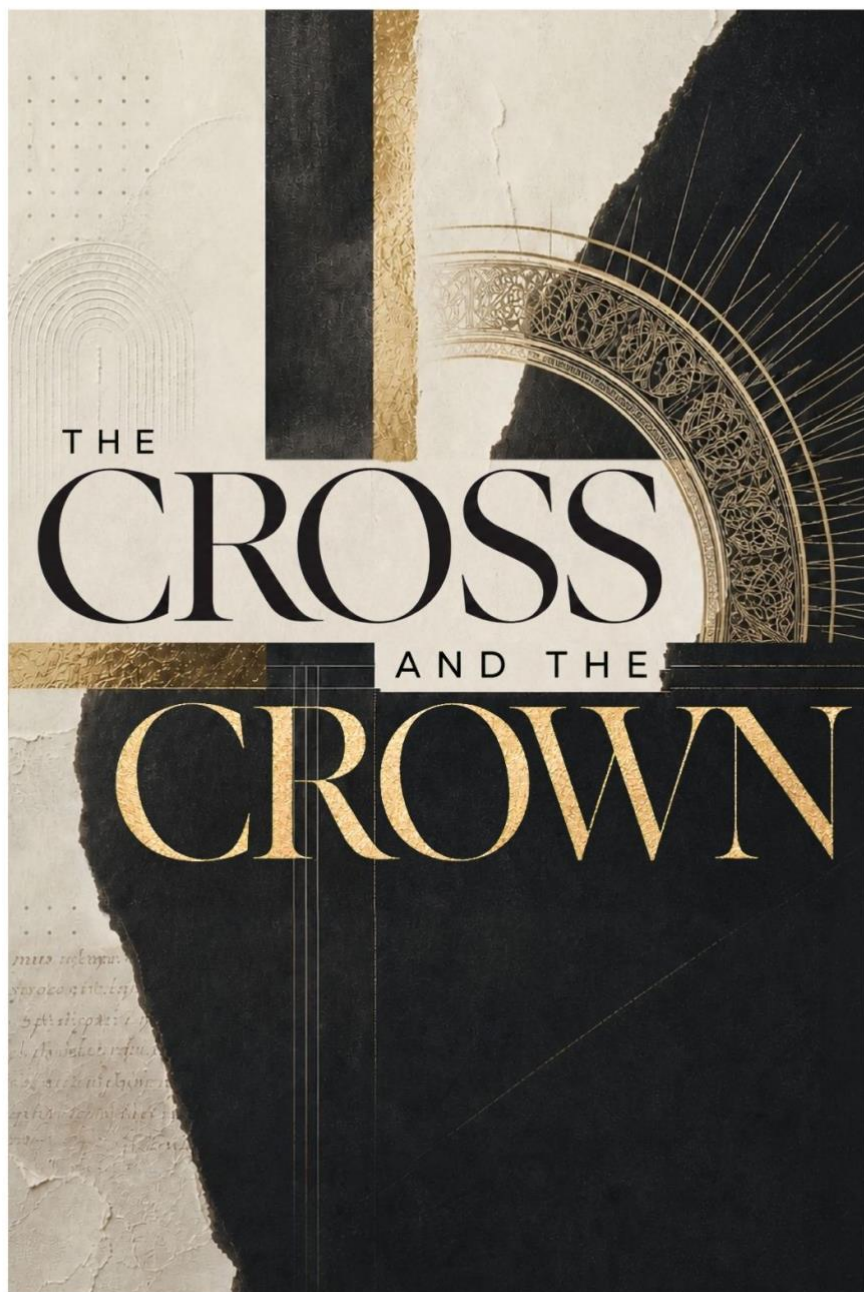


WORD TO LIFE // WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL



MATTHEW 25:14 - 26:17 - 29
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

- ☐ SEPT 7
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WEEK 6

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Week 5: Matthew 25:14-30

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 25:14-30

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 25:14-30 and complete the activities and questions below.

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

Question: What do you think Jesus means by “talents”? In other words, what has God entrusted to us?

Question: Do you think that it is fair that the master gives talents based on ability?

Question: What could it mean to actually *double* the talents that God has given you?

Question: Why do you think the man that had the least talents was most afraid to use them?

Question: What do you think was the greatest sin of the man who did nothing with his talent? Was it his poor view of the master or his lack of production?

Question: What are your thoughts on the relationship between fear and laziness?

Question: What does the master say the lazy servant should have done if he was afraid? How is that relevant to our relationship with God?

Activity: Write down all the gifts and abilities that God has given you. Pray that you would be a good steward of what has been granted to you.

Week 5: Matthew 25:14-30

Day 2: The Danger of a Defensive Mindset

READ: Matthew 25:14-30

EXPLORE:

This week's passage might be a familiar one. It's certainly one I've read many times. I've always focused on the danger of not stewarding what God's given us, or if I'm honest, I've wrestled in my own heart that not all of us are granted talents or resources equally. As I read over this portion of Scripture a few times, verse 24 seemed to jump out at me for a few different reasons. First, the man who had one talent approached in the same manner the others did. We see no indication that there was shame or hesitation as he watched the others reveal their earnings, knowing he had none. Instead, he approaches the master and says, "I know you. You're a harsh man." In verse 25, he goes on to say, "So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent." Let's unpack this parable of a man who thought he knew his master. Before we demonize fear, I think sometimes when it comes to the Lord, fear is a good thing. After all, aren't we supposed to work out our salvation "with fear and trembling"? What about the Proverb that says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"? That word in Proverbs that means reverence holds a different connotation. This servant describes his master as harsh, or sklēros, meaning hard or stern. His belief in the character of his master was revealed in his behavior. It led him to hide. While his peers took their talents and trusted them by investing, his fear led him to hide what his master had given him. We see numerous examples of angels saying, "Fear not." If our perception of God's character causes us to hide what God has given us, it's possible we are missing the simple truth that God is good. I love this quote from A.W. Tozer: *"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."* As we wrap up today, I believe this passage is a good reminder to evaluate areas of our own life where we might have tried to control our circumstances, our environments, maybe

