

LIFEPOINT CHURCH // WORD TO LIFE

# THE WAY



MATTHEW 19:1 - 20:16

WEEKS 5-8





**Word to Life** studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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## **Week 5: Matthew 19:1-12**

### **Day 1: A Day to Explore**

#### **READ: Matthew 19:1-12**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew 19:1-12 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** Why do you think that the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce?

**Question:** What is the significance of Jesus quoting the book of Genesis?

**Activity:** Write down the reasons that you believe God might allow for divorce.

**Question:** In verse 6 Jesus says, “let not man separate,” but in verse 9 Jesus says, “except for sexual immorality.” How would you reconcile the idea that Jesus says people shouldn’t separate what God has joined together with the statement that adultery is committed upon remarriage except if it’s on the basis of sexual immorality?

**Question:** Why do you think the disciples conclude that it is better not to marry?

**Activity:** Write down what you believe constitutes a eunuch and when a person should not seek marriage but stay single.

**Activity:** Write down what you would say to a fellow member of the church who is considering divorce on the basis that they are unhappy in their current situation.

## **Week 5: Matthew 19:1-12**

### **Day 2: The Scriptural Position of Divorce**

**READ: 1 Cor 7:15; Deut 24:1-4; Matt 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; Matt 5:31-32; Matt 12:7**

#### **EXPLORE:**

The goal of this WTL is to explain what the Bible teaches about divorce. If you have not considered the relevant biblical texts on divorce, I suggest that you read the verses listed above. The Apostle Paul commended the Bereans in Acts 17:11, when he said that they examined the Scriptures daily to see whether what he was telling them was true. Everything that you read should be measured against what the Scriptures say. All too often we can each be guilty of trusting in teachers or traditions to do our Scripture reading or our reasoning for us. There is wisdom in turning to Christians from the past and in the present for guidance on interpretation, but your ultimate authority should be the Word of God not the words of men. With that in mind, here are the views in which Christians have espoused in trying to compile the Biblical data.

- 1) Divorce is never permissible.
- 2) Divorce is permissible in the case of adultery.
- 3) Divorce is permissible in the case of adultery, or abandonment.
- 4) Divorce is permissible in the case of adultery, abandonment, or abuse.

There are different views that Christian denominations have taken with regards to divorce, but it is important to state the Biblical justification for each view. Interpretation 1 would be a straightforward reading of a verse like Luke 16:18 where Jesus says divorce=adultery with no exception. It would seek to explain other verses that seem to give exceptions as only applying to annulments (invalid marriages from the start). Interpretation 2



interprets “sexual immorality” from Matthew 19:9 as committing adultery. It states that verses like Luke 16:18 leave out Matthew’s exception because it is implied or assumed to be known by Jesus’ audience. Interpretation 3 adds the exception of abandonment because of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:15 where he says that if an unbelieving partner leaves, a Christian is no longer obligated to stay married to them. Most who argue this interpretation would expand Paul’s view to professing believers who also leave because they would no longer be behaving like genuine believers. Interpretation 4 would add the exception of abuse from a Biblical principle rather than a direct verse. Verses like Matthew 12:7 where Jesus says that God desires mercy over sacrifice create a foundation for the allowance of divorce if a spouse’s life is in danger and the preservation of life is the goal.

No matter which interpretation that you hold it is important to note that the heart of God is for His people to die to themselves and live for Him. He wants His people to not look for a way out of following His commands but to have the same heart that He has in a broken world. A heart that loves righteousness but gives grace and mercy for the weak and vulnerable.

**BIG IDEA: There are four main views of divorce but the exceptions are much less important than a right heart before the Lord.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Which interpretation do you believe is the most scriptural and why?

## **Week 5: Matthew 19:1-12**

### **Day 3: The Deception of Interpretation**

**READ: 1 Corinthians 5:1; Matthew 5:31-32**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Does theology affect the way in which we live our lives? When Christians read their Bibles and notice that something they are doing does not accord with what God's Word says do they change? Sometimes I wonder how many professing Christians live their lives that way. There is no question that we all fall short, but there is immense value in seeking to die to ourselves and live for Christ in every area of our lives. I had a friend group in college that sought to live according to Scripture and keep each other accountable to it, but occasionally we had differences on the interpretation of Scripture. There is nothing wrong with a difference of opinion on secondary Christian doctrines, but an issue arises when someone's interpretation is influenced much more by what they want to do rather than a straightforward reading of the text. For example, I had always understood that while alcohol itself was permissible, getting drunk is going against a command of Scripture. Paul says clearly that drunkenness is a work of the flesh in Galatians (5:20). Therefore I concluded that a Christian should not get drunk. However, my friend understood "drunkenness" as allowing alcohol to affect work, family time, or time with the Lord. So, drunkenness to him essentially only applied to someone who people would consider to be a "drunk." I disagreed with him, but theoretically he could be correct. The problem was that his interpretation would change how he behaved with alcohol. Could he really be trusted to be impartial in how he handled the text if it would affect how he lived his life?

In Matthew 19:9 and Matthew 5:32 Jesus says that divorce is committing adultery except if it is on the basis of "sexual immorality." The Greek word often translated as sexual immorality is *πορνεία* which is transliterated as "porneia." It's

where we get our English word for porn. According to the best available Greek-English lexicon, it can mean “unlawful sexual intercourse,” or “participation in prohibited degrees of marriage.” Essentially it means sexual activity outside of marriage. Notice Jesus did not use the word adultery, but a broader term. Jesus decided to use a term that is much broader rather than one that can be defined more narrowly. How does this fit into our earlier discussion?

