



GREATER THINGS

Growing
As A Disciple

Ron Pickell

Leader's Guide

Greater Things – Leader’s Guide

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Journey...

is about the life God has in mind for all of us — the life you have always wanted.

In Jane Austen's famous *Mansfield Park*, Tom, the oldest son of the Bertram family, once asks his father—a cruel, heartless slave trader—for a nobler mission. "Give me a noble mission, father," Tom cried. He wanted something more noble than the slave trade.

Tom's request is the cry of the human heart: for a life purpose that measures up to the magnificent beings we were created and meant to be. The life and mission that Jesus calls us to—in whatever service or use of our talents that God has blessed us with—is this nobler mission. It is the call of discipleship. It is the call of Jesus.

Who was Jesus? What was His mission? What can Jesus teach us about ourselves, life's meaning, and our relationships with others? Invitation, the first lesson in the *Journey* series, is an introduction to the life and mission of Jesus. *Greater Things* builds on it by exploring the call of discipleship. Through the voice of Matthew—one of Jesus' closest followers—we are going to learn, experience, and practice the rhythms of discipleship with Jesus.

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Breaking Down *Journey*

Journey was created for larger weekly on or off campus meetings in a teaching format and small group discussion. The beginning story or illustration introduces the topic of study.



- **Journey Together** helps ease participants into the topic through ice-breaker related questions.



- **Road Map** is the main passage for discussion followed by questions that help draw out the topic. If you are leading *Journey*, feel free to depart from these as needed and come up with your own questions, while staying on track with the main direction of the study laid out in the leader's guide.



- **My Story** has been prepared as a continuation of the larger group meetings for smaller groups that meet during the week to check in with one another and reflect on how God is using *Journey* in their daily life. We recommend these groups be flexible in terms of location and meeting time. Also, the amount of questions are limited in the My Story section, allowing for more personal interactions and life application.



- **Back Story** is a helpful guide for those leading out in the *Journey* Series and is only included in the leader's book.

Getting the most out of *Journey*

What You're Going to Need for *Greater Things*:

- Good soil—an open and receptive heart
- Willingness to work the soil—determination and diligence
- Hunger and thirst—a desire for God

The Five S's of Hearing and Discerning God's Voice

- **Seek:** Pray for God to open up each week's Bible passage for you. Is there a promise for you to claim, a sin to confess, words for you to follow, or an insight to share?
- **Soak:** Read the passage each day and write down any observations, thoughts, questions, connections, or anything God speaks to you about what you have read.

- **Seal:** Seal God's word to you deep within your heart by taking some time to meditate on whatever the most important truth to you was this week. Ask God to open the deeper recesses of your heart to teach you what you need most in your life this week.
- **Script:** Journal or write (even if only a few lines) noting the ways that God spoke to you during your reading, your meditation, or the group's time together. This will help you keep better track of God's voice and the way He is speaking through scripture.
- **Share:** Share with someone what you are learning from your time with God during Journey. As you share what you are learning, it will help drive God's word home to you even more and you will notice how God will use what He has revealed to you to bless others.

Journey Covenant

I want to grow in my understanding of Jesus and the life he has for me. I want to participate in Journey to enhance my own relationship with God this year. I will commit to doing the weekly assignments and life group meetings.

Signature _____

My best times of availability are

Morning: _____

Evening: _____

Email address _____

Cell Phone _____

More about Greater Things

Becoming like Jesus? There is no greater privilege or accomplishment in discipleship than to become like one's teacher. But Jesus actually inspires and promises to help us do even greater things in Him through His name. Greater than the works of Jesus? That may seem impossible and even blasphemous, but that is what Jesus promised: a discipleship that would continue His mission from one disciple to the next—Jesus living on and magnifying His efforts in all those who would pick up their cross and follow Him. Jesus spurred His disciples on with these words: "You will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

What kinds of greater things can we do through Jesus? How open was Jesus' mission? In what way was the kingdom of God to continue and advance after He was gone? What authority did Jesus extend to His followers that would enable them to continue what He had started? How were His disciples expected to accomplish even more in Jesus' name? What was the strategy? What resources was He providing? How could they be expected to do even greater things than Jesus with less spiritual power and divine resource than Him?

This is what we are going to explore together over the next few weeks. We want to dig deep into the question of what it means to become like Jesus so that Jesus' life and mission lives on in us—so that Christ is literally present on earth as a living body in the lives of those who call Him Lord.

Mathew, one of Jesus' earliest followers, was so compelled by Jesus' vision that he left his very lucrative business of tax collecting to become a follower of Jesus. In Matthew's account, we find not only a narrative of Jesus' life and ministry, but an actual reference to Jesus' pattern of discipleship and the competencies expected of His followers. In other words, what we learn from Matthew is how Jesus disciplined him, what Jesus expected a disciple to learn, and how Jesus wanted His disciples to incorporate into their lives what they learned from Him as their rabbi.

From the very beginning of Mathew's introduction about Jesus, we discover that Mathew's gospel is about Jesus, Mathew, the disciples, and ultimately us. Jesus is the start of a new people (Abraham) and a new kingdom (David) that will ultimately lead us out of our bondage of sin (Babylon). Jesus is Son of Abraham, the Son of David, and our Deliverer (Matthew 1).

Matthew's gospel centers around five of Jesus' most important speeches, which give us the framework for what discipleship with Him is about. After introducing Jesus to us as the Messianic

king—a *greater king*—in chapters 1-4, Matthew goes on to talk about the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7 (a call to have a *greater life*), Jesus’ sending out of the twelve in chapter 10 (a call to have a *greater mission*), the woes Jesus pronounced on the Pharisees in chapter 23 (a call to become *greater leaders*), the Olivet Discourse in chapters 24 and 25 (a call to prepare for a *greater world*), and Jesus’ call to make disciples in chapter 28 (a call to have a *greater identity*).

In becoming like Jesus, we are surrendering to Jesus as king, taking on His life, carrying out His mission, proclaiming His message, and becoming His *leaders* so we can help prepare others for His new *world* and to accept their new *identity* in Him. These are the seven discipleship competencies that Jesus introduced into Matthew’s life after he followed Him.

What
Discipleship
According
to Matthew
Means:

1. Learning that Jesus is more than our Savior, as wonderful as that already is. It means acknowledging Jesus as the number one priority in our lives and surrendering to His lordship.
2. Receiving the life of His kingdom and incorporating His spiritual disciplines, which will help us practice a new inner life and show up in the way we live before God and others.
3. Learning how to tell others about living a life from above—the blessed life. It means learning the compassionate ministry of Jesus and sharing the good news of the kingdom by incorporating the missionary practices of Matthew 10.
4. Explaining the kingdom of God to someone through our own story as well as the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13, making sure to adapt it to fit where people are at and how they respond.
5. Learning to live by example and living what we say, as well as practicing authentic servant leadership.
6. Reminding others about the consummation of Jesus’ kingdom and preparing them for the world to come.
7. Committing to leading an *Invitation* Bible study in your room or somewhere else on campus.
8. Committing to discipling someone in the *Greater Things* discipleship process.
9. Being baptized into the new life and identity we have in and through Jesus Christ.
10. Committing to following Jesus (“Christ in you, the hope of glory”).

“We are, to be sure, reconciled to God by Jesus’ death, but even more, we are ‘saved’ by his life (Romans 5:10)—saved in the sense of entering into his eternal kind of life, not just in some distant heaven but right now in the midst of our broken and sorrowful world. When we carefully consider how Jesus lived while among us in the flesh, we learn how we are to live—truly live—empowered by him who is with us always even to the end of the age. We then begin an intentional imitatio Christi, imitation of Christ, not in some slavish or literal fashion but by catching the spirit and power in which he lived and by learning to walk “in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). *Streams Of Living Water*, Richard Foster (1998, p.3)

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men” (Mathew 4:19).

Greater Things!

The Call Of Discipleship

I can still remember when our daughter Emily was around six or seven years old and liked to watch while I was tying a string or turning a screw. I could see her watching intently and begin to move her fingers as if she was already performing the task in her mind. She wanted to do what I was doing. Apparently, Jesus knows how much we want to be a part of His mission too. This is discipleship – doing what God does. Our hands and heart long to do what God has done in us and for us. Heeding the call of discipleship is about advancing God’s mission in the world as God works through us, following His example and being led by His Spirit.



1. What is the most important thing you learned from your mom or dad?
2. What are some important things you are learning from others right now?
3. If you could do anything that Jesus did, what would you want to do and why?