even the humans in our own home. Our misperception or inability to trust that God is good has left us so fearful that we've tried to live in our own bubbles, holding on for dear life to what we have until Jesus returns. I love sports. Many times, I've painfully watched teams who focus on playing not to lose instead of just focusing on winning. They get scared as time runs out, and they start to play tentatively. I've watched this with countless Christians who live their lives more defensively, rather than taking what God's given them and not being afraid to invest in the spaces God placed them in and see real fruit emerge from their obedience and His faithfulness. We do not need to live from a place of fear and control, nor do we need to manufacture our own refuge. I pray today as you read these words that you'll be reminded that *God is good*. Psalm 34:8 says, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" I love Lamentations 3:22 that says, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases." And 2 Timothy 1:7 reminds us that God has not given us a spirit of fear.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What has God entrusted to your care and how are you trusting Him with the fruit of that?
- **Question:** Take a minute and look at your own life. Are there areas where you find yourself living more defensively than offensively?
- **Challenge:** Ask the Lord to gently show you areas where you might be experiencing fear and might be tempted to control your own circumstances.
- **Challenge:** Meditate on Psalm 34:8.

Week 5: Matthew 25:14-30

Day 3: Management or Protection?

READ: Matthew 25:14-30

EXPLORE:

In my work, discussions around health often come back to psychological stressors. In one particular conversation with a patient surrounding stress and anxiety, we continually came back to his work. He shared he was a financial advisor and I was a little surprised. Based on our conversation thus far, I would have guessed a police officer, a social worker, maybe a trauma doctor. He went on to tell me about the pressure of holding someone else's livelihood in your hands. The stress suddenly made sense.

The word "talent" may sound a little funny to us, but its use here is simply a particular weight of gold, silver, etc. AKA money. However, we know in true parable fashion, Jesus is not limiting the principles of this story to money. He is speaking about stewardship, and with that lens, there are many "talents" that the Lord has given to us. Talents can be any resource, including time, health, freedom, money, or influence on others. Even unique skills, artistic abilities, or leadership qualities. The talents (both in character and quantity) given to each believer differ, but every believer is given and is responsible for some measure of talent.

There are a few ways we tend to err in stewarding our talents. First, we can see the talents we've been given as our own. Things held tightly for our own use or enjoyment. There is wisdom in saying no to things to honor biblical priorities. However, in some areas of Christian culture, the idea of "healthy" boundaries has been promoted as a guise for selfishness or laziness. We should not be afraid of this concept of laying down our boundaries as long as we do so before the Lord rather than man. We can often tell we are holding too tightly to our talents by our reaction to losing them. Health that suddenly declines or a position lost can

leave us devastated or angry with God for taking away what was *ours*. As believers, we should also be wary of veering off in the other direction: being too cavalier or downplaying the weight of the talents we have been given. When we fail to recognize that what we have been given is from the Lord, we may frivolously waste the resources the Lord has given us, missing out on the opportunity to participate in the work He is doing.

How can we bring our hearts back to a proper view of stewardship? First, we can intentionally sit down and consider the talents that the Lord has given us personally and recognize them for what they are: gifts from the Lord. After taking inventory of these resources in our lives, we have to determine how they are meant to be used. To do this, we must know, *really know*, the God who gave them to us. Considering the job of a personal financial advisor again, their purpose is to honor and advance the goals of the individual they work for. They may not consult their client on every financial decision, but by knowing their character and values, the advisor is able to make decisions in alignment with the client even in his absence. In the same way, we are called to continue to learn about the Lord and His character so that even in areas that He has not explicitly spoken into, we know how to steward His talents well to accomplish His purposes.

BIG IDEA: We are called to recognize the talents we have been given and know God enough to know how to be a good steward.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you find yourself quick to protect what is “yours” and dismayed when those things are lost for any reason?
- **Question:** What “talents” have you failed to recognize are from God and potentially missed opportunities to use them for His glory?

Week 5: Matthew 25:14-30

Day 4: Talents

READ: Matthew 25:14-30

EXPLORE:

What is a talent? In biblical times, a “talent” was a sum of money. More specifically, it was a way to quantify (or weigh) money. In Ezra 7:22, we see that wheat was measured in “cors” (about 6 bushels, or 220 liters); wine and oil were measured in “baths” (about 6 gallons or 22 liters), and silver was measured in “talents”. In 1 Chronicles 29:7, we learn that—in addition to silver—gold, bronze, and iron were also measured in talents. One talent of silver weighed about 100 pounds and equated to 20 years of wages for a laborer. While the term is used quite a bit in the Old Testament, it is only used by 2 authors in the New Testament. Matthew records Jesus’ words in 18:24, when He teaches about forgiveness. A servant owed his king 10,000 talents (200,000 years of wages) but obviously, had no way to repay the debt. Ultimately, the servant begged for the king to have patience with him, and the king felt compassion and forgave him the debt. John uses the term just once, in Revelation 16:21, when talking about huge hailstones – weighing as much as a talent of silver (100 lbs) came down from heaven in the plague of hail. But the most extensive discussion about talents, is of course in Matthew 25, in the Parable of the Talents. Here, we see a man about to go on a journey give 5 talents to one servant, 2 talents to another servant, and 1 talent to a third servant. Because of the Greek word used for money in verse 18 (argyria) we know that the talents in this story are silver talents. So, for the servant that received 5 talents – that would equate to 100 years of wages...in other words, a lifetime of wages. For the servant that received 2 talents, that equates to 40 years of wages, and for the servant that received 1 talent, that would be 20 years of wages. As we know from the story, the man who received a lifetime’s worth of talents, invested those talents and earned another lifetime’s worth of talents. The

man who received 2 talents also invested them and received 2 additional talents. However, the servant who did NOT invest his one and only talent...that talent was taken away from him and given to the servant who now had 10 talents. Over the years, the term 'talent' has slowly changed from being primarily related to money, but instead to skills and abilities. For example: a 'talented' musician, a 'talented' artist, or even a 'talent show.' Even though the subject matter of the object lesson has changed slightly over time, the principles of Jesus (always the Great Teacher) about talents are timeless. Jesus begins the conclusion of this parable with *"For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."*

Take a few moments to think about the talents that you have been given. Are you investing in those talents? If the giver of those talents showed up this evening, would He bless you twofold for investing in what He gave you? Or would He be more inclined to take that squandered talent away and give it to somebody else?