A husband or wife who is seeking divorce could use a very self-serving reading of this passage to give themselves grounds to leave their spouse. For instance, someone could reason as follows. Sexual immorality is grounds for divorce. Jesus also says that adultery is of the heart. Therefore, if my spouse has ever looked at someone else other than me in a lustful manner then I have cause for divorce. This is how one’s interpretation of Scripture can really affect their lives.

God does not want us all to be lawyers when it comes to His Word. In fact, Jesus regularly spoke against people who would have a heart like that. Surrendering to God’s Word does not mean looking for the loopholes. Paul said it best when he said, “all things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.” We don’t operate under the thumb of the law anymore. We operate as redeemed believers seeking to truly love God and love each other. Don’t worry about what you can get away with, be concerned with how you can best serve God and others.

**BIG IDEA: Live by God’s Word but recognize that your heart can still deceive you.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Write down ways in which you may be tempted to change the harder teachings of Scripture.

## **Week 5: Matthew 19:1-12**

### **Day 4: The Disciples' Question**

**READ: Matthew 19:1-12**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Liquidity is a concept used to describe investments. The more liquid an investment, the easier it is to convert your savings to spendable cash without penalty. Typically the less liquid an investment is, the higher the return. For example, with a basic savings account from the bank, you can withdraw your money at any time, but it pays a much lower interest rate than a 3-year CD. The tradeoff for that extra interest from the CD is that you can't touch the money for 3 years or the bank hits you with big penalties.

Marriage was created by God to be an institution without any liquidity. No cashing out just because you are unhappy or have unmet expectations. Under Mosaic law, if you violated the marriage covenant, then the penalty was death. Before the fall and sin entered into the world, Genesis 2:24 says a man is to "hold fast" to his wife and "they shall become one flesh." Both of these phrases describe a permanent union. The concept of divorce only came about once sin entered the world.

Note that when Jesus calls back to this pre-fall, permanent concept of marriage, both the Pharisees and the disciples cling to their optionality as it pertains to ending a marriage. The Pharisees, as they typically did, turned to the laws and pointed out the legal certificate which a man was required to give a woman if he wanted to divorce her. Unlike the Pharisees, the disciples did not directly question Jesus' teaching, but instead turned to a loophole. The thought of a marriage without a God-approved escape clause was so restrictive that they questioned whether it was better to avoid marriage altogether. They clung to the liquidity of the marriage investment without really considering

that by doing so, they were experiencing lesser returns in the form of lower quality marriages.

We as human beings hate to give up control. Through the Scriptures, God has laid out the path to righteousness. Instead of seeing it as liberating not to have to guess how God wants us to live, we see it as restrictive because deep down we all desire to be our own god and the ones making the rules that conform to our own desires. Instead of feeling as though God's commandments are restrictive, we should consider it freeing to know exactly what He expects of us. The consequences of defying God's will are the same whether we are clear on the expectations or not, so having to guess what those expectations would be a much worse situation.

In modern society, divorce is even more culturally acceptable and legally attainable and so it falls back on us as faithful Christians to honor the covenant of marriage and consider it as a permanent institution that glorifies God. An investment without any liquidity, but one that has the highest returns.

**BIG IDEA:** The permanence of marriage is a blessing and not a curse. God's commandments are a blessing and not a curse.

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** If divorce is not an option, then pray for reconciliation, diligence, and permanence for the marriages in our church.

## **Week 5: Matthew 19:1-12**

### **Day 5: What is the Meaning of “Hardness of Heart”?**

**READ: Matthew 19:1-12**

#### **EXPLORE:**

What comes to mind when you think of the phrase “hardness of heart”? Does it conjure up thoughts of vile people who raise the banner of Satan and deny the existence of God? Or perhaps there’s someone from your past whose words or actions hurt you deeply? What about your own actions or attitudes? Have you done some things that would fit the criteria of “hardness of heart”?

The concept of “hardness of heart” is a profound spiritual condition that represents human resistance to God’s original design and divine intentions. In Matthew 19:8, Jesus addresses this concept in the context of divorce, stating, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” The phrase “hardness of heart” represents a spiritual and emotional state of: 1) stubborn resistance to God’s will, 2) persistent rebellion against divine principles and/or 3) emotional and spiritual insensitivity to God’s original plan. Clearly, this is far more than just an issue relating to divorce.

A few biblical examples of “hardness of heart” are 1) Pharaoh and his denial to let God’s people, the Israelites, depart from Egypt and journey to the promised land (Exodus 7:13-14). 2) The Israelites, after being freed from Egypt, wander in the wilderness despite God’s miraculous provisions (Hebrews 3:8). 3) Note what Paul says about “hardness of heart.”: “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed (Romans 2:5).

**BIG IDEA: God has provided a remedy for our hardness of heart.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Even in the midst of a “hardness of heart,” there is good news. In Ezekiel 36:26 God says, “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” What a great promise! While we are still sinners, God expresses His love towards us not only in giving His Son, Jesus, to come and offer the ultimate forgiveness, but God also promises that He will change our hearts to become soft and pliable to His truth. The question for each of us is this: do I have any hardness of heart? Are there any signs of a rebellious spirit with me? Are there biblical truths that I am in clear opposition to? Are there biblical commands that I have been unwilling to fall in line with? Are you unsure if any of these are true for you? This would be a good time to pray Psalm 139:23-24 to God and ask Him to reveal any hardness of heart within you. It says, **“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in this way everlasting!”** Take time now to pray this scripture to God and ask Him to reveal any hardness of heart within you. As the Holy Spirit begins to bring about conviction, take on a spirit of humility by agreeing with God and confessing this hard-heartedness. Along with confession, ask God to change your heart and help you walk in true repentance.

