

## Matthew 7:24-27

### PRIOR TO THIS PASSAGE

This passage is the conclusion and call for response after a large block of Jesus' teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has been contrasting a life lived on the world's terms with a life of trust and obedience to God. Now, he calls his listeners to a decision about which life they will choose.

READ. OBSERVE. INQUIRE. (Read the passage out loud. Give the group time to read silently and note characters, repetitions, contrasts, surprises, and questions.)

### DISCUSSING THE PASSAGE (Use a mix of their questions and these.)

- Share observations and questions.
- What do these two builders have in common? What is different?
- Why is the foundation of a structure important?
- What possible reasons could a builder have for not choosing to build on a solid foundation?
- Why does Jesus end his teaching on life in God's kingdom with this mental picture?
- Why is acting on Jesus' words what makes a person like a foolish builder versus a wise builder?

*Summary:* The finale of Jesus' teaching is a call for his audience not just to believe certain ideas but to live life in a radically different way from those around them. Hearing Jesus' teaching but walking away without making any change is the most foolish thing someone could ever do. If we believe that Jesus is worth following, then we will make regular choices to bring our lives into alignment with his teaching.

### APPLYING THE PASSAGE

*Big Idea:* Our active response to Jesus' teaching is what gives us true security.

### *Application Options* (Pick the most relevant.)

1. Think back over the last few weeks of Bible studies. Is there anything you still need to do to respond to what Jesus has shown you? What specific steps do you need to take and when will you do them?
2. Which challenges or invitations from our last few studies feel especially significant for us as a community? How can we live out Jesus' teaching together this week? Let's make a plan and commit together to carrying it out.

## Matthew 18:21-35

### PRIOR TO THIS PASSAGE

As Jesus's ministry and status have increased, he has come into more significant conflict with the religious authorities while also being misunderstood by his own followers. This teaching on communal life under God's authority echoes many of the themes in the Sermon on the Mount (Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5-7).

READ. OBSERVE. INQUIRE. (Read the passage out loud. Give the group time to read silently and note characters, repetitions, contrasts, surprises, and questions.)

### DISCUSSING THE PASSAGE (Use a mix of their questions and these.)

- Share observations and questions.
- What do you imagine motivates Peter's question?
- How is forgiveness costly in this parable?
- Why is the first servant unwilling to extend forgiveness? How would you describe his perspective on his king, himself, and others?
- Why were the other servants outraged over someone else's conflict?
- How is Jesus' parable related to his conversation with Peter?
- Why is our forgiving other people so important to God?
- According to Jesus, how is our forgiveness of others connected to our own experience of God's forgiveness?

*Summary:* Jesus' parable about a forgiven servant who refused to forgive exposes the hypocrisy of our unforgiveness towards others. Other people's sin against us is tiny compared to our sin against God. Rather than holding it against them, Jesus calls us to surrender what we think we're owed and instead reflect God's abundant generosity in extending forgiveness to others.

### APPLYING THE PASSAGE

*Big Idea:* What we've been forgiven by our generous heavenly Father is far more than what he calls us to forgive.

### *Application Options* (Pick the most relevant.)

1. Is there anyone in your life whom you need to forgive? What holds you back from extending forgiveness to them? How does this passage help you move towards forgiveness?
2. Spend time reflecting on the ways God has been gracious in forgiving you. Thank him for his forgiveness. Ask for his help in making you a generous, forgiving person.

## Matthew 20:1-16

### PRIOR TO THIS PASSAGE

Just before this passage, Matthew tells of a law-abiding rich man who sadly turned away when Jesus challenged his relationship to wealth. Jesus affirmed that those who make costly choices to follow him will not be disappointed in eternity, “but many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

READ. OBSERVE. INQUIRE. (Read the passage out loud. Give the group time to read silently and note characters, repetitions, contrasts, surprises, and questions.)

DISCUSSING THE PASSAGE (Use a mix of their questions and these.)

- Share observations and questions.
- Why does the landowner keep returning to the marketplace?
- How might you feel if you were one of those hired at 3 or 5 pm?
- Why does the landowner choose to pay first those who worked for only one hour?
- What is so offensive about the landowner’s generosity?
- What do we learn about the landowner from his response to the grumblers?
- What does this parable reveal about the kingdom of heaven?

*Summary:* Jesus’ parable highlights how the kingdom of heaven subverts his audience’s assumptions about who deserves merit. The later workers all being paid a full day’s wages means their families can also be taken care of. The landowner is a generous, justice-driven man who puts others ahead of himself. But for the earliest workers, equal payment isn’t viewed as generosity worth celebrating but as injustice worth grumbling about.

### APPLYING THE PASSAGE

*Big Idea:* God is incredibly generous and gracious, but our grumbling reveals that we only care about his generosity towards us, not to others.

*Application Options* (Pick the most relevant.)

1. To what degree have you viewed participation in God’s mission as burdensome—too much work for too little reward? How might this passage renew your perspective?
2. How could we as a Christian community imitate the landowner and look for people to whom we can extend God’s generosity?