BIG IDEA: No matter how much or how little we have been given, we must always recognize and remember that it has all come from God.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Which of the 3 servants do you relate to most?
- **Question:** Is there a difference between human talents and spiritual gifts? If so, what are those differences?
- **Follow-up:** Has your King forgiven you of any debt that you could never repay?

Week 5: Matthew 25:14-30

Day 5: Diving Deeper into Parables

READ: Matthew 25:14-30; Matthew 16:24-26

EXPLORE:

We tend to think of parables as merely a ‘storyfication’ of theological principles, at least subconsciously. The cast of characters, everyday objects, and backdrops Jesus uses to paint each story seem unnecessary by our efficient American cultural standards, and we suppose they’re mostly for the benefit of the original audience of farmers and fishermen. However, this oversimplification doesn’t do the parables justice; what other short oral stories can bridge a *two-thousand-year* gap and still radically shape hearts and lives of people all around the world every single day? Only the intricate handiwork of a master teacher, Jesus, the same creator God who preserved the scriptures across time intentionally for us to read those same parables today in the modern age. The parables are complex vantage points into the mind of God, special footholds for finite human minds to learn about something as great or as infinite as ‘the kingdom of heaven’. Hover over the parable of the talents for a little longer than it takes to just read it at face-value and you’ll have the experience I’m having now: it’s hard to distill this story! Consider Matthew 25:29, “for to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away”. What is Jesus saying? At a high level we might summarize the moral of the whole parable in verses 14-30 to be that we’re each given one life to steward, a life with its abilities, finances, skills, and time, and that we should invest this life for the kingdom. But then what is verse 29 saying? If you’re lucky to start more advantaged in this life, will you be given even more? If you start at the bottom, are you doomed to not be a good steward? Surely not, since the servant with two talents, less than the first but more than the last,

doubles what little he has and is himself also rewarded in the end, even though he presented a smaller quantity over to the master.

Matthew 16:25 echoes 25:29, “for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”. This upside-down reality says that the one who “has much” is one who denies himself and takes up his cross to follow Christ, but the one who “has not” seemingly gains the whole world to himself but ultimately forfeits his soul. Perhaps verse 29 is doubling down on 16:25, helping us to break our misplaced love for the things of this world and replacing it with an even greater love for the Gospel. The one who loses *everything* for God, his entire life, will gain *even more* from an eternal relationship and reward with God. What a wonderful reality! The one who tries to keep it all has no power to make the soul right with God on their own merits, “even what he has will be taken away”.

BIG IDEA: Diving deeper into God’s word when something doesn’t make sense or seems confusing can yield an even sweeter encouragement, deeper conviction, and stronger insight.

APPLY:

- **Pray:** “Father, I want to know Thee, but my cowardly heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a rival. Then shalt Thou make the place of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine in it, for Thyself will be the light of it, and there shall be no night there” (penned by A.W. Tozer).

Week 6: Matthew 25:31-46

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 25:31-46

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 25:31-46 and complete the activities and questions below.

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

Question: What is significant about the kingdom being prepared for the sheep from the foundation of the world? Why do you think Jesus includes that detail?

Activity: Write down the tasks Jesus lists that the sheep performed.

Question: Who do you think Jesus considered the “least of these”?

Question: What does the eternal fire being prepared for the devil and his angels tell you about God's original intentions for all people?

Question: In what ways can you better care for people?

Question: Why do you think Jesus finishes His conversation with the disciples with this prophecy?

Question: Is Jesus stating that salvation is determined by whether or not we helped the poor?

Question: Is Jesus stating that salvation is determined by whether or not we helped the poor? How would you reconcile this passage with Paul's articulation of the gospel in Ephesians 2:8-9?

Week 6: Matthew 25:31-46

Day 2: Right or Left? Which Side are You On?

READ: Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 4:1-25

EXPLORE:

Right or left - which side do you hope to be on when Jesus comes to judge the nations? Clearly the *right* side. No one wants to be *left* out. At face value, it seems fairly evident that the means by which one gets to the *right* side of the judgment before Jesus is to give nourishment to the hungry and thirsty, to welcome those who are strangers, to clothe those who are without, to care for the sick and to visit those in prison. If we do this, we should be found on the *right* side – the salvation side – right? It is vitally important that we know the answer to this as our eternity depends on it. There is an error we must be careful to avoid when reading this passage. We must not allow this passage to lead one to believe that salvation comes by good works. For a better understanding, let's do two things: 1) Let's first seek to interpret this teaching in light of what the Bible teaches about how one comes to salvation. 2) Let's be sure we understand what it means to bear fruit of salvation (give evidence of salvation).

First, the Old Testament saints were saved by faith. Hebrews 11 tells the stories of numerous saints in the OT who acted heroically due to their faith. Abraham's story of faith is expounded upon by Paul in Romans 4. Please go read this chapter. It's made clear that Abraham was not justified (declared righteous) by his works (4:2), but by his faith (4:3). To be justified is to be saved and for our sins to not be counted against us (4:8). Romans 4:16 says, "that is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace." Grace is the key word here. Grace is God's free gift of salvation when what we deserve is punishment and death. In our Matthew 25 passage when Jesus teaches about the sheep and the goats, we must understand that we cannot give, serve, help or love those in need enough to earn salvation. Our sin is far too great!

Our sin far outweighs any good deeds that we can place upon the scale. We cannot overcome our sin with good works. But Jesus did it for us – He paid the punishment for our sins and then said, “whoever believes in me will not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16; see also John 5:24, 6:47). Finally, Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Clearly, Scripture teaches salvation is a gift of God by grace. It is not something we earn by good works.

Secondly, Scripture is clear that if one is truly a believer, his life should bear evidence of that faith. Jesus teaches in John 15:16 that our faith in Jesus should bear fruit that will last (is eternal). James 2:18b says, “I will show you my faith by my works,” meaning that the good works we do give evidence of the salvation that has already come by faith. Apply this to Jesus’ teaching on the sheep and the goats. We must interpret it to mean that those who have received the gift of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone will give evidence of that true faith in the way they express love to others by welcoming, caring for, nourishing, visiting and helping those in need.

