



EXPLORE **THE BIBLE.**
Adults

Matthew 14–28

Leader Guide (CSB)

Spring 2026



WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

If you're an adult of a particular generation, you'll probably remember a toy called The Magic 8 Ball™. For those who aren't as familiar, this was a foolproof tool for getting answers to any questions about the future . . . sort of.

In one sense, the 8 Ball guaranteed you an answer to every question. If you asked about your future spouse or whether you were going to pass your history test, the 8 Ball had an answer. The problem was that the Magic 8 Ball carried about as much prophetic authority as a fortune cookie. At best, the answers were vague. At worst, they were irrelevant.

Then again, it was designed for entertainment. No one with a modicum of sense would entrust their future to an oversized pool ball.

Of course, human nature still longs to know what's ahead. Whether we're thinking about this life or the next, we seek clarity. We want to see what's just around the bend.

Jesus understood that. That's why He often talked with His disciples about what would happen in the short term and in the distant future. Throughout the Gospels, including Matthew's Gospel, Jesus reminded His followers that He holds the future. He is God. He loves us more than we can imagine. He remains in control, and His people can trust Him.

Jesus might not give you every answer you've ever wanted, but He has promised to give you peace for today, tomorrow, and eternity. That starts with a personal relationship with Him. If you're seeking answers to the most important questions in life, here's what you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITERS



Ross McLaren wrote the Leader Guide commentary for these sessions on Matthew 14–28. Dr. McLaren retired from Lifeway after 25 years in various adult ministry leadership positions. He is the co-author of “Jeremiah, Lamentations” in the *Holman Old Testament Commentary* series, the author of the notes on Mark’s Gospel in various CSB Study Bibles, and the former editor of *The Herschel Hobbs Commentary*. He also has served as a college professor and lectured in universities in numerous countries. He has led multiple international mission trips and is the founder and lead teacher of the Multicultural LifeGroup at Brentwood (TN) Baptist Church.

Leslie Hudson wrote the group plans for this study of Matthew 14–28. Leslie lives with her family in White Bluff, Tennessee. She loves cold mornings, hot coffee, and a good deep dive in the Bible, all at the same time. She’s involved in the women’s ministry and music ministry at her church, but her passion is for her high school girls Sunday school class at First Baptist Church in Dickson, Tennessee.

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FROM THE TEAM LEADER



Recently, I stumbled across a box that held jewelry and small trinkets that once belonged to my grandmother. My task of organizing a closet suddenly felt like a treasure hunt. Somehow, I'd forgotten about putting this box away, meaning to sort through it "someday." Unpacking the items slowly, I took time to inspect each piece one at a time. While some of the jewelry was very familiar, bringing memories quickly to mind, others were less so. Each one felt like a prized possession. Every piece was dear to me because of its original owner.

The Gospel of Matthew provides us with a look at the key teachings of Jesus. We get a glimpse into Jesus's ministry inside and outside Galilee, His time spent in Jerusalem, and the week leading up to His crucifixion and resurrection. Matthew described the morning of Jesus's resurrection when the women arrived at His tomb only to find it empty. Not bound by death, Jesus arose! Time spent in this Gospel reminds us of Jesus's identity as the promised Messiah.

This quarter, we will examine several of Jesus's important teachings. Each one is valuable. Each teaching offers us a deeper understanding of Jesus's earthly ministry. Together, these teachings show us how to live as faithful followers of Christ, giving daily guidance and continual encouragement. Like the cherished possessions I found while organizing my closet, each biblical truth turns our attention to the One we received it from. I hope this quarter leads you to a deeper appreciation of God's Word and the One who gave His life to bring us salvation.

In Him,

Amber Vaden

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Explore

Discover



What Bible Study Leaders Can Learn from Flight Attendants

G. Dwayne McCrary

“May I have your attention please . . .”

I would guess the job of a flight attendant feels thankless at times. People board the plane expecting to be greeted and acknowledged. We aren't concerned about the flight attendants because we're focused on our travel plans and schedules. We expect them to hear our requests for coffee and deliver it exactly as we asked. We complain about things beyond their control, like flight delays and full planes.

Flight attendants serve a vital role in our travel experience. I would even contend that if we take time to observe them as they work, there is much we can learn. Let's consider some of the actions of flight attendants that parallel what we do as Bible study leaders. At least four similarities can be drawn to help us lead our groups.

PASSENGERS BOARD WITH OTHER THINGS ON THEIR MINDS.

When people board a plane, the last thing on their minds is how they will interact with the flight attendants. Passengers may be consumed with how their baggage will fit in the overhead compartment, how long the flight will be, or the notes they need to review in preparation for a meeting. Flight attendants must get the attention of their passengers to give directions about seat belts, inflating flotation vests, and locating the exits.

When people arrive for our Bible study groups, Bible study might be the last thing on their minds. Issues at work or in their families, events in the news, or the person who got their usual parking

spot may be occupying their thoughts. Just like flight attendants, we need to direct their attention to the lesson. As individuals arrive, we can pose a question or invite them to participate in an activity to help them focus on the study.

NOT EVERY PASSENGER HAS FLOWN BEFORE.

Some passengers might be making their first flight. They don't know where the seat numbers are located, that they need to face the wheels out when placing their bags in the overhead bins, or how to adjust the air vent. They can figure out

“EVERY PERSON DESERVES TO BE HEARD, MOVED FORWARD IN THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S TRUTH, AND CHALLENGED TO GROW IN THEIR FAITH.”



some of those things by watching others, but not everything. Many times, the flight attendant needs to point out the button that reclines the seat or explain the purpose of the bag in the seat pouch.

