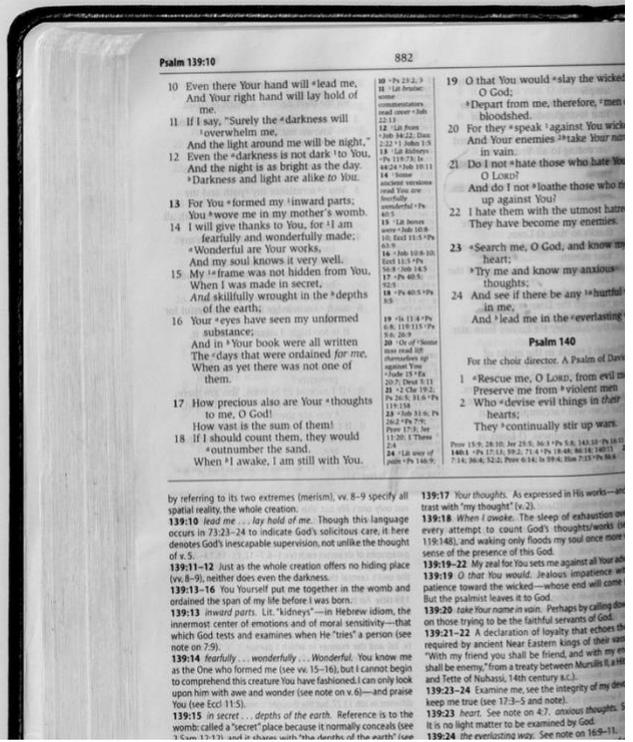


THE EMMANUEL DEVOTIONAL

A 28-Day Devotional in The Gospel of Matthew

Content provided by **NEWSRING CHURCH**



Psalm 139:10

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- 10 Even there Your hand will ^alead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of
me.
- 11 If I say, "Surely the ^a'darkness will
'overwhelm me,
And the light around me will be night,"^b
12 Even the ^a'darkness is not dark ^b'to You,
And the night is as bright as the day.
^a'Darkness and light are alike to You.
- 13 For You ^a'formed my ^b'inward parts;
You ^a'wove me in my mother's womb.
- 14 I will give thanks to You, for I am
fearfully and wonderfully made;
^a'Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.
- 15 My ^a'frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the ^a'depths
of the earth.
- 16 Your ^a'eyes have seen my unformed
substance;
And in ^a'Your book were all written
The ^a'days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of
them.
- 17 How precious also are Your ^a'thoughts
to me, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- 18 If I should count them, they would
^a'outnumber the sand.
When I awake, I am still with You.

- 19 O that You would ^a'slay the wicked,
O God:
^a'Depart from me, therefore, ^b'men
bloodshed!
- 20 For they ^a'speak ^b'against You with
And Your enemies ^a'take Your name
in vain.
- 21 Do I not ^a'hate those who hate You,
O Lord?
And do I not ^a'loathe those who rise
up against You?
22 I hate them with the utmost hate
They have become my enemies.
- 23 ^a'Search me, O God, and know my
heart:
^b'Try me and know my anxieties—
thoughts;
24 And see if there be any ^a'barren
in me,
And ^a'lead me in the ^b'everlasting

Psalm 140

For the choir director. A Psalm of David.
1 ^a'Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men
Preserve me from ^a'violent men
2 Who ^a'devises evil things in their
hearts.
They ^a'continually stir up wars.

Psa 139:10-19; 140:1-11; 141:1-10; 142:1-5; 143:1-6; 144:1-8; 145:1-13; 146:1-10; 147:1-11; 148:1-14; 149:1-9; 150:1-6

by referring to its two extremes (merism), vv. 8-9 specify all spatial reality, the whole creation.
139:10 *lead me . . . lay hold of me.* Though this language occurs in 73:23-24 to indicate God's solicitous care, it here denotes God's inescapable supervision, not unlike the thought of v. 5.
139:11-12 Just as the whole creation offers no hiding place (vv. 8-9), neither does even the darkness.
139:13-16 You yourself put me together in the womb and ordained the span of my life before I was born.
139:13 *inward parts.* Lit. "kidneys"—in Hebrew idiom, the innermost center of emotions and of moral sensitivity—that which God tests and examines when He "tries" a person (see note on 7:9).
139:14 *fearfully . . . wonderfully . . . Wonderful.* You know me as the One who formed me (see vv. 15-16), but I cannot begin to comprehend this creature You have fashioned. I can only look upon him with awe and wonder (see note on v. 6)—and praise You (see Ecc 11:5).
139:15 *in secret . . . depths of the earth.* Reference is to the womb (called a "secret" place because it normally conceals) (see 7:12; 13:9); and in contrast with "depths of the earth" (see

139:17 Your thoughts. As expressed in His works—and trust with "my thought" (v. 2).
139:18 When I awake. The sleep of exhaustion on every attempt to count God's thoughts/works (cf. 119:148); and waking only floods my soul (once more) with the sense of the presence of this God.
139:19-22 My zeal for You sets me against all four of **139:19** O that You would. Jealous impatience and patience toward the wicked—whose end will come. But the psalmist leaves it to God.
139:20 Take Your name in vain. Perhaps by calling down on those trying to be the faithful servants of God.
139:21-22 A declaration of loyalty that echoes the required by ancient Near Eastern kings of their vassals: "With my friend you shall be friend, and with my enemy shall be enemy," from a treaty between Murshili II and Tette of Nuhasi, 14th century B.C.
139:23-24 Examine me, see the integrity of my soul, keep me true (see 173:5 and note).
139:23 Heart. See note on 4:7. *anxious thoughts.* It is no light matter to be examined by God.
139:24 The everlasting way. See note on 16:1-11.