## **Week 6: Matthew 19:13-15**

### **Day 1: A Day to Explore**

#### **READ: Matthew 19:13-15**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew 19:13-15 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Questions:** What do you think it means that Jesus laid his hands on the children? Do you think that would have involved a blessing or some sort of specific type of prayer?

**Question:** Why do you think that the parents brought their children to Jesus?

**Question:** Why do you think the disciples rebuked the people?



**Activity:** Write down times in which you have been a detriment to others possibly coming to Christ and repent for those times. It could be how you acted in a situation or times in which you didn't act.

**Activity:** Write down ways in which you might help the people around you move closer to a right understanding of the gospel.

**Question:** In what ways might a little child exemplify the kind of person who belongs to the kingdom of heaven?

**Question:** In what ways might a Christian not want to emulate a child?

## **Week 6: Matthew 19:13-15**

### **Day 2: Faith Like An Infant**

**READ: Matthew 19:13-15**

#### **EXPLORE:**

What kind of people do you think should (or even can) come to Jesus and join His kingdom? This sounds like a silly question with an obvious answer: anyone and everyone. We don't know how the disciples would have answered this question directly, but we do know the answer in their hearts based on their actions in this passage. Whether they would have professed it with their mouths or not, their actions revealed they did not view everyone as worthy of coming to Jesus. If we take a moment to evaluate ourselves—our underlying thoughts and our actions— we might find that our answer to this question more closely aligns with the disciples' rebuke of the children than with the "right" answer above.

Luke, when recounting this story in his gospel account expands on some details and tells us "even infants" were brought to Jesus. As a mom, this caught my attention. As I have read parenting books, listened to podcasts, and seen my own child grow & learn, I have been surprised at how young a child truly does start to grasp and understand things I didn't think he could. So now I can see that yes even very young children could certainly understand and learn simple concepts and benefit from being brought to Jesus, but an infant? Certainly a newborn has nothing to offer. In fact, lovingly, I would claim that my newborn is much more of a liability than an asset to our family at this time. She requires constant attention, relying on us for food, diaper changes, soothing, even to simply roll into a different position. Yet Jesus said, "to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

We have talked throughout Matthew about this "upside down kingdom," and here we see Jesus correct the disciples for not

recognizing the place of children in this kingdom. The place of those who seem to be more of a burden than an asset. As we study this passage, we should invite the Lord to examine our hearts to reveal if we may be making this same mistake. We say that anyone can and should come to Jesus, but if we're honest with ourselves in thinking about evangelism in our everyday lives, are there certain people we tend to avoid? A family member whose life seems too messy or an old friend who has too many false beliefs to get past? A homeless person who you're not sure if you can trust or a coworker whose background is simply so different from yours? If I'm completely honest, there have been people in my life that fit some of these descriptions that I secretly (and selfishly) hoped didn't follow up because I knew the process of evangelism and discipleship would be quite difficult or just simply uncomfortable. I saw them as more of a burden than an asset to myself and more importantly to God's kingdom.

We once were infants in the faith—requiring diligent and burdensome teaching and discipleship. And no matter what “age” of your faith you are in now, you will still be a burden in many ways. Recognizing and remembering our great need and His great grace is an awesome way to start to change our mindset about the “children” around us who need to be brought to Jesus.

**BIG IDEA: God loves everyone and we need to have His mindset when looking at those in the world we aren't comfortable with.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Pray for a soft heart towards those around you that you may have written off.

## **Week 6: Matthew 19:13-15**

### **Day 3: The Physical and the Spiritual**

#### **READ: Matthew 19:13-15**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Oftentimes as Christians, we can tend to separate the spiritual from the physical. Going to work is a physical experience and going to church is a spiritual one. However, separating the physical and spiritual is like separating water from its wetness. They are both so intertwined as to being both parts of a whole. If you spend time contemplating how God, who is a spiritual being interacts with our world, it is so often physical. God's presence was said to dwell in a physical ark. Jesus who was the second person of the Trinity became physical in the incarnation. Communion is where we remember a deeply spiritual truth (Christ's resurrection to defeat sin) in physical elements (body and blood of the Lord). This WTL will seek to explain the physical act of laying on hands and how it relates to a deeper spiritual meaning.

Laying hands in Scripture is very context dependent. In the Old Testament laying hands on someone could mean that they were about to get stoned (Leviticus 24:14)! It could also be referring to what the priests would do to an animal right before they sacrificed it to God (Leviticus 1:4). In Genesis 48:17, Israel (once called Jacob) blessed and prophesied over Ephraim while laying his hand on his head. He performed a type of commissioning and blessing over his grandson.

In the New Testament the laying on of hands was used for commissioning elders (1 Timothy 5:22), healing (Acts 28:8), receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17) and blessing (Mark 10:16). So, what did it mean for Jesus to lay His hands on the children in our passage for this week and why specifically do the physical action to indicate a spiritual reality?

In a much later Rabbinic work that was developed long after Jesus, there existed a practice where the elders in Jerusalem would pray and bless a young boy so that he could study the Torah and engage in good deeds. It's possible that Jesus was doing something similar to the children brought to Him, but that reasoning is somewhat anachronistic and too wooden of an interpretation. Most likely Jesus was blessing the kids, possibly healing their bodies of any afflictions, and maybe even informally commissioning them to serve the Lord. It is reasonable to wonder as to why Jesus actually laid His hands on the kids and people in general when he would heal, bless, commission, or pray. The answer lies in how this WTL began. God loves to combine the physical and spiritual.

It has been shown medically that physical touch can lower cortisol and release oxytocin which relieves stress, anxiety, and even pain. It can also lower heart rate and blood pressure. There are actual positive physical benefits that laying on the hands can provide. There is also just an intuitive difference between someone choosing to pray over you with their hands on your shoulders. Laying on hands isn't required for things like prayer or even the commissioning of someone, but it provides a meaningful physical bond to accompany a spiritual one. The point of this WTL is not to get you to lay your hands on people more often but to see how amazing God is for the many subtle ways in which He comforts His people.

