus, was no one knows—neither the angels nor He Himself knew God's timetable.*

Because no one knows the time of Christ's return, any attempt to speculate and calculate it is a waste of time and energy. Instead, preparedness is the proper response to the fact that Jesus will return.

ASK: How do the two illustrations given help us better understand the nature of Jesus's return? (p. 91)

SHARE: *Noah tried to warn those around him, but they refused to listen. Before the flood came, they continued going about their normal routines. By the time they realized what was happening, it was too late. Likewise, Jesus's return will catch people off guard. Like men walking in the field or women working at a mill, many will ignore Jesus's warnings and fail to prepare for His return. And they will suffer the consequences for their decision.*

SAY: *We saw in verses 36-41 that we don't know when Jesus is coming back, but His return is guaranteed. In these verses, Jesus focused on what believers should do while they wait.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 24:42-44 aloud as adults underline the responsibilities of believers waiting for Jesus to come back.

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion on what adults marked in the verses. Highlight the need for diligence. Affirm that it would be easy to discount Jesus's return since it has taken so long, but we are called to be alert as we serve Him here on earth.

ASK: What does it mean to be ready for Jesus's return? Why is it important to be ready? (p. 91)

RECAP: Review the illustration that Jesus used to make His point about vigilance in this passage:

- **(24:43)** To illustrate the need for constant vigilance until His return, Jesus shared a short parable about a homeowner and a thief. The image comparing Jesus's return to a thief striking without warning was later repeated by Paul (1 Thess. 5:2-4), Peter (2 Pet. 3:10), and John (Rev. 3:3; 16:15) in their writings to first-century churches. It underscores the sudden and unexpected nature of the Lord's return—and the catastrophic consequences for those who are not prepared. The focus is on vigilance.

CONTRAST: Draw a two-column chart on the board. In the left column, write *be alert, know,* and *be ready.* Encourage adults to suggest the opposite of these terms and record their responses in the right column. Discuss how each side of the chart could affect one's approach to the second coming.

SHARE: *Again, Jesus made two points here. First, we don't know when He is coming back. Second, we can be sure that He is coming back. And because that's a guarantee, we need to stay alert and keep serving Him well until the day of His return finally arrives.*

READ: Invite the group to read silently Matthew 24:45-51, underlining the question in verse 45 and considering how the rest of the passage answers that question.

RECAP: Briefly discuss adults' responses to the verses they read. Summarize the following content to provide more context to Jesus's contrast of the two servants:

- **(24:45-51)** Jesus shared a second parable that further illustrates the importance of remaining faithful while we await Christ's return. Two servants were entrusted with a master's household. The implication is that the master was away for an extended period. During the master's absence, one servant was faithful to continue his tasks. The other was not faithful but rather pursued selfish pleasure. One was ready for the master's return, the other was not. Jesus was teaching His disciples about the certainty of His return and their doing His work and will as they awaited that day.

ASK: How are you preparing yourself for Jesus's return? (p. 91)

REFLECT: Remind adults that the servants represent two responses to Jesus and that the blessing and punishment represent real eternal consequences. Provide a few minutes for silent prayer so adults can consider where they stand with God right now.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage as adults consider their own level of commitment to each item:

- We can be certain that Jesus will one day return.
- Believers should be ready for Christ's return.

- Believers are to remain faithful while we await Christ's return, stewarding well the resources God has given us.

CHALLENGE: Challenge the group to consider their feelings about Christ's return and to use those as reminders to live for Him, seek Him, and share Him with people who do not believe.

DISCUSS: Direct attention to the **Apply the Text** question on page 91. Discuss responses and encourage adults to find ways to hold one another accountable to staying alert. Remind adults that this is what Jesus expects of His people as they wait for His return.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to bring this passage to life this week as each adult seeks to know God, live for Christ, and be filled with the Spirit.

AFTER THE SESSION

Keep the conversation going this week through your group text or email communication. Encourage the group to share how they are keeping Christ's return in mind as they go about their everyday tasks and life. Encourage adults to point to Jesus as they live among people who need to hear the truth.



Active Faith

Session 12 • Matthew 25:31-46



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 7** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 25:40*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 97.

ASK: What are the advantages of knowing the criteria by which you will be evaluated? What are the disadvantages of not knowing? (p. 97)

DISCUSS: Ask adults to share how they feel about performance reviews at work. Lead a discussion on measurements and standards used in various professions for such reviews.