“The person who trusts me will not only do what I’m doing but even greater things, because I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I’ve been doing”

John 14:12, MSG



Mark 6:6–13

1. What were some of the great things that Jesus gave the disciples to do when He sent them out together?
2. What did the call of Jesus entail here? What specific call and instruction does Mark mention here as Jesus extends His authority to the twelve?
3. How many of the things that Jesus instructs the disciples to do have you seen or been used by God to carry out yourself?
4. How important are each of these things and why?
5. What are some of the greater things can you think of that the disciples accomplished in Jesus’ name? What great things do you imagine God wants to accomplish through you?
6. What further questions do you have from this week’s reading?
7. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week to do great things for Him?
2. How is God reminding you this week of our call to be with Him?
3. What great things that God can do can we pray about together today?



Backstory

I guess you could say I am a part-time Warriors basketball fan – part time in that I get excited when the season gets close to the finals if my Warriors are winning. I even bought the special 2017 National Championship basketball cap, but other than that, I am not much of a follower.

I'm really just a fan, since I pay no attention to them during the regular season. Are you a follower of Jesus or just a fan? Are you someone who was baptized and still talk about Him when salvation issues come up or when you're at church, but pretty much stay detached from Him during your day-to-day existence?

Author and teacher Francis Chan illustrates the problem with people who say they are followers of Jesus, but only pretend to follow. He says they are like people on the highway who have their turning signal on, but never really turn. It's as if they have forgotten that their blinker is on. They appear as if they are going to make a turn, but never intend to do so. These people believe in turning – they just never actually execute the turn.

Life with Jesus is more than believing. It is following. It begins by watching and observing Jesus' life in order to follow His pattern. But life with Jesus is not a spectator sport. It's all about being and doing the things of Jesus. All who believe are called to discipleship, or as German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*, "Only he who believes is obedient and only he who is obedient believes." *Invitation*, the first of the *Journey* series, is just the beginning of the Christian life and journey. Discipleship is the journey.

The call of discipleship is the call to a new experience of life in God with Him at the center. It is also a call to action, to continue the ministry that Jesus started. It is a call to join Him in advancing His kingdom. This was the purpose of His coming – that we might participate in the life of God and to entrust us with His mission. It is also why He said it was necessary that He return to His Father – to open wide the door for the Spirit's indwelling that we might experience the life He lived and continue the work He started.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," Jesus said, that He might extend such authority to us (Matthew 28:18). Unlike most CEOs, kings, and even spiritual leaders, Jesus was eager to give away His authority and spiritual power. His practice was to minister and have His disciples watch, then have them do what they had seen Him do. Next, they would talk about what had happened. In the end, it was always Jesus' purpose that His followers not only do the things that He was doing, but go on to teach others the same things they had learned. Jesus not only gave them the authority to do what He was doing, He also gave them the authority to teach what they had learned to others. Until we begin to practice what we have seen and experienced from Jesus, the life of Christ is just that – His life, and it will never truly become our life.

The goal of this week's lesson is for participants to realize the importance of following versus just believing, and to imagine some of the things that Jesus might have us do in His name! Let's do greater things together in Jesus' name!

Discipled Matthew:

A Great Disciple?

We switched from Comcast back to AT&T U-Verse for our cable, internet, and phone service recently, and with that came the hassle of syncing everything up and making sure all the remotes worked. I started trying to wrap my mind around all the changes and quickly went from the more detailed instruction book to the quick setup guide with the pictures and graphics. Then the technician sat me down and went over everything. He set up my remote, got me registered on the new account, and walked me through the entire process. Some things are so complicated that it helps to have a guide for the journey.

Being formed in Christ is like that. Life in and through Jesus is so different than our past estranged life from God that we need someone to help us sync up with Christ. To live life as Jesus meant for us to live it takes an instruction book—the Bible. But beyond instruction, we need real tech support to help us with the new installation (life in the Spirit), to explain the various components of our walk with God (spiritual disciplines), and to tell us what to do about problem solving (troubleshooting). Disciplers are spiritual tech support—people who come alongside of us to help explain the Christian life through the lens of their own life journey. They know how to encourage, unpack, and help solve the mysteries of our new life in Christ because they've been on the journey for a while. Being discipled by another devoted follower of Jesus is like having our own personal tech support on the journey from death to new life in Christ.



1. Who was the first real Christ follower that made a lasting impression on you?
2. What impressed you most about them?
3. What lessons did you see and learn from them that you have incorporated in your life?



Matthew 9:9–13

1. What are some things Jesus taught Matthew about discipleship in this first encounter with him? What surprises you most about Jesus' calling of Matthew?
2. In Matthew 10:2-4, Matthew is listed as one of the original twelve disciples. What is unique about Matthew among the other eleven disciples listed here? What was important about Matthew's occupation, and why does he seem to keep bringing it up?
3. What kind of issues and questions did Matthew struggle with in his call to follow Jesus? What made his call so different from the rest of the twelve?
4. What can we learn from Matthew about discipleship with Jesus? How do you feel about being discipled by Matthew? How can you relate to Matthew as a follower of Jesus?
5. What are some of the great things that Matthew accomplished in Jesus' name? How can Matthew help us accomplish great things in Jesus' name?
6. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?
7. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week to do great things for Him?
2. How has the life of Matthew been a significant witness and influence in your walk with God this week?
3. How can this group pray for you today??



Backstory

The truth is, all of Jesus' followers were unlikely rabbinic candidates. The process to become a rabbi included three levels. Beth Sefer, the first, was an elementary school for ages four or five to adolescence and culminated in Bar Mitzvah at age twelve, where a student demonstrated his knowledge of Torah. The next level was Beth Midrash, where only the students of promise would go on to study oral Torah and to reflect on and interpret the finer application of biblical truth. The final level was to choose a rabbi to live with and follow for several years while they learned to become like them.

But if a student had not been selected for further training in the Torah, it was clear that they were not cut out to be a rabbi and must return to their father to learn the family business. Clearly none of Jesus' followers had made the grade since He found them learning the fishing trade of their fathers, or in Matthew's case, collecting taxes for Rome.

But these guys didn't choose Jesus. He chose them (John 15:16). Even more unheard of, Jesus' close followers also included several women (Luke 8:1-3). Women could never serve as rabbis according to Jewish tradition, but they had been allowed to follow and learn from Jesus, and in this sense be His disciples.

However, the most surprising and unthinkable disciple of Jesus, right up there with women disciples, was Matthew. There were no possible scenarios where Matthew could ever be considered for rabbinic training. Matthew was a traitor to his people. Matthew collected taxes from the Jews and delivered the taxes to Rome. In this way, Matthew was helping support the occupancy of foreign power. It was a complete rejection of God's call to Israel as His chosen people.

His fellow Jews also detested him because he would collect a tax on top of Rome's designated amount to keep for himself. These tax collectors, or publicans, were so hated by their fellow Jews that every Jewish male was thankful to God for three things: not being born a woman, not being born a Gentile, and not becoming a hated publican. In fact, the Zealots, one of Judaism's most militant sects, were committed to the overthrow of Rome and bringing in the Messiah through militant acts. Each Zealot took a vow to kill one tax collector to undermine Roman rule. It has also been suggested that most, if not all, of Jesus' other disciples were card-carrying Zealots. It has been mentioned that Jesus may have had to sleep between Matthew and the rest of the disciples at first just to protect Matthew and keep him alive!

The goal of this week's lesson and small group discussion is to point out how unlikely a disciple Matthew was and how important discipleship with Jesus must have been for him. No other Jewish teacher would have offered Matthew this privilege. Matthew must have reflected deeply on what discipleship with Jesus was all about. It should be clear that if he could be a disciple of Jesus, then discipleship is possible for anyone ready to leave everything and follow.

It has also been suggested that Matthew's gospel may have been written with the specific purpose of teaching discipleship according to Jesus. It was uniquely organized around the five speeches of Jesus: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), the sending out of the twelve (chapter 10), the parables of the kingdom (chapter 13), the Woes on the Scribes and Pharisees (chapter 23), and the Olivet Discourse (chapters 24-26). Discipleship under Jesus is framed according to these five major speeches. If we pay close attention to this framework, these five speeches will help define the core competencies of Christian discipleship.

Many, many books have been written about Christian discipleship emphasizing the essence of what it means to follow Jesus. Matthew, one of Jesus' personal followers, may have written the very first. If such is the case, our challenge is to listen closely to his message and to learn from him the core competencies of following Jesus today.

Can I Get A Witness?