In much the same way, some folks who attend our groups have never been in a Bible study before. Even if they have been in a group at another church, the dynamics of this church and small group might feel vastly different to them. We can help these individuals by providing them with a *Personal Study Guide* or *Daily Discipleship Guide* and directing them to the first page of that week's session. We can also introduce them to others in the group who can walk with them for the day.

PASSENGERS EXPECT TO BE TREATED FAIRLY.

If one passenger on our row gets extra snacks, we expect extra snacks too! Regular flyers don't wear badges or tags that reveal the airfare they paid or how often they fly, so the flight attendant must treat everyone like a frequent flyer or as if they paid a premium price to be there.

The people in our Bible study groups should be treated fairly as well. We value each person in the room regardless of their attendance pattern, position in the church or community, or stage of spiritual maturity. Every person deserves to be heard, moved forward in their understanding of God's truth, and challenged to grow in their faith.

SOME PASSENGERS WILL TRAVEL WITH YOU AGAIN BASED IN PART ON HOW YOU INTERACT WITH THEM.

Travelers will likely not have an opportunity to visit with the pilot, the person guiding the plane to the gate, or the baggage handlers. Their only guaranteed interactions are with the person checking tickets and the flight attendants. Therefore, travelers will equate the flight attendants with the rest of the company and decide whether to use that carrier again based on that interaction alone.

Individuals who attend our small groups may not visit with the pastor or other church leaders every week. As a result, our interactions with them in Bible study could have a tremendous impact on their decision to come back or not. We have the privilege of representing the vision and values of our churches and our Savior to the people who attend our groups. Our actions and attitudes need to give them a reason to return.

The next time you fly, thank the flight attendants for giving you an example of how to lead a Bible study group. We can use these lessons to be better Bible study leaders.

G. Dwayne McCrary is the manager of the Adult Ongoing Bible Study team at Lifeway and a frequent flyer. His newest book, *Marked by Prayer*, can be found at Lifeway.com.



Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Caesarea Philippi [sess uh REE uh FIH lih pigh]—a city located in the upper Jordan Valley along the slopes of Mount Hermon; the place where Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was (Matt. 16:13-20); the transfiguration (17:1-13), which occurred about a week after Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi, was probably also in this area

Centurion [sen TYOOR ee uhn]—an officer in the Roman army in command of one hundred soldiers; generally presented in a favorable light in the New Testament (Matt. 8:5; 27:54; Acts 27:3)

Herodians [hih ROH dih uhns]—an aristocratic Jewish group who favored the policies of Herod Antipas and supported the Roman government; they allied with the Pharisees in trying to trap Jesus with their question about paying taxes to the Romans (Matt. 22:15-22)

Galilee [GAL ih lee]—small region in the northern part of Israel where Jesus did most of His ministry (Matt. 3:13; 4:18,23; 17:22; 26:32); following the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, Galilee became the major center of Judaism

Mount of Olives—a two-and-a-half mile-long mountain ridge running in a north-south direction due east of Jerusalem; the name came from its extensive olive groves, well-known since ancient times (Zech. 14:4); at its peak it rises over 200 feet above the Temple Mount across the Kidron Valley

Passover—one of the three annual festivals, it commemorated the final plague on Egypt when the firstborn of the Egyptians died and the Israelites were spared because of the blood on their doorposts (Ex. 12)

Pharisees [FEHR uh sees]—religious group in Israel that controlled the synagogues and exercised great control over much of the population; the term means “separated ones”

Sadducees [SAD joo sees]—religious group in Israel that controlled the temple and its services; they rejected the oral law of the Pharisees and accepted the Pentateuch as the ultimate authority; materialistic in their outlook, they did not believe in life after death or rewards or punishment beyond this life and denied the existence of angels and demons

Scribes—during the exile in Babylon, scribes became the experts in God’s written word, they copied, preserved, and taught it; Ezra was a scribe (Ezra 7:6); in the New Testament, most were Pharisees (Mark 2:16). They were considered the experts in cases where people were accused of breaking the law of Moses.

BIBLE READING PLAN



MARCH

- 1. Matthew 14:1-5
- 2. Matthew 14:6-12
- 3. Matthew 14:13-21
- 4. Matthew 14:22-27
- 5. Matthew 14:28-33
- 6. Matthew 14:34-36
- 7. Matthew 15:1-9
- 8. Matthew 15:10-20
- 9. Matthew 15:21-28
- 10. Matthew 15:29-31
- 11. Matthew 15:32-39
- 12. Matthew 16:1-4
- 13. Matthew 16:5-12
- 14. Matthew 16:13-20
- 15. Matthew 16:21-23
- 16. Matthew 16:24-28
- 17. Matthew 17:1-8
- 18. Matthew 17:9-13
- 19. Matthew 17:14-21
- 20. Matthew 17:22-23
- 21. Matthew 17:24-27
- 22. Matthew 18:1-5
- 23. Matthew 18:6-9
- 24. Matthew 18:10-14
- 25. Matthew 18:15-20
- 26. Matthew 18:21-22
- 27. Matthew 18:23-35
- 28. Matthew 19:1-6
- 29. Matthew 19:7-12
- 30. Matthew 19:13-15
- 31. Matthew 19:16-22

