

## Week 9: October 31-November 6

**Instructions:** Follow the daily reading plan for five days each week. The reading plan will take you thru the four gospels chronologically over 28 weeks. At anytime during the week, take some time to complete the weekly bible study designed for you and the rest of the church. We challenge you each week to share what you have learned with another person and to come on a Sunday morning to Portland Community Church to share with rest of the church

Day 1 Matthew 14:1-12 Mark 6:14-29 Luke 9:7-9

Day 2 Matthew 14:13-21 Mark 6:30-44 Luke 9:10-17 John 6:1-13

Day 3 Matthew 14:22-36 Mark 6:45-56 John 6:14-21

Day 4 John 6:22-51

Day 5 John 6:52-71

The book of Matthew: “Jesus and the Religious Establishment”

Lesson 9: Matthew 11-12

### Introduction

“Are you the one who was to come?” (Matthew 11:3). It is a timeless question, one asked of Jesus while he was on earth and asked about him ever since. How one answers that question reveals their heart, their motives and their faith. Jesus handled this question straight on, understanding the need people have to know the truth as well as the hardened hearts that refuse to accept it.

In chapters 11 and 12, Jesus continues to teach and also continues to confront those who react to his work. We benefit from these chapters because we see the same reactions to him today – doubt, criticism, indifference and disbelief - from followers, from recipients of his good will and from the religious community. While what we learn will help us answer others, it will also strengthen our own faith. Ultimately, each of us must answer that question. Have you?

Pray and read Matthew 11 and 12.

What questions/comments do you have about these chapters?

What do you think are the main ideas of these chapters?

**Life Group Question: What does are world say about who Jesus is? What makes the Jesus of the bible attractive to people and what makes him unattractive?**

**Observation:**

1. What evidence did Jesus give to John’s disciples to prove that he (Jesus) was “the one who was to come” (11:3) and what were they do with this information?
2. Contrast John and Jesus’ actions to what was said about them in 11:18-19.
3. Why does Jesus praise his Father, the Lord of heaven and earth?
4. According to 11:27, who knows the Father?
5. To whom does Jesus say “come to me” and what does he offer them?
6. Use the following chart to record why the Pharisees criticized Jesus and, briefly, how he responded.

	<u>reason for criticism:</u>	<u>Jesus’ response:</u>
12:2		
12:10		
12:22,24		

7. What is the consequence for blasphemy and speaking against the Holy Spirit?
8. Who asked Jesus to show them a miraculous sign?

**Interpretation:**

1. Earlier in Matthew, we read of John the Baptist preaching about and then baptizing Jesus. Yet now John expresses doubt and sends his disciples to get confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah. Reread Jesus’ response to John’s disciples in 11:4-6 and 18-19; what do you learn from his words to address doubt about who Jesus is?
2. It was common for people to doubt Jesus while he went about his earthly ministry. While some sought confirmation (like John), others responded with criticism (11:16-19) and some with disbelief and indifference (11:20-24). To those who believed, he made an incredible offer. Reread 11:28-30. What do you think he meant by being “weary and burdened”? (See also Luke 11:46, Mark 7:3-4; Acts 13:39.)

Why is Jesus' yoke easy? (See also 1 John 5:3-5.)

3. In the beginning of chapter 12, Jesus and his disciples are accused of not keeping the Sabbath. (See Exodus 20:8-11.) How do Jesus' words in 12:3-8 & 9-13 support scripture's teaching that God gave us the Sabbath for our good and to bring glory to him?
  
4. In this passage of scripture, Jesus teaches that blasphemy (rejection of God) can be forgiven, but blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (disbelief in the spirit of God that dwells in Christ the Messiah) cannot. From what you read in Matthew 12:22-28, as well as Mark 3:28-30 and 1 Timothy 1:13-14, why is the former forgiven but not the latter?
  
5. Jesus called those asking for a miraculous sign "wicked and adulterous" (Matthew 12:39). They supported God's laws and had seen Jesus' miracles, but they still wanted more proof that Jesus was the Messiah. What does their request reveal about their faith? (See also Matthew 23:27-28; John 10:25-26, 36-38 & John 15:21-25.)

## **Application**

1. The Pharisees and religious leaders' of Jesus' day imposed great burdens on their followers, on top of the heavy demands of Mosaic law. Thankfully, we as Christians are saved by grace and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are, however, called to serve others and the body of Christ, and we can cause our own burdens by over committing. Describe your tendencies in this area. What significance do Jesus' words "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30) have for you?
  
2. In spite of all God has done to reveal himself, there are – and will always be – those who will not believe, no matter what miracles they see. What have you learned from this lesson that can help you respond to unbelief?
  