## Matthew 25:1-13

### PRIOR TO THIS PASSAGE

Jesus has been teaching his disciples about what it will mean to follow him in their near future and in future generations to come. Here he again uses a pointed and memorable short story (a parable) to teach his disciples and to illustrate the nature of being part of his kingdom (i.e., life with God in charge).

READ. OBSERVE. INQUIRE. (Read the passage out loud. Give the group time to read silently and note characters, repetitions, contrasts, surprises, and questions.)

DISCUSSING THE PASSAGE (Use a mix of their questions and these.)

- Share observations and questions.
- Describe the two groups of bridesmaids. How are they similar and how are they different?
- What motivated the wise bridesmaids to bring extra oil while the foolish did not?
- Why does the bridegroom tell the foolish bridesmaids that he does not know them?
- What does Jesus want his listeners to understand about the kingdom of heaven from this parable?

*Summary:* Ten bridesmaids await the bridegroom and the wedding banquet. The wise bridesmaids bring extra oil to keep their lamps lit, since his exact arrival time was unknown. When the foolish bridesmaids end up having to leave so they can buy more oil, they miss the arrival of the bridegroom and are shut out of the wedding banquet. The foolish bridesmaids needed to bring their own oil instead of trying to borrow some from the others. The kingdom of heaven is available to those who are eager and ready to know Jesus and be with him.

### APPLYING THE PASSAGE

*Big Idea:* Following Jesus means prioritizing your relationship with him, and others cannot carry that relationship for you.

*Application Options* (Pick the most relevant.)

1. What is your level of desire when it comes to having a relationship with Jesus? What is keeping you from pursuing a deeper relationship with him?
2. In what practical ways can you show your desire to be close to Jesus and develop your own relationship with him?

## Matthew 26:1-16

### PRIOR TO THIS PASSAGE

After teaching his disciples many things about how to follow him faithfully to the end, Jesus begins to tell his disciples about how he will soon be handed over to be crucified.

READ. OBSERVE. INQUIRE. (Read the passage out loud. Give the group time to read silently and note characters, repetitions, contrasts, surprises, and questions.)

DISCUSSING THE PASSAGE (Use a mix of their questions and these.)

- Share observations and questions.
- Make a list of the characters in this story. What does each character seem to value the most?
- What is the connection between this woman's actions, the plot of the chief priests and elders to arrest and kill Jesus, and the decision of Judas to "deliver" Jesus?
- Why are the disciples upset about the woman pouring perfume on Jesus while Jesus calls it a beautiful thing?

*Summary:* While the religious leaders are scheming to arrest and kill Jesus, a nameless woman interrupts his dinner party, pouring perfume on Jesus' head. Not understanding their rabbi's mission, the disciples call it a waste, but Jesus memorializes her actions as a beautiful preparation for his burial.

### APPLYING THE PASSAGE

*Big Idea:* Jesus engages and elevates those who pour themselves out for him and for his mission.

*Application Options* (Pick the most relevant.)

1. When you look at your life, on what are you putting the most value? What would you have to turn away from in order to give Jesus the highest value in your life? Pray and ask Jesus for help.
2. The woman pours herself out and surrenders her whole life to Jesus. What holds you back from doing the same? What are you tempted to hold on to, and what would it take for you to let go?

*Call to Faith:* (Share a personal story of how you came to the conclusion that Jesus is worth pouring out your life for. Then, use the instructions on page 9 of the leader's guide to invite group members to become followers of Jesus.)

## Matthew 9:35-10:8

### PRIOR TO THIS PASSAGE

Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven and demonstrated its power. The crowds were drawn to him, while the religious leaders were confused and indignant about the healings they were seeing him do. This story picks up with Jesus heading out to do some ministry.

READ. OBSERVE. INQUIRE. (Read the passage out loud. Give the group time to read silently and note characters, repetitions, contrasts, surprises, and questions.)

DISCUSSING THE PASSAGE (Use a mix of their questions and these.)

- Share observations and questions.
- What did Jesus see in the crowds that made him feel compassion?
- What is the harvest and how is it plentiful?
- Why does Jesus command the disciples to ask for more harvest workers before sending them out to do ministry?
- What do you think it would have been like to be one of the disciples and receive this authority and instruction from Jesus?
- What does it mean for the disciples to receive authority from Jesus and then "freely give" as they go out to do ministry?
- What is Jesus saying about life in the kingdom through this harvest/worker imagery and this sheep/shepherd imagery?

*Summary:* Jesus goes from town to town, having compassion on the sick, harassed and helpless people he encounters. Then he tells his disciples to pray for more workers in the harvest, he gives them his authority, and sends them out with instructions to freely give what has been freely given to them.

### APPLYING THE PASSAGE

*Big Idea:* Following Jesus means living in his authority and doing what he did.

*Application Options* (Pick the most relevant.)

1. In what ways are you already living out the authority of Jesus in everyday life? What next step is Jesus inviting you to take in his authority?
2. Jesus sends his disciples to go and do, to become workers in the harvest. To what corner of campus might Jesus be sending you? Pray and ask the Lord of the harvest to give you his authority and send you to reach those people.