APRIL

- 1. Matthew 19:23-26
- 2. Matthew 19:27-30
- 3. Matthew 20:1-16
- 4. Matthew 20:17-19
- 5. Matthew 20:20-23
- 6. Matthew 20:24-28
- 7. Matthew 20:29-34
- 8. Matthew 21:1-5
- 9. Matthew 21:6-11
- 10. Matthew 21:12-13
- 11. Matthew 21:14-17
- 12. Matthew 21:18-22
- 13. Matthew 21:23-27
- 14. Matthew 21:28-32
- 15. Matthew 21:33-46
- 16. Matthew 22:1-14
- 17. Matthew 22:15-22
- 18. Matthew 22:23-33
- 19. Matthew 22:34-40
- 20. Matthew 22:41-46
- 21. Matthew 23:1-7
- 22. Matthew 23:8-13
- 23. Matthew 23:14-26
- 24. Matthew 23:27-36
- 25. Matthew 23:37-39
- 26. Matthew 24:1-8
- 27. Matthew 24:9-14
- 28. Matthew 24:15-28
- 29. Matthew 24:29-31
- 30. Matthew 24:32-35

MAY

- 1. Matthew 24:36-44
- 2. Matthew 24:45-51
- 3. Matthew 25:1-13
- 4. Matthew 25:14-30
- 5. Matthew 25:31-40
- 6. Matthew 25:41-46
- 7. Matthew 26:1-5
- 8. Matthew 26:6-13
- 9. Matthew 26:14-16
- 10. Matthew 26:17-25
- 11. Matthew 26:26-30
- 12. Matthew 26:31-35
- 13. Matthew 26:36-46
- 14. Matthew 26:47-56
- 15. Matthew 26:57-68
- 16. Matthew 26:69-75
- 17. Matthew 27:1-5
- 18. Matthew 27:6-10
- 19. Matthew 27:11-14
- 20. Matthew 27:15-26
- 21. Matthew 27:27-31
- 22. Matthew 27:32-37
- 23. Matthew 27:38-44
- 24. Matthew 27:45-49
- 25. Matthew 27:50-56
- 26. Matthew 27:57-61
- 27. Matthew 27:62-66
- 28. Matthew 28:1-7
- 29. Matthew 28:8-10
- 30. Matthew 28:11-15
- 31. Matthew 28:16-20

USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD



BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

1. STUDY THE CORE PASSAGE.

Prepare early. Read the passage, listing key people, places, words, phrases, and actions. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* and the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* to dig deeper into the items you listed. If a QR code is available in a lesson, scan it to gain additional information on what's found in the passage. Write a summary of the session's main idea. Use the statement printed under each session title as a starting place.

2. READ THE GROUP TIME PLAN.

Study the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, which include ideas for integrating the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide*. Page numbers for related PSG content are provided in the Group Plans. These page numbers correspond to the regular print version of the PSG and may differ from large print versions. Adjust the plan to fit the needs of your group. Identify ways to engage adults, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas or questions, consult *Explore the Bible QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (which identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson and is found at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras).

Review the items available in the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*. Look at the Lifeway Sunday School blog and Groups Ministry blog for additional helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

3. GATHER AND REVIEW.

Review the group plan and options again and collect any supplies you will need. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for guests.

DURING THE GROUP TIME

4. ARRIVE EARLY.

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet adults as they arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

5. LEAD THE GROUP IN A TIME OF BIBLE STUDY.

Use the plan, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns, so be flexible.

AFTER THE GROUP TIME

6. EVALUATE AND RECORD.

Review and implement the After the Session idea to encourage the group to put the truths they discovered into practice. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you grow as a leader.

7. START PREPARING TO LEAD THE NEXT GROUP TIME.

MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide* and *Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.

Daily Discipleship Guide

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the *Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide* model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group, daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time, and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in the back.

Personal Study Guide

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.

Leader Guide

Resource for leaders of groups using the *Personal Study Guide*. Includes commentary and group teaching plans.

ADDITIONAL LEADER HELPS

Commentary

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.

QuickSource

Resource for leaders, providing additional discussion questions, an object lesson, and dig deeper feature. Also provides ease of use for an individual called on to step in and lead the group on short notice.

Leader Pack

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the *Leader Guide* commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).



Find out more or order at goExploreTheBible.com

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Matthew's Gospel is the longest book in the New Testament. Nowhere does the writer of this Gospel identify himself by name, but Matthew's human authorship was universally affirmed in the early church.

Author: Matthew's name appears in every list of Jesus's apostles (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). According to his own account, he had been a tax collector (Matt. 9:9). Both Mark and Luke identify him as Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27), the man who then made a great feast for Jesus at his own house and invited many fellow tax collectors and other "sinners" as his guests (Luke 5:29; see also Matt. 9:10; Mark 2:15). We don't know what happened to Matthew after Acts 1, but church tradition claims he traveled extensively in the Middle East and eventually suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia.

Recipients: That Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience of believers has been claimed since the end of the second century. The early church asserted that Matthew was written to a primarily Jewish audience with a particular emphasis on proving Christ was the Messiah, the awaited descendant of David.

Date: Many believe Matthew depended on Mark's Gospel and place its writing in the 80s or 90s. However, Irenaeus stated that Matthew issued his Gospel "while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome." This would place the writing closer to the early 60s.¹

Structure: Bible students offer two main suggestions as to how Matthew structured his Gospel. The first focuses on the five discourses of Jesus (Matt. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25). Each culminates with a statement that Jesus had finished His teaching. These statements separate His discourses from the Gospel's narratives (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

A second option is geographical, moving from north to south. This structure begins with Jesus's Galilean ministry and the northern areas beyond it (4:12-19:1) and

moves toward Jerusalem (19:2-20:34). It concludes with His final days in Jerusalem (21:1-28:15) before His appearing back in Galilee as the risen Lord (28:16-20).