3. What is one thing you would like to do this week to apply what you have learned from these chapters?

# Week 10: November 7-November 13

Day 1 Matthew 15:1-20 Mark 7:1-23 John 7:1

Day 2 Matthew 15:21-38 Mark 7:24-8:9

Day 3 Matthew 15:39-16:12 Mark 8:10-26

Day 4 Matthew 16:13-20 Mark 8:27-30 Luke 9:18-21

Day 5 Matthew 16:21-28 Mark 8:31-9:1 Luke 9:22-27

## The book of Matthew: “The Amazing Power of God’s Word”

### Lesson 10: Matthew 13:1-23

#### Introduction:

Up to this point, Jesus had delivered some of his teaching through parables. From here on, most of his teaching is in this form. The word parable is from the Greek word ‘parabole’ which means ‘a placing beside.’ It is an illustration or comparison used to communicate truth. Jesus’ parables included hidden meanings that would require explanation or be understood only by those with willing hearts. Even when Jesus explained a parable, its meaning would not be understood by nonbelievers.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus taught his disciples an important truth about how the state of one’s heart affects his ability to believe God’s word. These words were written also for us, and our own faith is strengthened as we seek to understand the truth of his message. Let us now read and have Jesus reveal the mystery of this parable and see our hearts change by the power of his words.

Pray and read Matthew 13:1-23

What questions/comments do you have about this passage?

What do you think is the main idea of this scripture?

**Life Group Question: What has your success been at farming or gardening? What tips would you give to someone who wants to grow a successful garden?**

#### Observation:

1. List the four places the farmer’s seed fell and what happened to it.
2. What is the contrast between “whoever has” and “whoever does not have”?
3. Why does Jesus speak to people in parables?

4. For what reasons are Jesus' disciples blessed?
5. Use the chart to describe the results when people hear/receive "the message of the kingdom," depending on where the seed fell (verses 18-23).

where the seed fell

result

along the path

on rocky places

among the thorns

on good soil

### **Interpretation:**

1. From your reading of this passage, who or what do you think each of the following represents?
  - the sower
  - the seed
  - the message of the kingdom of heaven
  - the evil one

Now read Matthew 13:37 (this is a different parable but also involves a sower), Luke 8:11-12 and Ephesians 3:2-5 and add any relevant information to your answers.

2. From Jesus' telling of the parable, it is clear that while people will see and hear him, not all will understand and believe his message. In fact, he says, people who do not hear and will not see have "calloused" hearts.
  - a. What enables some to hear and understand? (See also Matthew 11:25; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12; and 1 John 2:20, 27.)
  - b. What causes some hearts to become hardened? (See also Romans 1:20-24, 28 and 1 Corinthians 2:14.)
  - c. Given the context of this parable, why do you think Jesus wants us to know this?

3. When Jesus explained this parable to his disciples (verses 18-23), he described the differences in how people hear, understand and accept his message. How would you describe the condition of the hearts of these four types of people? (See also 2 Corinthians 4:4 & 7:10; 1 John 2:15-16 and Romans 10:9-10.)
4. Jesus assured his disciples that the lives of believers would be marked by change - that is, they would bear fruit. Earlier in Matthew 7:20, we read that "by their fruit you will recognize them." Read 2 Corinthians 6:4-10, Galatians 5:22-24 and Philippians 1:11, and describe what some of this fruit is.

How do believers encourage continued growth of these fruits? (See also Colossians 3:2, 8-10 & 15-25.)

### **Application**

1. Think back on your walk and relationship with God in terms of this parable. Describe the condition of your heart when you first heard the message of salvation, as well as any changes you have witnessed in your heart as time has passed.

Now write down the names of 1 or 2 people you know who have not accepted this message and describe the type of soil the seed is falling on. What have you learned that can help or encourage you as you witness to them about the kingdom of God?

2. As believers, we are still affected by sin and sometimes struggle to bear all the fruit that God promises. Look over your answer to Interpretation 4; in what area(s) do you think you are falling short of God's desire for you? Why do you think that is and what can you do to encourage his word to take greater hold of your heart?
3. What is one thing you can do this week to apply what you have learned in this passage of scripture?

# Week 11: November 14-20

Day 1 Matthew 17:1-13 Mark 9:2-13 Luke 9:28-36  
Day 2 Matthew 17:14-20 Mark 9:14-29 Luke 9:37-43  
Day 3 Matthew 17:22-18:5 Mark 9:30-37 Luke 9:43-48  
Day 4 Matthew 18:6-14 Mark 9:38-50 Luke 9:49-50  
Day 5 Matthew 18:15-35

## The Book of Matthew: “So Tiny Yet So Huge”

### Lesson 11: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46

#### **Introduction:**

During his ministry, Jesus performed miracles such as healing the sick and raising the dead to life. While those actions no doubt astounded those directly affected by them, there was not an immediate, worldwide impact. No, the ministry Jesus was sent to do started off with a small group of people in a small community with no way to spread the news except by one person to another on foot. That a worldwide impact did occur is astounding, given how it all started. Although the parables we will examine in this lesson are short, they offer great depth of insight into how a ministry that started so small could have such a huge impact. As followers of Christ, we can be encouraged in knowing that one believer at a time, we too, can make a difference. We can impact the world for him and that is nothing short of a miracle itself.

Pray and read Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46

What questions/comments do you have about these passages?

