



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 9: Matthew 9:35-38

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 9:35-38

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity**: While reading, include some observations in the space below.
- **Question**: Matthew 9:35 gives us a summary of the type of work that Jesus did when He entered cities and villages. What do you notice about His pattern of ministry?
- **Question**: The gospel referenced in verse 35 is not a genre of music or a type of writing. It means good news. If you had to explain what "*the gospel of the kingdom*" means in your own words, what would you say?
- **Question**: Jesus had compassion on the crowds. How would you define what it means to have compassion?

- **Question:** In what ways does your life reflect the compassion we see perfectly embodied in Jesus?

- **Question:** Shepherding is one of the most consistent metaphors for leadership and care in the Bible. Why do you think Jesus used the metaphor of sheep specifically to refer to the people around Him?
 - Is it easy or challenging for you to think of yourself as a “sheep” in need of a shepherd?

- **Question:** How do you think the imagery of a harvest helps us think about joining God’s kingdom activity locally and globally?

- **Question:** In view of the harvest that Jesus described in verse 38, what are some appropriate responses of His followers today?

- **Question:** Do you view yourself as one who is sent into a field ripe for harvest? Why or why not?

Week 9: Matthew 9:35-38

Day 2: The Example of Jesus

READ: Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 4:14-30; Acts 13:26-39

EXPLORE:

One of the best ways to learn is by looking at the patterns of those we seek to emulate. An aspiring chef looks to Gordon Ramsey. An aspiring artist looks to Michaelangelo. A disciple looks to their teacher.

In all of the Gospel Accounts of Jesus, we see His ministry begin in the same way. Jesus is baptized by John, He is tempted by Satan, He begins preaching throughout Galilee, and then He calls His disciples to follow Him. Jesus was primarily known by most people as a teacher. This can be seen when people who don't know Him will oftentimes call Him, Rabbi (meaning teacher in Hebrew).

Jesus had a consistent pattern of preaching to large crowds on the street or by the Sea of Galilee. He would tell the crowds to repent, He would speak in parables, and He would proclaim that a kingdom was coming. Jesus seems to have a different pattern when He would walk into a synagogue. Luke records what Jesus said at the synagogue in His hometown (Luke 4:14-30). Jesus would teach directly from Scripture in the synagogue and would show how He fulfilled Old Testament passages. In all but His hometown, He would heal people and cast out demons validating His interpretations after teaching. When Jesus was questioned about His teachings by the high priest, He responded by saying that everyone should know them because He publicly taught in the synagogues and the temple for all to hear.

After Jesus was resurrected, His disciples would likewise teach in the synagogues and also the temple. They would speak to the Jews about how Jesus fulfilled their scriptures and preach the gospel to them. Many Jews listened but unfortunately most did

not, so Jesus' disciples instead went to the Gentiles. They would preach to the Gentiles wherever they could find them. Throughout Acts, Paul can be seen preaching to the Gentiles in prison, in the marketplace, on ships, on islands, and even in front of hostile tribunals.

As Christians, we all seek to follow Christ in all of His ways. One way we accomplish this is by preaching the gospel in even the most hostile places. For most of His ministry Jesus faced conflict, and as His disciples we will inevitably face it as well. Let's seek to prepare ourselves well for it!

BIG IDEA: Jesus proclaimed the gospel everywhere He went no matter what backlash He faced. As disciples we should seek to do the same.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Where do you think you would be the most hesitant to bring up Jesus and share the gospel with people?
- **Question:** Do you think sharing the gospel should look different depending on the people you are talking to? If so, what are some different ways of approaching gospel conversations/sharing the gospel?

Week 9: Matthew 9:35-38

Day 3: Biblical Compassion

READ: Matthew 9:35-36

EXPLORE:

What is compassion, and how is it shown in the Bible? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines compassion as a word that implies “pity coupled with an urgent desire to aid or to spare.” To live with compassion means living a life that looks radically different from the routines we naturally fall into. We should not only be troubled by the pain and lostness present in our world but also feel strongly the call to servanthood and an urgency to share the gospel with those who are still slaves to sin. Colossians 3:12 reads like this: *“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”* The compassion that the Lord feels moves Him to action as he spares, heals, atones, and leads. Therefore, the feeling of compassion should move us to act in obedience to what Jesus taught.

The character of God always stays the same, and He remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. When we study the biblical metanarrative, it can be hard to believe how God’s people could have doubted one so consistent with His promises and faithful to forgive. The heartbeat through all the prophetic books is that God is faithful. Sinful patterns have always been present within humanity. We are impatient, closed-minded, and hastily despairing. The prophets in the Old Testament communicated on behalf of the Lord giving warnings to the wayward people of God who were quick to forget what God had said and done. God's promise of restoration is written like this in Micah 7:19, *“He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”* The most potent disease plaguing humanity is the sin that separates us from God. The heart of God is moved to compassion by this, and He is merciful as He has always been. Compassion is the necessary first step to change and it is inherently for the undeserving.

As I study biblical compassion and the instances where the Lord demonstrates it, I cannot help but notice that His compassion always leads to action. In Mark’s gospel account of our story today he wrote, *“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.”* (Mark 6:34). This beautiful imagery of the Lord as our

shepherd will be studied more later on in this book, but I do want to touch on why one would have compassion on sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are quite helpless creatures who would be lost without a shepherd and at dire risk of physical harm if not tended to. The separation from a “shepherd” was the immediate dilemma that the crowds found themselves in. Many of them did not even know it, but Jesus knew that His teaching if followed, would guide his people like a shepherd. He was gracious to heal the sick, just like a shepherd, and with expert hands He would tend to his sick sheep. He then commissioned His followers to go out into the “abundant harvest” and labor in it, with compassion, to bring the lost to Him.

Why do we so often claim to be compassionate while failing to share with others the only way they can be redeemed and their souls spared from eternal suffering? Sharing the truth in love and bearing one another's burdens, are the primary components of Biblical compassion. Part of compassion is caring for others' physical needs. As we have studied, we know that the Son of Man was acutely aware that the earth was not His home, and He made known to us the cost of following Him. James 1:27 reads “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world”. In our culture so centered on individual successes and motivations, this life of service is different and looked upon skeptically. As we draw nearer to the Lord and desire to do His will, we will find that compassion will begin to arise within us as the Holy Spirit leads us. Compassion is not like empathy, which can simply be felt. It must be cultivated and worked towards, with God as our example.

BIG IDEA: Biblical compassion leads to action as we seek to live our lives like Christ.

APPLY:

- **Reflection:** How often do you emulate true Biblical compassion that will be evidenced in action?
- **Reflection:** How does the compassion that the Lord has shown you motivate you to show compassion to others?