The Great King?

If you were asked to perform or speak somewhere, who would you want to introduce you? Often when I am asked to present, the person tasked with my bio usually mispronounces my name or emphasizes things about me I would rather not have mentioned. Introductions matter, especially when you have a last name like "Pickell." In this week's lesson we have a whole group of witnesses that emerge one at a time to remind us of who Jesus is. Some of them are very unlikely characters and some acknowledge who He is by default, but each one helps tell the story. Pay close attention this week to the list of witnesses provided by Matthew and the ways they introduce us to Jesus.



1. Who would you want to introduce you to others and why?
2. What would you most like people to know about you?
3. What is the most important thing to know about a person?



Matthew 1:1–17

1. Why would Matthew choose to introduce Jesus by tracing His family history? What can we learn about Jesus from His genealogy?
2. What surprises you most about the names on this list? If you could leave out some of these people to protect Jesus' reputation, which ones would you choose and why?
3. So far the entire Old Testament is referenced in the genealogy of Jesus as a witness of who He is. List some of the other important witnesses who provide testimony about the person of Jesus. What are all these characters saying about Jesus? Who is He and why is this important?
4. Everyone from the Old Testament genealogy record, which moves us from Abraham to Jesus in one grand historical sweep, knows who Jesus is. How does this help inform our view of Jesus?
5. How does this great list of witnesses right in the beginning of Matthew impact our obedience and discipleship to Jesus? What difference does it make that we are becoming disciples of King Jesus?
6. Allowing Jesus to become Lord of our lives is the first step, or competency, of discipleship. When did Jesus become king in your life? If He hasn't yet, what steps would you need to take for Him to take the throne of your heart?
7. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?

Discipleship Challenge: Our challenge this week after rereading Matthew 1–3 is to surrender to Jesus as the rightful king of our hearts and to offer Him the very first place in all we do. In fact, as a disciple this is our first act of every day—to begin by acknowledging Jesus as Lord of all.

8. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week to do great things for Him?
 2. How is surrendering to Jesus different than merely believing in and accepting Him?
 3. How can this group pray for you today?
-



Backstory

When we step back and look at the first three chapters of Matthew, it's as if one character after another marches onto the scene, each providing witness of who Jesus is either by design or default. First is the Old Testament genealogy from Abraham to Jesus. Biblical genealogies serve several purposes. They trace the lineage of the individual being highlighted. They also provide a broad sweep of history through an examination of the person's family tree. But perhaps most importantly, biblical genealogies move us from one important character to the next. For example, in the first genealogical list we come across in the Bible, we move from Seth to Noah—the next important character in the biblical story (Genesis 5). In Matthew, we move from Abraham, the father or beginning of God's people, to Jesus, the new beginning for the people of God. However, as mentioned in the *Greater Things* introduction, Matthew breaks up the genealogy into three significant historical periods of fourteen generations each: Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian captivity, and the Babylonian captivity to Jesus. This genealogy doesn't nicely divide its generations into groups of fourteen like the genealogical records of the Old Testament do, but genealogies don't actually have to be exact if they serve the overall purposes mentioned above. In this case, Matthew's genealogy introduces us to Jesus, the start of a new people (Abraham), and a new kingdom (David) that will ultimately lead us out of our bondage of sin (Babylon). Jesus is the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, and our Deliverer.

The next witnesses in Matthew's list is Mary and Joseph. The surprise here is Jesus' humble yet miraculous birth—a conviction that both His earthly parents shared and defended, and which could have resulted in their divorce if they had not been visited by angel messengers.

Of course, the next important witness is the Holy Spirit, who made it possible for Jesus to be born without an earthly father. The presence and conception of the Spirit in the birthing process is the clearest evidence that He is in fact the Messianic king.

The next witnesses brought in to testify for Jesus' noble birth are the Persian Magi. These ancient pagan astrologers were more tuned in to the significance of Jesus' identity than the Jewish leadership, including the ruling King Herod. Gentiles knew that Jesus was the long-awaited king of Israel. Herod was himself a witness through his slaughter of every male Bethlehem child two years and under, though he didn't care what the Magi thought so long as Jesus wasn't a real threat to his throne. Of course, the Jewish leaders also bore witness about Jesus by knowing His birth place. They at least knew that Micah 5:2 predicted Bethlehem—the city of David—as the location for Messiah's birth.

The testimony of John the Baptist sealed it for many people. John bore witness that he saw the Spirit of God descend upon Jesus at His baptism—the one sign John had been looking for to identify the true Messiah. However, the witness of John is not just the witness of a biblical prophet. John is the last of the Old Testament revelation. John's testimony is the weight of the entire Old Testament Word coupled with the presence of the Spirit in dove-like witness and made certain by the very voice of God when He said, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him." This tri-fold witness of Word, the Spirit, and the voice of God is undeniable.

Although every person in this genealogy stands up for Jesus, it may just be that the most undeniable witness is Satan himself during the wilderness temptation. The devil's testimony is another witness by default. His support is in the importance he placed on his temptation of Jesus. Jesus must be the one that Satan fears the most, or he would not have worked so hard to make Him stumble.

With one voice, all these people—Abraham, David, Joseph, Mary, the angel of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Gentile Magi, King Herod, John the Baptist, the Spirit, the Father, and even Satan—are saying the same thing. This is King Jesus! Does Jesus need so many voices? Probably not, but it is amazing when we put them all together! They become a loud and impressive crescendo—a bold witness that Jesus is king!

The King's Inaugural

A Greater Service

Presidential inaugurations are important, but mostly ceremonial. The first one hundred days in office are what the nation is really looking for to determine what kind of leader the new president will be once the election and inauguration are finally behind them. Though young King David's anointing, or inauguration, was done in secret, he followed it in the very next chapter by going forth and slaying Goliath, Israel's fiercest enemy. Jesus' anointing and mission was a near repeat performance, with the exception that the stakes were infinitely higher. Jesus was "led by the Spirit out into the wilderness" to face our world's greatest enemy and Jesus defeated him by listening to and obeying God's Word. This week's lesson reminds us of Jesus' mission and provides some clues about what discipleship with Jesus is all about.



1. What is one of the greatest responsibilities you have ever been given?
2. How did you prepare for it?
3. What was most difficult about it and how were you able to accomplish it?



Matthew 4:1–11

1. Why does Matthew include the account of Jesus' baptism? What is unique about the baptism of Jesus? How is His baptism connected with Jesus being sent out into the wilderness?
2. How did Jesus' baptism help prepare Him for the devil's temptations?
3. What was the first temptation (turning stones into bread) about? What was the devil tempting Jesus to prove? How has the devil tempted you like this?
4. What was the second temptation (jumping from the temple) about? If Jesus really was the Son of God, why didn't He accept Satan's challenge? What was Jesus being tempted with here? Has the devil ever tempted you in this way, and how?
5. The third and last temptation was less subtle, but perhaps the hardest for Jesus since it was similar to the struggle He would face again at the end of His life in the garden of Gethsemane. It was the struggle of surrendering to God's will even though it means personally suffering instead of the less painful and easier choice to bow to the devil. How have you been tempted with the easy way out instead of paying the price of obedience? Why does bowing to the "prince of this world" always seem easier?
6. What is the first competency in discipleship with Jesus? What is Matthew teaching us about discipleship in the very beginning of Jesus' mission? What spiritual resources does Jesus receive at His baptism that we too must have if we are going to overcome temptation?

Discipleship Challenge: God is challenging us to go beyond belief and acceptance and to join His mission. Ask God to clarify His mission in your life and help you understand what you most need to accomplish it.

7. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week to do great things for Him?
 2. How has God been speaking to you about the mission He has planned for you?
 3. How can this group pray for you today?
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Backstory

The first discipleship competency according to Matthew is surrendering to Jesus as king. The goal of this week's lesson is to see how faithfully Matthew presents Jesus as Lord, the long-awaited messianic king! Even the devil must acknowledge Jesus by default as the rightful king of the world. As king, Jesus must have our full and complete allegiance. If we are to begin the journey of discipleship, we must submit to His authority and recognize His reign in our life.