CONTEXT: Review this content from **Understand the Context** (p. 97) to explain Jesus's message in the earlier parables:

- “Beginning in Matthew 24:45, Jesus told three parables about preparedness. The first contrasted the actions of a wise, sensible servant with the actions of a wicked servant while the master was away (24:45-51). The second parable (25:1-13) concerned ten virgins who were part of a wedding celebration. . . . The prepared virgins accompanied the bridegroom to the feast. The unprepared ones failed to be ready and lacked enough oil to light

the bridegroom's way to the marriage feast. . . . The third parable in the Olivet Discourse tells of a master and servants (vv. 14-30). . . . The bottom line is that we are to be prepared and faithfully carrying out the work given to us by our Master.”

SHARE: Note that while Jesus used parables in Matthew 24–25 to explain an eternal “performance review,” this passage should be interpreted as a direct prophecy from Him regarding judgment in the last days.

SAY: *As we dig deeper into this eternal “performance review,” reflect on what your life says about Christ each day.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Matthew 25:31-33** aloud as the group listens for the terms describing Jesus.

ASK: What do these verses teach about Jesus's role in the final judgment? (p. 99)

SHARE: *Jesus referred to Himself as the “Son of Man” (v. 31). While He came humbly to Bethlehem, His return will be marked by glory and majesty. As He judges, He will separate individuals. Things like ethnicity, social status, and birthplace won't matter. Jesus will judge each person, not countries or nations.*

EXPLAIN: Identify the two groups Jesus mentioned:

- **(25:32-33)** Jesus used a metaphor to picture the two groups, sheep and goats. The sheep Jesus put on his right and the goats on the left. In that society, these domesticated animals often were pastured together and may have looked similar from a distance. But sheep were valued more. When evening came, the shepherd would place the goats with thinner hair in a warmer place, while the sheep with heavier wool stayed in the open. Shepherds also separated the goats from sheep for milking and for slaughter. Given the context of judgment, this might fit the setting better.

ASK: What is the significance of the right hand and the left hand? (p. 99)

- **(25:33)** For most people, the right hand is the stronger of the two. The Bible describes God's power as being in His right hand (Ex. 15:6). Ancient statues and wall-carvings show that people in Middle Eastern cultures received rewards or favors with the right hand. Those depicted on a leader's right hand were the favored ones. Further emphasizing the importance of the right hand, after Jesus ascended, He took His place at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 8:1; also Acts 7:55). The right hand, then, is the place of honor and power.

TRANSITION: *The right hand refers to a place of honor, while the left hand suggests disgrace. As Creator and King, Jesus has the right to separate the nations, but He also has a standard to determine who goes where.*

READ: Direct the group to read

Matthew 25:34-40 silently, underlining every word that describes the struggles people were having and how those needs were met.

ASK: What evidence distinguishes between a righteous and unrighteous person? (p. 99)

EXPLAIN: Lead a discussion based on the group's responses to the question. Note that once Jesus (the King) separated the sheep and goats, He began to explain His criteria:

- "The rewards were based on their actions of ministering to the King. In each case, the King was the recipient of the care they had given. A note of caution and clarification is necessary at this point. Although these righteous ones were applauded for their acts of compassion, these acts did not earn them the reward of the kingdom. This account is not teaching salvation by works. The clear teaching of the New Testament is that no one can merit or earn God's gracious gift of salvation. That comes by the grace of God through Christ's achievement on the cross. These actions of compassion by the righteous ones were the outflow and evidence of a right relationship with God (see Eph. 2:8-10)." (p. 101, Day 2)

ASK: What obstacles prevent us from ministering to the needs of others? (p. 99)

EXAMINE: Encourage adults to work together in teams of three or four. Direct each team to read the passage again and to focus on the ways the sheep ministered to others. Urge each group to identify practical ways

believers can provide similar ministry to others today. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share what they discussed. Record their responses on the board.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 25:41-46 aloud as the group considers the similarities and differences between these verses and Matthew 25:34-40.

ASK: What are the contrasts between these two sets of verses? (p. 99)

SHARE: Allow adults to share their observations about verses 34-40 and verses 41-46. Contrast the situations faced by the two groups:

- **(25:41)** For the sheep, the invitation was to “come,” while the goats were told to depart from me. The sheep inherited the kingdom, but the goats were sent into the eternal fire. In the Bible, fire is a common image for judgment, especially God’s ultimate judgment. Hell is not a metaphor. It is real place of torment that will serve as the eternal destination of those whose names are not found in the book of life (Rev. 20:15; 21:8).

