



The Kingdom Is Like A Study in Matthew

Small Group Participant Guide

SMCC - Winter 2023



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Preface - The Plan

Before anything else, thank you for joining a small group.

AND thank you for being one of those people who actually reads a preface.

It's no small thing to commit to a group like this, but I promise we've done our best to ensure it's a commitment you'll be thankful for.

Without further ado, here's the plan.

We'll spend the next nine weeks growing in two areas:

1. In our understanding of the Kingdom of God.
2. In our relationships with one another.

At the close of these nine weeks, if we've all grown in these two areas, then we've hit our target. This is how we plan to do so.

Most weeks, we'll spend time discussing a parable or two, which are stories that Jesus taught to convey certain truths. Every one of these parables centers on a particular theme—something Jesus liked to call "the Kingdom of God."

These guided studies and discussions will cultivate a deeper understanding of this kingdom that Jesus invites us into.

Then, a few of the weeks, instead of discussing parables, we'll spend time sharing aspects of our stories. Consider this an opportunity to grow in our ability to receive one of the greatest gifts God offers us—our friendships with one another.

That's it. It's a pretty simple plan, but one that we believe will pay huge dividends.

Our prayer is that through these studies, discussions, and relationships we all would grow in our devotion to Jesus, and by doing so, find even greater joy in him.



Week One - The Parable of the Soils

Setup Note - On Matthew

The earliest sources are unanimous that Matthew, one of the twelve disciples, is the author of this book. Matthew's chosen genre is that of "gospel," which is similar to biography, but slightly different. Gospel comes from a Greek word that simply means "good news." So, the gospel of Matthew is a biography of Jesus that's intended to provide good news to the reader.

The good news has everything to do with Jesus.

Thankfully, Matthew is a trustworthy source, because he himself learned from and lived with Jesus. As one of his disciples, he was an eyewitness to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

However, his gospel isn't just some diary of recollections, tossed together in whatever order they occurred in his memory. His gospel evidences a highly intentional and even artful design, that was crafted in order to communicate something very specific about who Jesus is.

First, **Jesus is the New Moses.**

In the same fashion that Moses arose and taught the people about God, rescued them from their slavery, and formed a covenant relationship between them and God, Jesus is a new and greater Moses.

Naturally, this idea would resonate most with those who are already familiar with and honor Moses—Jewish people. For that reason, and many others, it seems Matthew's primary audience was Jewish Christians. The overwhelming number of times Matthew quotes the Old Testament also supports this idea.

Structurally, Matthew's gospel is organized around five major blocks of teaching, paralleling the teachings of Moses, which were also delivered to the people of Israel in a set of five—the first five books of the Bible, often referred to as the Pentateuch.

So, Jesus is the new and better Moses, and that's good news. But that's not all.

Second, **Jesus is also the Long-Awaited Messianic King.**

In 2 Samuel 7, God promised David, a former king of Israel, that one of his descendants would reign upon the throne forever. But then, several generations later, the throne of Israel was abolished in the Babylonian Exile, in 587 b.c. (see 2 Kings 24-25). The kingdom was destroyed and the people of Israel were exiled to the land of Babylon.



Seventy years later, they returned to the land, but the throne was never re-established. They continued to live under the reign of foreign kingdoms.

During that time, the promise of a king that would reign forever became a lynchpin for hope. Therefore, when Jesus arrived, expectations for this king's arrival were already high.

The kingdom of God is the primary theme of Jesus' teaching throughout Matthew's gospel (Matt. 4:17, 23). Jesus himself is the king of that kingdom, the descendant of David who will reign for all of eternity. He is the long-awaited messianic king.

This also is some very good news.

Throughout this series, we're exploring many of the parables that Jesus taught. Each one illustrated something about the nature of his kingdom. By growing in our understanding of these parables, we're learning exactly what Jesus has invited us into in his everlasting kingdom.

The Parable of the Sower, the parable we're exploring tonight, is sort of a preliminary, foundational parable. By understanding it, we set ourselves up well to understand all the rest.

Group Study Guide

The Parable of the Soils - Matthew 13:1–23

V. 1-9

- Read the passage
- What are the four situations the seeds fall into?