The temptations that Jesus was hit with are the very ones that we are most vulnerable to. The first temptation was not so much about turning stones into bread as it was implicitly doubting His identity as the Son of God. "If you are the son of God, turn these stones into bread." We may not be the Son of God anymore than we can turn stones into bread, but our greatest temptation is to act like we belong to God instead of resting in God's Word that we are His beloved. Unlike us, Jesus could have performed a miracle. Instead He rested in God's Word to Him: "This is my beloved son. Listen to Him." Jesus did not have to prove He was the Son of God. God had already clarified this at His baptism. All Jesus had to do was rest in God's Word. Proving His identity to Satan by performing the miracle would have stripped the pronouncement of God of its meaning. Jesus was the Son of God because God said so, not because He worked miracles. Any miracles Jesus could have performed would have only affirmed what God had already made so. Likewise, "Man does not live by 'turning stones into bread – bread alone', but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." God's Word is no less important to us than it was to Jesus. We are God's beloved sons and daughters because in Jesus Christ, God has said so.

The second temptation was similar, but slightly different. The devil again tempted Jesus to prove He was the Son of God, this time by throwing Himself off the temple. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself off the temple and let God send His angels to catch you for the scriptures say that 'the angels will bear you up.'" In this case God was expected to intervene in Jesus' fall, which is understandable given that Jesus was the Son of God. This temptation revealed the difference between faith and presumption. Faith knows what God can do. Presumption demands God prove it. Presumption asks God to prove He is real and active in our life. Jesus quoted Scripture back to the devil, saying, "We should not put God to the test." We often require God to demonstrate His love for us by demanding He get us out of situations we might have avoided if we hadn't presumed that God would rescue us in the first place.

The last temptation is the most obvious. The devil openly claimed power and authority over this world. He offered to give his position as supreme world leader to Jesus if Jesus would just acknowledge him and bow down to him. Of course, bowing to the devil would have given him just what he wanted and established him as the supreme leader of this world. If Jesus was already king, He would not need to bow to anyone. Jesus again quoted Scripture by saying, "We must serve God only."

The truth is, every time we do not bow to Jesus, we give allegiance to Satan and surrender to his place of authority in our lives. Full and complete surrender to Jesus is the first step in discipleship. It begins by rejoicing in the freedom and salvation Jesus has already provided, and taking the next step of honoring and serving Him as Lord. This is a call to find our full identity in Christ. It is the call to a mature faith that trusts that God loves us fully and has already demonstrated it by sending Jesus into the world for our deliverance from sin. This is a call to full and complete surrender to Jesus as the rightful king of this world. This is when we surrender our own lives and echo Jesus' prayer that "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Unless we take up our cross and follow Him, we cannot be His disciples.

The Ethics of Jesus' Kingdom — Part 1

A Greater Life

Someone shared a story with me recently about a friend who had been unjustly accused of child neglect. The police were called when a four-year old boy was seen walking around unattended between a neighbor's house and his own home. The boy had wandered off for a few seconds from the neighbor's, but the police pressed neglect charges on the father. In spite of his explanation and personal account of the story, the father was jailed, forced to post an exorbitant bond, acquire an attorney, and forbidden to even see his son for over a month. Governing authorities and laws are meant to protect the rights of the helpless, but sometimes in our hurry for justice we look right past the truth and allow justice to be thwarted. Jesus is the king and the Son of David, and the ethics of His kingdom are built on the transformation of the hearts of His subjects. He is less interested in prosecuting offenders and more concerned about the real story. By establishing a kingdom where justice springs from the heart and is qualified by righteousness at the core of our being, Jesus has created a place where truth works its way from the inside out and where no law can ever count against us. He is crowned king of our hearts!



1. Have you ever been treated unjustly? Describe how it felt.
2. Describe what "God desires truth in our inward parts" means to you.
3. How has God used you to explain the real story when someone was being misrepresented?



Matthew 5:1–20

1. How do the Beatitudes help define the subjects of Jesus' kingdom? What makes the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, etc. blessed? What is the blessing reserved for these people and how is it coming to them?
2. How do these blessings from Jesus speak to you? How do they give you hope? Which ones encourage you the most and why?
3. How is the new government of Jesus a fulfillment rather than a replacement of the old law? What is the law of Jesus' kingdom and where is it written? What is the relationship between this new righteousness of Jesus and being the salt and the light of the world?
4. What is so different about what Jesus requires in our relationships with one another than what the Law of Moses required?
5. What is the relationship between the way the first half of the chapter talks about blessing, and how it says we are to treat one another in the last half? Which of these commands do you find most difficult and why?
6. If surrender to King Jesus is the first competency of discipleship, what is the second one? What steps will you need to take to move forward with Jesus as your rabbi?

Discipleship Challenge: Jesus is challenging us to live from above. Focus on your own poverty of Spirit this week in contrast to Jesus gift. What do you need to follow Jesus from the heart?

7. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week to do great things for Him?
 2. How has God been working in your heart this week?
 3. How can this group pray for you today?
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Backstory

The Beatitudes are a stark contrast to the blessings and curses that greeted the Israelites as they crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 27, 28). When the slaves of Egypt became the people of God in the Old Testament, they were greeted with curses if they broke the covenant and blessings if they kept it. Citizenship in Jesus' kingdom begins with a pronouncement from another mountain—the Mount of Blessing where Jesus blessed the most surprising of His subjects. Those in power, the wealthy, the healthy, and the prestigious had obviously already been blessed by God. But Jesus also pronounced blessings on those who were poor in spirit, those in mourning, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted, and those unjustly treated because of Jesus. In other words, He made them all His followers!

Jesus did not count them blessed because of their hardships, but in spite of them. They were blessed because in Jesus they had the kingdom! He knew what His followers were going to face for following Him. Yet regardless of persecution, insults, and many hardships, they were blessed by receiving Him. The blessing of God's kingdom rested on them.

What would bring about such hatred and persecutions? Righteousness—but a different kind of righteousness. A righteousness from above. A righteousness greater than the best human example of righteousness during Jesus' day—that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus compared the righteousness of the kingdom to them because they were regarded as the most devoted to the law and the prophets. The Pharisaic order was for the most part a lay led group of men very committed to the Torah. The most positive intent of pharisaism was to keep the law following the Babylonian captivity, since the captivity had been regarded as God's punishment for disregarding and disobeying His laws and commandments (Deuteronomy 27; II Chronicles 36:15, 16; Nehemiah 1:4-7; Daniel 9:4-14). Most scholars trace the Pharisees back to the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, who launched the restoration of the temple and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Because of this, during the first century the Pharisees were the most committed to the law and to righteous living. But Jesus said that the righteousness of the kingdom was to exceed Pharisaic righteousness. Jesus did not come to do away with the law or the prophets. Instead He came to bring it to fullness—to fulfill it. Fulfillment in that the law and the prophets both spoke of Him. The law was literally incomplete until Jesus came. Jesus Himself—His living of the law, His righteous actions, His justice for the poor, His righteous life, and His death and resurrection—completed the law in contrast to the example set by the Pharisees. The law—God's will—was not complete without Jesus! Jesus was not replacing the law, but His life was the only shining example of God's intention of a righteous life. Jesus is the righteousness of the kingdom!

What is the righteousness of Jesus? The righteousness of the heart. The righteousness from within. The righteousness that comes when the inner self seeks the will of God. This is a righteousness from above. This is the righteousness that can only come from God as a gift. Man does not have it. Not even the Pharisees could compare with this kind of righteousness.

Afterwards, Jesus went on to talk about the motive and the intent of the heart. "You have heard it said, but I say unto you..." What kind of king would Jesus be? What is the ethical standard of His kingdom? Governmental values that come from the very heart of God. Righteousness that does not come from fallen humanity but from God above, and is given to us as a perfect gift. The second competency of discipleship under Jesus is submitting to His righteous life reborn in our hearts. It is a righteousness that we cannot buy or manufacture from within ourselves. It is a life that is only found in Christ Himself—an inner righteousness that causes us to love with integrity and to seek the good in others no matter what the cost. This is the way of discipleship—the better righteousness, the way of love, the way of Jesus!

The Ethics of Jesus' Kingdom — Part 2

A Greater Focus

The Internet is such a great place to hide—to pretend to be more than we are. Facebook is bad enough, but dating sites like OkCupid and Match.com are some of the best places to fashion our own avatars. An avatar is the alter ego we want others to see and to know us by. Religion can be another place to hide and develop spiritual avatars by doing religious practices for show—things like public prayer, living by our titles, and referring to the good things we have done at just the right moment. This was what Jesus hated most about the Pharisees, who were considered by many to be the most committed of all the religious groups in His day. The Pharisees were a lay movement that rigidly practiced Jewish law. They even followed rules surrounding the law to protect it and keep themselves from breaking it. This is how they appeared to be so devoted. But it's also why they came into such conflict with Jesus, because Jesus saw right through their pretense. They practiced their right living before men instead of God. When religious practice in spite of our poverty of spirit bubbles up from God's blessing, we are living from the new self God formed in us instead of the self-made avatars we fashioned for the attention and praise of others. This is the spirituality of the kingdom—spirituality from the inside out!