BIG IDEA: Doing good to others does not earn salvation. It’s a natural outflow of salvation.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Are you in danger of believing you can earn your salvation by doing good works? Memorize Ephesians 2:8-9.

Week 6: Matthew 25:31-46

Day 3: Who Are My Brothers?

READ: Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 12:46-50; Matthew 10:40-42; Galatians 6:10

EXPLORE:

One of my (Brayden) favorite questions to ask people is what they would do if they had a billion dollars. Most people usually say that they would spend some money on a new house, car, boat, plane, and other frivolous items. I usually then ask what they would spend the money on after that and it usually takes them a while to come up with something. They usually then say that they would spend money on those same things but give them to close friends or family members. I would hope that a committed follower of Christ would find a better use for that amount of money. I hope that they would use that money to further the kingdom as much as God would allow. The reason I love asking the question about money is because it probes a person's heart, but it also helps inform us on how we should disperse what we currently possess. Where should our money and also our time go?

In our passage in Matthew, Jesus separates people based on what they did for the "least of these"? Who are they? I think a cursory reading of the passage particularly in the ESV would lead you to believe that they are not explicitly identified. However, in the Greek, it is clearer that "the least of these" are Jesus' brothers. The NASB makes this more clear, "that you did to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did to Me." Why is this important? Because it more explicitly identifies who "the sheep" are called to take care of. The sheep are called to take care of those to whom Jesus calls "brothers".

In Matthew 10:40-42, Jesus promises rewards to people who receive those who come in His name. At the beginning of Matthew 10, we see that Jesus is specifically referring to His 12

disciples who were called to preach the good news, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. So, those who Jesus identifies with are those He sends out and commissions. These are the ones that people are called to take care of. These are the “least of these”. It may sound good to the world to claim that we are all God’s children and all Jesus’ brothers and sisters, but this is not the case outside of a very general sense. Rather, Jesus says earlier in Matthew, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

This means that in Matthew 25, Jesus is not primarily concerned with “the poor” rather He is concerned with His obedient followers who are fulfilling the Great Commission. He is calling on everyone to support missionaries seeking to follow God’s will in bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth. This is not to say that we don’t care for the poor, but that we recognize that the greatest need for the world is a spiritual one not a physical one. Paul explains this principle well in Galatians, where he says that we are called to do good to everyone but especially those who are believers.

BIG IDEA: Jesus calls on those in all nations to support His missionaries so that God’s will may be done.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways can you better support missionaries?
- **Questions:** What is the best way for Christians to use their money? How can you help those within the church and those outside of it?

Week 6: Matthew 25:31-46

Day 4: The Servant Sheep

READ: Matthew 25:31-46

EXPLORE:

When our children were young, they loved the part of the zoo where they could pet the sheep and goats. One day, my daughter was running her hands over the fuzzy head of one of the little beasts when she asked, “What’s the difference between a sheep and a goat?”

I declared confidently, “Sheep have curly hair and goats have straight hair!” However, a petting zoo attendant explained that Angora goats have curly mohair, and wild mouflon sheep have long, straight hair. I wanted to reassure my daughter that there was a definite way to know, “Well, honey, sheep’s tails go down and goats’ tails go up!”

“Actually,” the attendant said as he handed the animal some hay to munch on, “It is easier to tell by their social behavior. Sheep are flock-oriented, docile grazers that prefer safety in numbers, while goats are independent, curious browsers that explore their environment actively.”

Like the attendant at the zoo, Jesus teaches us in Matthew 25:31-46 that the difference between sheep and goats is ultimately revealed by behavior. The King knew the sheep from the goats based on their social behaviors, not on how they looked! Individual physical characteristics do not carry any weight in God’s eyes; no, He looks at how we act.

In the world, we look at wealthy individuals and think that they are blessed or lucky. But in God’s kingdom, the lowly are exalted and the King rewards those who are merciful, compassionate, and willing to serve others even when their actions go unnoticed. In

the same way, God knows those who truly belong to His family based on how they treat the least of His brothers and sisters!

In the end, Jesus shows us that the clearest evidence of belonging to His kingdom is not status, appearance, talent, or public recognition, but humble love expressed through service. The King identifies His people by the way they respond to those who are hungry, thirsty, lonely, sick, imprisoned, or in need. Therefore, the call of Matthew 25 is not simply to admire compassion, but to practice it—to look for Christ among the overlooked and to serve Him by serving them.

What began as a simple lesson about animals at a petting zoo became a reminder to me that Jesus is not looking for outward appearances, but for social lives marked by communal service to the least of these in His name.

BIG IDEA: In God's upside-down kingdom, true greatness is revealed through humble service to others, especially those who are overlooked or in need.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Who are the people around me whom I may be overlooking, and how can I serve Christ by serving them today?
- **Challenge:** Choose one person this week who may feel overlooked or in need, and serve them in a quiet, practical way without seeking recognition. As you do, remember that when you serve the least of these, you are serving Christ Himself.

Week 6: Matthew 25:31-46

Day 5: The Ease of Apathy

READ: Matthew 25:31-46

EXPLORE:

There are certain truths of reality that we all like to adhere to whenever it is most convenient for us. If we are having difficulty praying to God, we can try and find comfort in the fact that God is going to accomplish His will no matter what we do. If we do not want to go out evangelizing, we can say that is between God and those who are lost to figure it out. If we do not want to give money, time, and resources to those who are less fortunate than us we reason that the poor will probably just waste our help anyway or that we might actually be hurting them by helping them. There are truths to be found in all of these arguments, but the problem is our tendency to avoid sacrifice for the sake of comfort. Jonathan Edwards once said, "Christians in this life, in and of themselves, have no being, desire, thought or act that is not tainted by sin." This should not be taken as Scripture, but it is very close to Isaiah 64:6 "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." Whenever we choose to act as Christians, we must not only seek to do good works and avoid selfishness but even examine our motives when we do those good works.

This passage in Matthew 25 calls us to be willing to sacrifice for others. It will be the case that if you consistently sacrifice on behalf of others that you will inevitably be let down on the results. You will sacrifice time, effort, energy, and money that someone else will abuse in some way. It may be greatly abused, or it may just not bear fruit that you can clearly see. Either way, you will be let down in this life and probably will be upset because of it. However, that is no excuse for not sacrificing.