Week 9: Matthew 9:35-38

Day 4: Helpless Sheep and Faithful God

READ: Matthew 9:35-38; Isaiah 40:11; Psalm 23

EXPLORE:

I (Cohen) have recently begun driving, and I quickly realized how amazing Google and Apple Maps are. My sense of navigation is terrible, and those two little apps are guiding lights as I try to drive around Houston. There are so many challenges if I try and plan a trip without proper navigation. Without a guide, I can quickly get lost, especially since I am a poor navigator to begin with.

There is a striking similarity to an inexperienced driver without a map and a sheep without a shepherd. Both are unconfident in where they need to go, and both seek direction. One of the beautiful things about the Christian walk is that we have a good and trustworthy shepherd to guide us. Isaiah 40:11, while it is a small part of a larger passage praising God, points to God shepherding His people. A section of it says, “He will gather the lambs in His arms.” There is a sense of closeness and nearness that God has with His people. He does not simply watch from a distance but holds us near and close.

Being a Shepherd is an involved job. You cannot simply read a book and look up every so often to check if all your sheep are still there. A flock can easily get distracted by this or that, and a shepherd must be focused and ready to help. In Psalm 23, David perfectly describes the ways God is involved in shepherding His people. He walks with them, restores them, prepares a place for them. Imagine what it would be like to be without this provision or safety. We as humans are easily distracted, we wander from good green meadows into dark valleys, and we would be so quickly lost in this world without God.

Matthew records the people as “harassed and helpless,” and this still rings true. We as Christians are harassed by the things of this world. As our problems pile up, it is easy to feel helpless. Yet, we should keep our eyes upon our shepherd. The one who holds us close in His arms in times of trials. Christ has compassion for us. God saw the crowds, harassed and helpless, and chose to shepherd them. Just as a sheep is lost without their shepherd, so are we lost without a faithful God to guide us.

BIG IDEA: God is a faithful shepherd, and we are lost without Him. Our Lord is not distant or removed in shepherding us however, but close and present in our everyday lives.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Where are some aspects of your life where you feel harassed or helpless? Pray and invite God to shepherd you in those spaces.

- **Question:** Sometimes we do not feel the reality of God’s closeness. What would life look like for you if you constantly lived as if God was always near and always guiding you?

Week 9: Matthew 9:35-38

Day 5: See the Harvest and Seek the Lord

READ: Matthew 9:35-38

EXPLORE:

Sheep without a shepherd. A harvest without laborers. These are the two images used by Christ in this week's biblical text. These visuals are nothing short of masterful! Sheep without a shepherd are helpless. A harvest without laborers is wasted. Jesus saw the crowds and, even as He was healing and teaching, He saw the need for God's commissioning of more laborers into a field ripe for harvest. Take a look at the four-fold structure of this passage once more to consider its theological significance.

First, Jesus felt compassion for the needs of the crowd. Second, Jesus alerted His disciples to the harvest need. Third, Jesus invited them to pray earnestly. Fourth, Jesus invited them to ask God to do the sending of more laborers. In His perfect wisdom, Jesus invited His disciples to not only be laborers in the field, but to pray that more laborers would join them. This is so incredibly significant. Jesus could have simply seen the need and sent the disciples. At times He does do that. However, this text displays Christ's deep desire to have an earnestly prayerful multiplication movement of workers who are daily seeking the Lord of the harvest to send out more laborers. Don't move through this dynamic of the text too quickly. Think about it.

After looking at the fields and turning to His disciples, Jesus encouraged His disciples to see the harvest and turn to the Lord. This is powerful. God is glorified when we see the world within which He has placed us as an opportunity to not merely sow, water, and weed, but also as a field.

For many, the implications of Jesus's words might be too quickly lost. The harvest is a wonderful time, but it is also a time of

diligent work and long hours. Certainly, sowing is hard and at times, unrewarding, but reaping is extremely demanding as well. Jesus wanted them to see the great opportunity that existed, and at the same time, acknowledge their utter dependence upon the Lord of the harvest to accomplish His purposes through them!¹

As the Word to Life Team gathered together to prepare and outline through this section of Matthew's Gospel Account, a few questions arose regarding this text. As we close, it would be beneficial to meditate upon these questions in view of God's Word. First, does your life give evidence that you believe there is a harvest to be worked? Do you have a certain anticipation that God is at work in the proverbial field in which He has placed you? Do you believe the harvest is truly plentiful? Second, does your life give evidence that you eagerly pray to the Lord of the harvest? Have you asked God to be sent and to send others with you? Does the way you've organized and executed your life demonstrate dependence upon the Lord in prayer?

Spend time considering these questions and more like them. Ask the Lord to transform your heart and life so that you might be faithful in prayer and in the field!

BIG IDEA: After looking at the fields and turning to His disciples, Jesus encouraged His disciples to see the harvest and turn to the Lord.

Apply: If you feel the Lord is calling you into the harvest in a new way. Take a first step and email your pastor today for next steps in the field.

Week 10: Matthew 10:1-15

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 10:1-15

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity and Question:** If you were asked to make two observations about the list of apostles mentioned in verses 1-4, what would they be? (Example: There are twelve of them and that fact is highlighted in particular in verse 2.)
 - Observation 1:

 - Observation 2:

- **Question:** Each of the twelve listed are either given in pairs or with added context about who they were. Why might that fact be significant?

- **Question:** In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commanded people to go into all the world. Why would it make sense to go to the “*lost sheep of the house of Israel*” first?

- **Question:** We have seen the phrase “*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” before. Using an online or physical concordance, where else did we experience this phrase in Matthew’s Gospel Account?
- **Question:** How would your behavior change if the heavenly king of the heavenly kingdom ruled in your heart and life to a greater degree?
- **Question:** Jesus set some guidelines for His disciples in their travel ministry. How would you summarize Jesus’s instructions?
- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus saw that it was specifically necessary to instruct how His followers should enter and leave a certain location?

Week 10: Matthew 10:1-15

Day 2: If You Like to Talk to Tomatoes

READ: Matthew 9:35-38; Matthew 10:1-15

EXPLORE:

I (Michael) have a very small vegetable garden in my very small backyard. I started it just because I relished the idea of being able to go back there and harvest my salad fixings mere minutes before consuming it fresh, free of nasty pesticides and genetic maleficence.

I am often overwhelmed by the amount of effort it takes to maintain 32 square feet of garden. Watering, weeding, dealing with pests - it never ends. In the summers I plant okra, and it loves our Gulf Coast heat and humidity. I have to get out there and pick okra sometimes twice a day to keep up with my bounty. Given the effort it takes me to keep up, it's difficult to imagine how many laborers were required to maintain an entire field before modern machinery became available. In Matthew 9:35-38 Jesus compared for His disciples the size and scope of their mission to manually harvesting a field, and then in Matthew 10, He immediately sent 12 of those disciples out to begin spreading the gospel. He knew those 12 wouldn't even reach every Jew in the region, but they weren't going to reach anyone if they never started. We cannot hear this message and ignore the call. We cannot be intimidated by the effort or the number of people that need to hear the gospel and repent.