What do you think is the main point of this scripture?

**Life Group Question: What do you think Heaven will be like? What is the difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and Heaven itself?**

#### **Observation:**

1. What are the comparisons made in each of the four parables?

verse 31:

verse: 33:

verse: 44:

verse 45:

2. How is the mustard seed described and what happens when it grows?
3. What is the result of the yeast being mixed with the flour?
4. Why is the man joyful in verse 44?
5. What type of pearl did the merchant find?
6. Compare the response of the man who found the hidden treasure with that of the man who found the valuable pearl.

### **Interpretation:**

1. All four parables we read in this section have to do with “the kingdom of heaven.” In fact, of the 23 parables Jesus tells in the book of Matthew, 12 are on this topic. Since repetition indicates emphasis, we can assume Jesus wanted his disciples to know what the kingdom was like. From what you have learned, what is the kingdom of heaven to which Jesus refers? (See also Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 3:2; and John 3:3-5.)

Why do you think this is such an important topic?

Note: The mustard seed is not the smallest of all plant seeds, a fact that some have used to discredit the accuracy of the Bible. However, Jesus was speaking to the people of Palestine and was comparing seeds of plants grown there. The mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds in that area at that time.

2. In the parable of the mustard seed, the tiny seed produces a tree large enough to support birds that “perch in its branches.” Given that Jesus’ earthly ministry started with 12 uneducated, ordinary and often-fearful men that faced great opposition and persecution, what do you think is the significance of this illustration? (See also Psalm 72:8 & 104:12; and Ezekiel 17:23.)

3. Yeast, or leaven, works by being kneaded into dough and given time to spread. The result is a whole batch of raised dough that is usually cooked to become bread. What is Jesus teaching his in the parable of the yeast about how the body of Christ can positively impact society? (See also John 16:13-14 & 17:14-18; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; and 1 John 2:15-17.)
  
4. The men in the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl did not acquire their treasures just by finding them. They both made decisions to willingly give up everything they had and buy them. What is Jesus teaching about becoming a follower of his and gaining entry into the kingdom of God? (See also John 3:15; Romans 8:16-17 & 9:6-8; and Galatians 3:26-29.)

### **Application:**

1. One of the lessons we learn from the parable of the yeast is that small things can indeed have a positive influence in a big way. Most people want to make a difference but often think they don't have much to offer, which is just the mindset Jesus tries to counter with this message. In what ways are you (or could you) act as yeast in service to God. What kind of impact do you see this service having for his kingdom?

Considering that your service to God has eternal implications, how does this compare to the other areas in which you spend your time?

2. The decision to give something up is not always easy; actually doing it can be even harder. Thankfully, because of the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts and the encouragement we find as we draw closer to God, it is possible. Have you given up everything to follow Him? What do you have you had a hard time giving up and why?
  
3. What is one thing you could do this week do apply what you have learned from this lesson?

# Bonus Thanksgiving week or week after Christmas

Day 1 Matthew 8:19-22 Luke 9:51-62 John 7:2-10

Day 2 John 7:11-52

Day 3 John 7:53-8:20

Day 4 John 8:21-59

Day 5 John 9:1-41

The book of Matthew: “The Meal that Kept on Giving”

Lesson 12: Matthew 14 & 15

## **Introduction:**

As we study Jesus in the book of Matthew, we see how people responded to him and how he influenced their faith in God. The passages in these two chapters are particularly insightful in this regard because they give us a look at a wide variety of people and their faiths – from some with an absolute disregard for God to others with total faith and humility. We can see their struggles, their hearts and the results of actions driven by their faith. The Lord offers more to us than we can fathom, yet it is up to us to respond in faith and let him work in our lives. Hopefully, each of us will be strengthened in our faith as we study this text. He will continue to give and we can continue to grow.

Pray and read Matthew 14 & 15.

What questions/comments do you have about these chapters?

What do you think is the main idea of each chapter?

**Life Group Question: Describe the biggest miracle that you have witnessed in your life or a close relative of friend? How did that change your life?**

## **Observation:**

1. Why had Herod put John in prison?
2. Under what circumstances was John killed?
3. Compare the events of the feeding of the 5000 and the feeding of the 4000 in the chart below.

	<u>feeding of 5000</u>	<u>feeding of 4000</u>
where Jesus was	14:13	15:29
who followed him	14:13	15:30
what happened	14:14	15:31
Jesus' feeling toward the people	14:14	15:32
disciples' concern	14:15	15:33
available food	14:17	15:34
Jesus' directions and actions	14:18-19	15:35-36

Note: The numbers 4000 and 5000 in these passages took into account only the men in attendance. With women and children, the number of people actually fed was likely closer to 20,000-25,000, respectively.

4. What was Peter's request as Jesus walked on the water toward him?
  
5. In regards to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law:
  - a. What did they question Jesus about?
  - b. Why did Jesus say that they nullified "the word of God?"
  - c. Why did Jesus call them hypocrites?
  