INTRODUCTION

Ever met someone who was not at all what you expected? Maybe it was the mutual friend you've heard stories about for years, or the professor whose reputation preceded him. Perhaps it was the first date who looked and sounded nothing like her online profile.

That sense of confusion we feel when someone isn't who we thought they'd be is the same confusion a lot of Jews felt when Jesus showed up saying He was the Messiah. Everyone knew about the Messiah. They'd heard the stories and waited hundreds of years for his arrival. And Jesus was not what they expected.

Matthew, one of Jesus' followers, wrote the Gospel of Matthew to document what had happened during Jesus' ministry. He wanted to help Jews understand how Jesus' life, death, and resurrection fulfilled every prediction about the Messiah they'd ever heard.

MATTHEW 1

The first time Matthew heard the story of Joseph, the father of Jesus, he could probably relate. Matthew was rich, had lots of friends, yet was called to follow Jesus (Matthew 9:9-10). Following Jesus could put Matthew's reputation at risk, just like marrying Mary could put Joseph's reputation at risk.

When Joseph found out his fiancée was pregnant, Matthew 1:24 says Joseph "did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him" and married her. When Joseph decided to obey God by marrying pregnant Mary, he gave up his reputation of being "faithful to the law" (Matthew 1:19). He was probably frustrated because his reputation had been marred, but his obedience gave him a much greater reputation. Joseph stepped into his life's purpose. He is listed in Matthew 1 as Jesus's earthly father.

When Matthew heard about Joseph, perhaps he was still struggling with people from his past harassing him for his decision to become a Christian. Perhaps he needed the hope that his legacy would far outweigh any hassles he faced. Maybe that's why he chose to begin his gospel with Jesus's genealogy and Joseph's story.

Today we know that what happened to Joseph also happened to Matthew. Matthew found his lasting reputation by following God's will. He chose to obey God instead of listening to the world. The result? He wrote an entire book of the Bible, which now begins the New Testament. His name is a part of the Bible because he valued the higher name of Jesus Christ.

REFLECT

- Are you facing a choice between listening to the world and obeying God's commands? How do the stories of Joseph and Matthew change your perspective on the situation?
- God promises to give us "a new name" in heaven (Isaiah 62:2). What choices are you making to invest in your eternal reputation?
- Do you know someone who is torn between the world's opinion and God's plan for his or her life? (Maybe it's you!) Take a minute today to pray for this person, and encourage him or her to keep a perspective like Joseph and Matthew.

MATTHEW 2

We live in a world of relentless voices telling us what we should own, where we should go, how we should live and especially what we should believe. How do we sift through them and separate what matters from what doesn't? How do we distinguish God's voice from all the chaos?

In Biblical times, God spoke to people through the written law, prophets, angels, and dreams. In Matthew 2:13-21, Joseph heard from God in a dream that King Herod had ordered the execution of the Christ child. Angels warned Joseph to take baby Jesus and his mother to Egypt until they were safe. Though God could use this same approach to address us. Hebrews 1:1-2 explains how God speaks to us today: "In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son."

Jesus's appearance on this planet is God saying, "I faithfully love you and relentlessly pursue you." Jesus's death on the cross is God saying, "I forgive you, no matter what." Jesus's resurrection from the dead is God saying, "You can be made brand new and live in freedom." Because of Jesus and our faith in Him, we can now clearly hear God through His word, the Bible. And as we strive to know more of God by reading our Bible, His Spirit teaches us how to hear our heavenly Father and how to know His will for our lives.

REFLECT

- What's one-way God has spoken to you in the past?
- What is one thing God is telling you right now in this season?

MATTHEW 3

Imagine what it must have been like for John the Baptist to see Jesus walking toward him asking to be baptized. John knew who Jesus was — the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance of sin, yet Jesus, who had never sinned, sought out John to baptize Him.

Why would Jesus take a step that clearly was not necessary? He told John that His baptism would "fulfill all righteousness." He came to be baptized not because He needed to be, but to be obedient to His Father. After Jesus's baptism, a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Jesus's act of obedience was pleasing to God the Father.

Baptism is a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. It is a symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. And finally, it is an act of obedience, an opportunity for us to clearly follow Jesus's example.

If we are followers of Jesus Christ, what circumstance or excuse should keep us from following our Savior's example? Jesus began His ministry on earth by coming to John to be baptized. Similarly, baptism should be our first step as His followers. Why wait any longer to take this important step?

REFLECT

- If you are a follower of Jesus and you have not been baptized since receiving Christ, what has been holding you back?
- If you have been baptized since your salvation, you have taken your first step, but there is always a next step as we walk with Jesus. What is your next step? What can you do today to take it?

MATTHEW 4

We've all been tempted. Sometimes it's something small, like a delicious dessert when trying to lose weight. Other times it's something big, like believing that God could not possibly love us or we've been too sinful for Him to care anymore.

Lies and temptation have been coming our way since Satan convinced Adam and Eve that God was holding out on them, and they fell for it.