The lessons for this quarter include the close of Jesus's Galilean ministry, His fourth and fifth discourses, and His journey to Jerusalem. These chapters consider His activities during Holy Week—including His trials, crucifixion, and resurrection. Matthew also described His commission to make disciples of all nations after His resurrection.

JESUS'S TITLES:

Christ/Messiah: In his opening lines, Matthew identified Jesus as the "Christ" (the Greek form of the word "Messiah"). Matthew repeated this title at the end of Jesus's genealogy (1:16-18; 2:4). The Messiah was God's "Anointed One" (Dan. 9:25-26; Ps. 2:2), and Peter boldly identified Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), an identification Jesus confirmed in verse 20. During His trial, the high priest ordered Jesus under oath, "Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (26:63). In both of these passages, Matthew linked Jesus to the titles Messiah/Christ and Son of God.

Son of David: Matthew also used this royal and messianic title in the first verse of his Gospel. It connects Jesus to the covenant of 2 Samuel 7:16,25-26, where God promised that a descendant of David would rule over a kingdom that never ends. Those seeking healing often addressed Jesus by this title (Matt. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31), along with those who praised His arrival in Jerusalem (21:9). In 22:41-45, Jesus tied together the titles "Messiah," "Son of David," and "Lord" in emphasizing that He was greater than David.

King: When the wise men sought Jesus, they asked for the "king of the Jews" (2:2). When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday it was in fulfillment of Isaiah 62:11—"Your King is coming to you" (Matt. 21:5).



Pilate asked Jesus about being the King of the Jews (27:11), and the soldiers and the religious leaders mockingly acknowledged such in 27:29,42. At the crucifixion, a placard for all to see proclaimed Jesus was King (27:37).

Son of God: Matthew used this title eight times. At Jesus's baptism (3:17) and transfiguration (17:5), the Father acknowledged Him as the Son. Satan challenged the title (4:3,6), but both demons (8:29) and His disciples (14:33) affirmed it. Peter (16:16) and Caiaphas (26:63) link the title to the Messiah. Matthew also noted a Roman centurion confessing Him as the Son of God (27:54).

Lord: Matthew repeatedly applied the divine title of *Yahweh* (LORD) to Jesus. He began his Gospel with John the Baptist preparing the Lord's way (3:3). In Matthew 7:21-22, entrance into the kingdom is based on Jesus's judgment as Lord. He also declared Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (12:8) and to His future return as the coming of the Lord (24:42).

Son of Man: Jesus called Himself "Son of Man" thirty times in Matthew's Gospel. Initially associated with the prophecies of Daniel (Dan. 7:13-14), He used it to claim the authority to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6) and to explain how He would sacrifice His life as a ransom (20:28). He is "seated at the right hand of Power" (26:64) and will return as Judge of all people (13:41; 16:27-28; 24:27,30,37,39; 25:31; 26:64). The title stresses Jesus's humanity, deity, and authority all at the same time.

MAJOR THEMES:

Kingdom of Heaven: God's kingdom is a major theme in Matthew. The phrase occurs more than thirty times and emphasizes that Jesus was not establishing an earthly political entity, but a reign that was not of this world (see John 18:36). The kingdom was the heart of John the Baptist's call for repentance (Matt. 3:2), as well as Jesus's own message (4:17,23; 9:35) and the message of His apostles (10:7; 24:14).

The phrase "the kingdom of heaven" starts and ends the Beatitudes (5:3,10) and provides the foundation for Jesus's followers to live out the Christian ethic in practical terms. The growth of the kingdom is assured, despite opposition. But the kingdom also demands vigilance (25:1-13). Matthew 13 records eight parables that help Jesus's followers understand the kingdom better. He added another kingdom parable in 18:21-35 and seven more in chapters 20-25.

Fulfillment of Scripture: Matthew recorded about fifty direct quotations from the Old Testament, plus numerous other allusions to it. Many of these are observed in the ten different formulas Matthew used to introduce Old Testament quotations, all of which contain the Greek verb for "fulfill" (*pleroo*). In other cases, Jesus referred to the fulfillment of Scripture Himself (13:14; 26:54,56).

Every Scripture was fulfilled because the prophecies were of divine origin. They either came "by" (*hupo*) the Lord or "through" (*dia*) a prophet speaking for God. All of this emphasized that what happened to Jesus was not the result of circumstances or unforeseen events. God was in control of the human events regardless of the choices and schemes of humans.

Summary: Matthew began his Gospel with an emphasis on the worship of Jesus—by the wise men in Matthew 2:2,11—and closed it with worship of the risen Jesus by the women at the tomb (28:9) and by the eleven disciples in Galilee (28:17). This is the response every reader of Matthew's Gospel should have after encountering Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, and Lord.

1. Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325. Vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.* William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973 [1867/1885]; McGiffert, Arthur Cushman, translator. *The Church History of Eusebius, in vol. 1: A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series.* William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976 [1890].