Another unexpected life lesson I've learned from the garden is that it feels much better knowing that I do the same thing as the other farm laborers that provide food for me. I am willing to do the same thing that they do. In Matthew 10:5, Jesus sends the

disciples out on what had to be a daunting mission, but he did not ask them to do anything that he had not already modelled to them. In Matt 10:7, He instructs them *to go saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand* while in Matt 4:17, from the moment he begins his ministry, *Jesus began to preach, saying “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* In Matt 10:8 Jesus commands them *to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons* which are all miracles that Matthew 8-9 records him doing. And in Matt 10:8-10 he tells them to do all this while taking no provisions and accepting no money along the way, a burden he was also willing to take on himself (Matt 8:20).

Lastly, I have painfully learned that, while I’m in complete control of the time and effort I put into my garden, I have very little control of the output. The weather, pests, and the digging habits of our puppy all wreak havoc on the amount of produce that comes out of that garden each season. In Matthew 10:11-15, Jesus sets the expectations for the disciples that while they are called to go and share, they are not in control of the outcome. If the people are receptive, stay; if they aren’t, *shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town* and leave them to God’s judgment. We need to boldly proclaim the gospel to the lost around us without regard to our calculation of the probability of a “successful” outcome.

BIG IDEA: We are all called to share the gospel, no matter what the cost or how daunting the effort might seem.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read through Matthew chapters 4, 8 and 9 again with a focus on modeling Jesus’s approach to evangelism.

Week 10: Matthew 10:1-15

Day 3: The Choice of God

READ: Matthew 10:1-15; Isaiah 49:6; Romans 1:16; John 1:11-12; Matthew 21:43

EXPLORE:

I (Brayden) grew up in a household with two older sisters. I was the runt of the family. When I was a kid, my oldest sister Brittney was always chosen to watch over me and my other sister Brandi while my parents were away. Brandi and I never liked this because we thought Brittney abused her authority and we could take care of the things around the house ourselves without problem. We thought we were treated unfairly and that my parents were big meanies for choosing her over us.

No one likes it when they aren't the ones chosen for something. In Matthew 10:5-6 Jesus tells His disciples not to go to the Gentiles but only to the Israelites. To many of us that might sound like God is showing favoritism or being unfair. However, God never chooses based on bias or because one group is better than another. God's choice of a few is to the advantage of all.

The reason God chooses the Israelites as His people is so that they can be a light to the whole world. His blessing of Israel was supposed to be for the benefit of the whole world. However, the people of Israel chose to disobey God and His covenant, so Jesus was sent on behalf of Israel. Jesus is chosen to single-handedly fulfill God's plan of blessing the whole world. In Matthew, Jesus tells His disciples to go out to all of Israel with the desire for them to repent from breaking God's covenant and recognize that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the one who will fix everything in Israel and then everything in the world. The majority of the Jews, however, reject Jesus and He is killed by them, but God uses this act to bless the whole world. The Jews were supposed to play their part in recognizing their Messiah, but instead played a different part in

initiating the crucifixion. As a result, all Jews who reject the Messiah are excluded from God's covenant because they refuse to believe in Jesus and be saved.

It turns out my parents knew what they were doing in putting Brittney in charge because when left alone I did some pretty foolish things. One example, which has now become a favorite family story, is when I heated up a cup of Ramen noodles without putting in the water. As you can imagine, that did not go so well. My parents chose Brittney not because she was loved more or because she deserved it, but because she was the best choice of imperfect options. God chose the Jews ultimately because from them Christ would come. God, in His patience and long suffering tried and tried to include the Jews in His plan to redeem the whole world but again and again they refused. Now we as Christ followers are called to bring God's blessing of salvation to all people through the gospel. We are the few that are chosen with the intention of benefiting all.

BIG IDEA: Understand why God chooses some over others.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How should it change your walk with the Lord knowing that you were chosen to the benefit of all people not just yourself?
- **Question:** In what ways have you not lived up to God's call for your life, and how can you change going forward?

Week 10: Matthew 10:1-15

Day 4: God Provides

READ: Matthew 6:11; 10:8-10

EXPLORE:

We have been reading about the first time Jesus sends out His disciples to evangelize, and He does so with very clear guidelines. Matthew 10:8-9: *"You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food."* During this time in history, it was customary to get paid if you came into a strange town and brought a teaching. However, the gospel message of Jesus is for all people and not just the affluent. Jesus wanted His disciples to know that the good news message is unlike any other. It is a free gift of salvation. Freely received and therefore freely to be given.

Taken in context with Jesus' other words, and the teachings of the New Testament, it's clear this command applies only to this mission in an effort to deepen their faith and dependency on Him (Luke 22:35-38). However, in a broader sense, Jesus was (and still is) sending His people out into the world with clear instructions to trust that He will provide for them. So, what does it mean to depend on God's provision?

Many of us have heard seemingly opposing statements regarding God's provision that sound biblical but are not. For example, "Let go and let God" compared to, "God helps those who help themselves." Both of these statements are not found in Scripture but rather are half-truths trying to have us to believe one extreme or the other. Scripture is full of exhortation to work hard and avoid slothfulness (Prov 10:4, 12:24; Col 3:23). God wants us to be wise and discerning (Prov 2:6-8; Mt 10:16; James 1:5). He designed mankind to be diligent and productive, so we should not just stand back and assume God will pay our bills as we do nothing. On the other hand, our own efforts, though necessary, are not sufficient. You see, God

has a perfect plan that cannot be undermined, but like Sarah and Jacob (Gen 16, 27), sometimes we try to speed it along with our own ideas and plans which will never produce an outcome as good as if we were to have waited on God.

We live in a time and place of wealth and abundance. Many people store-up, prep, or even hoard material things. Knowing that we are prepared reassures us and allows for a level of comfort, physically and emotionally, that many people in the world do not get to experience. These things aren't wrong in and of themselves, but maybe our motives in doing these things reveal our lack of trust that God will provide for us.

Depending on God's provision means trusting that He knows our needs and will meet them. It means trusting that God has given us everything we need to face life's situations, on the hills and in the valleys. It means trusting that God is able and willing to handle whatever we are facing. Just as earthly parents desire to care for their children, our heavenly Father desires to provide for us too.

BIG IDEA: God is faithful to provide everything we need.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does God's daily provision help to deepen faith and dependency on Him?

- **Question:** Examine your decisions. Are you trusting in God or trusting in yourself?

- **Challenge:** Thank God for all He has provided you.

Week 10: Matthew 10:1-15

Day 5: A Day to Share

READ TOGETHER: Matthew 10:5-15; Luke 9:5, 10:10-16; Acts 13:44-52; Romans 11:13-15

Instructions: *We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

A Jew left Israel and went on a journey through foreign lands. He was appalled by what he saw: Idolatry, immorality, violence, deceit, corruption in every quarter. How he longed to return to Israel, to the land promised to Abraham and his children forever! But had he become unclean by traveling through these pagan lands? Would he ever again be able to worship the Lord among his fellow Israelites? When he finally returned to his homeland, as he crossed the border into Israel, he paused and shook the dust off his feet. He would not pollute his precious country with one speck of unclean Gentile dust. Thank God, he was home again!