1. What are some of the most ridiculous lies you have seen on the Internet?
2. What are some pretentious things you have seen people say or do on the Internet?
3. What are some pretentious things you have seen people say or do at church?



Matthew 6

1. Matthew 6 is about practicing the righteousness we want others to see. What does this look like? When and where have you seen this? Have you ever been tempted to pretend that you are more spiritual than you really are? Why are we tempted to do this?
2. Jesus says to practice our faith in secret. What does He mean by a "secret" faith? Why does He instruct us to pray, give, and make promises in secret? What relationship do these practices have with the Beatitudes and the "better righteousness" of Matthew 5?
3. In what way is giving to others a spiritual discipline? How have you been blessed by giving something away?
4. What do you find most rewarding, difficult, frustrating, or easy about prayer? How does the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples help you in your own communion with God?
5. What does Jesus mean by "storing up our treasures in heaven"? How is this a spiritual discipline? How is our relationship with earthly goods an insight into our soul? What relationship does this have with the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 and the better righteousness of the kingdom?
6. What does Jesus mean by "seeking first the kingdom"? What is the relationship between the spiritual practices of Matthew 6 and seeking first the kingdom?

Discipleship Challenge: Jesus is challenging us in our spiritual practices. Focus this week on your prayer life, the help you give to others, and the value you place on material things. How can you tell if these practices are for God or to be seen by others?

7. How can this group pray for you?



For further study John 3:22-36.

1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week to do great things for Him?
 2. How has God been guiding you in the practices of your heart this week?
 3. How can this group pray for you today?
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Backstory

The 2014 film *Big Eyes* is about the life of American artist Margret-Keane, who was famous for drawing portraits and paintings of people with big eyes. It follows the story of Margaret and her husband, Walter Keane, who took credit for Margaret's phenomenally successful and popular paintings in the 1950s and 1960s. His name was on all her works since it was inconceivable in those days for a woman to be so accomplished.

How do you feel when someone takes credit for something you did? This is the focus of Matthew 6. Since life in the kingdom is a gift from God, we have no right to parade what appear to be our spiritual accomplishments before others as if they were our own. The audience that matters is not ourselves or others, but God. It is the life in "secret" – the hidden righteousness of God for us and in us, reflecting only to Him. If righteousness is something we've earned by our own generosity, spiritual devotion, discipline, and self-denial, then we have a lot to boast about, but not before God.

The goal of this week's lesson and discussion is to emphasize this new Godward focus of life. We are now living a life of gratitude toward God in place of striving to please others. When life is received as a gift from God, giving to others becomes a true heartfelt desire to bless others as we have been so richly blessed. Prayer becomes a private conversation with God instead of a parade of personal piety. Fasting becomes a hunger for something more than material food, pleasure, or success. It is a longing for more and more of a life with God in contrast to the things of this world, for "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." As impressive as the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees appears on the outside, Matthew 6 is a reminder of the spiritual impoverishment of human righteousness in comparison with the righteousness of God.

In view of the Sermon on the Mount, we really can't speak of righteousness and mean anything other than the righteousness of God. There is no other righteousness than God's righteousness. God is the standard for and the definition of righteousness. Anything less than Him is not righteousness at all. We can speak of our attempts to be righteous, but the righteousness of God is the only true righteousness. Righteousness outside of or apart from God is no righteousness at all.

In Matthew 6, Jesus calls us to a renewed life where we indulge in the gift of God's righteousness—seeking first the kingdom instead of erecting our own. Jesus wants us to engage fully with His life from above. He calls us to reject fake righteousness—the making of our own fig leaves in place of the robe of the life of God in Christ. He wants us to live in dependence on God and look completely to Him, as the birds of the air and the flowers of the field did after the fall of Adam, and not strive fruitlessly only to yield thorns and thistles as Adam did.

The inner righteousness of the kingdom is a return to the full, joy-filled life of the garden before sin cut us off from God. Life in the kingdom is not only a gift from God, it is a life focused toward God. We are no longer living for human praise. We have the approval of God and we live for His presence, His praise, and His glory. We are no longer worried about tomorrow, because we have been given today. We can finally seek the kingdom first in our life because it's ours for the taking! Jesus has brought God's kingdom within our reach, for the kingdom of God is at hand! "Fear not little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

The Ethics of Jesus' Kingdom — Part 3

A Greater Community

I watched a touching YouTube video the other day about two preschoolers. They were arguing about which of their mothers was right. The little girl's mother had said it wasn't going to rain that day and the little boy was holding fast that his mother's weather report, that it *would* rain, was correct instead. The disagreement escalated and their voices kept getting louder and louder until the girl drove her point home by poking the boy in the chest, announcing once and for all that her mother was right. The boy put his hand to his chest and cried out, "You poked me in the heart!"

Unfortunately, sometimes we act the same way and are so certain that we are right that we reach the point of hurting one another. In Matthew 7, Jesus challenges us to live by another standard—the standard of God's judgment—instead of judging ourselves and others. He wants us to trust the judgment that God has already given on our behalf. He wants us to live out of Jesus' beatitude and ask ourselves what we can do for others instead of what we can expect from them. When we accept God's account of us, we will stop comparing ourselves to others and live among them as equally blessed people instead of our spiritually impoverished lives. This will enable us to bless instead of curse. Living from above and before God is how He would have us live among others.



1. Who do you tend to compare yourself with?
2. When was the last time you were completely wrong about someone?
3. Who are the most encouraging people in your life?



Matthew 7

1. Matthew 7 is about the judgments we make about others and about ourselves. Have you ever been misunderstood or falsely accused? Describe how it felt.
2. Jesus says to judge others with the same standard of judgment we would want for ourselves. If God is the judge of all, how has He judged us? How should that influence our judgment of others?
3. What does Jesus mean by "giving to dogs what belongs to God" and "throwing our pearls before swine"? What does this have to do with our "good advice" for others?
4. What does living by the Golden Rule—giving to others—have to do with a life of blessing?
5. Jesus says not to judge others, but then tells us to pay attention to people's actions. Isn't this a form of judging? If not, what is the difference between the two?
6. Why is calling Jesus our Lord, casting out demons, and performing healings in His name not a sure sign of knowing Him? How is it possible to engage in such important spiritual practices and not connect with Him? What have we learned about life in the kingdom so far from Jesus' sermon that contrasts with these dramatic practices?
7. Jesus says that the wise person not only learns the spiritual life lessons of His kingdom, but puts them into practice. In other words, they build their life on them. How are we to go about putting the ethics of kingdom life into practice?

Discipleship Challenge: Jesus is challenging us in our relationships. This week we are going to practice speaking to God about others instead of speaking to others about God.

8. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week to do great things for Him?
2. How has God been guiding you in your relationships this week?
3. How can this group pray for you today?



Backstory

If the life of the kingdom is a gift and meant to glorify God instead of ourselves, then we have no right to pass judgment on others since we did nothing to possess it. Each new life from above belongs to God, who alone has the right to acquit or condemn. Comparing ourselves to others implies we have accomplished something on our own and deserve recognition. God is generous and has opened the door wide for whoever knocks. All we have to do is ask! When we live as though kingdom life is something we have accomplished ourselves, we are quick to pass judgment on others who don't live up to our standards.

The message here is to treat everyone as people who have been brought to new life in Christ and to trust our life to God. Each life belongs to Him, and no one else. We have no right to claim privilege from our achievements and no right to condemn others when they fail to measure up. Romans 14 stresses this same message: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4).

The Golden Rule is our best guide in how to relate and get along with others. But even here Jesus introduces a kingdom perspective. The rabbis had their own version of the Golden Rule. The common Jewish expression was stated in the negative: "Don't do unto others what you don't want done to you." But Jesus turned this axiom on its head by emphasizing doing good for others instead of simply not doing harm.

Kingdom life is more than not judging others. It's about treating others the way we want to be treated. Jesus says to give others the break that we would want for ourselves. We are to put ourselves into the shoes of the other person and give them what we would want if it were us in their place.

Prophets are a different story. Prophets are supposed to speak for God. When someone claims to have a word from God and to speak for God, we can tell if they are true to that word by the way they live. We can expect their life to match up with their teaching. It's simple. Apple trees produce apples, and those who teach will produce the fruit of their teaching. Living a life from above comes out in our behavior.