"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Our God knows we will be tempted, and God Himself will provide an escape plan. Matthew 4:1-11 tells the story of Jesus' own temptation and how to defeat temptation as He did:

1. Temptation comes when we seem weak and defenceless, so be alert. (Matthew 4:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 12:10)
2. The scriptures are our weapons against temptation, so arm yourself. (Ephesians 6:17 and James 1:25)
3. God is faithful to protect us and provide for us so we can endure. (John 14:27 and Matthew 6:30)

If we give up and give in, temptation leads to sin (James 1:2-15). But this doesn't have to be the case! Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us and remind us whose we are (John 14:23-24). God is faithful to protect and provide an escape plan. The question is, will we be faithful and take it?

REFLECT

- What are you most tempted by?
- Jesus was hungry, so Satan tempted Him with food. Satan knows our weaknesses, and like Jesus, we can defeat temptation by knowing God's promises. What does it look like for you in this season to remember God's promises?

MATTHEW 5

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus compares his followers to light, saying we "are the light of the world," unable to be hidden. No one puts a lamp under a bowl because a lamp is designed to help people see in dark places. Christ's words and actions showed the true nature of the world around Him. Christ-followers give light to those around them by doing and saying what Jesus did. By growing in relationship with Jesus every day, following Him step by step, we partner with Him in spreading the truth.

Another of Jesus's disciples, John, said it this way: "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7).

Light cannot be anything other than what it is. It's bright; it dispels darkness; it enables people to see what they are doing. God is light, and since He sent His Holy Spirit to live inside believers, so are we. As his ambassadors on earth, we shine even when we don't know it.

Jesus told His followers to "let your light shine before others," calling them to live an active faith, not a passive one. Put your light on its stand. Your circumstances are an opportunity to shine brightly for the Lord and to share God's overcoming truth with those around you. Your family and community can tell what you believe by how you live.

REFLECT

- What situation are you in right now in which you have to exercise faith in God?
- How can you share your faith with others in the midst of your circumstances?

MATTHEW 6

Worrying can be an everyday occurrence for some people. Sometimes it becomes such a normal part of life that it's not even noticed. It becomes a piece of who they are. Many anxious people find themselves wishing to be more laid back, and they begin to think, "Okay, today I will not worry as much. Today I'm going to stop myself from worrying." But, the worrying doesn't stop. Instead, it becomes an even bigger mess of worrying about not worrying.

So, just how do we get rid of worry? Beginning in Matthew 6:25, Jesus talks specifically about worry. In fact, Jesus instructs us not to worry at all about anything. Such things even as simple as food and clothes worry us day in and day out. These worries are rooted in our doubt that Jesus will provide for us. Jesus says in verse 33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you." We must hold on to and trust in the promises of Jesus. He will provide.

The best way to begin not worrying should not begin with us; it begins with Jesus. We must look to Jesus and build a relationship with Him, and as His promises unfold before us, we will see His faithfulness. Then and only by Jesus, our worries will begin to fade.

REFLECT

- What is the one thing you spend most of your time worrying over? How can you begin to give control of that worry to Jesus?
- Do you fully trust God to provide for you? Why or why not?
- Is worrying keeping you from having a better relationship with Jesus? What can you do to worry less and trust God more?

MATTHEW 7

When we hear the name of Jesus, it should not make us feel condemned or ashamed. We should feel hope and forgiveness. Unfortunately, some of us grew up hearing that Jesus only saves “good people” from hell. We believe we are “bad people” unworthy of salvation. When we believe that lie, we don’t really know Jesus.

Matthew 7:21 warns against falling prey to false assumptions about who Jesus is, stating those people will not inherit the kingdom of God. “Watch out for false prophets,” Matthew 7:15 says. “They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” Believing the wrong things about Jesus could keep us from salvation.

But we can know that we know Jesus, without question. In the same way we recognize trees by their fruit, we’ll know we’ve met Jesus by the change happening inside us. Matthew 7:16-19 says, “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” God is good; therefore He only produces good fruit. If the fruit in your life isn’t good, it isn’t God.

REFLECT

- Have you ever made an assumption about someone that proved untrue once you got to know them? When did you know you’d gotten to know the “real” them?
- What are the good fruits God is producing in your life and in the lives of people you know? Take a moment to pray that He’ll help you recognize them and give you discernment to steer clear of “bad fruits.”

MATTHEW 8

We place our faith in countless people and things. We believe our legs will support us, so we get out of bed. We believe our brakes will enable our car to stop, so we drive. We believe our boss will pay us, so we show up for the job. When we have faith in something, our behaviour is affected. We act out of faith.

The opposite of faith is fear. We can choose one or the other. Imagine a world in which car brakes only worked half the time. We would be terrified at every intersection. God is infinitely more reliable than the finest car on the market, but we don't treat Him that way. Our faith seems to extend just beyond our ability even though God is able to do infinitely more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:20). We hope for good when God promises the best.

Matthew 8 is full of the fulfillment of God's promises in people's lives. If we really have faith that God works in these ways, it radically changes the way we live our lives. We are willing to address sin we've brushed under the rug because Jesus forgives and heals. We will step out and risk something for God because we know He'll provide for us ([Philippians 1:6](#)). Faith like this eliminates fear because our faith is in a certainty: Jesus.

When we are afraid to address an area of sin in our life and be obedient to God's call, it is because we doubt the truth of God's promises. Our faith is limited by our need to believe we are better equipped than God to manage our issues. Fear of condemnation and failure overtake us. God offers freedom from fear through faith in Him.

REFLECT

- Does your faith in an unseen God propel you to action each day?
- In what area of your life are you doubting God's promises?
- What part does God have for you to play in growing your own faith?

MATTHEW 9

There's an old saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." But Jesus taught, "If it ain't broke, it can't be fixed!" He said, "...It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick ... For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12, 13b).