One amazing reality that is true of the Christian worldview is that God will always see your heart. One terrifying reality that is true of the Christian worldview is that God will always see your heart. God will see when you are lazy. He will see when you work hard. He will see when you are angry or when you have a heart of love. God always sees not just our actions but our intentions. As faithful believers in Jesus we are called to not focus primarily on outcomes but obedience. We may never see good outcomes in this life. There are plenty of prophets who never did! But we are called to sacrifice, nonetheless. Paul in Romans 12:1 tells us “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Sacrifice can seem like a huge burden, but if we recognize that everything we have is from God it is really our opportunity to give back to Him. I hope and pray for David’s heart when he was offered animals for free. He said this in 2 Samuel 24:24, “But the king said to Araunah, ‘No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing.’” The sacrifices we make for God in this life are nothing less than treasures that will echo for eternity. It’s easy to be apathetic toward others and their needs, especially with all the distractions that we have in this life. It’s difficult to make sacrifices, but the life of the Christian is not one of ease but a cross.

BIG IDEA: Don’t be concerned about the outcome of your sacrifices, be concerned about a life without any.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you find it difficult to give because you are worried it won’t be worth it in the end?
- **Challenge:** Make one sacrifice today to God for someone else and pray over it.

Week 7: Matthew 26:1-16

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 26:1-16

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 26:1-16 and complete the activities and questions below.

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

Question: Why do you think that Jesus reminds His disciples yet again that He will be delivered up and crucified? Why would He remind them of this right after speaking to them about what will happen at the end of days?

Question: What are the main reasons that the chief priests and elders wanted to kill Jesus?

Question: Why do you think Jesus' own disciples could not see the significance of what the woman did?

Question: Do you think that the woman poured out the ointment on Jesus knowing its significance (for His burial)?

Question: What can you learn from the woman's example?

Question: Why is her action so important as to be proclaimed in the whole world?

Question: Why do you think this event was the turning point for Judas?

Activity: Write down the most radical sacrifices that one could make for Jesus. Pray about ways in which you can make sacrifices for God today.

Week 7: Matthew 26:1-16

Day 2: Earthly Waste and Heavenly Abundance

READ: Matthew 26:6-16

EXPLORE:

Two words stick out to me in this passage, both in verse 8:

- Indignant – “anger at something unjust or unworthy”
- Waste – “to spend or use something carelessly”

Pretty loaded, subjective terms, right? If I am indignant at something, I have personally defined what is and is not “just” or “worthy”. If I think something is wasted, I have determined that it was not used for as great a purpose as it ought to have been based on how I perceive its value.

The disciples were indignant that the woman dispensed the expensive oil on Jesus. In their eyes, the oil was worth more than honoring Jesus and that her actions were careless. Their reaction to the woman’s actions revealed the condition of their hearts and what they thought of Him. And at first blush, maybe we don’t fault them. Their hearts were in a good place after all; they wanted to help the poor! But their subjective view on value was only shaped by an earthly perspective, not an eternal one. Jesus’ response points this out – “you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me”. The disciples may be able to temporarily help the poor with money, which is not bad, but Jesus has something even more valuable, that will help them the most. Jesus has their *eternal salvation* in mind. The irony of the disciples’ determination of value is further extended in verses 14-16. Jesus is traded for only 30 pieces of silver – the price of a slave. Jesus, the Son of the living God and Redeemer of the World, traded for the equivalent price of a servant – and, deemed unworthy of the use of a nice bottle of oil.

Have you ever given a child something of value, maybe a nice piece of steak or special toy, knowing that they will not appreciate

the full value of it, but still feel delighted to give it to them anyways? I wonder if that was how Jesus felt in much of His time on earth. The gift of His life and death was one we did not fully recognize, but He gladly gave it anyways. Jesus knew His earthly life was not a waste because He foreknew His resurrection that could bring all into eternal life. And because of that, He is worthy of all our praise and worship. The woman knew this to be true. She did not find anything unwarranted about dispensing the entire bottle on Jesus. She was prepared and intentional about giving her everything to Jesus.

Waste is only an earthly concept because it perceives the misapplied value of temporary things that will cease to be. There is no lost value of the things of Heaven. Eternal treasures are in abundance, so there is no limit of their use and therefore no waste. There is no worship or praise of the Lord that is not worth it, and there is nothing more valuable than Him.

BIG IDEA: God notices our generosity because it depicts the condition of our hearts.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do the things you value indicate about your eternal perspective?
- **Question:** Are you holding on to things for yourself instead of surrendering them to Jesus because you think you know best how to use them? Are you bringing your everything to Jesus?
- **Question:** Have you bypassed a relationship or an opportunity to share the gospel because you think it is not worthy of your time or effort?

Week 7: Matthew 26:1-16

Day 3: Is It Even Sacrifice?

READ: Matthew 26:1-16; Luke 10:38-42

EXPLORE:

This passage shares the “beautiful thing” that Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, did for Jesus as she recklessly pours out the costly alabaster flask of perfume upon the head of Jesus. Jesus’ own disciples see this act from a beloved friend of Jesus as foolish and wasteful. The beauty of what Mary did for Jesus was that it was entirely for Christ and Him alone. Yes, everyone in the home could benefit from the beautiful scent of the perfume, though they chose to grumble instead, but the act was one of obedience and worship to Jesus alone. So much of what we do is divided in our intentions. We want to glorify God, but we would not mind if others noticed our good deeds as well. We want to live sold out for Jesus, but we are only willing to go as far as is comfortable. Mary gives us a picture of reckless abandon for Christ. She sees Jesus as worth giving up her earthly inheritance because He is her eternal security.