V. 10-17

- Read the passage

The twelve disciples approach Jesus after the parable and ask him to explain what he just said. Jesus does do that, but first, he explains why he's transitioned into using parables in his teaching.

Notice his invitation at the parable's close:

Whoever has ears, let them hear." -Matthew 13:9 (NIV)

At this point, Jesus was beginning to experience opposition in his ministry and teaching. Many listened to him who had no interest in following him or understanding his teaching. So, he began to teach in parables, in order to guard himself from those who were against him, but to still offer teaching to those who desired to understand.



The disciples, in approaching Jesus and asking for further explanation, represent that group.

This split in the group of people listening is why Jesus references Isaiah 6:9-10. This passage speaks of the people of Israel hardening their own hearts against God. They stopped up their ears and refused to listen to him, until it was too late, and they had lost the ability to hear or understand altogether. Jesus references that passage to say the same thing is happening all over again.

So, the parables draw the divide between those two groups to an even greater degree. Those who want to learn, will; those who don't, will not. The parables are a strategy for putting the ball in their court, to see how they will respond.

V. 18-23

-Read the passage

-What is the seed?

-What do the four situations the seeds fall into represent?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What's the earliest memory you have of the gospel being shared with you?
2. How has your understanding of and trust in the gospel changed over time?
3. How have difficulties served to test and perhaps even grow your faith in Jesus?
4. How do you see the cares and worries of this life, and maybe even the desire for wealth and what it can offer, as distracting you from trusting Jesus?
5. What would it look like to continue trusting Jesus in the current season you're in?



Week Two - The Parable of the Weeds

Setup Note - On Context

The way we interpret stories we've heard all our lives isn't something we usually think about. We just know how to understand them, because they fit our context.

When it comes to the parables of Jesus—his teachings that were given in the shape of stories—more work is required to cross the cultural gap in order to understand them well.

Tonight, we're looking into just that.

Last week, we learned about the Parable of the Soils, a foundational parable for understanding the rest of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom. We also learned how Matthew structured his gospel to stress that Jesus is both the New Moses and the Long-Awaited Messianic King.

Throughout this series, we'll be exploring Jesus' teaching on the kingdom, which aligns with both of these themes. As the New Moses, he is the one who provides new authoritative teaching. The content of that teaching is entirely wrapped up in a kingdom of which he himself is king—the kingdom of God.

He delivers these teachings through a unique genre—parables. Parables are little stories given to communicate truth. When striving to understand and interpret the parables, it's important to keep a few things in mind.

First, sometimes Jesus provides the interpretation. This is true of both the Parable of the Soils and the Parable of the Weeds. When that's the case, there's no need to look for anything further, because Jesus has already explained the meaning.

However, for many of the parables, Jesus doesn't offer any explanation. So, what do we do with those?

Second, in interpretation, context is king.

Jesus may not offer full-length interpretations, but he often provides the context we need to understand the parable at either its beginning or end. Those contextual clues are the keys to unlocking the meaning.

For example, in The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, Jesus closes the parable with this line:



“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” - Matthew 18:35 (NIV)

That single line unveils the theme of the entire parable—it’s all about forgiveness. That theme provides an anchor for the reader, tying them to an accurate understanding of the story.

Matthew 13 records seven parables. Every single one of them, except for The Parable of the Soils, opens with the phrase, “The kingdom is like...”

That refrain provides the theme of these parables—the kingdom of God. Any interpretation that wanders from this cannot be the actual meaning, because Jesus gave them to teach about the kingdom.

Tonight, we’re studying the Parable of the Weeds, which Jesus does provide an interpretation for. By gaining a deeper understanding of it, we’ll learn more about the kingdom into which Jesus has invited us all.

Group Study Guide

The Parable of the Weeds - Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

V. 24-30

- Read the passage
- What is the theme of this parable? How do we know already, even before hearing the interpretation Jesus gives?