Matthew's audience was mainly Jewish, and much of his writing was aimed at the Jewish religious leaders of the day. For centuries they had believed being "good people" and "obeying the rules" made them right with God. But even if their behaviour wasn't always perfect, they knew their family heritage had them covered. Really? The naked truth is these folks didn't want Jesus. They didn't see a need for change, nor were they willing to change. They thought they could do things for themselves. Furthermore, they hated Jesus for hanging out with all the sinful people they looked down on.

Humans love to self-improve. It feeds our pride. But if someone can fix himself, then what's the need for Jesus? The apostle Paul said it this way, "I do not set aside (reject) the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing" (Galatians 2:21). In other words, if someone can work hard enough to get right with God, then what was the point of Christ crucified?

Jesus is for everyone, from preachers to prostitutes. Everyone needs God's grace. Salvation is not a life made better. It is a life made brand new (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Bible teaches a broken and burdened life is the requirement for entering God's kingdom (Matthew 11:28). After all, only sinners need a saviour. Forgiving sins is what Jesus does best. It is an act of worship when we release our sins and let God forgive us.

REFLECT

- No one becomes God's child by having Christian parents or being born into a Christian family. You must have your own personal relationship with Jesus. How would you describe your relationship with Jesus today?
- Are you still trying to earn God's acceptance by "being good" and "obeying all the rules?"
- What is one thing you've been trying to fix on your own that you need to let God handle instead?

MATTHEW 10

Jesus knows our hearts better than we do. When He sends out His disciples in Matthew 10, Jesus gives specific commands, not to limit the disciples, but to prepare and encourage them for the experiences ahead. The Word of God is living and breathing, so we can learn from these same commands thousands of years later.

Live simply. Freely you have received; freely give (Matthew 10:8b). This command guards our motives. Greed and pride quickly ruin character. In the same way, heartfelt generosity can be a game-changer in someone's life.

Be wise. "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). A life dedicated to Jesus Christ might be lonely, difficult or even dangerous. Committing your life to Christ is never guaranteed to be easy, but Jesus knows how to bring joy into our lives, even in tough times.

Don't be afraid. God gives us the words to speak under pressure and calms our worrying hearts by telling us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing. God knows every hair on our heads. Jesus tells us, "Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31).

You are precious to God. You were created to glorify Him and bring others toward Him. "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). Jesus has called us to love a simple, wise, fearless life because He knows His strength is all we need.

REFLECT

- Living simply isn't easy because we're prone to listen to an "I want it now!" mentality. What changes can you make in your budget in order to spend money more wisely?
- If Jesus was generous with the resources He had, how can we be generous with ours?
- We all have areas where we need to practice more wisdom. Are you being wise in your conversations, money and time? If not, what changes do you need to make?

MATTHEW 11

Do you unload all the groceries in one trip? Loading way more than you should on each arm, you awkwardly and barely close the trunk. Bag handles cut into your arms. You can make it. Just a little longer. If you are a one-trip unloader, you know the relief you feel when you make it to your destination, or better yet, someone meets you and takes some of your load.

Have you tried the same trick spiritually?

I can handle all this on my own.

I can carry the weight of my sin, my sorrow, my to-do list.

Yes, it hurts. I should ask for help, but I can do this.

Carrying a load of groceries is probably not going to cause any more damage than a broken jar. Carrying our sin or sorrow is more serious. We cannot do it. It is too heavy for us. Thankfully, we don't have to. Jesus is ready to take our heavy load. Only He has the power to heal our hearts from the damage done by sin and sorrow. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus invites us, "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Here are a few ways to give our load to Him.

Ask Him to forgive your sins and give Him control in your life (Romans 10:9-10). Spend time each day talking to God and reading the Bible. This is how our mind is renewed and we learn to rest in Him. Talk to someone else who loves Jesus when you are dealing with sin or hurting (Galatians 6:2). God places people in our lives to support our growth. Don't beat yourself up when you mess up. Ask God to forgive you and remember you are forgiven. Focus on Jesus instead of your sin (Romans 8:1).

REFLECT

- Have you given control of your life to Jesus?
- What's one load you are trying to carry on your own that you need Jesus' help with? Tell Him how you're feeling and ask for His help today.

MATTHEW 12

Have you ever felt disliked? Maybe even hated? Most of us have at some point in our lives. Jesus did, too.

The Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders, hated Jesus. They treated Him like a suspected criminal — always following close behind, watching Him, waiting to see if He did something against the rules they had studied, memorized and defined.

Jesus was born into a humble family, and many may have considered Him to be the underdog. He was not what the Pharisees were expecting as they anxiously awaited the arrival of the Messiah, so they discounted Him.

Matthew 12 records a time when Jesus went into the synagogue, knowing the Pharisees would be there to condemn Him. Still, He approached a man with a shrivelled hand. As the Pharisees watched to see if Jesus would heal this man on the Sabbath (a day of rest when no work was to be done), Jesus healed him by restoring his hand, just as sound as the other.

The Pharisees thought they had caught Jesus in the act. Now they had evidence that Jesus was unlawfully performing miracles on the Sabbath. Jesus had gone after the one, a man whose life needed to be changed, in the face of persecution. Jesus explained this man's life was more valuable than recovering a lost sheep on the Sabbath. Whereas the Pharisees thought it was more appropriate to keep the letter of the law.

Jesus still goes after the one. He accepts us for who we are no matter who is watching. You are valuable to Him.