SAY: *Jesus made it clear that eternal punishment in a place of torment is real. Hell is not a metaphor or philosophical idea. As believers, we should recognize that those who reject Jesus will spend eternity in hell—and we should do all we can to convince them to turn to Christ before it’s too late.*

ASK: What prevents some people in our culture from believing the biblical teaching about hell and eternal life? (p. 99)

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week’s Bible passage, considering how these truths should shape our relationships and our ministries:

- We should live our lives knowing we will stand before Jesus one day.
- We demonstrate our love for God when we minister to other believers.
- We should recognize that unbelievers will be eternally separated from God and will face everlasting punishment.

DISCUSS: Direct a volunteer to read the **Apply the Text** activity on page 99. Allow the group to suggest ways they have shown compassion in the past and how they could again in the future. Stress that today’s focal passage reminds us that Christ looks at the heart.

PRAY: Allow adults to spend a few minutes in silent prayer, talking to God about how He wants to work in their lives. Close in prayer, asking God to give each adult a clear vision for showing mercy to other believers and showing grace to the world.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send a group email or text to the adults in your Bible study, reminding them of Matthew 25:40. Encourage anyone who has had a chance to minister to the “least of these” to share their stories.

Our Atonement

Session 13 • Matthew 26:17-30



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*).

ASK: How does death sometimes sharpen our focus on the things that really matter in life? (p. 105)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 105.

DISCUSS: Encourage the group to consider the “final dinner party” scenario. Encourage a few volunteers to share whom they might invite and what they might say to those gathered.

CONTEXT: Draw attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Point out that this session examines the last supper, which is part of Jesus’s trial and crucifixion. Summarize this information from **Understand the Context** (p. 105) to give an overview of Matthew 26.

- “Passover began on Thursday evening at sundown. . . . Also on that day, or perhaps a day earlier, the chief priests met to initiate Jesus’s arrest (26:3-5). Sometime that afternoon, while Jesus spoke of end

times under the olive trees on the Mount of Olives, Judas the betrayer sold Him out (vv. 14-16). Sometime on Thursday, Jesus sent John and Peter to prepare for the Passover celebration (see Luke 22:8). Following the Passover meal, Jesus returned to the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, where He spent an agonizing time in prayer as He faced the coming event of the crucifixion (vv. 36-46).”

TRANSITION: *Today’s session focuses on Jesus’s Passover meal—His “last supper”—with His disciples. Through Jesus’s words around that meal, we’ll get a clear view of our own sins and what Jesus’s death means for our sinfulness.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 26:17-25 aloud as the group highlights the setting and significance of the event.

EXPLAIN: Briefly summarize verses 17-20. Note that the secrecy about the location would keep Jesus and His disciples hidden from the Jewish leaders.

- **(26:17)** “Where do you want us to make preparations for . . . the Passover” implies that Jesus already knew where they would celebrate the Passover. Jesus told Peter

and John to locate a certain man and to tell him that the Teacher's time is near. This referred to Jesus's impending death and seems to indicate that Jesus had shared what lay ahead for Him with this unnamed man.

- **(26:17-19)** Preparing the Passover involved arrangement of the room and the food for the meal. It also could have included sacrificing the lamb at the temple and transporting it to the site where it would be roasted and eaten. Other parts of the meal included greens, bitter herbs mixed with stewed fruit, wine, and unleavened bread.

ASK: How did the disciples respond to Jesus's announcement of betrayal? How do you think He felt in that moment? (p. 107)

RECAP: Allow adults to discuss their responses. Point out that Judas spoke last and that he called Jesus "Rabbi," while the others called Him "Lord." Explain the meaning of verse 24:

- "While the impending death of Jesus was the fulfillment of both prophecy and the plan of God, the actions of Judas arose from his own willful choice. There is no conflict between God's sovereign will and Judas's free will. Jesus was not a victim of some political process but the center of God's plan for the salvation of humanity. Judas was not merely a pawn in God's plan but someone who acted out of his own decisions and perhaps flawed thinking. Because of this, Judas would suffer the consequences for his decision." (p. 109, Day 2)

SHARE: Emphasize that Jesus knew exactly what was going on. Point out that His response showed that He understood how Judas had given himself over to sin.