V. 36-43

- Read the passage
- Who, or what, are the following:
 - The Farmer - (Jesus)
 - The Field - (The World)
 - The Good Seed - (The People of the Kingdom)
 - The Weeds - (The People of the Evil One)
 - The Enemy - (The Devil)
 - The Harvest - (The End of the Age)
 - The Harvesters - (Angels)
- Have some open discussion on the passage.
- What does this parable teach us about the world? (see below)



This parable teaches us that, right now, the world is a mixed bag of people. There are those who belong to the kingdom because they've received the gospel, the message of the kingdom, upon good soil.

However, there are also those who have received a different message. A message that is fundamentally evil in nature. A message that leads not to delight, peace, and joy, but to pain, loss, and suffering.

The promise of this parable is that one day, at the end of the age, Jesus will sort out everything, and remove all evil from this world. The promise includes the understanding that Jesus will extract the evil even from within those who've trusted him.

This is good news.

Until then, things will remain as they are. Notice, in the meantime, we're not instructed to sift through the mess and sort people out, scrutinizing whether they've trusted Jesus or not, and casting them out if they haven't. The parable actually teaches us the reverse. We should NOT do that.

Because if we take matters into our own hands, the result will likely include tearing out wheat and leaving behind weeds. It will include harming people in their journey with God.

So, the best thing we can do is trust him and join the work he's invited us into of spreading the message of the kingdom and living according to it as best we can, knowing that one day, he will remove all evil from this world and from those who've trusted in him.

This is a promise worth clinging to.

Group Discussion Questions

1. A common proverb says, "You reap what you sow." How have you seen that play out for good in your own life?
2. The Final Judgment isn't something that we often consider good news. Yet, that's exactly how the Bible portrays it. So, what is the good news in this parable? Discuss how this is good news.
3. Have you ever felt "sifted" in your experience of church, where someone judged and scrutinized your beliefs with an aim to punish you if you didn't meet some standard? How does it help to know that Jesus instructs us to not do that?
4. What's the difference between sharing the gospel and its implications versus attempting to "sift" the faith of others?



Week Three - The Small Group Meal

The Group Meal

The Small Group Meal is all about growing in heart, by growing in our relationships with one another. It can be potluck style. One person can host and provide the meal, while others supplement. You can even order out and split the cost.

As long as you spend time together, sharing a meal and each other's stories, you've hit the target.

Setup Note - On Heart

In order to be equipped as disciples, we need to be equipped in our heads, hearts, and hands. There's overlap, for sure, but small groups are tailored to bring about next steps in Heart.

Maybe you're asking, what is my heart?

Your Heart is the place where your identity abides.

Overall, your identity is like a deck of cards. You have all of these different roles that you fill—friend, co-worker, coach, son or daughter, husband or wife, mother or father, etc. But of all of them, one is primary—your top card. The card you play first in any situation.

Growing in Heart is about learning to let your identity in Christ be your top card. This means before anything else, your identity in Christ is what determines your value and worth.

As we grow in our ability to let that be our top card, we're enabled to grow relationally as well. We're able to be vulnerable, to let down our guard, and to let others know who we really are, because we're secure in our identity in Christ, in his love for us.

For that reason, the goal tonight is to spend an evening together sharing both a meal and each other's stories.

Origin Stories

- There are three pieces to an Origin Story.
 1. Origins - where you grew up and what it was like.
 2. Catalyst - the catalyst that led them to one of the following:
 - Jesus, Utah, or SMCC - let people self-select.
 3. Resolution - what has happened since the catalytic moment; where are you now in your journey?



Week Four - The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

Setup Note - On the Gospel & the Kingdom

Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught about the kingdom constantly.

For some, this could be cause for confusion, because the emphasis of many churches nowadays admittedly does not center on the kingdom.

Instead, many churches focus on communicating the gospel.

However, this distinction, between gospel and kingdom, gives rise to a question. The question is, are these things actually different?

In the first century, the word "gospel" meant good news. But not good news in the sense that coffee is a dollar off today or your favorite football team won over the weekend.

Gospel news was life-changing, world-impacting news. The kind of news that forever divided your life into a before and after.

The gospel, or the good news, that Jesus taught was about the arrival of his kingdom. He himself is its king.