As Jesus sent His disciples throughout Israel, He gave them a strange instruction. If a town did not listen to them, they were to boldly shake its dust from their feet and leave that town. This meant that the town was rejected for rejecting Jesus. Although that town considered itself Jewish, it had become just as unclean in God's sight as the idolatrous Gentiles.

This was not the final judgment, but a warning about the final judgment. It was a warning that by rejecting the promised Messiah, the town had become even more deserving of God's wrath than the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities God had destroyed

with fire. A judgement day is coming for the whole world, because of sin and wickedness. Jesus has already taken the punishment for all those who will receive forgiveness through repentance of sin and who put their trust in Him. A justified judgment awaits all who persist in rejecting Jesus.

Sometimes we need a stern rebuke to come to our senses. What is loving does not always appear pleasant and congenial. That's what these towns needed. After being rejected by these towns, the most loving thing Jesus' messengers could do for them was to give them a harsh warning of impending doom if they did not receive King Jesus.

Much later, Paul and Barnabus shook the dust off their feet against other Jews who rejected Jesus. This gave an opportunity for Gentiles to receive the good news of eternal life in Christ. The tables had turned! By rejecting Jesus, many Jews made themselves unclean, outside of God's family. Many Gentiles joined God's family through faith in Jesus, becoming clean through baptism into Jesus' atoning death. Gentile believers should never have a smug "We're in, you're out" attitude towards Jewish unbelievers. Paul saw his ministry to the Gentiles as a roundabout way of ultimately bringing his fellow Jews back into God's family through faith in Christ.

BIG IDEA: Sometimes the loving thing is to warn someone about unbearable judgment if he persists in rejecting Jesus.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Pray for the salvation of those you know who are still rejecting Jesus. Pray also that many Jews would rejoin God's family through faith in Jesus.

Week 11: Matthew 10:16-25

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 10:16-25

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

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

- **Question**: Jesus sent His followers as *wise* and *innocent*. Would you say those words describe the way you could be characterized? Why or why not?

- **Activity**: In verses 17-25, Jesus lists challenging experiences that His disciples will encounter in discipleship. List as many as you can from these verses.

- **Question**: There is quite a cost to following Jesus. Do you think most people count the cost of following Christ early in their faith? Why or why not?

- **Question:** Verse 19 comes with an instruction to not be anxious. What is the basis (detailed in verse 20) for Christ's followers to not be anxious?
- **Questions:** Either now or in the past, what have been some reasons you have been hesitant to share your faith? How would this week's passage challenge those reasons?
- **Question:** What is the point Jesus is making in verses 24-25?
- **Question:** This passage touches on some hard realities of following Jesus in a world broken by sin. How could suffering, slander, and sorrow work to deepen discipleship?

Week 11: Matthew 10:16-25

Day 2: Sheep Among Wolves

READ: Matthew 10:16-25; 1 Peter 4:12-16; Hebrews 13:3

EXPLORE:

The organization Open Doors(opendoors.org) recorded nearly 4,500 Christians murdered for their faith last year. They also counted over 350 million believers living in areas where they suffer fierce persecution and suffering for their faith. Believers living in countries that are hostile towards Christians are sometimes called “the persecuted church.” But we shouldn’t make the error of thinking of persecuted believers as somehow separate or different from us. There is one body of Christ, one Church. Persecuted believers are our eternal brothers and sisters in the family of God.

God doesn’t intend persecuted believers to bear their burden of suffering alone. The Apostle Paul wrote that when one member of the body suffers, all suffer together. Believers in persecution will only endure through the power of God’s Spirit, and as the body of Christ it is our duty to carry our suffering siblings on prayerful shoulders.

Persecution is a weapon the enemy uses to prevent believers from building the kingdom of God. He uses the fear of persecution to undermine the faith of God’s children and to weaken their resolve to share the story of Jesus. The enemy means it as evil against us, however God is able to use it to refine the faith of believers and to spread the Gospel.

It’s easy to view how Christians living in nations hostile to the Gospel are treated and think that we in America haven’t experienced “real” persecution. We tend to think of persecution in only its most extreme forms, but the Bible speaks of a spectrum of suffering from mockery to martyrdom. While American Christians have not yet experienced the most extreme forms of persecution, it wouldn’t be correct to say that we have not experienced it at all. We are routinely slandered, ridiculed, and insulted for His name.

What's important to focus on is not how extreme the attacks are, but what our response is. Do we continue to faithfully live for and obey Jesus, even if such allegiance leads to ridicule or scorning? Do we allow fear to silence our witness before it leaves our lips? In situations where we suspect our testimony will be received with mockery it is very tempting to simply say nothing and allow our enemy the victory.

For inspiration, we can look to our brothers and sisters living in nations where they are experiencing severe persecution. Though they know that their public association with Christ may lead to beatings, loss of employment or imprisonment, they trust His promise that those who endure to the end will be saved.

BIG IDEA: Jesus never promised His disciples an easy time. In fact, He sent out his followers into the world with a warning that they would be like sheep among wolves, but He promised that those who endure to the end will be saved.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Pray for believers in persecution. Pray that they will not feel alone or isolated, that they will be able to love their persecutors, that they will not be fearful, that their suffering will glorify Christ, and that they will remain faithful through their suffering. Ask God to help you to remember to support them in prayer. Finally, ask God to help you honor them by remaining faithful in your witness despite your own fears.

Week 11: Matthew 10:16-25

Day 3: No Substitute for Preparation

READ: Matthew 10:16-25; 1 Peter 3:13-16; 2 Corinthians 10:4-6

EXPLORE:

When I (Brayden) was in high school and had just committed myself to Christ, I remember listening to someone speak about Matthew 10:19. My takeaway from this verse was that whenever I found myself in a gospel conversation God would speak through me and I would automatically know what to say. Well, sure enough one day I was out fishing with a couple of buddies in high school and God came up in conversation. One of my friends was saying how he didn't believe in God and how certain things just didn't make sense. I remember my heart beating hard and fast, my palms getting sweaty and my mouth going dry as I thought: "Well, here we go! Alright God I'm ready for you to take over and speak through me" and... nothing happened. I had no idea what to say and the topic eventually changed. This event left me discouraged and made me wonder why God did not speak through me.

Reading Scripture within its context is absolutely vital. There are some cases where Scripture is speaking to all Christians but most of the time, the context for the passage should change how we understand the passage. In Matthew 10:19, Jesus is actually prophesying about what will happen to the disciples. Jesus says *when* they deliver you over... this will happen. Jesus had promised them that the Spirit of the Father would speak through them when they stand before hostile rulers and authorities. This was not about all Christians receiving precise and divine words in gospel conversations, but it was about the disciples being given confidence and boldness to speak before these rulers. So, how does the passage apply to us?