ASK: What can we do to resist becoming immune to the dangers of sin? (p. 107)

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 26:26-30 silently, underlining the meanings of the bread and the cup.

ASK: What was the significance of the Passover meal? How did the meal connect to Jesus's mission? (p. 107)

CONNECT: Summarize this content to highlight how Jesus redefined the Passover in light of His sacrifice:

- **(26:26-28)** The Passover meal included a variety of dishes with different meanings. One of those dishes was the *matzah* bread, a flat, unleavened piece of bread that represented the bread eaten in haste in Egypt as the Israelites prepared to flee (Deut. 16:3). Jesus broke and gave this bread to each disciple with the instructions to take and eat. With this action, Jesus changed the meaning of this bread. The breaking of the bread pointed to His death. No longer was this a reminder of the exodus; now it would serve as a reminder of Christ's atoning death. The lamb's blood was a major feature in the Passover ritual (Ex. 12:7,13,22-23). But now Jesus focused on His own blood, represented by the cup. Taking this cup, Jesus gave thanks and urged His disciples to drink from it. The cup of wine symbolized His "blood" that would be poured out for the forgiveness

of sins. That Jesus had them drink from a common cup symbolized their unity.

ASK: Why is it important for believers to remember Jesus's sacrifice on the cross? (p. 107)

PRAY: Direct adults to scan the QR code for the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** (p. 59). Invite them to pray this session's memory verse, Matthew 26:28, back to God as noted in the prayer guide.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- Believers must recognize their own capacity to betray Jesus.
- We find forgiveness by accepting Jesus's death as the payment for our sins.

CHALLENGE: As a group, consider why it is important for all believers to regularly remember Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. Remind adults that regularly celebrating Jesus's death through the Lord's Supper should challenge them to reflect on their sin and His atonement.

DISCUSS: Direct adults to the **Apply the Text** activity on page 107. Guide the group to consider how they personally prepare for the Lord's Supper and how they might encourage one another the next time the ordinance is observed. Point out the **Apply the Text** questions on page 111. Urge adults to reflect on these questions and to ask for God's help in eliminating false steps that could lead them to deny or betray Jesus.

PRAY: Encourage adults to continue using **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) to pray Scripture back to God during the week ahead. Close the session in prayer, thanking Christ Jesus for offering His body and blood so we can find forgiveness and avoid the wrath we deserve.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email your group this week with a phrase, verse, or thought from this week's lesson. Challenge them to complete the **Bible Skill** activity on page 107. Enlist a few volunteers to be ready to share what they learned when you gather for Bible study next week. Remind adults that the coming session will be the last in the study of Matthew's Gospel.

Our Savior

Session 14 • Matthew 27:27-31,45-54



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*) and **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Peter in Matthew's Gospel*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 113.

ASK: What does the amount of space devoted to Jesus's death tell you about its importance? (p. 113) Affirm Matthew's focus on Jesus's death as central to his Gospel.

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Note that today's session, along with the Easter session studied earlier in the quarter, conclude Matthew's Gospel. Briefly review some highlights from other sessions and emphasize that all of Jesus's teaching, preaching, and healing had pointed to this moment.

SHARE: *Matthew emphasized Jesus's death because it opened the door to salvation and a new relationship with God. As we study this session, examine your thoughts about Jesus's death and what it means to your life.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

BACKGROUND: Highlight again the trials Jesus endured. Point out the last few items

on **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Peter in Matthew's Gospel*). Note that, along with the trials and humiliation, Jesus endured the betrayal of Judas, the denial by Peter, and the scattering of His other followers.

SAY: *But all of these just set the stage for the deeper suffering He was going to experience.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 27:27-31 aloud as adults underline examples of how the soldiers treated Him.

RECAP: Emphasize the cruelty of the Roman soldiers, as portrayed in this passage:

- **(27:27-31)** Criminals condemned to crucifixion were commonly stripped before being placed on the cross, a way to add humiliation to their agony. Jesus, though, did not have to wait for this element of humiliation; the soldiers stripped him during this mocking phase and they dressed Him in a scarlet robe. Since every king needed a crown, the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They placed a staff in his right hand. Perhaps it was the bamboo cane used for flogging. They spat on him, showing great contempt in a culture where honor was valued highly. They also kept hitting him on the head with the "scepter." The imperfect tense of the verb shows the repeated

nature of this action. Any thorns pointing inward were driven deeper into Jesus's head. The spitting and repeated blows fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 50:6.