Those who claim to know God and even brag about doing miraculous events in His name may be imposters unless their words are backed up by a kingdom life. Again, it's not the things we do or say or even the miraculous signs we produce that verify who we are. It is the clear and indisputable knowledge that all of our actions and behavior come from a life outside us—in and through Jesus Christ. When we get this, our life will be built on rock instead of sand—the rock of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. The rock of His very life from above that He has come to give!

This, then, is the second discipleship competency of Matthew: a *greater life*. A life from above, lived before God, and no longer full of us comparing ourselves to others. Discipleship with Jesus is impossible without this greater new life in Him!

Giving Away The Kingdom

A Greater Mission

I recently started a home project that I hoped would be a simple repair to a leak and some dry rot in the floor of our bathroom. Unfortunately, as we opened up the floor we soon began to realize that the water damage was much worse than we had expected. I knew I needed help, so we asked my brother-in-law, who specializes in home repair, to spend a couple days with us scoping out the problem. Again, the more we tore out, the more the project grew from patching the floor and replacing the shower to ripping out the entire flooring and replacing all the plumbing. We had to rent a jackhammer, add gravel filling, and pour a new concrete floor. What began as a simple home repair turned into a major demolition and complete remodel of our bathroom. I could not have accomplished it without help from Glen, my wife's brother. Even with him, however, both my wife and I realized we would need even more help from people who could prepare and pour a new concrete floor, and later from a crew who could rebuild and tile the shower area.

In the same way, as Jesus' mission began to grow, He needed more and more help to advance His kingdom. He appointed twelve disciples at first, but according to Luke, He later needed to appoint another seventy to multiply His efforts and continue what He was doing. Jesus led by example in Matthew 8 and 9 and then sent out His followers to do the same. This was the beginning of the greater things Jesus expects of all His disciples.



1. Describe a recent time in your life when you needed someone's help to complete a task.
2. Share one thing you have learned about helping others.
3. What do you like/dislike about asking for help?



Matthew 10

1. In Matthew 10, Jesus appointed twelve followers to join Him as His disciples and to help advance His mission. What was so different about being a disciple of Rabbi Jesus?
2. How were the disciples to go about their task? What were some of Jesus' specific instructions to them? What did He want them to do? How did Jesus provide for their success?
3. What message were the disciples supposed to share with people, and how were they to deliver it? What things were to accompany their message? What did those things have to do with Jesus' mission?
4. What did the disciples need most to carry out their mission? What were they to expect from others? Why was it important to stay in one place instead of moving around from place to place?
5. What other instructions did Jesus give? How many of these instructions are still relevant today, and how would you apply them?
6. Following Jesus' example and giving away the kingdom as Jesus instructed His followers to do here in Matthew 10 is another core competency of our discipleship with Jesus. What are some ways you have been giving away the kingdom recently? What is standing in your way of this discipleship competency?

Discipleship Challenge: Jesus is challenging us to care about others and proclaim His kingdom. Prayerfully ask God to show you the needs of others around you and how meeting their needs will advance God's kingdom. Joining Jesus mission and spreading the good news of His kingdom is the joy of discipleship with Jesus!

7. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week to do great things for Him?
2. How has God used you to advance His kingdom this week?
3. How can this group pray for you today?



Backstory

It can be easy to assume that the priority in following Jesus is right belief (doctrine) or right behavior (lifestyle). When we model our life with God more on the laws established during the Hebrew Exodus, we tend to develop this perspective. The Israelites were transitioning from slavery to freedom and the number one priority was embracing a new identity and adopting a new lifestyle different from that of the Egyptians and the Canaanites. These things are still a priority with Jesus' mission, which is concerned with the transition from the "present evil age" to "the kingdom of God." However, one of the surprising things we are met with in Jesus' model of discipleship is our bold and immediate witness.

This is illustrated by common stories such as that of the woman at the well (John 4), where the Samaritan woman was an immediate witness, becoming a well of water welling up to eternal life for the people of Sychar. Then there is the story of the demon possessed man chained up in the cemetery (Matthew 8). Once he was exorcised, the man asked to join Jesus and His disciples, but Jesus instructed him to "go tell what great things God had done for him."

In fact, the response to Jesus and His mission was so great in some circumstances that Luke refers to people taking the kingdom by force (Luke 16:16). The message of Jesus is so life-changing and transformative that followers of Jesus are enlisted to be a witness right from the start. New lifestyle and instruction will come, but discipleship starts with their eager testimony to the difference Christ has made in their life.

Missing this important priority of discipleship training under Jesus throws us off balance. We can be stuck in the rut of learning and relearning the gospel without ever sharing it. Jesus would prefer that we practice and gain experience rather than increase our biblical knowledge. Again, the greater life of the kingdom is more about the message we live and share than the theology we develop.

Jesus also reveals some practical points for sharing the message here in Matthew 10.

Ways to advance the kingdom:

- Begin where you are and start with the people you know. (Don't start with the Gentiles.)
- Proclaim a simple message. ("The Kingdom of God has come near to you!")
- Minister to people's needs. (Cast out demons, heal the sick—show the world that the kingdom is practical.)
- Travel light. (Remember that people need Jesus, not clever resources and technology.)
- Partner with dependable people. (Stay in one house and work outwards from there.)
- Be careful. (Remember that you are sheep among wolves.)
- Work smart. (Be shrewd as snakes, but innocent as doves.)
- Speak up. (Remember that the Holy Spirit will give you what to say.)
- Follow Jesus' example. (Remember that like teacher, like student.)
- Don't be afraid. (Remember that no one can harm your soul.)

The third competency of discipleship under Rabbi Jesus leads to a *greater mission*. Discipleship without the goal to advance God's kingdom is no discipleship at all!

Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus

A Greater Message

One of the most important competencies in building a strong relationship is communication. The art of communication is just that—a great art that requires practice and skill. Practicing assertive communication and active listening is fundamental to any healthy relationship. Couples that do not learn how to verbalize their feelings and wishes or practice really listening to their partner by staying focused with their eyes, heart, and body have not learned how to truly hear and understand each other.

There is a similar problem going on between Jesus and most of us. We often fail to hear and do what Jesus is telling us to do in Mark 4—the companion version of the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13. Here Jesus warns us, “Consider carefully what you hear...with the measure you use, it will be measured to you and even more” (Mark 4: 24). Unfortunately, many have not really heard Jesus’ message. When asked what the gospel is, people respond with many different answers, such as “God is love,” “Jesus saves,” “For God so loved the world...” or “Jesus is coming very soon.” This is all very good news, but the gospel that Jesus proclaimed and taught His disciples to share was, “The kingdom of heaven is here!” The Good News of Jesus was the good news of the kingdom. If we are going to share Jesus’ gospel with others, we too will need to understand His message of the kingdom and learn how to share it in a way that others can understand and embrace with their whole life.



1. Who do you know that’s a good listener?
2. How can you tell when someone is really listening to you?
3. Which is more difficult—confronting others or being confronted? Why?



Matthew 13

1. Matthew 13 is about the parables of the kingdom. Which of these parables is the easiest for you to understand, and why?
2. The disciples seemed surprised that Jesus had shifted His approach to telling stories. Why did He move from the openly proclaiming the kingdom to telling stories about the kingdom?
3. Jesus tells seven parables illustrating the good news of the kingdom. What can we learn from the following parables?
 - The Parable of the Sower
 - The Parable of the Weeds
 - The Parable of the Mustard Seed
 - The Parable of the Yeast in the Bread
 - The Parable of the Hidden Treasure
 - The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price
 - The Parable of the Net
4. What were people expecting concerning the coming of God’s kingdom? How do these parables challenge their expectations? What can we learn from Jesus about telling others about the gospel of the kingdom?

5. How would Jesus' message change if He were sharing it with people today? What words would He use and how would He revise His message? How would Jesus have us explain the good news of the kingdom now?

Discipleship Challenge: Jesus is challenging us to proclaim His gospel. Practicing the fourth competency of discipleship under Rabbi Jesus—a *greater message*—by telling someone what you have learned about the good news of the kingdom from this lesson.

6. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week to do great things for Him?
2. How has God used you to explain the message of Jesus this week?
3. How can this group pray for you today?



Backstory

It stands to reason that if discipleship under Rabbi Jesus means bowing to a greater king because of a greater life from above, it fosters a *greater mission* through a *greater message*.