When it comes to sharing the gospel, Jesus Himself tells the disciples in the context of verse 19 that they are to be *“wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”* He was saying they needed to use discernment when stepping into tricky situations. All Christians need to have this mindset when navigating through gospel conversations. If we take all of scripture into account, we can have a good understanding of God’s expectations for us in evangelism.

One of Jesus’s closest disciples named Peter tells us in his letter that we as Christians always need to be ready to give a defense for the gospel. Paul tells the Corinthian Church that Christians ought to destroy all arguments made against the knowledge of God. Both Paul and Peter who were powerfully called by God to say that Christians need to accumulate knowledge of God in order to be able to share the gospel with others. There is no substitute for our own preparation. God does not call us to passive faith, but to active obedience. It must also be said that God is still with us as we speak to others. A good parallel verse to Matthew 10:19 is 2 Timothy 1:7. *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.”*

BIG IDEA: When it comes to gospel conversations, we put in the work, but God handles the results.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Where do you think you could grow in knowledge when it comes to defending your faith?
- **Question:** What does “preparing to give a defense for the hope that is in you” look like for this next week?

Week 11: Matthew 10:16-25

Day 4: Be Like Sheep

READ: Matthew 10:16-25

EXPLORE:

I (Sarah) do not have to convince any of you that the times at hand are uncertain for Christians today. With many people facing criticism and being imprisoned for voicing what they believe, it can be a challenge to know what the future holds. Whether it is mixing up Fridays on your calendar, failing to realize there is a test coming up, or missing a task for an employer, we can often struggle to be fully prepared. One of the worst feelings is being caught off guard. Failing to be prepared for trials, at minimum, may give you a slight panic attack, at most, they can crush you. The words which Christ spoke were designed to prepare His followers and us as well.

The passage we are studying this week is Christ's heads up. We should not be "surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon us."¹ Christ cared enough about us to give us clear instructions and examples of what we could expect. We may not be flogged and dragged by our neighbors, but we very well may be slandered, mocked, or sabotaged. You may be unfollowed, blocked, or even reported on social media for biblical posts. You may lose your job for sharing Jesus. Or, in a very realistic way, you can be imprisoned or even killed for spreading the gospel. It's there in this passage. It's a promise. You will be hated by all for my name's sake.²

We must be ready, but how do we prepare ourselves in a world that changes with the tides? Knowing the Scriptures only in our minds is not enough. We need to live it out with other believers. Our strength is certainly supplied from God in and through our church community around us. Remember, Jesus sent His disciples in pairs. This begs a very important question. Who can you lean on when you are being persecuted? Who is willing to go out as sheep amongst wolves with you, knowing the cost? We not only need the encouragement of Christ and the words of the Holy Spirit, but also the strength of one another.

¹ See 1 Peter 4:12 for reference.

² See Matthew 10:22 for reference.

The best and greatest encouragement is this: He is with us. Wherever we go, and whatever we experience, Christ is present. He is not just nearby if we need to phone a friend. Scripture tells us that if we are in Christ, the Holy Spirit resides within us. He knows our trials and He is familiar with suffering.

To be clear, this is not a call to irreverently defy or dance with the law. When we want to raise our voice louder than the lies, put an end to heinous activities, or practice our legal rights, we need to remember God is sending us out as sheep. We are sheep who most importantly have a good and capable shepherd in Christ. Consider Daniel who faced serious and even life-threatening hostility for glorifying God. We don't live in a den of lions, but the same God who emboldened Daniel is capable of sustaining us today. Certainly, we should consider biblical examples of a job well done, but we should first and foremost see Christ. Consider Jesus who Himself was referred to as a lamb led to slaughter. With scriptural truth, Jesus responded to the anger and violence of His day. In the face of persecution and unjust judgment, Christ was focused on obedience and humility as he laid down His life in accordance with God's good plan. His example ought to always be placed before us as we prepare for faithfulness in the fires of life and opposition.

BIG IDEA: We should be prepared for the trials and persecutions that are ahead and be encouraged by what Scripture tells us about them.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does reflecting on Jesus's example and the promise of eternity with Him help you to endure trials?

- **Activity:** Read the following and take some notes
 - o Luke 10:1-3; Mark 6:7-11, Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 13:5, Isaiah 53:7, Daniel 6

Week 11: Matthew 10:16-25

Day 5: Before the Son of Man Comes

READ: Matthew 10:16-25

EXPLORE:

One of the blessings of Word to Life Studies is that we get to pause in the biblical text for an expressed purpose that might otherwise not receive as much description in a weekend sermon. In the text we are studying this week, Jesus said to His disciples, *"You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."*² In today's study, our hope is to discuss what exactly Jesus meant by *"before the Son of Man comes."*

Let's set the stage for this conversation. We need to remember that Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man very often. We have discussed this title in the Word to Life Studies before. With this in mind, it's helpful to look at the range of interpretations that have been suggested about this passage.

1. Some have suggested this promised coming of the Son of Man refers to the close of the particular and specific mission on which Jesus was about to send them.
2. Some have suggested this passage may refer to Jesus's resurrection. The coming of the Son of Man is His post-resurrection appearance which then explains why His disciples had not yet gone into *all the towns*.
3. Some have suggested this passage may refer to the sending of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost.³ These interpreters see Matthew 10:23 fulfilled in the promised Holy Spirit of Acts 1:8 being given for the evangelization of Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the earth.
4. Some have suggested this passage refers to when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. They view the coming of the Son of Man as a fulfillment of predicted destruction which makes

connects the call for ministry amidst persecution in verses 16-22.

5. Some have suggested that this passage is referring to the second coming of Christ at the end of the age. This option considers the continued mission to all the places in Israel in partnership with a gospel engagement to the ends of the earth.
6. Some have suggested that this text is fulfilled in the transfiguration of Jesus. Before Jesus revealed His glory to Peter, James, and John, He said, *“there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”*⁴

Behind each of the understandings above, you will find respected biblical scholars, both contemporary and historic, who are doing their best to understand the text given its context. Certainly, whatever biblical interpretation you reach should not conclude that Jesus was mistaken in His promise to the disciples in Matthew 10:23. God is always good on His Word even when we wrestle to comprehend what it means. Although the particulars of what Jesus meant concerning the Son of Man’s coming receives ongoing and charitable disagreement,³ there is no uncertainty about God’s provision and sufficiency amidst difficult ministry environments.

BIG IDEA: The meaning of the Son of Man’s coming is debated, but there is a lot about God’s character in the biblical text that is certain.

APPLY:

- **Question:** As you read the six perspectives above, which of the following do you find the most persuasive and why?

³ More discussion on this question will most likely occur in the upcoming sermon.