MATTHEW

- I. **Birth and Infancy of Jesus** (1:1-2:23)
- II. **Beginning of Jesus's Ministry in Galilee** (3:1-4:25)
- III. **Discourse One: The Sermon on the Mount** (5:1-7:29)
- IV. **Jesus's First Miracles** (8:1-9:38)
- V. **Discourse Two: Ministry of Jesus's Disciples** (10:1-42)
- VI. **Responses to Jesus's Ministry** (11:1-12:50)
- VII. **Discourse Three: Parables about the Kingdom** (13:1-58)
- VIII. **Close of Jesus's Ministry in Galilee** (14:1-17:27)
- IX. **Discourse Four: Character of Jesus's Disciples** (18:1-35)
- X. **Jesus's Ministry on the Way to Jerusalem** (19:1-20:34)
- XI. **Jesus's Ministry in Jerusalem** (21:1-23:39)
- XII. **Discourse Five: Olivet Discourse** (24:1-25:46)
- XIII. **Betrayal, Crucifixion, and Burial** (26:1-27:66)
- XIV. **Resurrection and Commission** (28:1-20)



Courage

JESUS IS GREATER THAN ANYTHING WE FEAR.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 14:22-33 Memory Verse: Matthew 14:27

This lesson emphasizes several facts about Jesus that leaders should take to heart. First, Jesus sent His disciples out onto the lake—and into a storm. This means that following Jesus doesn't guarantee difficult circumstances won't arise. But it's also important to remember that Jesus is aware of where His people are and what they are facing, including their need for Him to come to them.

Also, Peter's attempt to walk on the water reveals the importance of keeping our focus on Jesus instead of the surrounding circumstances. As the writer of Hebrews encouraged his readers, we too need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (Heb. 12:2). We also learn from Peter's experience that while faith may motivate us, "little faith" will never sustain us in the overwhelming tides that hit us in life.

Matthew left his readers focused on Jesus as the "I am," the Savior, and "the Son of God." As you prepare to lead this session, reflect on the storms of your life and what Jesus has taught you through them. Ask God for wisdom as you seek to help the adults in your Bible study learn to focus on Jesus in the face of every fear.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



Fear is a powerful foe that hinders us from progressing in life. Listen to people around you and you will hear any number of fears mentioned. Many people are terrified at the idea of public speaking. Others have fears of heights, failure, the dark, crowds, spiders, and snakes. Personal fears include injury and illness. Our fears impact our thinking, relating, and acting. Fear influences all aspects of life. Dealing with fear correctly is essential for a well-balanced life. (PSG, p. 9)

What do you consider to be your biggest fears?



Understand the Context (Matthew 14:1-36)

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist heralded the start of Jesus’s ministry; and after His baptism, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1-11). By 4:12, Jesus had heard that John had been arrested, and He began ministering in Galilee, specifically the city of Capernaum (4:13). From that point until 18:35, Jesus’s ministry was focused in Galilee.

Thus from Matthew 4–18, the Gospel highlights Jesus’s “Great Galilean Ministry.” In these chapters Matthew did not seek to offer a chronological, step-by-step account of Jesus’s movements. Instead, he grouped his narrative generally around Jesus’s teachings (chaps. 5–7), Jesus’s miracles (chaps. 8–10), and various reactions to Him (chaps. 11–18).

Toward the end of His Galilean ministry, Jesus began a series of withdrawals into the districts around Galilee. Some of this time was spent in special training of the Twelve. Matthew 14:13 records the start of the first withdrawal into Bethsaida. During this time, the events of this session occurred. The second withdrawal saw Jesus take His disciples into the Syrophenician area around Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 15:1-28). Jesus’s third withdrawal took them from Syrophenicia to a Gentile area known as the Decapolis on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 15:29; Mark 7:31).

The fourth and final withdrawal took Jesus and the apostles into the sparsely populated

and cool northern hill country around Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13–18:35). Combined, the four times of withdrawals totaled about six months, from the Passover in the spring to the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall.

Jesus’s first withdrawal, covered in this session, was sparked by two significant rejections. The first came in the response to Him and His message in His hometown of Nazareth (13:53-58). The second occurred when Herod Antipas had John the Baptist beheaded (14:1-12). Jesus’s withdrawal took Him outside the Galilean territory controlled by Antipas and put Him into the tetrarchy of Philip, who had shown little interest in opposing Jesus. This is also where Jesus multiplied the fish and loaves to feed a multitude (14:13-21).

After feeding the crowd, Jesus sent His disciples back across the water while He dismissed the people. He also wanted to spend some time alone in prayer. Meanwhile, the disciples had difficulty crossing the sea because of a storm. Jesus then walked across the water and approached their boat. At Jesus’s urging, Peter got out of the boat and also walked on the water briefly. However, when Peter’s distractions and fears kicked in, Jesus rescued him from sinking and brought the boat safely to the other side.

Read Matthew 14:22-33 in your Bible. Identify the variety of fears experienced by the disciples in this passage. (PSG, p. 10)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus’s Ministry Beyond Galilee*) and **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Peter in Matthew’s Gospel*). Print one copy of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*) for each adult in your group.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 9 of the PSG.

ASK: **What do you consider to be your biggest fears?** (PSG, p. 9) Allow adults to share their responses. Discuss how fears change over time, highlighting the difference between things we fear as children and things we fear as adults.

SAY: *Regardless of what forms the fears take, they are still very real. And they have the potential to throw our lives into chaos.*

CONTEXT: Point out that today’s session focuses on how Jesus helps His people face their fears and respond in faith. Highlight this information from Understand the Context to share background for this session.

Following John’s death, Jesus withdrew to be alone with the disciples to sort through His response to such tragedy. This desire to be alone was interrupted by the crowds that followed. Jesus showed compassion by healing the sick late into the afternoon. The result was a hungry crowd of five thousand men, not including the women and children. Jesus miraculously fed all of them. (PSG, p. 10)

TRANSITION: *As you reflect on today’s verses, let your fears come to the forefront of your heart and mind. Intentionally face those fears as you study what Jesus did in this passage.*



Peter in Matthew's Gospel

Throughout Matthew 16:28, Peter appears in a variety of key moments. These encounters reveal the ongoing growth of Peter as a disciple and also the context for his response to the cross through what Jesus says from the cross and recorded in the Bible.