Mary was mocked by those around her, but she was memorialized by Jesus. Jesus knew the intentions of Mary’s heart and saw her act of obedience and love as true faith and worship while the rest of the world saw it as waste. When was the last time you risked being mocked or seen as foolish for the sake of loving Christ fully? Luke 10:42 speaks of the same Mary as she sat at the feet of Jesus listening to His teaching and Jesus says of her, “but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” Jesus is the only necessary thing in our lives. Jesus is our good, better, and best portion and He will never be taken from us. Mary’s obedience to sit at the feet of Jesus and to recklessly shatter a year’s worth of wages upon the head of her Savior ought to challenge and convict us of the ways in which we play it safe in our walk with Jesus. If we claim that Jesus is truly

the Lord of our lives, we must be willing to live a life of worship to Him no matter how it may be perceived by others or what it could cost us. Matthew 16:25 says, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. "

The Narrow Way by Steffany Gretzinger has a line in the song that says, "Is it even sacrifice if I trade the world for You?" How different would we live if we genuinely believed that Jesus is far greater than any earthly gain we could receive or give up? Is there actually anything in this life that is better, greater, richer, or deeper than Christ alone? Things we may see as "extreme" acts of faith such as moving overseas for missions, giving most of our income to the church or mission, adopting hurting, traumatized children, dying for our faith, etc. are not extreme if we see Christ rightly. Being in the word daily and being persecuted for our faith should feel the same – both joyful acts of worship because we see Jesus as who He really is: the best thing we could ever long for.

BIG IDEA: When we truly see Jesus as our better portion, wholehearted, selfless, reckless devotion becomes joyful sacrifice rather than a costly loss.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What does Mary's willingness to pour out such an expensive perfume reveal about how she viewed Jesus?
- **Question:** What do your actions reveal about how you view Jesus?

Week 7: Matthew 26:1-16

Day 4: The Slow Fade of Judas

READ: Matthew 26:1-16

EXPLORE:

One of the craziest realities about our civilization is that one bad decision can affect the rest of your life. One moment of rage, confusion, or carelessness can put a person in prison for the rest of their life or even end their life completely. And society would actually view it as fair, mostly because it largely agrees that a person willing to do something gravely evil, they should be removed from everyone else. Every person is capable of grave evil, but it usually does not come about out of nowhere. There is usually a build up of compromises that leads up to the horrific sin. Casting Crowns, the popular Christian band from a few years ago wrote a song that illustrates this point well.

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away.

It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray.

Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid when you give yourself away.

People never crumble in a day... It's a slow fade.

For some reason this scene with a woman pouring out very expensive ointment on Jesus was enough for Judas to become the betrayer of betrayers. He went from one of the twelve disciples who cast out demons to a man that was possessed by Satan (Luke 22:3). His name has become an example of antonomasia. That's a fancy word for saying that when we call someone "a Judas" we know we are calling them a traitor. But how could this happen? How could Judas have fallen so far?

John gives us insight into Judas' heart when he sees the amount of "waste" happening before his eyes. "But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was

this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.” John tells us that Judas was a thief. That apparently all throughout Jesus’ ministry Judas was stealing from the ministry fund. How absurd to think that Judas would see and be around the teachings and miracles of Jesus and be stealing from Him the whole time! It almost does not seem possible, except when we examine our own hearts.

Do you not believe in Jesus and know the power of God to see all things? And yet, do you not sin and avoid what God has called you to? In your own way, do you not betray Jesus? Do you not steal from His glory? It’s easy to condemn Judas, but it’s a terrifying thought to know that can be like him. No one wants to be Judas, but the truth is that we are much closer to him than to Jesus. Let us not be prideful for the times we have been faithful but instead let us repent and confess over the times that we have been unfaithful. Let us consider the words of Paul speaking to the Corinthians (10:12), “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” If we truly have put all of our faith and trust in Jesus, He will sustain us to the end, but there are many warnings of Scripture not to compromise and indulge in any type of sin. Let us not slowly fade into sin, but consistently live in the light and confess our sin and put to death our sinful desires. Let us also heed the outro of the song mentioned earlier: “Oh be careful little eyes what you see.”

BIG IDEA: Egregious sin does not happen overnight, watch and pay attention so that you do not betray Jesus.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Spend some time examining your life and where you might be tempted to betray Jesus.

Week 7: Matthew 26:1-16

Day 5: Matthew 26:1-6

READ: God's Money or Blood Money?

EXPLORE:

Matthew 26 is a very long chapter consisting of 75 verses. There is a lot to unpack in this chapter, but verses 1–16 contain important reminders about the role money played in the events leading to Jesus' crucifixion. In the opening verses of the chapter, Jesus sets the scene for the disciples as He reminds them that Passover was quickly approaching, which also meant He would be crucified soon. In verses 3–5, it is revealed that the chief priests and the scribes are plotting to kill Jesus. However, the religious leaders have reservations about killing him during Passover because they feared angering the people gathered to celebrate the feast. While these verses do not directly mention money, they set the stage for the events in the following verses with both the woman's anointing of Jesus and Judas betraying Jesus. In verses 6–13, Jesus is in the house of Simon the leper when a woman approaches him and pours expensive oil on His head. Understandably, the disciples are horrified to see the very expensive oil go to waste and point out the proceeds from selling the oil could be used to help the poor. The disciples likely believed Jesus was going to agree with their assessment of the situation, but he did not respond how they were expecting. Instead, He praises the woman and once again tells the disciples He will not be with them for much longer. The woman poured the oil on Him to prepare Him for burial and her action would be remembered wherever the Gospel was preached. There are a couple of interesting aspects to these verses. The first is that Matthew does not record the name of the woman. The absence of a name means the action of preparing Jesus for His burial holds more significance than her name. The second is that while the disciples believed the money from selling the oil could have been used to help the poor, Jesus ultimately wanted the woman and the expensive oil to point to

the message of the Gospel. The next three verses detail Judas' betrayal of Jesus and how Judas took advantage of the chief priests' plot to kill Jesus. Each of the four Gospel accounts provide the account of Judas going to the chief priests and scribes with the intent to betray Jesus. In Matthew 26:15, Judas specifically asks what the religious leaders are willing to offer him if he betrays Jesus. This is not the same as asking for money, but the chief priests knew Judas could be bought and paid him thirty pieces of silver. Matthew is the only Gospel account to record the amount of money Judas was paid. This is intentional because in 27:3 it is revealed the thirty pieces of silver were given to fulfill a prophecy found in Zechariah 11:3. While it is unclear what motivated Judas to go to the religious leaders, the money given to him was a possible motivation, while also fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy. These two accounts in the first part of Matthew 26 are a sobering look at the different ways money can be used. In the case of the woman anointing Jesus, she paid no regard to the expensive oil and used it to acknowledge Jesus' coming burial. On the other hand, Judas was paid to betray Jesus to the religious leaders instead of seeking to help minister with the other disciples. Christians should be aware if we are using our money for selfish gain or in an unwise manner and we should ask God how we can be good stewards of our money so that God will be glorified and the kingdom of heaven will continue to advance.