Week 12: Matthew 10:26-33

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 10:26-33

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity**: While reading, include some observations in the space below.
- **Question**: When instructing His followers toward fearlessness, Jesus said, *“Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”* How does verse 27 help you understand what *covered and hidden* things Jesus is talking about?
- **Question**: Do you find it challenging to not fear other people? Why or why not?
- **Question**: Jesus references sparrows, pennies, and numbered hairs. What is His point in referencing these three things?

- **Questions:** Jesus has spoken about birds before. Where else in Matthew's Gospel Account has He referenced birds? Were the references similar in the point they were making?
- **Question:** Have you ever experienced God freeing you from anxiety? If so, how did it take place? If no, why do you think you haven't had that experience?
- **Question:** How does a right fear of God help us to be rightly fearless before other people?
- **Question:** What is the difference between unwise fear and appropriate caution?
- **Question:** Jesus said, *"whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."* What comes to mind when you read that closing verse in this week's text?

Week 12: Matthew 10:26-33

Day 2: God's Revelation and Bold Witness

READ: Matthew 10:26-33

EXPLORE:

Have you ever had a process move slower than you'd hoped? Have you ever had a question take longer to answer than you initially thought? Have you ever received advice incrementally over a painfully prolonged timeframe? I (Stephen) have.

The answer for all of us is a resounding, "Yes." Sometimes, processes are slow, answers are delayed, and advice is unhurried on accident. On other occasions though, an unrushed process, a timely answer, and an opportune piece of advice come wisely and at the right time... even when they don't match our schedule.

In a moment of reassuring, Jesus explained to His disciples that what was hidden would not always be that way. What was covered would be revealed! God had and continues to have sufficient reasons to do precisely what He does precisely when He does it. Jesus used that fact to embolden His followers toward an audacious witness in the world rooted in a trust of God. After Jesus commanded His disciples to have no fear He said these words: *"Nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known."*⁴ This text begs the question, "How does the future-oriented revelation of covered things cause boldness in the life of the believer?" In response to this question, two points can be raised.

First, what was, at one point, concealed about the nature and ministry of Jesus would one day be revealed after His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. This is good news. As we've studied previously, Jesus had sufficient reasons to keep His

⁴ See Matthew 10:26 for reference.

identity secretive for a brief time so that the gospel would be graciously and faithfully understood and communicated. Verse 27 expounds this idea. What Jesus had entrusted to His disciples initially would one day be revealed with clarity. This clarity was not meant to merely give them a future-oriented hope, but a present tense boldness to continue on.

Second, in view of the incoming resistance that Jesus's followers were about to face, it is reasonable to conclude that He had the heinous acts of persecutors in view. Both the nature of Jesus as God incarnate and the sinful deeds of those who persecute His followers will be made known. Scripture is filled with examples of God's ability to see and perceive all that takes place.⁵

The promise that, in God's good timing, He will unveil that which is hidden and reveal that which is concealed would have been a profoundly emboldening encouragement for the first century church. It should be a fortifying idea for us as well. For a short time, the identity and substitutionary work of Jesus was not understood. For a short time, the persecutors of the disciples seemed to hold the power. Jesus was encouraging a deep and unwavering trust in God's perfect timing to reveal what was mysterious and to expose what was hidden.

BIG IDEA: The fact that hidden things will be revealed ought to spark future-oriented hope and present tense boldness.

- **Question:** If you were an original follower of Jesus and you heard Him say verses 26-27, how would that help you proclaim with boldness?

⁵ Hebrews 4:13 expresses this fact about God, writing, "*No creature is hidden before His sight.*"

Week 12: Matthew 10:26-33

Day 3: Who You Fear is Your Authority

READ: Matthew 10:26-33; Deuteronomy 10:12-13

EXPLORE:

This passage gives instruction on who to fear and who not to fear. We see that we are not meant to fear others but meant to fear God alone. This is challenging because fear is an emotion existing in every human for self-preservation. This kind of fear protects us from danger and harm. The fear that is being discussed in this passage, however, is different than simply self-protective fear. This fear relates to who we ascribe the most value and authority to. When we fear man more than we fear God, we are saying that man has the greater authority. Matthew 10:28 says, however, that God is the one who has the greater authority because He governs both body and soul.

So, how do we fear God more than we fear man who can insult, accuse, persecute, harm, and even kill? Deuteronomy 10:12-13 says, *“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?”* Here we see that fearing God coincides with obedience, service, and love. As we love the Lord and obey His commandments, we demonstrate that we have a healthy fear of God more than we fear what man can do to us.

A beautiful aspect of fearing God that we see in Matthew 10 is that we have a God who loves us and cares for us. Read verses 29-31 again. We can truly fear God and set Him as our highest authority because we can trust that He wants what is best for us. He is not a god who demands fear by inflicting suffering and screaming threats. He is a God who deserves fear because He laid

down His life for His people. He is a God who deserves the highest authority and respect because He left His throne to take on our broken flesh. It is the very fact that He loves us, cares for us, and values us that we can trust that our fear of Him is not misplaced. As we face sufferings and trials from the world, even persecution, we can trust that God cares for us and has not abandoned us. So, as we strive to turn our fear away from what the world can do to us and back to the Lord, let us acknowledge the areas in our lives where we fear what others think of us or can do to us more than we trust God's good design for our lives. Let us walk in obedience and service to God, as we read in Deuteronomy, in order to live out our love and fear of God for His glory and our good.

BIG IDEA: Who we fear reveals who we ascribe the most authority and value to.

Apply:

- **Question:** In what ways does your life reveal an unbalanced fear of man? Where does your money go, where does your time go, and what occupies the majority of your thought life? How do you respond when someone inflicts harm or threatens you?

- **Question:** In what ways can you serve, love, and obey God to restore a healthy fear of Him rather than man? What can you do differently with your money, your time, and your thoughts?

Week 12: Matthew 10:26-33

Day 4: Talk About It

READ: Matthew 10:26-34; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Matthew 26:75; John 21:17

EXPLORE:

Have you ever heard the common imperative: *Don't talk about religion or politics!* Usually the phrase can be heard at work, at gatherings of extended family, or at any large social gathering where there are people with many different opinions. Apparently, the phrase was popularized by, of all things, Charlie Brown. The character Linus said it in a famous Charlie Brown television special, "There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people... religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin." This phrase was popularized because our culture has increasingly prioritized an atmosphere of tolerance. Today, this tolerance boils down to, "don't disagree with anything," or at least "don't disagree publicly with these specific subjects." It's safe to say, Jesus does not agree with this mentality.

In Matthew 10:32-33, Jesus says that anyone who wants to be with God must not be ashamed of Him before men. It can be difficult for us to put ourselves out there and say that we are Christians in many contexts. Sometimes it's not that we care if people know we are Christian, we just don't want to come right out and say it. I think in this passage Jesus calls us not just to affirm Him if someone asks, but to go further and make sure people know that we serve Him.