6. Describe how and why the Canaanite woman approached Jesus.
  
7. How did Jesus describe this woman's faith?

### **Interpretation:**

1. The genuineness and strength of a person's faith is reflected in their words and actions. From what you read in these chapters, how would you describe the faith of each of the following: (accompanying scriptures are from Matthew unless otherwise noted)
  - Herod (14:1-11)
  - John the Baptist (14:13-21 & Luke 15:29-38)

- the disciples (14:13-21, 15:29-38)
- Peter (14:25-31)
- Pharisees and teachers of the law (15:1-9)
- the Canaanite woman (15:21-28)

Note: The Canaanite woman was Greek and was “born in Syrian Phoenicia” (Mark 7:26). She most likely was a follower of pagan gods before turning to Jesus.

2. In spite of the fact that he had just learned of John the Baptist’s gruesome death, Jesus’ heart was filled with compassion toward the needy and sick people who had followed him. Exhaustion and grief could not keep him from reaching out and meeting their needs. What do you think was at the root of his compassion for these people? (See also Matthew 9:36; John 3:16 & 2 Peter 3:9.)
  
3. God, the one who created the universe in 6 days, is certainly able to satisfy man’s hunger without anyone’s help. Yet as we read here, Jesus twice worked with his disciples to feed multitudes of people in a miraculous way. What can we learn from these accounts about working with God to serve others? (See also 2 Corinthians 9:6-11; Philippians 2:3-4 & 1 John 2:3-6.)

Note: After being fed, Matthew notes that the people were “satisfied,” or filled. This comes from the Greek word ‘chortazo’ and is also used to describe animals when they are completely full and wanted nothing more from the feed trough. It is the same word used by Jesus in Matthew 5:6 when he says “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

4. Driven by his convictions, John the Baptist’s boldness in speaking God’s truth and his direct confrontation of Herod’s sin cost him his life. This is in quite a contrast to the Pharisees and teachers of the law who were impressed by their own positions and who saw their man-made traditions as greater in importance than God’s word. Reread Matthew 15:1-20. Why do you think Jesus had such harsh words for them? (See also 1 Timothy 6:20-21 & 2 John 8-11.)

### **Application:**

1. John the Baptist was not, using the modern phrase, ‘politically correct.’ He spoke truth without trying to appear tolerant or respectful of others’ individual belief systems. God’s truth was his bottom line, unlike the Pharisees and other teachers of the law. In our culture, many ideas compete with God’s word to be called truth. Think about where you spend a lot of your time: school, work, with friends, sports fields

etc. How does the atmosphere there encourage or hinder you in your effort to live according to God's word? In what areas do you find it hard to stay away from the influences of the world and what have you learned from scripture that can strengthen your focus on God's truth?

2. In spite of all the miracles they had seen Jesus perform, when it came time to find food for many hungry people, it did not occur to the disciples to ask him to provide. Since they were Jews, they knew God had provided manna from heaven for their forefathers when they came out of Egypt, (Exodus 16:1-7). Even so, they did not ask, but instead complained that there just was not enough. What in your life are you facing (big or small) that you have not yet asked God for help with? Describe the situation and pray for His provision. Then find a passage in scripture to encourage you to look to him first. (If you have trouble finding one, you may want to use Psalm 23:1, Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 6:31-33 or Philippians 4:19.)
  
2. What is one thing you can do this week to apply what you learned in these two chapters?

# Week 13: November 21- November 27

Day 1 John 10:1-21

Day 2 Luke 10:1-24

Day 3 Luke 10:25-11:13

Day 4 Luke 11:14-54

Day 5 Luke 12:1-34

The book of Matthew: “Who Do You Think Jesus Is?”

## Lesson 13: Matthew 16 & 17

### Introduction:

If you were to stand in a mall and ask passersby “Who is Jesus?” you would get answers ranging from ‘he is the Son of God’ to ‘he was a wise man’ and everything in between. Some may argue, some may scoff and some may not even stop to answer the question. Regardless of how important it may seem right now, however, all will need to answer it eventually and “give an account of himself to God,” (Romans 14:11).

As we go deeper into the text, Jesus reveals more and more of himself to the disciples. We know the end of the story, but they are in the thick of it and are trying to comprehend that the Son of Man is with them. Try and put yourselves in their shoes as you read. As he teaches and probes the disciples, let him teach and probe you. Try and answer the questions he puts forth and then savor his words. In the end, answer the question yourself: Who is Jesus?

Pray and read Matthew 16 and 17.

What questions/comments do you have about these chapters?

What do you think is the main idea of each chapter?

**Life Group Question: What was the biggest question that you had about Jesus/God before you came to faith in Christ? Who in this passages do you most identify with and why??**

### Observation:

1. Who came to Jesus and tested him?
2. What did the disciples still not understand according to 16:9-11?

3. What did Jesus tell the disciples to be on their guard about?
4. Jesus asked the disciples who people were saying he was.
  - a. Who did some say Jesus was?
  - b. Who did Simon Peter say Jesus was and how did he know that?
5. What did Jesus warn his disciples about in 16:20?
6. List the things Jesus began to explain to his disciples.
7. Who knelt before Jesus and why? (17:14)
8. Why did Jesus tell the disciples they had been unable to heal the man's son?