LOCATION	REFERENCE	EXPERIENCE
Sea of Galilee	Matthew 26:12-13	Jesus accepted Jesus's invitation to wash the feet and eat at table.
Caesarea Philippi	Matthew 26:13-20	They continued their journey from Caesarea Philippi.
Caesarea Philippi	Matthew 26:13-20	In the heart of his confession, Peter received a unique for receiving Jesus's words.
Mount of Transfiguration	Matthew 26:13-20	Peter, James, and John witnessed the Transfiguration of Jesus along with appearances by Moses and Elijah.
Caesarea Philippi	Matthew 26:13-20	After Jesus' death, Peter was the first to see and hear him as he rose from the dead on the third day.
Caesarea Philippi	Matthew 26:13-20	Jesus' death interrupted by Peter's question about forgiveness, leading to the context of the Transfiguration.
The Temple of Jerusalem	Matthew 26:13-20	After a question from Peter about personal sacrifice, Jesus stated that the disciples will be involved with Jesus' death.
Jerusalem	Matthew 26:13-20	Despite the disciples' protest, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times.
Jerusalem	Matthew 26:13-20	When the disciples left Jesus in the garden, Jesus asked Peter specifically why he couldn't stay awake to pray with Jesus.
Jerusalem	Matthew 26:13-20	As predicted, Peter denied Jesus three times and repented with Peter's weeping.

PRAYING SCRIPTURE IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

1. Read the opening paragraph of the passage and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you study the passage. Write your thoughts and prayers in the spaces provided.

VERSE	THOUGHTS	VERSE	THOUGHTS
Matthew 16:28		Matthew 16:28	
Matthew 16:29		Matthew 16:29	
Matthew 16:30		Matthew 16:30	
Matthew 16:31		Matthew 16:31	
Matthew 16:32		Matthew 16:32	

Group Activity Option

Music

Show a video of Zach Williams’s song “Fear Is a Liar.” (If you don’t have access to a video, simply play a recording.) Comment on how fear looks different based on the seasons of life, but it remains an ongoing part of our broken world. Ask: **What fears have you faced recently? What made them so difficult?** Share that this session examines how Jesus helps us walk through fearful times.

Jesus's Presence (Matt. 14:22-27)

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23** After dismissing the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Well into the night, he was there alone. **24** Meanwhile, the boat was already some distance from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them. **25** Jesus came toward them walking on the sea very early in the morning. **26** When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they said, and they cried out in fear. **27** Immediately Jesus spoke to them. “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

(v. 22) *Immediately* is one of Matthew’s characteristic words. In this story, he used it three times (vv. 22,27,31). His first use ties this section to the feeding of the five thousand. In Greek, *made* often indicates compulsion. Matthew did not state why Jesus sent His disciples away or why He did so before *he dismissed the crowds*. However, John noted that the crowds wanted to make Him a king (John 6:15). Jesus likely did not want His disciples caught up in that frenzy, so He compelled them to *go ahead of him*. The phrase *other side* refers to the western side of the Sea of Galilee.

(v. 23) Matthew never named the *mountain* where Jesus retreated. Rather, the expression refers to the steeply rising hills near the lake where Jesus went *to pray*. Matthew also did not indicate the content of Jesus’s prayer, but emphasized that He wanted solitude, stressing it twice with the words *by himself* and *alone*.

(vv. 24-25) *Meanwhile* turns the focus back to the disciples in the boat. *Early in the morning* (v. 25) provides a timeframe, while *some distance from the land* provides a location. According to John’s account, they were “three or four miles” out into the lake (John 6:19).

Nothing indicates that these experienced fishermen feared for their lives, but they were dealing with difficult conditions. Matthew noted their boat was *battered by the waves* and that *the wind was against them*. The word *battered* sometimes referred to torture or great distress. The disciples were struggling against the natural elements. By this point they probably were wet, cold, and exhausted.

They also had been rowing for several hours! Jesus had dismissed them around sundown and now it was nearing sunrise. The wording suggests

between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. And that’s when *Jesus came toward them walking on the sea*.

The simple sentence carries a much deeper meaning. The words are a Christological statement identifying Jesus as God. Job testified that God walks on “the waves of the sea” (Job 9:8). In Psalm 77:19, Asaph proclaimed that God makes His way “through the sea and . . . through the vast water.” (See also Isa. 43:16.) In other words, Jesus was doing what only God can do!

(v. 26) Seeing this, the disciples had three reactions: *they were terrified*, thought they saw *a ghost*, and *cried out in fear*. *Terrified* is used of both physical and mental anguish, and their cry of fear was a shriek. Meanwhile, superstition held that disembodied spirits haunted the lake and wandered upon it at night.

(v. 27) To calm the disciples’ fear, *Jesus spoke to them*. This is the second use of *immediately* in the passage (vv. 22,27).

He told them three things. *Have courage* is an expression usually spoken by Jesus (except in Mark 10:49). *It is I* is more than just a self-identification; it relates to the divine name (“I Am”) in Exodus 3:14. Thus, along with walking on the sea (Matt. 14:25), Jesus also claimed equality with God by using the divine name for Himself. Jesus’s words, *Don’t be afraid*, were the standard greeting in a theophany or epiphany (Matt. 1:20 17:7; 28:5,10; Luke 1:13,30; 2:10; Rev. 1:17). The present imperative could be translated, “Stop being afraid,” thus forbidding an action already begun.