**BIG IDEA: The laying on of hands shows the beauty of how God combines a physical action with a spiritual reality.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** What other spiritual realities could be underneath our day-to-day physical experiences?

## **Week 6: Matthew 19:13-15**

### **Day 4: The Humble and the Bold**

**READ: Matthew 19:13-15; Matthew 18:1-5**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Throughout the Bible, children offer a unique glimpse into the heart of God, but they also reveal who will ultimately inherit and enter the kingdom of God. This idea is previously seen in Matthew 18:1-5 when Jesus uses a child as an example of who will enter the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 19:13-15, Jesus and His disciples are in the midst of a crowd that is bringing their children to Jesus so He would lay His hands on them. While the passage does not explicitly say why children were brought to Jesus, it was common in the ancient world for parents to ask a teacher or spiritual leader to bless their children. However, despite this practice, when the disciples see the children approaching Jesus, they try to prevent the children from reaching Jesus by rebuking them.

To understand the disciples' reaction, it is necessary to look at how children were viewed in the ancient world. Unlike in modern society where children and their needs are often put first in every situation, children in the ancient world often had one of the lowest statuses in society. They had little to no influence on those in authority and were seen as unimportant individuals who were dependent and subject to those above them in society. With this in mind, it is easy to see why the disciples were harsh with the children. In their minds, the children were a distraction for Jesus and the disciples wanted to prevent them from slowing His teaching and ministry down.

In verse 14, Jesus evidently becomes aware of the disciples' rebuking the children and responds by calling the children to Him. This interaction is similar to what occurred in Matthew 18 as Jesus reminds the disciples that "for to such belongs the kingdom of

heaven.” Once again, as the children are called and welcomed by Jesus, they also illustrate who will receive the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 15 closes this short passage with Jesus laying His hands on the children as a blessing before leaving them. Instead of turning the children away, Jesus showed the disciples and the crowds that the kingdom of heaven was not for people in high positions, but instead belonged to those in society who were spiritually like children and were willing to approach Him in faith.

Matthew 19:13-15 continues Jesus’ teaching on the values of the kingdom of heaven. From the beginning of the passage, it is clear the disciples are functioning under the accepted cultural view that children are less valuable and a distraction as they attempt to block children from reaching Jesus. However, Jesus challenges this view by calling the children to Him and uses them to remind the disciples of the upside-down nature of the kingdom of heaven. People who are seemingly unimportant and vulnerable will inherit the kingdom of heaven because of their willingness to boldly approach Jesus in faith. As Christians, this passage should challenge us to come to Christ as the children did—with humility and expectation as we seek to glorify Christ in all we do.

**BIG IDEA: The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who humble themselves yet have the boldness to approach Jesus in faith.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How does the ancient world’s view of children change your understanding of this passage?
- **Challenge:** Consider how the children came to Christ and what it would look like for you to come to Christ in the same way.

## **Week 6: Matthew 19:13-15**

### **Day 5: A More Biblical Rebuke**

**READ: Matt 19:13-15; Prov 17:10; Prov 27:5; Prov 3:1; Prov 28:23**

#### **EXPLORE:**

If you read this text to our culture, what do you think would cause the most offense? The answer likely would be the disciples' rebuke of the parents for bringing their children to Jesus. Our culture would not get upset about the disciples stopping children from coming to the Lord but the idea of rebuke in general. The only appropriate time for rebuke according to our culture is for those who are rebuking others (and politicians). However, the rebuke spoken about in Scripture is different. It is oftentimes rebuking someone for how they are living their lives. That kind of rebuke in our culture is heresy, and tolerance is orthodoxy. Our culture says that you can never tell someone how to live their lives. You definitely can't hold them to God's standard. That's archaic, puritanical, tyrannical, and unfortunately for us as Christians, biblical. This WTL will provide a brief survey on rebuke and how we can honor the Lord when we are called to it.

Let's start with a definition of rebuke. "Rebuke" is to exhort someone to change their ways. God rebukes His people constantly in the Old Testament. The prophets in the Old Testament spend most of their time rebuking Israel. Jesus rebukes the wind, seas, and waves (Matt 8:26). He also rebukes the demons (Mark 9:25). Rebuke usually has a negative connotation but the wisdom literature in Scripture can help us see it as a positive. One who is wise is said to welcome rebuke. Open rebuke is said to be better than concealed love. Scoffers are said to not listen to rebuke. Receiving rebuke from a wise man is said to be better than the praise of a fool (Ecc 7:5). Rebuke in general is said to be better than flattery. We should learn from these verses that everyone needs to be rebuked. We should be rebuked, and we



should rebuke so that none of us are blind to our sin. But how should we go about it?

When it comes to rebuke and correction, it's important to keep in mind that one size does not fit all. There should be a difference between when rebuking a soft heart versus a hard one. Paul says that when a brother or sister is caught in a transgression they should be restored in a "spirit of gentleness" (Gal 6:1). When Paul is speaking about unity within the church, he says that we should share the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Paul also tells Timothy that he should not "sharply rebuke" older men, younger men, older women, or younger women but instead should treat them like fathers, brothers, mothers, and sisters. We are called to be loving to our church families. A loving, soft rebuke, however, is not the only kind. When we face hard hearts, we are called to a more direct approach. Jesus rebuked by calling those with hard hearts "fools," "blind," "vipers," etc. Paul calls the Galatians foolish. He calls others lazy and says that some need to be "rebuked sharply" (Titus 1:13). This doesn't mean we have license to be rude, to be quick to attack, or be hateful in any way. It does mean though that sometimes rebuke needs to be intense to wake people up to their blind spots. We also should rebuke for the good of the other. We should always analyze our hearts and seek to do what most glorifies God and helps others.