ASK: What emotions does this passage evoke in you? (p. 115)

SHARE: Remind adults that this intense suffering was not without a purpose. Note that while we might see it as a tragedy, Jesus had predicted all of this and understood that it was a necessary part of God's plan of salvation.

PRAY: Give adults a few moments for quiet reflection and prayer. Urge them to thank Jesus for the things He experienced on our behalf that day.



Passion Week

Learn more about Jesus's final week on earth—the events that led Him to the cross and the hope that followed.

OVERVIEW: Briefly summarize the events of Matthew 27:32-44. Note that being hung with criminals (Isa. 53:12) and having soldiers gamble for His clothes (Ps. 22:18) fulfilled messianic prophecy.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 27:45-49 aloud as the group listens for the supernatural events related to Jesus's death.

DISCUSS: Encourage adults to discuss the source of the darkness. Summarize the following information to provide additional insights:

- **(27:45)** Some skeptics have suggested the darkness was the result of an eclipse. However, Passover always involves a full moon, and an eclipse can occur only during a new moon. The darkness recalls the ninth plague on Egypt (Ex. 10:21-29), along with other Old Testament prophecies that describe God's judgment (see Amos 8:9). Significantly, the Egyptian plague lasted three days, while this darkness lasted three hours. But the darkness had deeper meaning. During this time, God dealt with human sin and the atoning sacrifice for it. Figuratively speaking, God, who is too holy to look on sin (Hab. 1:13), turned His back on the sinner (Isa. 53:5,10).

ASK: How does Jesus's cry on the cross point to the greatness of our sin? (p. 115)

SHARE: Briefly discuss the crowd's response and why they would have mentioned Elijah. Emphasize that through the entire experience, Jesus remained in complete control of His life and, ultimately, His death.

READ: Instruct the group to read Matthew 27:50-54 carefully, paying attention to all the details of Jesus's death.

ASK: What evidence from the day's events might be used to help others recognize that Jesus was the Son of God? (p. 115)

EXAMINE: Highlight the supernatural events around Jesus's death:

- "A second phenomenal act of God while Jesus was on the cross was the tearing of "the curtain of the sanctuary." This curtain

separated the holy place from the holy of holies and was a symbol of separation (Ex. 26:31-33). The curtain in Herod's temple was reportedly almost twenty-one inches thick. For such a curtain to be split from "top to bottom" could only be an act of God. Symbolically, the barrier between Holy God and unholy humanity was removed by the death of Jesus (Heb. 4:16)." (p. 118, Day Four)

ASK: How would you respond if you had witnessed these events?

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion about the centurion's response. Affirm that he and those with him were eyewitnesses to all that had happened, and it led to a confession of Jesus's deity.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- Jesus's willingness to endure the shame and humiliation of crucifixion leads us to humble surrender and praise.
- We can be confident in knowing that Jesus's death was part of God's redemptive plan.
- The crucifixion of Jesus calls for the response of faith.

REFLECT: Remind adults that Jesus's death requires a response from each person. Challenge them to take a few minutes to examine their own hearts and to decide if they have made that response to Jesus. If so, encourage them to identify someone who

still needs to accept Him and to start praying for them.

DISCUSS: Lead the group to respond to the **Apply the Text** activity on page 115.