I (Brayden) have worked quite a few jobs in the past. I've worked at a BBQ restaurant, a stadium, a convention center, a grocery store, and a hotel. In each of those places God laid it on my heart to have gospel conversations with my fellow coworkers. One consistent pattern I have found is that if I bring up Christianity early on with someone, then I'll have a weight taken off my

shoulders no matter how the conversation turns out. However, when I put off talking about God, it becomes harder and harder for me to bring it up. Scripture gives us a pattern of testifying about God wherever we go for a reason. Satan wants us to keep quiet and be afraid to bring things up. He wants us to stay away from divisive topics, but this is antithetical to Jesus. Jesus says He came to bring a metaphorical sword that makes people choose between Him and the world. When we read the words of Jesus, we should understand our call is to put ourselves in situations that make us uncomfortable.

I think it also needs to be said that while Jesus' words are clear about not denying Him, it is clear that we serve a gracious and holy God. The most famous disciple (Peter) denied Jesus three separate times and yet became a huge pillar of the early church. If you have denied Jesus in the past before family, friends, or coworkers ask God for forgiveness and seek to proclaim Him before those you see today.

BIG IDEA: Let people know you are a Christian.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Are there people around you that don't know you are a Christian? If so, how could you remedy that?

- **Question:** How often do you pray for God to put you in situations where you could bring up the gospel?

Week 12: Matthew 10:26-33

Day 5: Severe and Sweet: An Understanding of Jesus's Teaching

READ: Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9; Mark 8:38

EXPLORE:

Our status before God is tied to our relationship with Christ. Our eternal destiny hinges upon our acceptance of God's grace in Christ or our renunciation of Jesus. Look again at Matthew 10:32-33. Jesus said, *"So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."*

Think about how these words must have been experienced by Peter. He was a devoted follower of Jesus who sometimes spoke before he thought. He made promises before he knew how challenging they would be. On one occasion, Peter had been told by Jesus that he would deny him three times. This act of betrayal was unthinkable to Peter. In unsurprising, but tragic fashion, Jesus was accurate in his prediction and Peter denied his Lord three times.

In Luke's Gospel Account we hear Jesus say the same thing Mark records a very similar sentiment. There will be deep shame for those who are ashamed of the gospel. There will be a denial for those who have denied Christ. So, think again about Peter. He was a man who clearly and verbally denied Christ before others. Thankfully, Peter's story on earth and relationship with Christ did not end with his denials. On a beach after Jesus's resurrection, the Christ he had once denied, restored him to Himself. Peter did not persist in his denial of Christ but was graciously reinstated to boldness and into a relationship with his Lord and Savior again.

I (Stephen) think we might rightly see the intensity of this passage to such a degree that we miss how glorious it is. Confessing Christ as savior and Lord means that you are claimed as one of His own! Imagine that a trial is set to begin in which your entire life's deeds are laid out before you. The judge has every right to convict you of

the wrongdoing. Your record will surely condemn you. Suddenly and sufficiently, Jesus comes and speaks, "This one is mine." Can you even begin to comprehend what Christ has promised to do for those who by grace through faith have believed in Him, resulting in the profession of that belief to others? Can you even begin to imagine?

Peter felt the agony of denying Christ as that same Christ was on His way to dying for him! As the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to write, those who are too embarrassed of Jesus before others will find that they have grieved the heart of God. This verse would have been a profound encouragement to persevere for the Apostles. The world would despise them, families might reject them, and they would often encounter their own sin as they falter and fail. Even still, they would hear the severity and sweetness of Jesus's words calling them to persevere. Do not deny the Lord. Do not be ashamed of Him. Confess Him as Lord and Savior and find that He is powerful, gracious, and good!

BIG IDEA: Our status before God is tied to the gracious establishment of our relationship with Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Have you ever been ashamed of Christ or hesitant to confess him as Lord? If so, when? If no, why?

- **Question:** Scripture is clear that we are not saved because of works we do. How is that truth compatible with Jesus's teaching here?

Week 13: Matthew 10:34-39

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 10:34-39

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

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

- **Questions**: The passage we are studying this week starts with Jesus saying, *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth."*
 - Do you think we are wrong to sing songs about God's peace? Why or why not?
 - How do we understand Jesus's words in verse 34 with His title as the *Prince of Peace*?
- **Question**: Verses 35-36 talk about the strife that will take place in homes because of genuine belief. Have you ever experienced anything like this?

- **Question:** If you were to describe your top five priorities in life, what would they be?
- **Question:** How do you think Jesus's words in verses 37-38 challenge the priorities and allegiances we most often highly prize?
- **Question:** Crucifixion is a shocking metaphor for discipleship in verse 38. In what ways do you think "*taking up a cross*" is a helpful description?
- **Question:** Opposition will occur because genuine believers are following Jesus. What do you think is the difference between enduring opposition and enticing it? What is the difference between persevering opposition and provoking it?

Week 13: Matthew 10:34-39

Day 2: Jesus, Our Peace

READ: Matthew 10:34-39; Ephesians 2:14-18

EXPLORE:

One of the most consequential inventions of all time was the creation of dynamite. Dynamite was the most powerful explosive at the time it was made and was mostly used for militaristic purposes. The creator of dynamite was labeled the “merchant of death” for profiting off of something that brought so much devastation in battle. This “merchant of death” was none other than Alfred Nobel who is mostly known today because of the awards he established, of which the most well-known is *The Nobel Peace Prize*. How did someone go from the “merchant of death” to someone known for peace? Well, it turns out that Alfred Nobel always had peace in mind even when inventing dynamite. Nobel’s intention was to create a substance of “such frightful efficacy for wholesale destruction that it would make wars impossible.” This is a similar argument scientists would later make about nuclear weapons in World War II. The point is that sometimes people become famous for something they never actually stood for. In our passage this week, Jesus is clearing up a misconception about Himself.

In verse 34, Jesus tells His disciples that He actually did not come to bring peace but a sword. During His time Jesus was misunderstood and today Jesus is still misunderstood. It’s common today for people to think of Jesus as passive, inoffensive, and completely tolerant. This was definitively not the case. In these verses, Jesus proclaims three different things. He must be actively followed, He will be so offensive that people will be against their own family members, and He will not tolerate love for family members over Himself. Jesus said all of these things quite plainly and yet, Jesus is still largely misunderstood. Why is that the case?

The confusion comes from often misunderstood passages¹ in scripture that seem to say Jesus *did* come to bring peace, so in order to make sense of this we must reconcile those passages with this one. The solution to the problem is in recognizing who Jesus is bringing peace to and why. Jesus did not come to bring peace between individual people or between people groups themselves. Jesus came to bring peace between people and God. He came to destroy the barrier between God and humanity caused by the fall in the garden of Eden. That barrier was sin and Jesus destroyed it through His death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus did this for all people who would accept Him by grace through faith. Ultimately Jesus will bring definitive peace and rest to all of His creation when He comes back to earth, but this was not the purpose of His first coming.