REFLECT

- What is something in your life you need Jesus to restore?
- Do you ever find yourself trying to conform to rules instead of following Jesus' example?
- What can you learn from Jesus when it comes to showing your faith in the face of adversity?
- We all have areas where we need to practice more wisdom. Are you being wise in your conversations, money and time? If not, what changes do you need to make?

MATTHEW 13

Gesù è il Signore.

Those are powerful words, but unless you speak Italian, they mean nothing. "Gesù è il Signore" means "Jesus is Lord" in Italian. The frustration we feel when we're surrounded by a language we don't understand is the same feeling people get when Christians speak their own language or refuse to meet them where they are.

In Matthew 13, a large crowd came to Jesus. He didn't break them into manageable groups or send people away. Instead, Jesus got in a boat so everyone could see and hear Him speak. Then, Jesus taught using parables, or simple stories. When the disciples asked why He taught in stories, Jesus replied, "You have been given the chance to understand the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. It has not been given to outsiders" (Matthew 13:11, NIRV). Jesus met people on their level by using words they could understand. Teaching again in a parable, Jesus explained meeting people where they are allows the seed of the Gospel to sink into their hearts and grow more easily.

Obstacles can make it difficult to share the Gospel. Jesus didn't let obstacles stop Him, though, so we can't, either. In this story, Jesus met people where they were by stepping out on a boat. How can we step out to reach people where they are and share the Gospel?

REFLECT

- What obstacles hold you back from sharing the Gospel?
- How can you overcome them?
- One great way to share the Gospel is to tell your story. Take time to write your story and practice how you would tell it to a non-Christian.

MATTHEW 14

We all have situations, issues, problems, and discomforts that push us and pull us this way and that, leaving us overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted. Matthew 14 begins with Jesus experiencing one of those situations.

One of Jesus' closest friends just died, and He needed time to reflect. Jesus withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place (Matthew 14:13). Although Jesus was looking for space and quiet, He didn't receive it right then. "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14).

Rest is a command from God, but so is loving our neighbours. Too often, we can ignore one at the expense of the other. We over-focus on loving others and neglect the need to take care of our own spiritual and emotional health. Or, we over-focus on resting and neglect the hurting people around us, justifying our actions as "needing some me time."

Jesus showed us that these two ideas — resting well and loving others well — can coexist.

The people followed Jesus, and He met their needs, putting them before Himself. But Jesus still found time for rest. After this, He rearranged His schedule to make time for God, going "up on a mountainside by himself to pray" (Matthew 14:23).

By drawing close to God, Jesus' spirit was renewed, and He was able to do many miracles for those He loved. As we take time to draw closer to God, we feel more encouraged and equipped to manage our hectic schedules and enjoy all life has to offer. God can do miracles in and through us if we put Him first. Just as God poured into His Son when they spent time together, He will renew us so we can do the work He has for us. We can only begin to imagine the miracles we will be witness to when our eyes are solely upon our creator.

REFLECT

- Jesus was the perfect role model of how to steward our time and put God first. How are you modelling this behaviour in your own life?
- What is one way you can rearrange your day to spend more quality time with God?
- How can you serve more people in your life who may desperately need your time and attention?

MATTHEW 15

Rules. Most people don't like them. A lot of people don't agree with them. Sometimes we have trouble following them but decide to do so anyway for the greater good.

We can read through the Old Testament in books like Leviticus and Numbers to learn about the rules that people had to follow before Jesus came. The complicated and detailed list of rules seem impossible to follow because they were. Lucky for us, a miracle happened since those laws and rules were in place. Jesus came.

And instead of setting lots of requirements to be in His presence, Jesus invites people into a relationship with two simple words: "Follow me."

There are no rules or shortcuts to make us better in Jesus' eyes. Jesus simply wants us to follow Him with all of our hearts. In Matthew 15:11 and Matthew 15:19, we see how difficult this is. Our hearts naturally incline toward selfishness and sin, but Jesus wants to change our hearts as we grow closer to Him. Only the power of Christ can rid the evil from our hearts and replace it with good. We just have to ask Him to change us.

REFLECT

- What is one thing you need to ask Jesus to change about your heart today to become more like Him?
- Has there ever been a time when you asked Jesus into your life? If not, you can find out more by contacting info@eefc.ca.

MATTHEW 16

It might sound silly, but this children's poem describes the mind of most humans.

I had a little tea party, one afternoon at three; 'Twas very small, three guests in all, just I, myself and me. Myself ate up the sandwiches, while I drank up the tea, 'Twas also I who ate the pie, and passed the cake to me.

Like a tea party with I, myself, and me, our thought life is all one-sided: "More! Mine! No fair! What about me?"

The Jewish leaders were No. 1 in their own eyes, too. They exalted themselves as the greatest and most holy in the land (Matthew 16:11-12). Moreover, the Jewish leaders hated Jesus because He received the people's devotion, which they desperately desired.

The disciples were no different. They constantly bickered about who would be the greatest in Jesus's kingdom (Matthew 18:1). Even Peter unintentionally tried to thwart God's plan, reasoning Jesus could bypass the cross and establish His kingdom right then and there. In Peter's mind, he could receive his place in the kingdom sooner, and everyone would see how awesome he was (Matthew 16:22-23).

The solution for everyone was the same. Jesus responded, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). It was an invitation to all requiring a decision to either follow Jesus or the Pharisees. Being subjects under Roman authority, the Jews knew the cross would mean pain, humiliation and certain death.