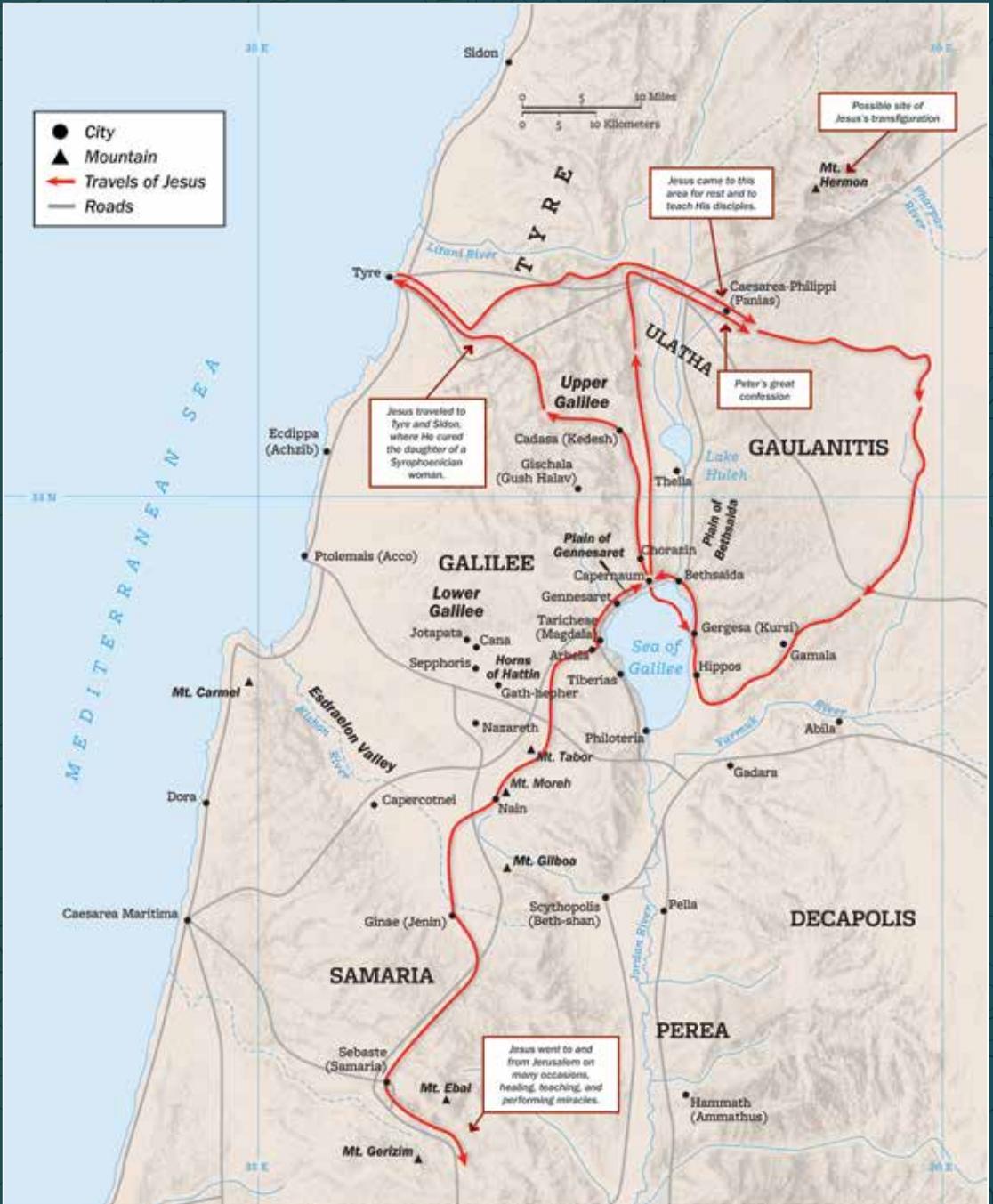
CHALLENGE: Encourage the group to reflect on the **Apply the Text** question on page 119 during the coming week. Encourage them to journal their responses and to consider sharing them when you gather for your next Bible study.

PRAY: Invite adults to bow their heads as you read Matthew 27:50-51 aloud. Invite them to respond aloud as God reveals the impact of today's passage on their hearts. Close with prayer, thanking Jesus for His death, which provided access to God.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send adults a group text or email during the week. Remind them that this was the final session in Matthew's Gospel. Share that the group will be starting a new study in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. Encourage them to come and to invite a friend or family member to join them.

JESUS'S MINISTRY BEYOND GALILEE



"Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee" is based on "The Ministry of Jesus Beyond Galilee," Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1998), p. 224. Used with permission.

MATTHEW 14–28

Turning points are key to any story. A character moving in one direction suddenly transitions to a new path. Overcoming obstacles, the hero wins in the end. Matthew 14–28 represents a turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus. After preaching and healing in Galilee, Christ turned His face toward Jerusalem. His steps ultimately took Him to a cross—and an empty tomb. As believers, we benefit from this turning point. Through His example, we learn how to face our fears, overcome opposition, sacrifice for others, and embrace the hope that only He provides. By studying Matthew 14–28, we gain a better understanding of what it means to live out our faith each day—and how we can move forward to make disciples of all nations.

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