### **Interpretation:**

1. When Jesus warned the disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadduces, he emphatically stated that he was not talking about actual bread and yeast. Given the context of their conversation (they had just seen Jesus multiply small amounts of bread to feed thousands of people), what is he trying to get them to understand? Why does he use yeast to describe the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadduces? (See also Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; & Luke 12:1.)

Note: The Pharisee and Sadduces were both sects of the Jewish faith. Pharisees were known for being very legalistic and putting their own traditions above the laws of God. Sadduces denied anything supernatural and got their authority from the first five books of the Old Testament.

2. Jesus asked Peter point blank "...who do you say that I am?" Because Jesus was fully God while on earth, he knew what was in a man's heart; he knew how Peter would answer. Why, then, do you think Jesus asked that question? What is the significance of Peter's response? (See also Luke 12:8; John 12:42-43; & Romans 10:9-10).
3. After talking to the disciples about himself and the church, Jesus told them not to tell people that he was Christ, the Messiah. He had previously told others not to reveal his identity or works, perhaps to keep crowds away or to discourage people from seeing him as a political or military leader.

- a. Given what he was teaching the disciples here and what he would tell them soon after (Matthew 16:21-28), why do you think Jesus told them “not to tell anyone that he was the Christ” now?
  - b. What does this teach you about God’s timing in carrying out his plans? (See also Isaiah 55:8; Proverbs 3:5; & Micah 4:12.)
4. Although Jesus had earlier sent out his disciples with the abilities to “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers [and] cast out demons,” (Matthew 10:8), they encountered a man whose son they were not able to heal. What do you learn from Jesus’ response (Matthew 17:20), and scripture in general, about your ability to accomplish what God sets before you? (See also Psalms 37:4; John 3:21-23& 5:14; Philippians 4:13; and James 4:3.)

**Application:**

1. When Jesus asked Peter “...who do you say that I am?” Peter answered without hesitation or doubt. This is an example for us since we, too, must answer the same question. If someone approached you at school, work or the gym and asked who Jesus is, how would you answer?

Do Jesus’ words, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven,” (Matthew 10:32-33) have any affect on your response?

2. We know that God will always give us the means to accomplish what he wants. Taking this into account, examine your own faith in light of something God has asked you to do – at work, in a church ministry, at school, for your family, etc. Are you making sufficient progress or would Jesus say you are not “because you have so little faith”? How do you see your faith affecting this situation?
3. What is one thing you can do this week to apply what you learned from these chapters of scripture?

# Week 14: November 28- December 4<sup>th</sup>

Day 1 Luke 12:35-59

Day 2 Luke 13:1-21

Day 3 Luke 13:22-35 John 10:22-42

Day 4 Luke 14:1-35

Day 5 Luke 15:1-32

The book of Matthew: “How to Make it in the Real World”

Lesson 14: Matthew 13:24-30 & 13:36-43

## Introduction:

Throughout the Bible, God teaches us his ways. He created us and knows what is best for each one of us; his guidance leads us toward the fullness of life he intends. The challenge, of course, is to stay in his will while living amongst evil. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts when we accept God’s gift of salvation, but we continue to live out our lives in a world of sin. In the parable we will study in this passage, Jesus makes it clear that he is aware of this challenge. Good and evil live side by side and it will continue this way until the end of time. Our hope comes from knowing that God is in control and aware of our struggles. The insight we will gain from this passage should encourage us to keep the faith and face the challenges we live with every day.

Pray and read Matthew 13:24-30 & 13:36-43.

What questions/comments do you have about these passages?

What do you think is the main point of this text?

**Life Group Question: Describe your battle with weeds in your yard? Are you winning? What is the evil that exists around you? Can you do anything about it?**

## Observation:

1. What is the kingdom of heaven compared to in this passage?
2. Who are the main characters in this parable and who do they represent?
3. What do the field and the harvest represent?

4. When did the weeds appear?
5. Why were the servants told not to pull the weeds out and what were they told to do with them instead?
6. Describe what would ultimately happen to the “sons of the evil one” (i.e., the weeds).
7. What is the fate of the righteous or the good seed?

### **Interpretation:**

1. The weeds were sown among the wheat but were not recognized until the wheat had sprouted. They existed next to each other for some time before anyone noticed. How is this analogous to believers living next to evil? What does scripture teach about how evil may go unnoticed? (See also Psalms 55:21; Proverbs 5:3-4; Romans 16:17-18; and 2 Corinthians 11:3.)

Note: Weeds are also known as ‘tares’, which is from the Greek word ‘zizanion’. This is a type of darnel weed that looks a lot like wheat until the wheat becomes ripe and develops grain. It would be hard to tell one from the other early in the growing cycle.