For us, denying ourselves means setting aside the will and rights to our own lives. Then, we submit ourselves completely to Jesus' will. The time for doing whatever we want has ended. The cross was Jesus' test of His obedience to His Father's will. As Jesus followers, our test is the same. If we will not submit to God's authority, are we really His disciples?

REFLECT

- Jesus gave up His life in obedience to His Father in heaven. Are you willing to give everything to follow Jesus?
- How would you describe your obedience to God today? Are you all in or are you still trying to hang onto your rights?

MATTHEW 17

Have you ever stood at the bedside of a loved one and watched them suffer in despair and pain? Have you ever been drawn to make a difference in the life of another but simply didn't know what to do?

Such was the case in the story of a father who had such relentless faith that his child was healed from his days of suffering. This father recognized the power and authority of Christ. He believed that if he could get his son to Jesus, his son's life would be miraculously changed. To his dismay, when the father brought his son to Jesus' disciples for healing, he found that they could not grant his request.

The Bible says Jesus told His disciples that it was because of their measure of faith that the father's son was not healed: "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).

Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Jesus is the Word (John 1:1-5), and Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Our faith in Jesus and the power of His Word positions us to see miracles and wonders in our own lives and in the lives of others.

By reading God's Word and allowing His word to saturate our hearts, we can strengthen our faith and make a life-changing difference in the people around us.

REFLECT

- What does your daily Bible reading time look like?
- What do you believe about the power and authority of God's Word? Are these beliefs reflected in your actions?
- Have you ever witnessed a miracle in your life or in the life of others? What did this look like?

MATTHEW 18

As children, we all had to learn what hurts so we can keep ourselves safe. Sometimes, we listened to mom's warnings to stay away from the stove or keep our fingers out of the electrical sockets. Other times, we learned the hard way — ignoring our parents' advice and letting injury be our teacher.

In Matthew 18, Jesus teaches about how valuable each one of us is to Him. Jesus wants every one of us to grow closer to Him every day. While rough things will happen along the way that challenge us or maybe even cause us to fall short of the life Jesus wants for us, we are warned to avoid being the cause of these “stumbles” for ourselves or for other people.

When we make willful decisions to do things that are in conflict with what Jesus wants for us, we hurt ourselves and others. That's why Jesus tells us we are to do whatever it takes to avoid putting ourselves in a situation where we're tempted to sin. Just like an outlet cover kept us from electrocuting ourselves as kids, creating boundaries in our adult lives can help us break the temptation to sin. We don't have to take Jesus' call to cut off our hands literally. Instead, if we find our hands reaching for things which result in us committing a sin, we need to change what's in our grasp. If our feet take us to places where we easily give in to sinful temptation, we need to change where we're going. If our eyes look at things which stir up sinful thoughts which lead to sinful actions, we need to change where we're looking.

Experience is an effective teacher, but so is Jesus' instruction. When it comes to making our way through life, we can learn by hurt or we can let Jesus help by showing us what to stay away from.

REFLECT

- What parts of your life put you at the greatest risk for repeated sin and falling short of the life Jesus wants for you?
- What do you need to change today to obey Jesus and stop putting yourself in danger?

MATTHEW 19

Have you ever noticed how easily we assign different values to words based on who's speaking?

Suppose your broke uncle called and said to sell all you have and buy stock in Blackberry. You'd probably roll your eyes, thank him for the call, then get off the phone as quickly as possible. However, if Warren Buffett called and said he was going to sink his entire net worth (over \$74.7 billion) into that same stock tomorrow, our reaction would be entirely different. Based on his reputation and success in investing, we would take his advice about money seriously.

In Matthew 19, we see a rich young ruler come to Jesus and ask how to get to heaven. Upon hearing that he had to sell everything he has, the young man turns away from following Jesus. What is really fascinating is the title that the young man uses to address Jesus: good teacher. This title was a sign of respect used for religious teachers in the temple.

How would this story change if the young ruler really understood that he was addressing God come in the flesh, not just a religious teacher? The young man wanted eternal life, a relationship with God after death. This young ruler was face to face with the object of his desire and missed it because he didn't realize who he was speaking to.

How often do we fail to follow Jesus for the exact same reason? Following Jesus is about taking our next step in faith, but faith has to be in something worthy of it. If we let the object of our faith become ourselves, our church, our finances, or anything other than God, we will find ourselves like the rich young ruler — walking away from what Jesus calls us to.

REFLECT

- Has your appreciation and wonder of who Jesus is, been growing or shrinking over time? Why do you think this is?
- What would you be doing differently if Jesus showed up every day on your doorstep?
- What is Jesus asking you to do that makes you wonder if He knows what He is doing? What step can you take today to have faith in what He has called you to do?

MATTHEW 20

Past sins and mistakes can weigh us down and make us think we are not worthy of God's love or we must earn His love. In Matthew 20, Jesus tells the story of workers in a vineyard. The owner of the vineyard hired a set of workers at the start of the day and promised them a set amount of wages. He continued to hire workers throughout the day, and at the end they all were paid the same amount. Jesus told this story to illustrate how God sees and treats His children and to paint a picture of God's heart toward all of us.

Each of the men in the story was looking for a job, and the vineyard owner provided a place for them. In the same way, Jesus came to make way for all who look for Him to be called His children (John 1:12). God desires that all people would be saved, and God gives salvation to those who believe in Jesus (1 Timothy 2:4).