**BIG IDEA: We are called to rebuke in order to restore those who go astray.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Write down ways in which you need to be rebuked. Also, write down how someone could rebuke you where you would receive it well.

## **Week 7: Matthew 19:16-30**

### **Day 1: A Day to Explore**

#### **READ: Matthew 19:16-30**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew 19:16-30 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Questions:** Why do you think that the man believed a specific good deed could be enough to grant him eternal life? What kind of answer do you believe the man was looking for?

**Questions:** Why do you think that Jesus responded the way that He did? What could He be trying to convey to the man?

**Questions:** Why do you think Jesus mentions those specific commandments? Which of the other ones out of the 10 commandments did He leave out and why?

**Activity:** Read Exodus 20:1-17. Write down the commandments listed and compare the ones that Jesus brought up with the man.

**Question:** If the young man believed that he kept all the commandments, why did he still ask if he lacked something?

**Questions:** According to Jesus, what would make the man perfect? How does what Jesus said to the man compare to how we would share the gospel today?

**Question:** What other reasons might people have for being sorrowful if they were told to give something up?

**Question:** In what way is wealth a detriment to the kingdom of heaven?

**Questions:** How could Jesus' own disciples not know how salvation works? What do you make of Jesus' response to them?

## **Week 7: Matthew 19:16-30**

### **Day 2: What Must I do?**

**READ: Matthew 19:16-26; Galatians 3:23-27**

#### **EXPLORE:**

The story of the rich young ruler is often misread by people who claim that we earn eternal life through our good works. At first glance, it might appear as if Jesus is suggesting salvation through commandment-keeping. In a sense, He is. If we could follow the commandments completely, we would have no need of Jesus' salvation. But none of us can keep the commandments. Even Christians, who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us as our Helper, keep the commandments imperfectly and intermittently.

The young ruler wanted to earn salvation. His assumption was that he had to perform some work to gain eternal life. He was looking for something in himself that would earn God's approval. The disciples expressed a similar idea when they responded to Jesus' declaration that it is difficult for a rich person to enter heaven. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish culture, wealth was seen as a blessing upon a righteous person who was regarded as having the favor of God. When the disciples asked, "who then can be saved?" they were essentially saying, "if someone who obviously has God's favor will have trouble going to heaven, the rest of us don't have a chance."

Jesus' response to them was that no one - rich or poor - has any ability within themselves to earn eternal life. If salvation depended on human worthiness or qualifications, it would be beyond the grasp of any of us. It is impossible for man - salvation depends exclusively on God. Neither is it "God + man." Jesus doesn't say that God initiates salvation and good works complete our salvation. It's God alone. Jesus makes a clear, black-and-white distinction -- with man it's impossible. It is God who rescues.

The conversation is designed to bring the young man to understand that entering God's kingdom is only possible by becoming Jesus' disciple with his life fully committed to the kingdom. Discipleship is marked by total, undistracted, and unqualified commitment. It's what Paul will later call being "in Christ" (Gal 3:26-27).

Paul sums it up like this: "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Proclaiming that Jesus is Lord is more than verbal assent without real commitment. It's taking our lives, dreams, possessions, families -- everything we desperately want to hold on to, and everything we love about ourselves -- and fully relinquishing it all to Him.

The commands to the young ruler to "sell" and "give" are not simply more good things to be done to earn eternal life. They are followed by "come" and "follow" -- something far more profound. Jesus is calling the young man to discipleship, and his first lessons are sacrificial charity and complete devotion to following Christ. The demands of discipleship differ among believers, yet the commitment remains the same: the total surrender of all we have and who we are to the Lord.

**BIG IDEA: Salvation cannot be earned through our own work; it comes entirely and exclusively through righteousness from God given to those united with Christ.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** What is something you are tempted to rely on rather than Christ to feel secure, approved, or "good enough" before God?

## **Week 7: Matthew 19:16-30**

### **Day 3: Only One Who Is Good**

**READ: Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Faith is an amazing thing. It's what Christ uses to save us from our sins. Faith is what happens when a human being surrenders their lives to a God ready to forgive them. But how does a person get to that place? One way is by others removing stumbling blocks to them having genuine faith in the real Jesus Christ. As Christians we are called to have a defense of the hope that is in us. We are called to always be ready when faced with questions or attacks against the veracity of what we believe. One text that many people use to attack the claims of Orthodox Christianity is Matthew 19:17. It is primarily brought up by Muslims and cults. The accusation goes like this: Because Jesus asks why He would be questioned about what is good and the fact that He says only One is good, Jesus must be stating that He is not God and that He is not good. If someone came to you saying Jesus is not God and brought up this verse, what would you say?

There are a few problems with the claim that Jesus is not God, and the historic Christian church has misunderstood His identity. The biggest problem is that in developing a well-articulated doctrine about the person of Jesus Christ, the early church took into account the totality of Scripture. They were aware of this verse along with the other Gospel accounts that record the same story slightly differently (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19). They had answers for this objection going back to the very beginning. They also knew that there were so many other verses that pointed to the deity of Christ and the reality of the Trinity. The other big problem is that Jesus' answer to the man is intentionally ambiguous. He is trying to teach the man something he does not understand and answering a question with a question is a strategy Jesus often employs in order to get His questioner to think deeply

about what they are actually asking. It should be clear that Jesus never actually denies that He is good or that He is not the one who is good. So, what is Jesus' point and what is He trying to get the man to think deeply about?