Jesus provides us peace with God and peace within our souls. Our job is to tell people of Jesus' true purpose and explain how He can give them peace, and we must be willing to risk disturbances in our peace between people here on earth to do so.

BIG IDEA: Jesus offers peace with God to all people but did not come to bring peace between people.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus is so misunderstood in our culture today?

- **Question:** How do we give people a more accurate view of Jesus?

Week 13: Matthew 10:34-39

Day 3: Who is Worthy?

READ: Matthew 10:37-38, Ephesians 4:1-3, Revelation 5:1-12

EXPLORE:

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? There are perhaps many ways to answer this question, but three times in this week's passage, Jesus describes what it looks like to be "*worthy of [Christ]*" in order to teach us that our own answers to this question often fall far short of his standard.⁶ We must love him over and above the love we have for our parents. Over and above the love we have for our children. And, in fact, we must love him more than our very lives — taking up our cross, dying completely to self, putting him first above all other loyalties, and placing our own will in submission to his will. This is a hard lesson, but Jesus is clear that it is only then, that we will be "*worthy of [him]*."

It is critical to highlight, however, that Jesus is not describing a need for us to earn his grace or salvation through "worthy" actions. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says, "*I . . . urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.*"⁷ This sequence of events is clear, our walking in a worthy manner only comes after God graciously calls us into faith. Paul likewise exhorts the Christians in Philippi to "*let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ*" so as to serve as a clear sign of their salvation from God.⁸ Like good works, a worthy life should flow from the unmerited grace we receive freely from God. It is not the other way around. And how thankful we can be for this!

While all people have worth and value inherent in our creation "*in the image of God*," we have all been catastrophically marred by sin, utterly unworthy to stand before a holy God. In Revelation 5, the apostle John sees, in the midst of the heavenly throne room, a scroll

⁶ See Matthew 10:37-38

⁷ Ephesians 4:1

⁸ See Philippians 1:27-29

outlining God's eternal plan for judgement and redemption. And when an angel calls out in a loud voice *"Who is worthy to open the scroll?"* John weeps, because it appears no one worthy can be found. That is until the *"the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, . . . a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain"* steps forward. Jesus is worthy to open the scroll. Jesus is worthy to bring God's redemptive plan to pass. And he is *"worthy . . . to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."* For it was in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus wholly submitted his will to that of the Father's. It was on Calvary that he took up his cross, a perfect sacrifice for an imperfect people. And it's in him that we see our unworthiness washed away by an imputed righteousness we could never have gained for ourselves, a value beyond anything this world or our own strength could ever offer. As Keith and Kristyn Getty so beautifully sing:

*Two wonders here that I confess
My worth and my unworthiness
My value fixed, my ransom paid
At the cross*⁹

Whereas we remain entirely unworthy of the forgiveness, redemption, and riches of his grace that he lavishes upon us, Jesus wants us to see the true worth we have in him and embrace our calling as his disciples. In response, how can we not follow his example, submit our wills to God, and strive to live lives worthy of our calling?

BIG IDEA: We do not merit God's grace, but we are called to act according to the grace which we have so freely received through Christ. Let us strive to live lives worthy of our calling as disciples.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What does a life "worthy of Christ" look like?

⁹ *My Worth is Not in What I Own* by Keith and Kristyn Getty
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05jKxv8Apul>)

Week 13: Matthew 10:34-39

Day 4: Picking Up Your Cross and Denying Self

READ: Matthew 10:34-39; Romans 6:1-14; John 12:20-26

EXPLORE:

Today we will be discussing Matthew 10:38-39 in which Jesus says, *"And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* When a condemned prisoner took up the crossbeam to carry it to the site of his eventual crucifixion it was a symbol that he was on his path to death. In a similar way we all are or have been condemned prisoners walking the earth (Romans 6:23). The way that we overcome the condemnation of sin, and the world is to take up the crossbeam, and carry it to the site of our execution. Taking up our cross is the ultimate form of self-denial. Paul describes this process of self-denial. Romans 12:1-2 says, *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* Paul says in Romans 6:6, *"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."*

A similar verse to Mathew 10:38-39 appears in John 12:24-25. In John 12:24-25 Jesus says *"Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* We are like the grains of wheat connected to the plant. If we hold on to the connection of the world, we will not serve our purpose. We will remain alone, clinging to the pleasures of this world. But if we choose to take up our cross, we can bear fruit as new creations.

As Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Through this self-denial, picking up the crossbeam, and accepting the death of ourselves, we are new creations and can allow Christ to live through us and bear much fruit.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How do Matthew 10:38-39 and John 12:24-25 use the imagery of taking up the cross and the grain of wheat to show similar ideas on how disciples must deny their idea of self?

- **Question:** How can we as believers better embody Paul's call in Romans 12:1-2?

- **Activity:** Remember Matthew 5:13-16, Pray that the church remains separate from the world, lighting the world so that others would follow their example and glorify God.

Week 13: Matthew 10:34-39

Day 5: Jesus the Better Gift

READ: Matthew 10:34-39

EXPLORE:

Is it possible to love a good thing too much? Some might say no. After all, it is a *good* thing. But I would submit to you that *it is* possible to take a good thing that is meant to be received with joy and to love it so much so that it becomes a god that is worshipped rather than a gift that is enjoyed.

This is not just what I believe. This is what Jesus indicates here in this text. Did you see it? Jesus tells us that there will be people whose commitment to Himself will cost them good things- their families. We know from Scripture that family is a good thing, right? Psalm 127 makes this clear. It reads, "*Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward... blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!*" If this isn't enough to show us the gift God gives us in family, consider one of the first commandments God gives to Adam- "*Be fruitful and multiply...*" So certainly, God views the family as a gift to humanity.

So why does Jesus say, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"?² It is because Jesus calls His followers to have their chief love set on Himself, even if this love comes at the cost of losing one's family. And one's family isn't the only thing that is to be laid down on the altar before Jesus. It is also one's very own life. Notice what Jesus says in verse 38. "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Jesus calls His followers to lay down everything, even their very lives, at His feet so that they may find their life in Him. Followers of Jesus are to love Him more than anything or anyone else.

As we consider this sobering text, it is clear that following Jesus comes with a great cost. But it also comes with an even greater reward- knowing the Lord Jesus Christ and being forgiven of our sins. Jesus does for us what no gift can do for us, no matter how good. Through faith in Jesus, we have peace with God. We are no longer held under condemnation but rather are forgiven, cleansed, and given the very righteousness of Christ. As we love Christ, we follow the One who laid down for us so that we could receive the gift of knowing Him.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Is there any gift in your life that might have become a “god” to you?

- **Question:** If Jesus were to ask you to lay down something that you love, would you be willing to do it?

- **Pray:** Ask God to make your love for Jesus stronger than anyone or anything else.



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