As it says in Matthew 4:23,

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming **the good news of the kingdom**, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." - Matthew 4:23 (NIV)

The good news was not only that this kingdom offered joy, rest, and abundant life, but that the offer was extended to everyone. None were excluded from the opportunity to belong.

The same holds true today.

Jesus' further teaching on the kingdom, what we're studying tonight, delves deeper into the nature of the kingdom he's invited into.

This is a significant study for us because the gospel we've received is an invitation not only to a king but also to a kingdom. In studying these parables, we're learning more about the kingdom that Jesus has offered us.



Tonight, we're looking into two parables that deal with the humble origins of the kingdom, and also the size and influence that it will inevitably come to have. May the following study and discussion help us all to understand the kingdom better, and to understand the fullness of the gospel we've been offered.

Group Study Guide

The Parable of the Yeast - Mt. 13:31-35

V. 31-32

- Read the passage
- What do we learn about the kingdom's origins?
- What do we learn about the kingdom's growth?

V. 33-35

- Read the passage
- Again, what do we learn about the kingdom's origins?
- What do we learn about the kingdom's influence?
- What are the kingdom's actual origins?
- When you consider the growth and influence of that kingdom, what comes to mind over the past 2,000 years?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had something in your life, be it a hobby or a friendship, that started small but then grew larger than you ever expected? Share about that.
2. These parables teach that while the kingdom's origins may be small, it will continue to grow in size and influence. How has the kingdom, and the gospel, impacted your own life? (a few examples include hospitals, the printing press, and widespread literacy).
3. What might it look like to help the kingdom grow through you, by living according to it in your own life?
4. In what area of your life would you like to see the kingdom have greater influence?



Week Five - The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

Setup Note - On the Cost of the Kingdom

What is something you'd give anything for?

Truth be told, we don't encounter too many things with that kind of value.

Yet this is Jesus' exact claim about the kingdom—that it is worth selling everything you have in order to attain.

Thankfully, such a purge of possessions isn't actually required to take hold of it. Because the only sacrifice that was necessary for us to receive the invitation is the one Jesus already made.

From us, really, only one thing is required: TRUST.

Yet trust often leads directly to sacrifice. As we learn the culture of Jesus' kingdom and embrace it within our lives, sacrifice is involved. Yet, every sacrifice given is another step taken in trust and towards joy.

The promise is that what we receive on the other side of sacrifice so far outweighs anything lost that it's nearly unimaginable. This is why the kingdom is worth giving up everything to attain.

However, we can't know this firsthand until the sacrifice has been made, the next step taken, and joy is found on the other side.

These parables give us the opportunity to weigh the cost of Jesus's invitation, to consider the pros and cons of placing our trust in him, and even to appraise what we've lost and how much more we've gained in following him.

Group Study Guide

Matthew 13:44-45 - The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

V. 44

- Read the Passage
- What does the man do when he discovers the pearl?
- What emotion characterizes the man as he does this?



-Can you imagine giving up everything you have in order to gain something and being able to do so joyfully? What does this parable communicate about the worth of the kingdom?

V. 45

-Read the Passage

-What is the merchant looking for? What does he do when he finds one of great value?

-What do both of these parables communicate about the value of the kingdom?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was the first big purchase you made growing up? What emotions were involved in saving for and making that purchase?
2. How have you grown in understanding the value of Jesus' kingdom throughout your life? Was there ever, or is there even difficulty now, in trusting that it is worth it?
3. What have you lost in trusting Jesus? What have you gained?
4. Is there any next step before you now that would require greater trust in Jesus? What's your hesitation in taking it?



Week Six - Highest Highs & Lowest Lows

Setup Note - On Presence

As a culture, we're often ill-equipped to handle the negative emotions of others. Because of this, we can feel unsure about what to do when others share difficult pieces of their story with us. It's uncomfortable to know someone is hurt or upset and not know how to fix it.

In these kinds of situations, our instincts often lead us to try to fix it anyways or to find some way to move past the negative emotions as quickly as we can.

Tonight, our goal is to share some of the best and some of the most difficult pieces of our lives with one another. This will include joy, and it will include sadness.