Key Doctrine

God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. (See John 1:1; Philippians 2:5-8.)



APPLICATION POINT: We can trust Jesus to walk with us in the storms of life.

OVERVIEW:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee*) to set the geographic focus for the upcoming sessions.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 14:22-27 aloud as the group notes words that stick out to them from the verses. Encourage adults to talk about how the crowd might have felt at being sent home and how the disciples felt being sent out on the lake by Jesus.

EXAMINE:

Enlist a volunteer to read "Did You Know?" on page 11 of the PSG. Remind adults that many of Jesus's disciples were experienced fishermen who probably had dealt with storms on the Sea of Galilee before. Use information from verses 24-25 of the Leader Guide (p. 18) to describe the meaning of "battered" and the wind being against them. Share:

Jesus came to the disciples for two reasons: to join them and to help them. . . . When His disciples cried out in terror and fear, Jesus immediately called out to them. His words were intended to encourage them and allay their fears. Have courage, He said, it is I. Literally, Jesus declared, "I am." . . . With this short exclamation, Jesus was hinting at the presence of the great "I Am," the Lord God Almighty. This was God Himself who was with them during the wind and waves. There was no need to be afraid. (PSG, pp. 12-13)

ASK:

When has Jesus's presence been especially meaningful to you? (PSG, p. 13)



Group Activity Option

Storm Sketch

Give each adult a sheet of paper and a pencil. Ask them to sketch the boat, storm, disciples, and Jesus from Matthew 14:22-27. Ask: ***What might the storm and boat represent in your life? How are you watching Jesus reveal Himself in the storm?*** Instruct adults to consider this sketch through the week, labeling the elements of the storm and security of the boat in terms of their own fears.

Jesus's Invitation (Matt. 14:28-30)

28 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter answered him, “command me to come to you on the water.” **29** He said, “Come.” And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. **30** But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

(v. 28) Verses 28-31 contain “the story-within-a-story” that is not found in other Gospels. Bible students debate what Peter implied by **Lord**. In its common use, the term can mean “Sir,” as in Matthew 8:21. In its strongest sense, it is an address to the divine. Based on the audacity of Peter’s request, he likely meant it in this strongest sense.

The conditional statement **if it’s you** could be read as a statement of uncertainty, perhaps even doubt. But Matthew used the Greek conditional form that assumes the truth of the statement. Thus Peter’s words could be rendered, “Lord, since it’s you.”

Peter requested Jesus to **command** him to **come to you on the water**. *Command* is the same word Jesus used when He ordered the crowds to sit down in verse 19. Whatever his reasoning, Peter’s request demonstrated courage. In verses 28-29, Matthew switched the term he had used to describe Jesus’s walking on the “sea” in verses 25-26 to “water” for Peter’s experience. Matthew probably did so to indicate that Jesus had walked some distance, whereas Peter took only a few steps on the water.

(v. 29) Jesus responded favorably to Peter and instructed him to **come**. The word is, as Peter requested, a command. In answering Peter in this way, Jesus was indicating that He not only had the power to walk on the water Himself, but He also was able to share that power with others. This provided more evidence that Jesus is God and that He is the Messiah.

Of course, Peter had to get **out of the boat**. From there, he **started walking on the water**. However, the phrase **came toward Jesus** (as well as v. 30) indicates that Peter’s miraculous achievement was short-lived. Regardless, Peter did walk on the water, and he must have gotten close enough for Jesus to reach out and take hold of him (v. 31).

(v. 30) **But** indicates a major change in the narrative. Peter became rattled when he **saw the**

strength of the wind. Since one cannot see wind literally, the text suggests that what Peter started to focus on was the *effect* of the wind. This could include the white caps, the sea surges, the sea spray, and so forth.

Shifting his focus from Jesus to his dire circumstance caused Peter to be **afraid**. Once his fears overcame his faith, the disciple began to **sink**. In verse 27, Jesus had told the disciples not to fear, but now Peter panicked because he focused on his circumstances. Once he began to sink, he was living up to his name—“the stone” or “the rock.” He was sinking like one!

To his credit, Peter sought help from the proper Source. Even though he realized he was going down, Peter still believed his Lord could save him. Peter cried to the same **Lord** who had commanded him to come out of the boat in verse 29. And his cry was simple: **save me!**

Save means “to rescue” or “to deliver from danger,” whether physical or otherwise. And that is its primary meaning here. Peter was asking to be saved from drowning in the depths of the lake. But “save” also has a salvific meaning, and Matthew clearly used this episode to recall David’s words in Psalm 69:1-2: “Save me, God, for the water has risen to my neck . . . I have come into deep water, and a flood sweeps over me.”

Bible Skill

Examine and reflect on similarities between two passages.

Look for similarities between the event in Matthew 14:22-33 and Matthew 8:23-27. Then look for differences between the two events. Explain why you can be certain these were two different events.

Jesus's Response (Matt. 14:31-33)

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” **32** When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33** Then those in the boat worshiped him and said, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

(v. 31) For the third time in this episode, Matthew used the word *immediately* (vv. 22,27,31). Peter's cry for rescue in verse 30 needed an immediate response from Jesus. In response, the Lord took two actions represented by two verbs: He *reached out his hand* and He *caught hold of* Peter. In Psalm 144:7, David also prayed for God to “Reach down from on high; rescue me from deep water.”