2. The servants were not to pull up the weeds because the wheat that was intertwined with it might be taken up with it. In other words, the servants were not to judge what to pull out. What is Jesus teaching here about judging others? What is the difference between being a judge (and pronouncing judgment) and using our God-given brains to discern and make judgments? (See also Matthew 7:1-5; John 3:17-18 & 8:14-16; and Philippians 1:9-11.)
3. It is clear from this passage that God will – “at the end of the age” – gather his people and bring judgment on what is evil. From what Jesus describes here, along with other relevant Scripture, what can we conclude about the fate of
  - a. those who do not know God? (See also Matthew 25:41; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; and 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9.)

- b. those who have trusted Jesus for their salvation? (See also Matthew 24:30-31; Philippians 3:20-21; and Revelation 21:1-4.)

### **Application:**

1. Until the Lord comes and separates the wheat from the weeds, believers will live with and around nonbelievers. They are our neighbors, classmates, co-workers, friends and family; indeed, we were all weeds at one point. Who are some of the 'weeds' in your life right now? Describe the challenges some of them present as you strive to live according to God's word. What do you think God is trying to teach you from this lesson about living around them?
  
2. Because our culture values tolerance, Christians are often criticized for making a judgment about whether something is right or wrong. We are, however, to "preserve sound judgment and discernment" (Proverbs 3:21) and "never tire of doing what is right," (2 Thessalonians 3:13.) Think about a particular action or behavior that you know is wrong, being done by someone you know. Describe how you could confront their actions according to God's word without wrongly judging them.
  
3. Think of one thing you could do this week to apply what you have learned in this passage.

# Week 15: December 5- December 11

Day 1 Luke 16:1 - 17:10

Day 2 John 11:1-44

Day 3 John 11:45-54

Day 4 Luke 17:11-37

Day 5 Matthew 19:1-12 Mark 10:1-12 Luke 18:1-14

The book of Matthew: “The Key to Becoming Gracious”

Lesson 15: Matthew 18:21-35

## Introduction:

Grace is getting what one does not deserve. Sin creates a barrier between man and God, but by grace, he has forgiven us; if we accept this gift, we can have fellowship with him for eternity. The more we recognize how we have sinned and continue to fall short, the more we come to appreciate his forgiveness; “for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus,” (Romans 3:23-24).

Part of our growth as Christians comes as the Holy Spirit works in us to change our hearts. Our ability to extend grace to others through forgiveness can (and should) come through this change. In this passage, Jesus teaches about forgiveness through the parable of the unmerciful servant. It is a convicting message, illustrating the command to “forgive as the Lord forgave you,” (Colossians 3:13). Whether you are young or old, a long-time believer or new to the faith, you will confront situations that call for forgiveness. It is often hard to extend, and sometimes even hard to accept. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear that forgiveness should only be extended when, and if, deserved. But that is not what Jesus teaches. His ways baffled the religious leaders of his time, and continue to stand out as radical today. If we want to follow Jesus, however, we will take his teaching to heart and learn to forgive as he has forgiven us.

Pray and read Matthew 18:21-35.

What questions/comments do you have about this passage?

What do you think is the main idea of this passage?

**Life Group Question: Has anyone ever owed you money and never paid it back? How did you feel about that? Have you owed money to someone and never paid it back?**

## Observation:

1. How many times does Jesus tell Peter he is to forgive his brother?

2. To what is the kingdom of heaven compared?
3. How much did the man owe the king and what resulted from his not being able to pay?

Note: The Greek word ‘murias’ (from which we get our word myriad) means literally ten thousand, but was also used to represent an amount that was incalculable. A debt of ten thousand talents was one that would be impossible to repay.

4. How did the king respond to the man’s begging?
5. Describe the encounter the servant had with one of his fellow servants.
6. Why does the master call his servant wicked?
7. Who did the master turn the servant over to and why?
8. What does Jesus say that this parable illustrates?

### **Interpretation:**

1. This passage starts with Peter questioning Jesus about how much a person is to forgive his brother. Given other biblical teaching about forgiveness and knowing that scripture does not contradict itself, is Jesus’ answer to Peter here to be taken literally? What is Jesus teaching us about the amount of forgiveness we are to extend to others? (See also Luke 17:3-4; Romans 5:20-21; and Ephesians 4:32.)
2. The servant owed the king a debt he could not repay. His punishment, losing everything, was cancelled by the king in a gesture of undeserved grace. How does this part of the parable represent who we are and what we have received from God? (See also Psalms 50:1-4; Romans 3:22-24 & 6:23.)
3. Even though his master forgave the servant’s debt, the servant did not forgive a debt owed to him by another. Unfortunately, this is more the norm – forgiveness does not come naturally to us. Even so, as believers in Christ, we are to forgive and not just when we feel like it. What can we learn from scripture about how to forgive in spite of our inclination not to? (See also Psalms 50:10-12; Romans 8:5-9; John 14:23-26; and Ephesians 4:32.)