BIG IDEA: Use your money for the kingdom of heaven and not for your own selfish purposes or gain.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How do you use your money selfishly?
- **Challenge:** Ask God how you can use your money wisely so that those around you will be pointed to Jesus.

Week 8: Matthew 26:17-29

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 26:17-29

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew 26:17-29 and complete the activities and questions below.

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

Activity: Read Exodus 12:14-28 and record what you see as similarities between what happened then and what will happen with Jesus.

Question: What is so significant about Passover?

Question: What did Jesus mean by, “My time is at hand”?

Question: Why do you think that Jesus told the room that one of them would betray Him?

Question: Why do you think the disciples were sorrowful and questioned if it was them?

Question: Do you think that the other disciples bear any responsibility for the fall of Judas?

Question: What did Jesus mean by the phrase: "Take, eat; this is my body"?

Question: What did Jesus mean by not drinking of the fruit of the vine until a future time?

Week 8: Matthew 26:17-29

Day 2: The Ultimate Covenant

READ: Matthew 26:17-29; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Jeremiah 34:14-16

EXPLORE:

In the Ancient Near East, the term ‘covenant’ didn’t have the religious overtones it has today; rather, it was part of the social fabric of the day, an essential element of interactions between clans, tribes, and nations. It was always made with good intentions between the parties. There is never a covenant binding the two to harm one another in any way. There is a term for this: covenant loyalty (*hesed*). There was a formal requirement that both parties keep *hesed*.

God used the mechanism of ‘covenant’ to frame His relationship with His people. Biblical covenants were always initiated by God. It is not as if Abraham, Moses, or even David approached God and said, ‘Yahweh, we’d like to make a covenant with you.’

How ought we to define a covenant? If you were to have asked my daughters to define a biblical covenant, when they were 9, they would say: ‘A covenant is a relationship that God establishes with us and guarantees by His word.’ That may work for children but what about for adults? O. Palmer Robertson, one of the finest Old Testament scholars, best defines it as follows: A covenant is a bond-in-blood, sovereignly administered. That definition has everything – it is a bond between two parties, defined by the shedding of blood, and initiated and administered by God. All the biblical covenants, from Noah (Gen. 8) to Abraham (Gen. 15), to Moses (Exod. 24) to David (2 Sam. 7) were to be understood and interpreted under this rubric.

Whereas all these covenants had present implications (to them), they also had future promises. All these covenants were rather external, and the signs (rainbow, circumcision, Sabbath, throne)

were external as well. But we know what happened. The children of Israel (including the Davidic line) failed to show *hesed* to their covenant Lord. The exile was inevitable (as promised in Deut. 28:26-37). On the eve of the exile, God, through Jeremiah promised that He would send a new David to establish a new covenant, not written on tablets of stone but in their hearts. This is found in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Jeremiah 33:14-16. On the day of the initiation of this new covenant, all the sins of His covenant people, past, present and future would be atoned for, forgiven, never to be recalled. And He will be our God, and we will be His people.

Six centuries later, at a Passover meal, the Son of David would change the centuries old liturgy saying, 'This is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin.' Less than 24 hours later, this David's heavenly Father led him to Mt. Moriah (Jerusalem) carrying the wood of the cross to shed His blood for His covenant people, so that their sins would be atoned for and forgiven. This is what *hesed*, or covenant loyalty, cost Yahweh. And that meal became for us a celebration of the new covenant which cost the God of the covenant His only begotten Son so that we can live in His presence forever.

BIG IDEA: All the covenants in the Old Testament pointed forward to the ultimate covenant which was ratified in the blood of the Savior whom God sent because of the Father's great love for us.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does this understanding of the covenants shape our understanding and preparation for the Lord's Supper? What should our stance and attitude be toward our sin that drove the Savior to shed His blood to establish the New Covenant?

Week 8: Matthew 26:17-29

Day 3: Who has Two Thumbs and is a Sinner?

READ: Matthew 26:17-29

EXPLORE:

While Jesus and the 12 disciples were eating their Passover meal in fellowship, Jesus dropped this verbal grenade in the middle of the table. “One of you will betray me.” Our culture uses the word betray very liberally so it is important to be clear what Jesus means by “betray”. The Greek word *paradidōmi* that Jesus uses means to deliver someone treacherously. He is not merely accusing them of planning to betray His trust or gossip behind His back but literally delivering Him over to be taken. In contrast, this is different than the term Jesus uses in next week’s passage when Jesus declares that they will all fall away (*skandalizō*) Him, which is more of a passive offense or stumbling. Jesus makes a clear distinction between the offenses that Judas and the other 11 are about to commit.

Imagine if someone stood up in the middle of your family’s next Thanksgiving dinner and out of the blue declared that “one of you has sold me out to a bunch of Muslim extremists who are about to come haul me off in a windowless van.” After everyone scooped their jaws off the table, you’d probably hear a mix of disbelief and some uncomfortable laughter. Once you realized the accuser was serious you would probably start to wonder not only who he was accusing but also want to make sure that you were not being wrongfully accused. The disciples all individually begin to question Jesus as to whether He is talking about them. When they say, “Is it I, Lord?”, they are using the Greek term *mēti* which is a question expecting a negative answer. In case you were wondering if any of the other 11 disciples were actually doubting their loyalty to Jesus or thought there was a possibility that they would betray Him, they were not. The 11 knew they were not about to hand him over to the authorities, but they were still

fearful that He might be accusing them. The 11 loved Jesus and certainly did not want Jesus to think they did not love Him or that they were planning to betray Him. Peter was offended even at the thought that Jesus believed that they would deny him, much less be ready to hand him over to His adversaries. In verse 25, Judas asks the question in the same way as his fellow disciples, but notice he addresses Jesus as Rabbi (teacher) and not Lord. It's a very subtle difference that's easy for the reader to overlook, but very indicative of the difference in Judas's lack of devotion to Jesus. Based on his response, it's certainly not lost on Jesus.