There are two intentions that Jesus could have possibly had in mind in responding the way He did that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first intention is that Jesus was asking if the man knew that He was actually God. The clarified meaning would be, "Do you ask me about goodness because you know who I am?" The second intention is that Jesus was trying to get the man to see that he had too light of a view on what it meant to do good and be good. If he didn't know who Jesus was, then he was going up to Jesus and calling Him good just because He was a teacher of the Torah (a rabbi). If the man thought all rabbis were good, then he didn't truly understand what it means to be good and do good. Jesus was trying to get the man to understand the high bar that it actually takes to be good, and how the man could never attain it.

Both of these interpretations of what Jesus said to the man are possible if not likely. They explain the text and show that the claims made against the divinity of Jesus are unfounded. If you ever hear someone make an argument against the truths found in Scripture and passed down through the historic Christian church, be ready to give a clear defense against them.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus is the only one who is good. Be ready to defend that claim against all those who would challenge the historic faith of the Christian church.**

**APPLY:**

- **Challenge:** Go back to the end of the first paragraph and write down a clear answer.

## Week 7: Matthew 19:16-30

### Day 4: Blind to Idolatry

**READ: Matthew 19:16-26; Matthew 6:19-24; Luke 12:13-21**

#### EXPLORE:

*“What good deed must I do to have eternal life? . . . go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven . . .”*

This is a jarring command from Jesus, especially so when we see the other gospel writers stress in their parallel accounts of this interaction that the command to sell extends to *“all”* of the rich man’s possessions (see Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-30). It hits even harder when Jesus goes on to declare that *“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”* (Matthew 19:24) because this statement is meant to be taken exactly how it sounds — it is an impossibility. Humanly speaking, a camel will not pass through the eye of a needle. Likewise, one with material wealth will not enter the kingdom of God. Which returns us to the original question. What are we to do? Is ridding ourselves of all money and possessions the path we too must follow to gain eternal life?

Scripture warns repeatedly of the dangers of money and our temptation to *“lay up for [our]selves treasures on earth”* (Matthew 6:19). The perceived self-sufficiency, security, and control that accompany wealth are powerful lures, to say nothing of the selfish gratification we seek by hoarding possessions or constantly pursuing newer, bigger, better, and more. It is imperative that we guard against these temptations. But in his response to the rich man’s questioning, Jesus, with a touch of irony, identifies an even more fundamental problem.

It’s with all sincerity that the rich man claims to have kept all the commandments. He can check all the boxes required of a pious



first century Jew. The irony, however, is that in his heart he hasn't even made it past the first commandment, *"you shall have no other gods before me"* (Exodus 20:3). He is completely blind to his idolatry and Jesus calls him out. His *"great possessions"* have become an idol. That's why Jesus' command to sell everything is coupled with a command to *"come, follow me"* — his wealth is preventing his worship. And we too can deceive ourselves, if not with money, then with any number of other things in our lives that we subtly and maybe even subconsciously place over and above God in our hearts.

Being rich is not in and of itself a problem, but we must have properly ordered hearts. Money is dangerous because it can reveal a broken heart. *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:21). And God must be our treasure above all else. Humanly speaking, the rich cannot enter the kingdom of God because, humanly speaking, our sinful hearts of stone cannot turn away from the myriad of idols that captivate us. But as Jesus is quick to explain, *"with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"* (Matthew 19:26). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christians are called and equipped to reorder their desires, to find their richness in God, so they are free to use their material riches, and all other aspects of their lives, for God's glory.

**BIG IDEA: Don't be blind to the subtle temptations to idolatry in your life. Whether it's money, possessions, or anything else, place everything in submission to God and seek to glorify Him with all that you have.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Where in your life are you most susceptible to idolatry? Make an honest assessment of the things you're most likely to turn into an idol. What can you do to guard against this as you strive to follow Jesus?

## **Week 7: Matthew 19:16-30**

### **Day 5: A Complicated Cavern**

**READ: Matthew 19:16-30; Ephesians 2:8-10**

#### **EXPLORE:**

When we read God's Word, we can often wish it was an easy to understand as a hole in the backyard. There's dirt, some rocks, maybe a worm or two, but not a lot of surprises. However, God's Word is not like that at all. It's more like a massive cave. It's more like the biggest cave in the world called Son Doong in Vietnam. It's huge (38.5 million cubic meters), has different, unexpected features that add to its beauty (subterranean river, unique vegetation, a jungle), and has many facets always to be further explored (new passages continually found throughout the cave's interior). The Bible is not always easy to understand, what you would expect, or fits neatly into our theologies. However, it is worth submitting to and something that always challenges us to go deeper.

After Jesus gets through explaining to the disciples that it is impossible for a rich person to be saved, Peter has an unexpected reply in my estimation. Jesus says, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." If I had to guess what Peter would say in response with my theological understanding that we are saved by grace through faith, he would say, "Jesus, we believe all things are possible with God that's why we trust in Him for our salvation." Or maybe Peter might ask, "What does all things being possible for God have to do with salvation?" But instead Peter focuses on what he and the disciples did. He says that he and the disciples left everything (like Jesus told the man to do) and looked for what Jesus would give them. How then does Jesus respond?

I would have presumed Jesus to say something like, "Peter it's not your actions that save you but my future work on the cross." Except Jesus says that their reward will be great for their

obedience in following Him. He says they will sit and judge the twelve tribes of Israel and that all who follow Him will inherit eternal life and receive a great many things. What are we to make of this response by Jesus? How does this passage fit into being saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The answer lies in the complexity of Scripture. We are saved by God by a simple belief and confession (Romans 10:9) and yet we must sacrifice everything, take up our cross, and follow Christ. Salvation is simultaneously the easiest process while also being the hardest. We do nothing, and yet we do everything. Is this a contradiction? It is not, but only because God is there in every part of the process. He takes over our spiritual lives whenever we come to Him so that we might be able to die to ourselves and follow Him. Paul says it like this in Philippians 2:12-13, **“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”** It is not by our own actions that we do the good necessary for the followers of Christ, but it is the Holy Spirit willing us towards that good. This is why Jesus can still say that while the disciples did leave everything and follow Him, it was only because with God all things are possible. When we die to ourselves daily and seek to gain the Lord’s reward in the future, we must never forget that it is only by His Spirit that we are able to do so.