“Forgiveness reflects the highest human virtue, because it so clearly reflects the character of God...It is central to the heart of God to forgive, and only the Christian who radiates forgiveness radiates true godliness.” John MacArthur

4. When the master hears of his servant’s lack of mercy, he responds by punishing the servant. The servant was not doing the will of the master so discipline was deemed necessary to (presumably) change the servant’s heart. Is this a contradiction of the teaching of forgiveness? How are we to look at discipline in light of the call to forgive? (See also Hebrews 12:5-11.)

### **Application:**

1. Jesus did the unthinkable on the cross: he asked for forgiveness for those putting him to death. His love for all men was so deep, he could be concerned for these souls while suffering his own torture. Describe an extraordinary example of forgiveness you know of or have experienced. What was the motivation behind this act and how has it encouraged you to be more forgiving?
2. Nothing in scripture suggests there are sins we do not have to forgive even if committed against us. Not the intentional death of a loved one, not a crime, not a vicious lie spread all over school, work, or Facebook. Write a list of things you have difficulty forgiving or think you could never forgive. What verse or part of this lesson could you hold up to as reminders of God’s incredible forgiveness of you and his will for you to forgive others?
3. What is one thing you could do this week to apply what you have learned in this lesson?

# Week 16: December 12- December 18

Day 1 Matthew 19:13-15 Mark 10:13-16 Luke 18:15-17

Day 2 Matthew 19:16-23 Mark 10:17-24 Luke 18:18-24

Day 3 Matthew 19:24-20:16 Mark 10:25-31 Luke 18:25-30

Day 4 Matthew 20:17-28 Mark 10:32-45 Luke 18:31-34

Day 5 Matthew 20:29-34 Mark 10:46-52 Luke 18:35-43

The book of Matthew: “How to build a great marriage”

Lesson 16: chapter 19

## Introduction:

Throughout scripture, Jesus teaches on topics that affect every aspect of our lives. In this passage, he answers questions about marriage and divorce and then puts material possessions in an eternal perspective. He does not tell people what they want to hear; he pronounces the truth and forces people to look at their actions in light of God’s word. God wants all people to come to a saving knowledge of him and Jesus undoubtedly knew that had he softened his message, people would have been more likely to follow him. But he also knew that that approach would keep people from experiencing the fullness of life as he intended. He wants us to have great marriages and great lives. Our ways, without God, do not bring the richness and abundant life he offers. It is up to each of us to decide if we will follow him and live according to his plan.

Pray and read Matthew chapter 19.

What questions/comments do you have about this chapter?

What do you think is/are the main idea(s) of this chapter?

**Life Group Question: What is the key to a happy and fulfilling marriage? Who do you know that has one?**

## Observation:

1. Why did the Pharisees come to Jesus and what did they ask him?
2. What did the Creator intend for marriage from the beginning? (Matthew 19:4-6, 9)
3. For what reason did Moses say divorce was permitted?

4. Who was brought to Jesus and how did he respond to them?
5. What did Jesus say the man had to do to get eternal life and how did the man respond?
6. What is impossible for man but possible with God?
7. For what reason did Peter say the disciples left everything?

### **Interpretation:**

1. In responding to the Pharisees, Jesus begins by going back to creation and God's original plan for marriage. (See Genesis 2:24.) He also explains what he wants for the two when they become one flesh. From what Jesus teaches here, along with other instruction from scripture, describe what God intended for marriage. (See also 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, 10-11; 2 Corinthians 7:14-16; Ephesians 5:22-33.)

Note: The Pharisees generally did not adhere to God's teaching on divorce. They interpreted God's laws liberally and in fact, supported easy divorces. They were known to divorce their own wives often and for trivial reasons.

2. When Jesus taught that divorce was wrong, the Pharisees tried to reveal a contradiction in his teaching by going back to the law given to their people by Moses. According to that, they said, a man could divorce his wife. (Actually, the law to which they referred did not sanction divorce, but rather gave instructions for remarriage; see Deuteronomy 24:1-4.) Other than trying to trip Jesus up, what do you think the Pharisees hoped to gain from this exchange?

Note: Through his word, God gives people two legitimate reasons for divorce. One, mentioned here, is adultery. The other is a nonbeliever leaving a believing spouse, (1 Corinthians 7:15). God does not say divorce is a must in these situations, just that it is acceptable. He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) because of the damage and pain that occur when a bond that was not meant to be broken is severed. Divorce is not unforgivable, however, and does not cause God to love his people any less.

3. In this chapter, sandwiched between his teaching on divorce and gaining eternal life, is a short account of children coming to Jesus. It is not directly connected to the other topics of his teaching, yet Matthew deemed it important enough to insert here. What do you learn from the statement “the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these [children]?” (See also Matthew 18:1-6.)

Why do you think Matthew thought this teaching was so important?

4. The rich young man was drawn to Jesus and obviously had a desire for eternal life. We know from scripture that to receive eternal life, a person must acknowledge his sinfulness, recognize that Jesus atoned for these sins through His death and resurrection, and be willing to give his life up to Jesus. What do the young man’s responses here reveal about his willingness to accept these terms? (See also Romans 3:10, 20 & 10:9-10 and John 12:25-26.)