How could there be a greater message than the gospel? Only if it is more than just the Good News about our personal salvation, and includes the good news about God's sovereign lordship over the world. When Jesus speaks about the gospel, it's almost always the gospel of the kingdom. This good news includes the end of the reign of sin and the devil, but more importantly a world in which love reigns supreme.

In Matthew 13, Jesus changed His entire method of teaching and communicating the gospel in order to get His message across. He moved from the direct approach to telling parables—stories that relate the message of the kingdom that are simple and down to earth. For example, He compared the kingdom of God to:

- A farmer spreading good seed on different kinds of soil.
- A farmer sowing a field with good seed followed by an enemy sowing weeds, which will later be separated out during the judgment.
- A mustard seed—the tiniest of seeds that becomes the largest of shrubs.
- A hidden treasure that one stumbles upon, or a special pearl of infinite value that one goes in search of.
- A net that catches all kinds of fish, which will also be sorted later by angels during the judgment.

With these metaphors, Jesus explained some very important things about the gospel of the kingdom that are still relevant today. The good news is being spread like a farmer sowing seed. The message of the kingdom is falling on all kinds of people and they are responding in all kinds of ways, from complete rejection to full acceptance. The parable of the weeds helps explain why the kingdom of God for now exists right alongside the present evil age. When some people stumble across the kingdom and recognize it for what it is, they will trade all they have for it. When others who are intentionally searching for the most important thing in life find the kingdom, they will willingly pay the infinite price to have it. For now, the kingdom is a collection of all kinds of people who have been brought in like fish scooped up in a net, and will all be sorted by angels at the end of time.

In these seven stories that Jesus tells, He illustrates the message of the kingdom. It's happening now. It's tangled up with the old age of sin. It's both here and still yet to come. It's gathering all kinds of people.

This is good news! The kingdom has already begun! It is a life-giving message that not only changes us, but is remaking the world. Right now people are being gathered into God's kingdom. This is good news now for those who are ready to receive it. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus, and He is extending that authority to those who believe in Him and want to join Him in His mission.

Leading By Example

Becoming Greater Leaders

In my first official pastoral position out of college, I learned more about what not to do as a pastor than what to do. The truth is that we can learn a lot from the mistakes of others. My lead pastor was rude, he was unkempt, his children were undisciplined, he was always yelling at his wife, and not long after we moved on to our next pastoral appointment he confessed that he was making romantic advances to a young girl in our youth group. He was a terrible example of commitment to Christ and a pastoral leader. Still, I was determined to learn as much as I could, even if it was from his mistakes. Fortunately, I found a great pastoral example in my next lead pastor. He was humble, loved God and people, had a great relationship with his wife and children, and was deeply respected by the church family.

In Matthew 23, we are introduced to the fifth competency of discipleship under Rabbi Jesus: *greater leadership*. Jesus contrasted His own servant leadership style to the pompous leadership of the Pharisees and teachers of the law – the official spiritual leaders of His day. No one is perfect except Jesus, so even though every leader we are paired with will be imperfect in some way, we can still learn from them – if only what not to do.



1. Apart from Jesus, who has been your most inspiring leader?
2. What are some important things you have learned from others?
3. Which of Jesus' leadership traits do you value most and why?



Read Matthew 23

1. Jesus opens with several comments about the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. How would you describe their leadership style? What are some of the most disturbing things that Jesus mentions here?
2. Jesus pronounces seven woes on the Pharisees and the teachers of the law because of their bad example. What is significant about this pronouncement? What is a woe and what does it mean?
3. What word best defines each woe? How are they the opposite of servant leadership?
 - Woe 1:
 - Woe 2:
 - Woe 3:
 - Woe 4:
 - Woe 5:
 - Woe 6:
 - Woe 7:
4. What can we learn about the principles of Jesus' leadership from this chapter? What does Jesus value most? What disturbs Him most?
5. Which of these areas of servant leadership is most convicting for you and why? What leadership principle do you most want to develop and why?

Discipleship Challenge: Jesus is challenging us to be great leaders. Practice the fifth competency of discipleship under Rabbi Jesus this week by working on your weakest area of servant leadership.

6. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week to do great things for Him?
 2. Which area of servant leadership have you been working on this week? What has been the greatest challenge for you?
 3. How can this group pray for you today?
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Backstory

Jesus knew that His time on earth would be short, so He had to think of His successors right from the beginning. Godly leaders were Jesus' strategic plan. He developed people, not programs. On several occasions, Jesus emphasized the kind of leadership He was after. Discipleship with Jesus is about learning how to lead as a servant.

Jesus emphasized leadership principles of grace, humility, kindness, integrity, faithfulness, and sacrifice. He never asked His followers to do anything that He was not willing to do or hadn't already done. Some of the important passages that reveal Jesus' servant leadership style are:

"The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters." (Matthew 10:24)

"Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28)

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'" (Matthew 18:1-3)

The religious establishment sat in "Moses' seat." The scribes and Pharisees were the given religious leaders of the day, but they had forfeited their right to lead when they failed to practice what they taught. Jesus was officially removing these leaders from power and handing the leadership of His kingdom over to the twelve. That is what He meant by "whatever is bound on earth will be bound in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). Jesus was recognizing the disciples by giving them the authority to bind and loose as the priests and religious authority had done in the previous dispensation. Jesus' followers would be God's new servant leaders on earth.

The eight woes of Jesus here represent the end of the religious authority of the scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus criticized them for:

1. Teaching about God, but refusing to enter His kingdom.
2. Taking advantage of widows.
3. Converting people to a dead religion.
4. Practicing oaths that were trivial and meaningless.
5. Practicing the law with legalistic precision, yet bypassing the spirit of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness to God.
6. Practicing ritual cleanliness on the outside, yet being putrid on the inside.
7. Being outwardly strict in their law-keeping, but devoid of the law's real intent.
8. Honoring the prophets of old while behaving more like those who persecuted them.

The fifth discipleship competency of Jesus is developing *greater leadership*—authentic leaders that lead from the heart and teach by example. Leaders that live and apply the spirit of the law instead of a dead pretense. This is what it's about! Servant leaders are our product! Discipleship with Jesus is about developing people who are learning to take our place. Discipling others without the goal of teaching them to disciple others themselves in the servant leadership of Jesus is no discipleship at all!

Making All Things New

A Greater World

When the first explorers discovered the Americas, they believed they had stumbled upon a whole new world—a primitive, untouched land without the taint of European politics and culture. The words of Jesus to the disciples must have seemed no less surprising and unbelievable as He talked about the setting up of His kingdom. Herod’s temple upgrades continued for nearly sixty years and were still in process during Jesus’ day. These improvements were what started the conversation between Jesus and His disciples. The disciples were marveling at the beauty of the temple when Jesus reminded them of the clash of kingdoms that would leave these stones, so recently replaced, strewn all over the ground with no two stacked upon each other. Jesus’ vision for the world included so much more than a mere temple upgrade. Jesus had come to introduce a brand-new world filled with new people, as announced in Revelation 21:5: “Behold, I make all things new!”

In his last temptation, the devil offered Jesus the world and a way around the cross if Jesus would merely bow to him—the reigning prince of this world. This may have been the only real temptation of the three and Jesus might have fallen for it if He had only come to take over Satan’s kingdom, but in truth He came to introduce a whole new world—a world in which God would be king and everyone and everything would be in sync with God for His glory.



1. What do you look forward to most about Jesus’ kingdom?
2. What are your greatest fears about the return of Christ?
3. What do you want others to know about Jesus’ new world order?



Read Matthew 24, 25

1. What prompted the discussion between Jesus and the disciples about the destruction of the temple? What was the connection between the destruction of the temple and the preceding chapter on the woes of the Pharisees?
2. What are some of the signs that point to the nearness of Jesus’ coming? How many of these signs have already taken place?
3. What is the main sign that we are to look for in the setting up of His kingdom?
4. Jesus tells four stories about being prepared for His coming:
 - The Parable of the Unjust Steward
 - The Parable of the Ten Virgins
 - The Parable of Investing the King’s Gold
 - The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

What are these stories about? How are they different from one another? How are they similar? How do they help us prepare?

5. According to Jesus’ answer in His final sermon, how are we to prepare for His coming? What is our role in ushering in Jesus’ kingdom?
6. What excites you the most about the return of Christ? What preparations do you still need to make to be ready?

Discipleship Challenge: Jesus is challenging us to prepare and be engaged for a new world order. Practice the sixth competency of discipleship—a *greater world*—under Rabbi Jesus this week by imagining the world under the lordship of Christ and by reminding someone about His vision for the world.

7. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week to do great things for Him?
 2. How has God been helping you set up for His kingdom?
 3. How can this group pray for you today?
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Backstory

Dallas Willard writes that Jesus' view for the world was vastly different from the world we find ourselves in.

To his eyes this is a God-bathed and God-permeated world. It is a world filled with a glorious reality, where every component is within the range of God's direct knowledge and control—though he obviously permits some of it, for good reasons, to be for a while otherwise than as he wishes. It is a world that is inconceivably beautiful and good because of God and because God is always in it. It is a world in which God is continually at play and over which he constantly rejoices.¹

This is the world that Jesus inaugurated for all of us that we might “seek first the kingdom and His righteousness.” The temple was what God directed first Moses (the mobile sanctuary), then Solomon (the first temple) to build so the people could have a place to meet with Him. There was no more sacred place on earth, yet Jesus threatened to destroy it (Matthew 26:60, 61), and He prophesied here about its coming demise.

For Jesus, the temple was “a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17). His problem with the temple was how the Jewish leaders had profaned it by turning it into a marketplace and limiting its access, but another issue was the size of the temple in relation to God. God had reminded King David thousands of years earlier that the world was His temple and David's own family would be the human genus of this new structure (Isaiah 66:1, I Chronicles 17). Neither the original temple that Solomon built nor this second one, which had been rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity and was now in the process of a sixty-year upgrade, would ever be able to contain the God of the universes.

Jesus referred to this in His conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4: “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.” There was no physical place large enough for Yahweh. Paul underscored it in His reference about God to the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17:

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.”

It was important that the disciples get this. Until they realized Jesus' picture of God and His relationship, they would continue to cling to the only world they knew. They would keep trying to use Jesus and His resources to reshape the world according to their smaller vision. They had to understand the same reason that Jesus refused to bow to the devil in exchange for regaining this world: He did not want it in the first place. Jesus had come to bring an end to this world and to establish a new world order—the kingdom of His Father. To clarify this mission, Jesus told four parables of judgment emphasizing the need to prepare for God's new world order. Each one provides a different focus to keep in mind while preparing ourselves for a great new world.

1. The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Prepare through faithful service.)
2. The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Prepare for a wedding delay.)
3. The Parable of Investing the King's Gold (Prepare by advancing the kingdom.)
4. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Prepare by identifying and ministering to Jesus.)

The sixth discipleship competency of Jesus is letting go of this world system in order to fully embrace the greater world of Jesus. As Jesus once said, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:36). The path of discipleship leads to a new world order under the lordship of Jesus Christ! Disciples are fully committed to this brand-new world!

1. Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (pp. 61-62). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

The Reclamation of All Things

A Great New Identity

In the 2014 movie *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, the world has separated into two camps: genetically altered apes and humans. The apes have escaped from the science labs that created them and have found refuge in the mountains. Meanwhile, a deadly virus has wiped out most of humanity and the survivors are holed up in dilapidated cities without electricity or other conveniences the human race once enjoyed. Their world has fallen apart. Through a twisted series of misunderstandings, the apes have come to believe the humans are out to destroy them and vice versa. The consequence: an all-out war.

As the humans develop their defensive plan, we hear their motivation as they fight for survival. One man says, "You all know what we're up against! And I want you to know – it's not just about power! It's about giving us the hope to rebuild, to reclaim the world we lost!"

In this quote, we find the heartbeat of most movies, literature, and sporting events: dominion. Who will come out on top? Who is the strongest? Who will rule? Who will reclaim what was lost?

From Rabbi Jesus, we learn the answer: *He* will reclaim what was lost (Matthew 18:11). And He will do it in the most unlikely way: by living the life humans couldn't live, dying the death humans should have died, and donating His merits to humanity. Now He lives in His people through the same Spirit that brought Him back to life, empowering them to live a new kind of life and partner with Him in the reclamation of all things (Luke 24:49, Romans 8:11). What are the implications of all this?



1. Describe your vision of a perfect world.
2. What can we do as Christ's followers to help shape that world?



Matthew 27–28

1. What do you think is significant about the way Matthew ends his gospel (Matthew 28:16–20)?
2. Read Genesis 1:27–28. What was God's first command to humans? How does it compare with Jesus' last command in Matthew? How would this command benefit the world?
3. Read Genesis 12:1–3. How is God's call to Abram similar to His command to Adam and Eve? Now return to Matthew 28:16–20. What is God still concerned with?
4. Being baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit is being immersed into a new identity. What changes about you when you're brought into a new identity with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit?
5. Jesus commissions His disciples to spread out and fill the earth with this new and greater identity, which is an expression of who God is and what He has done. How would your life and world change if you personally lived from this greater identity? How might these things reflect Jesus' plan to reclaim and renew all things?
6. Read Ephesians 1:22–23. We read that Christ's church is His people, who "fill all in all." In light of all the texts we've looked at up to this point, what images come to mind when you think of Christ's people "filling all in all"?
7. How can this group pray for you?

Discipleship Challenge: Being a disciple of Jesus means living as a family of missionary servants. This is our new Trinitarian identity and it's not an individual endeavor. The church isn't an event we attend, but a family we belong to. Meet with a few friends this week over a meal and talk about how you might live differently with each other in the next 3-6 months if you really believed you were family. What if you believed you were servants to the least of these? What if you believed the Spirit had given you a purpose for mission? Practice this seventh competency of a *greater identity* by agreeing with a few friends to live differently in light of your new identity.



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week to do great things for Him?
2. How has this last lesson helped pull together the overall picture of what discipleship under Rabbi Jesus is all about?



Backstory:

We've come full circle. We've been learning about discipleship from Matthew under Rabbi Jesus, His most unlikely follower. According to Matthew, discipleship begins by acknowledging and honoring Jesus—the true Messianic king. It culminates with our new identity and the extension of His kingdom.

Jesus is the new head of a renewed humanity that is reclaiming all that was lost in the downward spiral of sin and death. In Jesus, the dominion our first parents forfeited by giving in to the serpent has finally been restored. Jesus is propelling the world on a new trajectory of reclaimed dominion, bearing the fruit of righteousness and multiplying the grace of God in the very place where sin once reigned supreme.

Jesus' victory over sin and death established by His resurrection from the dead would be enough to start the world over on a new divine course. But God's design was much more than a realignment of the world. God's plan was total restoration—reclaiming all that was lost in the fall. This is why discipleship is so important. Discipleship is so much more than our personal spiritual renewal. Discipleship leads to the honor, glory, and dignity of helping to advance this renewal as a volunteer in Jesus' mission. In discipleship, we are being trained and enlisted for the restoration of all things. And—privilege above all privilege—we are graciously permitted the joy of inviting others to join the revolution through the discipleship process.

All authority—*all* authority—in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. He won the right to rule! But now, unlike any other earthly sovereign the world has ever known, He shares His right to rule with us by giving us the opportunity to help advance His mission. Those who once led in the rebellion are now conscripted for the revolution. "Go," Jesus says. "Go make disciples!" This is the message of Matthew. The discipleship competencies of Rabbi Jesus are there for us to learn in the gospel of Matthew for just this purpose—that we might join the cause and make more disciples as Matthew instructs us to do.

We have a *great new king*, and we have been given a *great new life*. This gives us a *great new mission* and a *great new message* that will make *great new leaders*! And those leaders, in turn, will make a *great new world* that is filled with people with *great new identities* under the lordship of Jesus Christ!

We will never be the same. We belong to Jesus. We have His life. We have been called to His mission. He is sharing with us His deepest secrets for a new world order. Through His Spirit we are to live the message we are sharing. We will never view the world in the same idolatrous way again now that we have His life-giving perspective. Finally, we know why we are here. We have regained our purpose—our original life purpose that was abandoned in the garden—through the redeeming work of Christ.

This is the final discipleship competency under Rabbi Jesus. We are to claim our *greater identity*, going in His authority to do what we have always been ordained to do—have dominion! The kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ through

the redeeming process of discipleship. This is how we are to accomplish greater things in Jesus' name! This is Jesus' plan for transforming the world! This is how His kingdom has come, is advancing, and will ultimately overcome the world!

The prince of this world has been cast down. His kingdom of selfishness, pain, misery, death, and destruction is being replaced by God's kingdom of love, joy, faithfulness, beauty, truth, and grace. Through the victory of Jesus, we have been delivered from sin and enlisted in the service of our king. This is our new identity. We have become His disciples! Now, under His authority, let us go in Jesus' name and make disciples!