The vineyard owner provided a consistent wage for all workers no matter how long they worked. This payment was not based on work but on a relationship. Just the same, God does not give salvation based on works but based on a relationship with His son, Jesus. His grace is open to all people regardless of past sin (Ephesians 2:8, Romans 8:1).

God extends His grace freely to all. Our past and future mistakes cannot blot out God's forgiveness, and our good works can't earn it. God's generosity is evident through His gift of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:15). He stands with His arms open to all.

REFLECT

- How has God shown generosity in your life?
- How is God asking you to model His generosity to others?
- Knowing you cannot outgive God, is He calling you to give more of your time, talent, or treasures?

MATTHEW 21

"Hed up yonder a ways til ya reach the old Miller place. Turn right then go a fur piece then left after ole Clyde Thompson's farm. That'll swing yous out past Tucker's pond and then takes another left. It's a dirt road but it'll carry ya out to the highway you're a lookin' fur," replied the farmer to the request for help.

Directions like this are frustrating and useless without knowing the area or having the farmer actually lead us there. Trying to live a righteous life without following Jesus is just as frustrating.

Jesus didn't just give His followers a list of directions to follow. He gave us an example to follow. Jesus demonstrated righteous living through His words and actions. In clearing the temple, Jesus acts in accordance with Scripture. In quieter moments with the disciples, Jesus teaches biblical principles using stories and metaphors He knew they would understand. As a result, we see them listening intently, asking clarifying questions and responding in faith.

Being lost in the sticks is one thing, but being lost in life is far more serious. Being lost in life has eternal consequences. Just as Jesus used the Scriptures to remind His disciples about truth and living a righteous life, the Bible is filled with the wisdom and direction we need for today. Get to know God's voice by spending time with Him in His Word, and He will lead you in the way of righteousness.

REFLECT

- Think of a situation in your life where you are trying desperately to control the outcome. Have you been in God's Word, covering the situation and your response in prayer?
- Which lessons from Matthew 21 could help you learn to trust God for the direction in your life?

MATTHEW 22

A forceful, off-target blow from a hammer. A screech of tires caused by slamming on the brakes. A phone call delivering unexpected news. You've probably experienced one of these scenarios, and it's possible the first thought that ran through your mind — or came out of your mouth — was a not-so-glamorous four-letter word. When things go wrong, raw emotion often comes out.

Jesus understands that we endure pain and suffering. He experienced the fears and trials we all have and gave us the example of how to act. Jesus was hated, mistreated, falsely accused and plotted against, and His response was a four-letter word, but not the one we may have been tempted to use. Jesus responded with love. The Bible gives many commands, but Jesus made it clear which commandments were most important in His response to the Pharisees in Matthew 22:37-40. Love God first, then your neighbour as yourself.

Loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind means to completely surrender to Him. Before we can love others, we must first love God. After all, we can't give someone else what we don't have. We show God how much we love Him in the same way we show love to our spouse or our children — by spending time with Him. We can do that daily through reading the Bible and prayer. Then, we show our love for others by sacrificing our selfish desires to help someone in need of finding a way to be a blessing to a coworker, friend, or stranger. Love. Imagine what the world would look like if everyone used this four-letter word.

REFLECT

- How are you experiencing Jesus' love on a personal level?
- How can you draw closer to Jesus?
- What's one way you can serve someone else today?

MATTHEW 23

It's a rule: No phones allowed at dinner.

Then, while waiting for the food, you hear that familiar "ding." So you check that text message. (It might be important, right?) But your teenager is quick to call you out, saying, "Hey! No phones allowed!"

This is an embarrassing reminder of the need to practice what we preach because our kids are watching. We're setting an example for them. As Christians, it's even more important to practice what we preach, because non-believers and other believers are watching.

In Matthew 23:1-7, Jesus warns the crowds and His disciples to obey the Pharisees. They were to submit to the Pharisees' authority but not follow their hypocritical example. The Pharisees' motives were self-serving. They put heavy burdens and extra rules on themselves so they look holy and others would admire them. There was no love in their hearts, and they didn't lift a finger to help those who were struggling.

If we aren't careful, we can fall into the same trap of trying to follow the rules at the expense of renewing our minds (Romans 12:2). If we profess our belief but don't possess Jesus in our hearts, we become hypocrites. Jesus also warns us that if we focus on religion instead of relationship, we may lead others astray.

When we have a relationship with Jesus, He will be reflected in our words and our actions — no matter where we are or what trials we face — because He will be in our hearts.

REFLECT

- How do your actions reflect the love of Jesus? In what ways are your actions more like those of the Pharisees, critical and self-serving?
- How are you growing in your relationship with Jesus so He can change your heart, not just your behaviour?

MATTHEW 24

As networks compete to cover breaking news, the desire to be first can cause mistakes. Experts are sought out to provide deeper insight, but when there's little information available, they have to choose their words carefully and lean on clarifiers like "suspect" and "allegedly." Viewers who rely solely on what they see on TV may find themselves misinformed.

The same is true when it comes to Jesus' return. Several imposters have proclaimed the day the world will end, building sturdy shelters and hoarding food and supplies. But then the day comes, and nothing happens.

Jesus addresses the truth concerning the end of times in Matthew 24:36, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Believers in Jesus are already prepared for the end of times. The only shelter we need is a relationship with Jesus.

When we have a strong relationship with Jesus, we are less likely to be misled by false predictions. The first step to building a relationship with God is to read the Bible and know the truth for ourselves. God speaks to us through His Word and provides guidance and purpose for our lives. Second, we must continually be in prayer and listen closely for His voice. Finally, we must follow God's directions and conduct our lives in a manner pleasing to Him.