**BIG IDEA: The Lord works within us to die to ourselves daily and continually seek to follow Him.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Pray to God and ask Him to reveal to you the parts that have yet to be surrendered to Him.

## **Week 8: Matthew 20:1-16**

### **Day 1: A Day to Explore**

#### **READ: Matthew 20:1-16**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew 20:1-16 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** Why do you think that Jesus compares God to a master of a house?

**Question:** Do you think there is any significance as to the master of the house going out at third hour, sixth hour, and ninth hour before the eleventh hour?

**Question:** What do you believe is the significance behind the idle workers not having anyone looking to hiring them?

**Questions:** Did the workers have a legitimate right to be upset about being paid equally despite the differences in the time each spent working? How might their anger be similar to the way in which individuals complain about the lot given to those more fortunate than them?

**Question:** Is there a direct parallel between workers working in the “scorching heat” and believers living out their Christian lives?

**Question:** In what ways do people begrudge the generosity of God? In what ways have you begrudged the generosity of God?

**Questions:** Why does Jesus end the parable with “the last will be first, and the first last”? What does that have to do with the overall message of the parable?

**Activity:** Paraphrase this parable in the space below and explain how it relates to the gospel.

## **Week 8: Matthew 20:1-16**

### **Day 2: The Failed Vineyard and the True Vine**

**READ:** Matthew 20:1-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:8-13; John 15:1-7

#### **EXPLORE:**

What we have in this passage is the first usage (in Matthew's book) of the 'vineyard' metaphor that would have been familiar to Jesus' hearers and Matthew's readers. Vineyards (along with fig trees and olive trees) were emblematic of the blessing and provision of God.

The first real mention of a 'vineyard' occurs in Genesis 9, immediately after the flood, where we read that Noah planted a vineyard, and subsequently ate of its fruit and became drunk. Vineyards grow best in dry climates (definitely not tropical) that get rain infrequently and Palestine in first century was well known for its grape harvest. The vines require careful attention, but can last for centuries. Among the many metaphors God chooses to describe His covenant people, the 'vineyard' or 'vines' feature prominently in the Scriptures, particularly in the prophets and the Gospels.

The most comprehensive usage of 'vineyard' metaphor is found in the writings of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC prophet Isaiah, mostly profoundly in Isaiah 5:1-7. Here we have God telling Isaiah to pull out his stringed instrument and sing a ditty about his 'beloved' who planted a vineyard. People are called to listen to this song, with an ostensibly catchy tune which leaves people humming along, until they are shocked to hear its ending. What is in view here is an 8<sup>th</sup> century estate that has a field of grape vines that have been carefully cultivated. The owner of the vineyard, the LORD, has done everything he can for it (verse 4a) and in due course looks for grapes to produce wine and all he finds is 'wild grapes' that is not useful for anything (verse 4b). He keeps waiting and hoping to no avail. What then is the vineyard owner to do?

Here the hammer drops. He will remove the protection around it, allowing animals to trample (verse 5). He will not prune it nor fertilize it nor allow the rains to water it (verse 6).

What was a promising planted vine (a ‘pleasant planting’) that had God’s Law (‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’) now is disgusting and has produced fruit that is not fit for consumption (‘bloodshed’) and deserves to be trampled and destroyed. This is what is in store for Judah.

In a similar fashion Psalm 80:8-13, God describes bringing out a vine out of Egypt and planting it in a lush garden; yet it would be later ravaged by wild hogs. Later Ezekiel (15:1-4) would write that God is going to take the wood of the vine and burn it but this wood wasn’t even adequate for burning.

But now all that is changed. Whereas the nation of Israel was a barren vine, Jesus comes as the ultimate Israel—the true vine (John 15:1-8). Whereas the nation of Israel sought to prosper apart from the true owner of the vineyard, we are connected to the true owner – we are the branches and we can only bear fruit when we are connected to the true vine.

**BIG IDEA:** Whereas the nation of Israel was a failed vine that could never bear good fruit, when we are connected to the true vine, Jesus Christ, we have the privilege of bearing fruit for the owner of the vineyard, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus.

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Are you trying to bear fruit on your own apart from the nourishing nutrients found in the true vine?
- **Challenge:** You can only bear good fruit if you are connected to the true vine, Jesus Christ, so run to Him.

## Week 8: Matthew 20:1-16

### Day 3: Difficult Grace

READ: Matthew 20:1-16

#### EXPLORE:

“There but for the grace of God go I.” A famous quote that you may have said or heard at one point in your life. It means something like—I can’t judge that other person because if God had not blessed me in the way that He did, I could have done the same thing. It’s not exactly in Scripture anywhere but the concept is a very helpful one for seeing the grace of God. The issue is that few of us believe the expression and those that do often forget it. How come? It is because we don’t constantly thank God for the gifts that He has given us. We compare ourselves to others, judge others for their faults, and question whether or not God really wants to save everyone.