Is Jesus teaching here that people must give up all their material possessions in order to be saved? Read 1 John 3:16-18, Matthew 6:19-21,24 & 25:21, and Luke 12:16-21 and explain what you learn about the relationship between wealth and salvation.

### **Application:**

1. God created marriage as the intended model for all people of all times. How does our culture (or the culture in which you grew up) support or work against God’s intentions as stated in Matthew 19:4-6?

Do you think God’s model for marriage should be expected of nonbelievers? How do you, as a follower of Christ, respond to those who do not follow this model?

2. The rich young man was not able to loosen his grasp on his material possessions. While these things are not inherently evil, they can interfere with our relationship with Christ. We can become so comfortable with, or enamored or distracted by them that it becomes harder and harder to give our heart fully to Him. Instead, we should have a willing heart to use them for His glory and give them up in obedience to His call. What do you possess that you would have a hard

time giving up if called and why do you think this is? How has your perspective on possessions been changed by the study of Matthew or by your relationship with Christ?

3. What is one thing you can do this week to apply what you have learned in this lesson?

# Week 17: December 19- December 25

Day 1 Luke 19:1-28 Matthew 21:12-13,18-19 Mark 11:12-18 Luke 19:45-48

Day 2 Matthew 21:1-11,14-17 Mark 11:1-11 Luke 19:29-44 John 11:55-12:1,9-19

Day 3 Matthew 21:12-13,18-19, Mark 11:12-18, Luke 19:45-49

Day 4 John 12:20-50

Day 5 Matthew 21:20-22 Mark 11:19-25 Luke 21:37-38

The book of Matthew: “The baby That Troubled the World”

## Lesson 17: Matthew chapters 1-2

### Introduction

The birth of a child is almost always a joyous, eagerly anticipated event. We tell our own stories and listen to those of others. It is fitting that Matthew begins his gospel with such a story since Jesus did come to earth as a human being and indeed, started his life here as a baby. We cannot relate personally to his deity but as we watch the beginning of his life unfold, we can picture him as human like us. In the gospel of John (1:14) we read, “The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” and as we study, the words of Matthew – and Jesus himself - come alive.

What we are also treated to here is the opportunity to witness the reactions to those who knew of Jesus’ birth. As we read Matthew’s account, we can imagine the looks on the various faces and the emotions of all who heard. What they were thinking and why? How did they know what was happening? Finally, after we take it all in, we can ask – what is my response to the baby born in the manger?

Pray and read Matthew, chapters 1 and 2.

What questions/comments do you have about these chapters?

What do you think are the main ideas of chapters 1 and 2?

**Life Group Question: What is the nicest gift that anyone has ever given to you? How does the Christmas story have impact in the way you relate to people around you?**

### Observation

1. In the genealogical record in 1:1-17, the lineage from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ is recorded.
  - a. Who is the last name in the list before Jesus?
  - b. Where is David in this record and how is he described?

Note:

The phrase “son of” as in 1:1 can mean a literal son or a descendent of, like a grandson, etc.

2. Who are the main characters in 1:17-25?
3. What was Joseph's initial reaction to Mary's pregnancy? What made him change his mind and what actions did he take instead?
4. Where and when was Jesus born?
5. How did the following people react to the news of the birth of Jesus?
  - a. magi
  - b. King Herod and all Jerusalem
  - c. chief priests and teachers of the law
6. Briefly recount the events in 2:13-23.

Note:  
There were many Herods in biblical times. This King Herod, known as Herod the Great, lived from 37-4BC.

## Interpretation

1. David was anointed by God to be king of Israel after Saul in 1025BC. Why do you think it was important for Matthew to show Jesus' relation to David? (see 2 Samuel 7:4-5, 13-17 and John 18:37)
2. According to Mosaic law, Joseph could have had Mary punished by death after learning of her pregnancy. (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). What do his actions, as described in 1:18-25), reveal about his heart and his relationship with God?
3. Reread Matthew 2:1-11 and then read Luke 2:8-16. What do you learn from scripture to explain what prompted some to go see the baby Jesus and why others did not?

For extra insight:

In 1:22-23, Matthew references a prophet the Lord had spoken through hundreds of years earlier. The prophet Isaiah told King Ahaz (a descendant of King David's) that God would deliver Israel from their enemies in spite of the king's refusal to follow him. (See Isaiah 7:14) Why do you think Matthew included this in his gospel?

## Application

1. The responses to Jesus' birth as noted in observation 5 are basically the same ones we see toward him today: hostility, matter-of-fact acknowledgment, and devotion and worship. What was your initial response when you first learned about Jesus and what is it now?

How does knowing the circumstances of his birth affect your relationship to him on a day-to day basis?

2. Other than the gospel accounts of Jesus' birth and first years, there is no other information in scripture about Joseph. We do know, however, that God chose him to be Jesus' earthly father and that no role given us by our creator is insignificant. What do you learn from Joseph that you can use as a father, husband and/or servant?
3. What is one thing you can do this week to apply what you learned from the scripture studied here?