As the desire arises within you to somehow fix things or to alleviate the emotion in the room, remind yourself **to just be present**. To listen, to give space for negative emotion, and to be present with each person as they share their story. Practice the skill of **Attunement**, tuning your emotions, like the strings on a guitar, to the emotions of the person sharing.

This is an opportunity to grow as disciples of Jesus together, and to be equipped in our Hearts. Remember, **your heart is the place where your identity abides**. And identity is always shaped and reinforced by community. See tonight as a chance to help each other remember what our real identity is and where our real worth continues to be found—in Jesus Christ alone.

This exercise takes time to do well. Therefore, **both this week and next are dedicated to it**. At the close of the evening, there will be an opportunity to pray for those who've shared.

Highest Highs & Lowest Lows

- Pass out cards.
- Give everyone 5 minutes to write down their four highest highs and their four lowest lows, across the entirety of their lives.
- Then, begin sharing. Have people share just two from each list. So, two of their top four, and two of their low four.
- As the leader, thank each person for sharing at the close of their time. This can be as simple as saying, "Thank you for sharing."



Week Seven - Highest Highs & Lowest Lows

Setup Note - On Presence

As we said last week, our culture often leaves us ill-equipped to handle the negative emotions of others. This exercise is a chance for us to grow in that ability.

Tonight, our goal is to continue sharing some of the best and some of the most difficult pieces of our lives with one another. This will include joy and sadness.

As the desire arises within you to somehow fix things or to alleviate the emotion in the room, remind yourself **to just be present**. To listen, to give space for negative emotion, and to be present with each person as they share their story. Practice the skill of **Attunement**, tuning your emotions, like the strings on a guitar, to the emotions of the person sharing.

This is an opportunity to grow as disciples of Jesus together, and to be equipped in our Hearts. Remember, **your heart is the place where your identity abides**. And identity is always shaped and reinforced by community. See tonight as a chance to help each other remember what our real identity is and where our real worth continues to be found—in Jesus Christ alone.

At the close of the evening, there will be an opportunity to pray for those who've shared.

Highest Highs & Lowest Lows

- Begin sharing, giving opportunity to those who didn't get the chance to share the previous week. Have people share just two highs and two lows. So, two of their top four, and two of their low four.



Week Eight - The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Setup Note - On the Character of the King

Forgiveness is costly.

So much so that in order for forgiveness to be possible some measure of debt must be acknowledged. Otherwise, there is nothing to forgive.

The very idea of forgiveness implies that some price must be paid. Forgiveness is the decision to pay that price on behalf of the one to whom the debt belongs. Whether they asked for it or not. Whether they receive it or not. Forgiveness is paying the price for another.

This is why it's true to say that forgiveness is costly.

Yet without it, not a single one of us would have ever received the invitation to join Jesus in his kingdom and to receive him as our king. Because before any of us could receive that offer, our debt of sin had to be paid.

Thankfully, that was a price Jesus willingly and gladly paid with his life.

This reality impacts not only our relationship with him but also with others. Because of his sacrifice, we've received the ability to forgive the debts of others. And truly, the kingdom that he's invited us into is one that has a culture defined by forgiveness.

Today, we'll study the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant and learn more about forgiveness and the central role it plays in the culture of the kingdom we've been invited into.

In doing so, we'll learn more about Jesus as a king as well. Because whatever the culture of the kingdom is, it flows directly from the character of its king.

Group Study Guide

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant - Mt. 18:21-35

V. 21-22

-Read the passage

-How does this conversation between Jesus and Peter set us up to understand what the parable is about?



V. 23-35

-Read the passage

-How much money is the servant forgiven for?

How much does he have the other man arrested for?

-Why, after being forgiven of his own enormous debt, does the man treat the other so harshly?

What does this indicate about his own understanding of being forgiven?

-How does the final line drive home the point of the parable?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Did you ever get in trouble growing up? Share with the group.
2. How does understanding forgiveness through the lens of relational debt change your perspective on it?
3. What's a time somebody else paid the price for you, to offer forgiveness?
4. What's a time you've paid the price to forgive somebody else?
5. Is there someone in your life that you've been struggling or even refusing to forgive? What might help you to trust Jesus in taking that next step of beginning to forgive them?