REFLECT

- Where do you turn when the Bible is difficult to understand? Are there people in your life you can go to when you have questions?
- What's one way you've already seen God change your mind about what's true through reading the Bible?
- As you spend time with God, He will guide you to your next step. Based on what you're reading and hearing from God, what is your next step?

MATTHEW 25

No matter how much you love your computer, give it time and inevitably, something will go wrong and you'll discover the magic of Ctrl+Alt+Del. As the computer restarts, it goes into "safe mode." Safe mode is designed to help fix most, if not all, problems with the operating system. Safe mode is designed to be temporary, not a permanent way of operating. But too often, we'll try to live our lives like a computer in safe mode.

That's what happened with the workers in Matthew 25:14-30. Three workers had the choice to either play it safe or make a move. As each was called to stewardship and faithfulness, only two of the workers seized the opportunity to capitalize on the talents given to them. As a result, the two workers received a double portion of their investment and were highly praised for their faithfulness. The third worker, however, made a choice to do nothing. This worker decided to play it safe, and he buried his portion. The lazy worker was not only severely rebuked and punished, but the resources given to him were also taken away and distributed to one of the faithful workers.

As we anticipate the Lord's return, let us remain faithful to what God has entrusted in us. As believers, we can either play it safe or we can take action. As we follow Jesus, we should not linger in "safe mode," but instead, we should move forward in productivity.

REFLECT

- Is there any area of your life where you're operating in safe mode? What is keeping you from taking risks?
- We are called to make wise investments with what the Lord has given us. What's one way you can better manage your time, talent, or money to bring glory to God?

MATTHEW 26

When you take a trip to another county, you can't buy anything without the correct currency. To get the right money, you visit an exchange booth and trade your money for that country's currency according to the exchange rate. Sometimes, you receive more than you gave, and sometimes you get less.

In Matthew 26, we find two instances of people making an exchange. The first is a woman who interrupts a gathering to pour an expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus. We find out the price of the perfume was equivalent to one year's income. This woman was willing to give up a year's pay for the opportunity to worship at Jesus' feet. The second exchange is made by one of Jesus' 12 disciples, Judas. Judas was willing to betray Jesus for 30 silver coins.

In these stories, Matthew shows us that one person sacrificed something in life for Jesus while another person sacrificed Jesus for something in life. We have the same choice to make today in our lives. Each day we have the decision to either worship Jesus or betray Him. We can either sacrifice our lives for Jesus, or we can sacrifice Jesus for our lives.

REFLECT

- What is one thing you are tempted to exchange for the full life Jesus promises?
- Do you think we get more or less than we give when we follow Jesus?

MATTHEW 27

Every other Friday, people everywhere rejoice. Why? Because it's payday! We get a little slip of paper that represents exactly what we've earned from the work we've done. It's easy to understand: the wages of work is money.

The Bible also uses the idea of wages. In Romans 6:23, Paul writes that "the wages of sin is death." That means that sin earns death. But what exactly is sin? Sin is missing the mark, falling short of God's law in our thoughts or actions. Sin isn't just about what we do or don't do; it's also about what's inside of our hearts. The death that sin earns is both physical and spiritual. Physical death is the end of your body. Spiritual death is eternal separation from God. Earlier in Romans 3:23, Paul wrote that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Based on the Bible, we know that sin earns death and that we've all sinned. But, here's the good news: God loves us so much He wants to rescue us from our sin!

The debt of sin must be paid. In the Old Testament, people paid the debt of their sins with sacrifices. But this method of atonement wasn't permanent. One sacrifice didn't cover all of a person's sins. God wanted to not only erase our debt, but in doing so restore us to a right relationship with Him.

To do this, a sacrifice like no other was required. Jesus' death was significant for many reasons. First, while Jesus faced temptation, He never gave in (Hebrews 4:15). Second, Jesus willingly gave up His life (John 10:18). And third, it provided forgiveness for our sin (1 John 4:10).

REFLECT

- Ask God to reveal to you any sin that is in your life right now. What is one step you can take to help you turn from that sin and pursue righteousness instead?
- Take a moment to thank God for loving us and sacrificing His Son for us. If you've never asked Jesus into your life, you can do that today. Contact info@eefc.ca to learn more.

MATTHEW 28

We've all been asked at some point: "How'd you hear about us?" Maybe it was the new patient paperwork at the doctor's office, a survey after your first trip to a restaurant, or part of the checkout process while ordering online. Chances are the answer to that question is the same: heard about it from a family member or friend. When we are satisfied with a product or service, we want to tell others about it. We want the people we love to experience the good things we experience.

Our relationship with Jesus is no different. Jesus' love, grace, and mercy are the most satisfying things we could ever be offered, and they're free! Through Jesus, we have hope, joy, and the promise of eternity. There is no better product, service, or offer out there. If we are excited to share tips on sales, food, and physicians, why wouldn't we be bursting at the seams to share the news of salvation with the ones we love?

Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." He wanted His disciples to go ahead and tell everybody about His sacrifice and love, but He also reminded them that they aren't in it alone. Jesus is with us as we go, tell, and make disciples.

REFLECT

- Who do you know who needs to hear about Jesus?
- What is one thing that keeps you from sharing the Gospel with your friends and family as easily as you would share a recipe or favourite store? What can you do to overcome this obstacle?
- One of the best ways to share Jesus with others is by telling your story. What has Jesus done for you? Let someone know today!