When we read the Bible or listen to Sunday sermons, it can be hard to hear that we are all sinners or that we all fall short of God's righteousness. We can hear these messages and read these verses with an arrogant and judgmental spirit while still finding a way to acknowledge the faults of our neighbor. Instead, hopefully we can read each Scripture and hear each message and search internally and pray humbly for God to point out where we are falling short and areas we can improve to seek out righteousness. Not for guilt and shame, but in order to better understand and fully experience the limitless grace that God affords us. To carry my analogy a little further, we are called to be the person who stands up at Thanksgiving dinner and admits, "I have not sold you out to Muslim extremists, but I did make fun of you behind your back about your most recent haircut and I'm jealous that your new car is way nicer than mine. Please forgive me."

BIG IDEA: When you read Scripture, don't point fingers, but instead point two thumbs right back at yourself.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Allow yourself to hear God's truth and experience God's grace.

Week 8: Matthew 26:17-29

Day 4: Certainty in the Presence of Uncertainty

READ: Matthew 26:17-29

EXPLORE:

Imagine being one of the disciples of Jesus. You go on the road with Him day in and day out for three years. Three years is a long time! That is longer than most master's degrees. That is actually how long most pastors spend in seminary. But if you were one of Jesus' disciples I'm guessing there were no breaks. Imagine all of the crazy events that you would have witnessed. John actually ends his Gospel by saying, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Let's consider what was written: Casting out demons; God speaking from heaven; Moses and Elijah appearing on a mountain; Jesus in glorified form; The blind receiving sight; Lepers completely healed; The dead coming back to life; Bread appearing from nowhere; Water turning into wine; Jesus walking on water; Jesus calming a storm with a few words; Coins being found in fish. That is just to name a few of the things that the disciples saw! If you had seen all of that, where do you think it would have all been headed? My guess is you would not have possibly thought or even considered Jesus dying on the cross, yet that is exactly what happened.

In the passage for this week we see the Passover meal taking place and Jesus identifying one of the disciples as a betrayer. After all the craziness the disciples had seen this must have been a huge shock. I mean you know Jesus is Lord and that He chose each of you personally to be at His side, so how could anyone actually betray Him? There was probably a big temptation to just outright say Jesus is wrong, but Peter tried to rebuke Jesus one time and got called Satan, so the disciples probably feared trying that again. Rather, Matthew said that the disciples became sorrowful.

Whether it was going to be them or another it would be a depressing thing to hear your Lord tell you that something horrible is about to happen. At some point in our lives we will all receive terrible news. Whether that news be from the television, from our phones, from close friends or family, from our church, or from the doctor, we all await terrible news. There is no easy resolution to awful news. When we hear it, there most likely will be fear, anxiety, loneliness, sorrow, and pain. However, there is one truth that we must always hold to even in the darkest of days.

God knows what is happening and God will work it out in the end. In the moment, the disciples must have been terrified to hear about Christ's betrayal and His impending death, but Jesus was not caught off guard. Jesus knew what was going to take place and He took steps to make it happen all along the way. God works around the evil that man seeks to do. The greatest evil perpetrated against God was God's greatest triumph. Jesus knew that He would be betrayed and go to the cross, but He also knew that it would lead to good news for all of mankind.

Whenever you hear bad news, or experience overwhelming uncertainty, remember that God is certain. Remember that God can bring good from the worst evil. Remember also that before Jesus received the crown, He went to the cross. We likewise must take up our cross before we join Him in glory.

BIG IDEA: In times of uncertainty, remember that God is certain and brings good out of the worst evil.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Call or meet in person with someone you know and pray for them.

Week 8: Matthew 26:17-29

Day 5: Passover and Communion

READ: Matthew 26:17-29

EXPLORE:

The passage describes Jesus' last Passover meal with His disciples at the end of His earthly ministry. The first Passover appeared in Exodus 12, when God delivered the Israelites from Egypt where God commanded them to sacrifice a one-year-old male lamb without blemish and mark their doorposts with its blood so the angel of the LORD would "pass over" them. From that point on, Israelites were required to observe the Passover each year by eating roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread in remembrance of what God had done. This ceremony also pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, who revealed Himself as the true and perfect Passover Lamb. Through His death, His people are delivered from sin and death.

Matthew 26 was not only Jesus' last Passover with His disciples—it was the final Passover for everyone. Christians are no longer required to observe the Passover in the way it was described in Exodus. As He fulfilled the Passover, He instituted Communion. From that moment on, Christians began commemorating Christ's sacrificial death not with lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread, but with broken bread and a cup of wine. Paul summarized communion in 1 Corinthians 11:26: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

The Bread: In verse 26, Jesus breaks the bread, gives it to His disciples, and says, "Take and eat; this is My body." This echoes John 6:35, 41, and 51, where He declares, "I AM the Living Bread." The broken bread represents His body. When we take a piece of that broken bread, we remember the sufferings Christ endured. Furthermore, we commemorate that just as a piece of bread belongs to the whole loaf, each one of us belongs to the body of

Christ. When all believers unite, we form one body—the church. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

The Wine: Leviticus 17:11 teaches that life is in the blood. Jesus giving the cup to His disciples symbolizes Him giving His life to them. By drinking the cup as His disciples, His life flows into us and vivifies every part of our lives. Luke 22:20 says, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”

Communion centers on this new covenant, fulfilling God’s promise in Jeremiah 31:31–34 that HE will make a new covenant and write HIS Law on the hearts of HIS people.

BIG IDEA:

- **Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover.** God’s people are no longer required to observe the Passover by sacrificing a lamb, but by placing their faith in Jesus.
- **Bread represents Christ’s body.** As we take a piece, we confess that we are part of the body of Christ, and when we unite as one, we are the body of Christ in the world.
- **Wine represents the blood of Christ, the source of life.** The cup reminds us that His life-giving blood is at work within us.

New promise. Jesus establishes the new covenant with us through His blood.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What did Paul mean when he urged believers to examine themselves before eating the bread and drinking from the cup in 1 Corinthians 11:27-28?
- **Challenge:** Examine yourself to see whether you are living as a member of Christ’s body and whether Jesus is present in every part of your life.



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