Week Nine - The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

Setup Note - On "The Kingdom Is Like"

Over these eight weeks, we've learned much about each other and the kingdom we've been invited into.

We shared dinner and snacks. We shared our origin stories, connecting the dots from where our lives began to where we are today. We shared our highs and lows across these weeks, and even our highest highs and lowest lows across our lives.

And together, we've studied and discussed parable after parable, delving deeper into Jesus's teaching to learn exactly what he's invited us into, and what he was willing to die for in order to make possible on our behalf. In doing so, we've learned that...

- The kingdom's culture is marked by forgiveness.
- The kingdom is of inestimable worth, more than all that we have in this life.
- The kingdom had humble origins but has grown, and will continue to grow, in size and influence beyond anyone's imagination.
- The kingdom is at the center of the good news Jesus taught and proclaimed.

Tonight, we bring this formal study to a close, by examining one more parable. One that deals with the notion of rewards in the kingdom.

It can be difficult to rid ourselves of the desire to earn. For example, maybe we've accepted that our entrance into the kingdom is a gift from Jesus. But now that we're in, we feel pressure to climb the ranks through our own efforts, believing we can earn a higher place.

This final parable teaches that we have already received every blessing within the kingdom of God. Therefore, we serve and follow Jesus, not to earn anything more from him, but simply for his glory and our joy. That is the foundation of our motivation.

So, let this final discussion further ground your motivation concerning why the kingdom is worth it. Not for the sake of any greater reward, but for the sake of the rewards we've already been given.



Group Study Guide

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard - Mt. 20:1-16

V. 1-16

-Read the passage

-At what times does the landowner hire different workers? How many hours have the different groups worked?

-Why are the workers upset when everyone gets paid?

-What is the landowner's response to their grumbling?

-What does this teach us about God's generosity to us?

-How does this challenge the motivation we sometimes have to serve God in order to gain things from him?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was your first job? Do you remember how it felt to get paid? Share with the group.
2. Payment, as a reward, is often the primary motivation when it comes to work. But when it comes to serving Jesus, what other motivations are at play?
3. Sometimes, it can be easy to serve because we think we're earning credits with God. Has that ever described your own motivation in serving God? If so, how did that impact your joy in serving?
4. Maybe having the motivation to serve is something you're struggling with even now. What might it look like to serve in response to Jesus' grace, rather than to earn something? Even more so, what might it look like to serve for the sake of your own joy?



Appendix I - The 22 Relational Nutrients

Grace

Quadrant 1: Be Present

- **Acceptance:** Connect without judgment
- **Attunement:** Be aware of what another is experiencing and respond to it
- **Validation:** Convey that a person's experience is significant and not to be dismissed
- **Identification:** Share your similar story
- **Containment:** Allow the other to vent while staying warm without reacting
- **Comfort:** Provide support for someone's loss

Quadrant 2: Convey the Good

- **Affirmation:** Draw attention to the good
- **Encouragement:** Convey that you believe in someone's ability to do the difficult
- **Respect:** Assign value
- **Hope:** Provide reality-based confidence in the future
- **Forgiveness:** Cancel a debt
- **Celebration:** Acknowledge a win, both cognitively and emotionally

Truth

Quadrant 3: Provide Reality

- **Clarification:** Bring order to confusion
- **Perspective:** Offer a different viewpoint
- **Insight:** Convey a deeper understanding
- **Feedback:** Give a personal response
- **Confrontation:** Face someone with an appeal to change

Quadrant 4: Call to Action

- **Advice:** Recommend an action step
- **Structure:** Provide a framework
- **Challenge:** Strongly recommend a difficult action
- **Development:** Create a growth environment
- **Service:** Guide engagement to giving back

Adapted from John Townsend's People Fuel



Appendix II - The Blue Card

GREAT GROUPS REQUIRE GREAT COMMUNICATION

AS A HEALTHY, GROWING PERSON, I STRIVE TO:

1. Ask for what I need, want, or prefer - clearly, directly, honestly.
2. Recognize, manage, and take responsibility for my own thoughts and feelings.
3. When under stress, state my own beliefs and values without becoming adversarial.
 4. Respect others without having to change them.
 5. Give people room to make mistakes and not be perfect.
 6. Appreciate people for who they are: the good, the bad, and the ugly.
7. Accurately assess my own limits, strengths, and weaknesses and freely discuss them with others.
8. Be deeply in tune with my own emotional world and to be able to enter into the feelings, needs and concerns of others without losing myself.
9. Have the capacity to resolve conflict maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspectives of others.



HOW TO BE A GROUP MEMBER EVERYONE LOVES

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME

I commit to make our group time a priority. There will be times that I can't come. Those times are the exception and not the rule. If I can't make it I will let you know ahead of time.

YOU CAN TRUST ME

I commit to make our group a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes). Furthermore, unless someone's health or safety is at risk, I will keep anything that is shared strictly confidential.

YOU CAN ASK ME

I commit to have a positive attitude toward Next Steps and vulnerability. When you ask me about my journey with Jesus Christ it's because you want something for me, not something from me.

YOU CAN LEAN ON ME

I commit to care for the needs of the group and individuals in the group. Love costs something. Whether it is bringing snacks or supporting others in times of difficulty, it's my joy to do so.



Appendix III - The Kingdom Is Like... Devotional Guide

The Kingdom Is Like - A Study in Matthew Devotional Guide

This devotional guide is tailor-made to help you foster your own relationship with Jesus and to grow towards greater devotion and greater delight in Him.

Each week has four days' worth of instructions for short times of Bible reading, reflection, and prayer. You'll find the passage for each day listed below and the steps for engaging with those passages on the next page.

We invite you to use this guide in structuring your own time with Jesus.

Maybe spending time like this with Jesus is something you've practiced for years. Maybe you've never done it before in your life.

We all start somewhere.

By following this guide, you'll be laying a foundation upon which your relationship with Jesus can grow across a lifetime, to greater devotion and greater delight in Him.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Week 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 13:1-23	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 3
Week 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 13:24-30; 36-43	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 4	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 5	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 6
Week 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 13:31-32	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 7	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 8	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 9
Week 4	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 13:33-35	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 10	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 11	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 12
Week 5	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 13	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 14	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 15	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 16
Week 6	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 13:45-46	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 17	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 18	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 19
Week 7	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 13:47-52	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 20	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 21	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 22
Week 8	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 18:21-35	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 23	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 24	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 25
Week 9	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 22:1-14	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 26	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 27	<input type="checkbox"/> Mt. 28



THE SMCC METHOD OF JOURNALING

1. Observe (Bible reading)

Read the passage and spend time contemplating it.

Make observations. Jot down notes and questions. Find something from what you read that seems interesting or profound, and roll that thought over in your mind.

When we meditate on God's word, we invite the Holy Spirit to convince us of something that's true and important.

2. Apply (Something I will believe or do)

A conviction is a firmly held belief.

When we meditate on Scripture, we often learn things we didn't know before about God, ourselves, or our world. These new ideas become convictions when we make them personal.

We can do this by taking what we've learned and asking the question, "So what? How does this change the way I understand God, myself, or the world? Does it affect who I trust to be my authority, where my identity is found, or even the activities that fill my life?"

When we ask and answer these questions, we're applying what we've learned from the Bible and forming convictions upon the Bible's teachings.

3. Pray (Conversation with God)

The most important person we can connect with each day is God. Prayer is one way to do this.

A helpful practice for all of us is to write down a short prayer each day. Your prayer could include any or all of the following:

- something you appreciate about God (perhaps something you learned from the Bible).
- something you're thankful for.
- something you've learned about yourself.
- something that you want to ask God to do for you.

All in all, this practice might take 10-15 minutes. That's 10-15 minutes spent each day connecting with the God who created all things, including you. The God who loves and delights in you, and desires to spend time with you.

By forming this regular practice of spending time with Jesus, you're investing in your relationship with him and your joy.