Only after Jesus rescued Peter did He correct him. A present tense verb highlights how Jesus responded to His disciple. Jesus called out Peter's *little faith*. This is not the first or last time that Jesus rebuked His disciples for their lack of faith in Matthew's Gospel (see 6:30; 8:26; 16:8; 17:20). Yet, in spite of Peter's inadequate and insufficient faith, the Lord still saved him. Peter and the disciples' faith was weak, but it was much different from the total unbelief of others (see Matt. 13:58).

Jesus then asked Peter, *Why did you doubt?* The word *doubt* refers to having a divided mind, wavering, or hesitating between belief and unbelief. Matthew used the word again in 28:17 to describe responses to a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in Galilee. Thus this unique experience ends with the focus more on Peter's failure than on his singular accomplishment.

(vv. 32-33) After Peter and Jesus entered the boat, *the wind ceased*. The term *ceased* literally means “to grow weary.” In other words, the wind tired out! It was the wind that had so frightened Peter (v. 30). Now, even that had died out.

The disciples in the boat responded in a way not recorded in the other Gospels: They *worshiped him* and confessed Him as the *Son of God*. *Worshiped* literally refers to prostrating oneself. Possibly the disciples did that, but based on the conditions in the boat the term may simply mean they gave Jesus honor, praise, and glory.

As good Jews, they knew to worship God alone (Ex. 34:14); thus, this was a clear affirmation of Jesus's deity. *Truly* is a strong affirmation of certainty. So, at this point, there was no doubt in the disciples' minds as to Jesus's identity.

In their confession, the emphasis is on *God* since it comes first in the original text. This is the first full confession of Jesus's identity in the Gospel, and it anticipates Peter's words in 16:16. However, Matthew had presented Jesus as the Son of God previously (2:15; 3:17; 4:3,6; 8:29) and would later (16:16; 17:5; 27:54). The narrative ends with the focus totally on Jesus and who He is.

With everyone back in the boat and the storm calmed, the disciples arrived safely at their harbor (v. 34). No matter what circumstances they may encounter, Jesus ultimately brings His followers to a safe harbor.

Praying Scripture

Matthew 14:31

Spend time praying Scripture using Matthew 14:31. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Ask God to reveal areas where your faith might be weak. Confess your doubts and commit to keeping your focus on Christ alone.

During the session, invite adults to pray this Scripture as well. You and the adults in your group can also take advantage of the Explore the Bible Prayer Guide. This QR code also appears on page 17 of the *Personal Study Guide*.



Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.



APPLICATION POINT: Jesus's power should lead us to worship Him.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 14:31-33 aloud as the group carefully listens for what caused the storm to calm. Point out that the storm was not rebuked by Jesus in this instance; rather, it simply stopped when Jesus and Peter got into the boat.

RECAP:

Summarize the following from page 15 of the PSG and engage adults in responding with their own insight:

“Unlike the calming of the storm in Matthew 8, Jesus said nothing to the elements of nature. The storm apparently stopped without a word from Jesus. Calm occurred the moment Peter and Jesus got into the boat. The presence of Jesus in the boat most likely calmed the storm in the hearts of the disciples as well. Not only did the wind stop, but suddenly the boat was at the shore, a goal the disciples had labored for most of the night to accomplish. . . . These nature miracles of Jesus were not for show, but always to meet the need of the moment. In this case, it was the rescue of the disciples. This was a tangible response to a desperate situation.”

ASK:

How do you tend to respond to Jesus's power when you experience it? (PSG, p. 16)

PRAY:

Highlight Jesus's words to Peter in verse 31. Challenge adults to consider the measure of their own faith and the strengths of their doubts. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) to each adult and invite them to pray Matthew 14:31 back to God as noted on page 22 of the Leader Guide.

DISCUSS:

Direct attention to the Summary Statement for this session: *Jesus is greater than anything we fear*. Allow adults to share how they see that truth revealed in today's passage. Emphasize that Jesus has a way of transforming our doubts and fears into faith and worship. Point out that no matter what we are experiencing in life, we can be sure that He is in control and that He can calm any storm we face. Challenge adults to demonstrate Peter's courage by stepping out of their "boat" and to refuse to let the "winds" distract them from what Jesus is doing in their lives.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 17 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *We can trust Jesus to walk with us in the storms of life.*
- *When Jesus issues an invitation, we can step out with confidence knowing that He is with us.*
- *Jesus’s power should lead us to worship Him.*

HIGHLIGHT:

Allow adults to share which of these statements provide the greatest encouragement for them today.

DISCUSS:

Direct half the group to read and reflect on the first set of questions on page 17 of the PSG. Instruct the other half to do the same with the second set of questions. After a few minutes, review responses from each group. Talk about how the responses to each question should shape their prayers and their daily walk with Jesus.

REFLECT:

Help adults remember that Jesus is Lord of every storm and that no struggle is outside of His power and authority. Say: *As we walk toward Jesus in our storms, we can believe He has the power to get us where we need to be.* Challenge the group to reflect on God’s faithfulness each day as a way to gain courage and to establish hope for the future.

PRAY:

Remind adults to use **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*) as a way to pray the truths of today’s session back to God. Invite adults to pray silently for the people beside them, specifically that they would know Jesus is with them in their storms.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send a text or email to the group reminding them of the truths of this session. Note that there are hundreds of verses that urge us to reject fear. Suggest they choose one verse to reflect on this week and to share that with the group. You may also want to share the video to “Fear is a Liar” by Zach Williams from the Engage activity. Challenge adults to trust Jesus and His promises, not the lies of fear.

LEADER EXTRAS



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