I (Brayden) grew up Lutheran and was taught that you can lose your salvation. There were of course Biblical justifications for this belief but at its core it relied on a fundamental assumption that I used to believe and have argued with those still in that tradition about. The belief is that if a Christian believes the gospel but then goes around stealing, fornicating, and murdering God could not possibly save them even if they say they repent at the end of their lives. It’s a persuasive argument for many people. The easy retort to that idea is that the person who would do those things could never have been saved in the first place. They obviously didn’t *really* believe the gospel as to be saved. They simply were faking or deceiving themselves. The scriptural backing would be 1 John 5:19 **“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.”** It’s a fair point, but what if they never left the fold? What about a Christian who stays but “sins greatly”?



“There but by the grace of God.” What are the factors that lead us into sin? We have our own sinful desires and the enemy who tempts us. Can we turn either of those realities off? No. We are challenged every day. How often do you sin? I’ve asked the question to tons of people and not a single one says they have even gone one day. Not even one. Do some sins not matter? When does God refuse grace to those who repent?

Matthew 20:9 says that some came to work at the eleventh hour, the last hour of the day. They worked less than anyone else and received the same. Who understood the grace of the master more, those who came in the early morning or at the last hour?

God calls us to not covet or judge others because it corrupts our understanding of His grace. I don’t have all the answers on how God handles the salvation of everyone around me. My job is to trust in His Word and His promises. God is good, He shows mercy to all, none will have a legitimate complaint in the end so we have no reason to complain now. Don’t believe that you have to have certainty on how God deals with the heart of every person. Just remember that the master calls you into His fields and it’s an unfathomable grace to even be out there.

**BIG IDEA:** Love God for His goodness towards the world and His grace towards you.

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** In what ways do you compare yourself to others, judge others, and question the love that God has for all people?

## **Week 8: Matthew 20:1-16**

### **Day 4: Joy in Service, Not Compensation**

**READ: Matthew 20:1-16; Galatians 6:6-10**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Excitement fades quickly. Vacations lose their wonder, dream jobs become routine, and long-anticipated plans can disappoint almost immediately. We have an unfortunate tendency to grow numb even to great gifts. The same danger exists in our service to God. If we are not careful, we can grow weary in doing good and slowly shift from joyful service to apathetic obligation — until we barely recognize the faith that once motivated us.

Jesus addresses this heart posture in Matthew 20:12, when the laborers who worked all day grumble, “saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’” Though they agreed to their wages, comparison robbed them of joy. We face the same temptation when we measure our faithfulness against others or expect visible rewards for our obedience. When our focus shifts to what we think we deserve based on what we have put in or sacrificed, our motives drift. We may be serving in our own strength, pursuing work God did not call us to, or seeking blessings more than the Blessor Himself.

Galatians 6:9 says, “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” What good is this referring to? Likely the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. What happens when we grow weary of growing in the fruit of the Spirit? The fruit of the flesh takes over. We are not going to do any godly good from the fruit of the flesh. So, how do we fight this tendency in us to grumble, become apathetic, or seek gifts rather than God Himself? We must keep our eyes on our calling. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,

knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” We must call to mind the joy of our first love. We must remember why we sought to abound in good works (2 Cor. 9:8) in the first place; the joy of salvation. 2 Timothy 4:7-8 states, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” We serve not for immediate reward, recognition, or comparison, but out of love for Christ and gratitude for salvation. Our joy is found in faithfulness itself. Though our rewards are not yet fully received, they are secure. So, we keep our eyes on the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14), serving Him wholeheartedly – whether we see the fruit now or not.

**BIG IDEA: We are called to serve God faithfully not for the rewards we see, but out of love for Christ and trust that our labor in Him is never in vain.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Do you experience fullness of joy in obedience to Christ or is your joy dependent on the fruit or rewards received after?
- **Questions:** Do you feel like you are laboring in the scorching heat and it does not feel worth it? Take time to inspect your heart motives as well as what you are laboring in. Are you truly laboring in obedience to Christ’s calling or is it your own “good works?” What outcomes are you hoping for or expecting from your labor? Are you growing in your faith through this labor or growing weary?

## **Week 8: Matthew 20:1-16**

### **Day 5: The Control and Generosity of God**

**READ TOGETHER: Matthew 20:1-16; 2 Timothy 4:6-8**

**EXPLORE:** In the midst of this parable of workers and rewards, there is a troubling verse about control. Humans generally quite like being in control of things. We don't enjoy not being able to decide things and have them in our hands. However, in verse 15, Jesus speaks to God's control over the rewards of a Christian's labor. He very clearly points to the utter lack of control we have and displays God's justice in divvying up His rewards.

In the context of the story, Jesus is speaking to God's ability and divine control over rewarding the workers. While it may seem unfair that the laborers who worked less got the same reward as those who worked the whole day, the master in the parable points out that they all agreed to the same payment. The reward is the master's, and he is being generous even in the act of hiring the laborers!

Verse four adds a piece of key context to how the master gives the reward. He says to the workers at the third hour, "whatever is right I will give to you." God is not unjust in His generosity towards us, nor does He wrong any of His workers. He apportions to them what is right and good. It is so easy to look at others and see what rewards they receive and feel left out. However, in wishing to control the reward we receive and being jealous of others, we miss the greatest of our rewards. The master has hired us.

Let us not begrudge the generosity of God! How grateful we should be that the master has hired us to work in His vineyard. We get to share the gospel, and we get to join Him in the great work of furthering His kingdom and glory. We do not control the reward, but He who controls it is just and will not do us wrong.

Our eyes should not drift side to side, thinking of the rewards of others, but of the work we have set before us. When we stand before God at the end of our days, we should echo Paul's words in 2 Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Our Lord, and righteous judge, will give us what is right.

**BIG IDEA: God is not unjust in giving rewards, and our eyes should be grateful and focused on the work He has given us, not others' prizes.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** Jealousy is a strong temptation. How have you been tempted to envy other's rewards?
- **Question:** How can you chase after God's work in your life?



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