



# LENT 2021

A LENTEN JOURNEY THROUGH MATTHEW

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE



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Greetings, Riverside!

The season of Lent is upon us. On February 17, Ash Wednesday will usher in this season where the church sets her collective attention on repentance and fasting. We don't hold rigidly to these seasons and structures at Riverside, but the shared rhythms of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost root us in the redeeming story of Christ, and live into the Biblical wisdom of the teacher that "there is a time for everything" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Built into these annual rhythms are the wide spectrum of our life with Christ: anticipation and fulfillment, proclamation and response, lament and joy.

We are also nearing a year since COVID-19 turned everything upside down, and one of the lifelines of Riverside Church during this year of pandemic has been the faithfulness of our home groups. Home groups have gathered in backyards, around campfires, under heated blankets, in the Beacon, and on Zoom. Our leaders and our people have adapted, lamented, loved well, and made the best out of a truly stressful situation and season.

These devotionals have been written by the wonderful people who make up our home groups! You'll hear from people in all of our Riverside home groups: Beacon, Farmington Square, Marquette, Near Northwest, North by Northwest, Potato Creek, West of Westside, and a new, Unnamed Home Group.

As the "In" Pastor at Riverside, it is truly one of my great delights that I get to encourage and interact with each of these groups and leaders. I assure you that as you walk this Lent journey with us, you are in for a treat! May the Spirit of Christ be near to you in these coming weeks, and may your faith be enriched by this journey with Jesus.

Grace and Peace,

Andrew

Andrew Gates



# WEEK 1


## MONDAY (2/15/21)

Hi, my name is Susan Titus. I'm in the Marquette Home Group led by Keith and Shelley. I've been married to Shawn for almost 33 years! I have served at Camp Ray Bird for over 20 years and I never get tired of summer camp. Demonstrating Jesus' love to campers is an amazing job to have! I joke with my friend, Alyssa, that I will probably just fall over and die there one day. To which she always replies, "can it not be during summer camp- it will scare the campers", and "do we have to talk about this?" :).

In this Devotional, we are going to walk through the life of Jesus as told through the eyes of Matthew, one of His disciples. During Advent, the season of waiting prior to Christmas, we journeyed through the Old Testament looking at stories that pointed to our need for a Savior, God's plan to redeem us through a Savior, and prophecies about the coming Savior. I cannot imagine God's excitement to see it all come to pass in the birth of Jesus.

God among us. Dwelling in our neighborhood (the world). Being vulnerable to hunger, relational pain and disappointment, and ultimately to death.

I am praying to see Jesus through fresh eyes during this Lenten season. That the stories we read, and the questions we answer, will reintroduce me to Jesus.



A couple questions to consider as we begin this journey together:

② What is one thing you'd like God to show you about Himself during this season?

② What area of your humanness are you most thankful for Jesus being able to identify with?



## TUESDAY (2/16/21)

Hi, my name is Shawn Titus and I am in the Marquette Home Group led by Keith and Shelley. Speaking of Keith, I think I will just refer to him as Ootlatch from now on (One Of The Leaders Around This Church).

Today we are going to watch a video from the **BibleProject** about the book of Matthew. But first, think about what you know about the book of Matthew:

❓ What is Matthew's purpose?

❓ What is the main point?

❓ What is unique to Matthew vs the other gospels?

📺 Now watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Dv4-n6OYGI> and see how your answers compared with theirs.



It is good for me to be reminded of the connection between Jesus and the Old Testament and the comparison with Moses. I know that in my head, but not being a Jew from that time it can be hard to keep in mind the significance.

- ② They talk about 3 main points (Messiah from the line of David, New Moses, and God with us). *How do each of these apply/speak to you?*

They have a couple interesting things for us to keep in mind as we read Matthew in the coming days:

1. Look up the Old Testament quotations.
2. Look closely at the people who accept Jesus.

## WEDNESDAY (2/17/21)

Hi, my name is John Zahlmann (JZ). I'm in the Marquette Home Group led by Keith and Shelley. I'm a high school English teacher, still finding my roots in the South Bend area, and have been at Riverside ever since I moved to Indiana.

☞ Take a little bit of time to stop and read **Matthew 2:13-23**.

So, I LOVE Christmas. I have a year-round countdown and I truly go all out for the holiday season. But if I'm honest, when I think of "the Christmas story" from the Bible, I never remember that the precious baby Jesus (the Savior and King) was in danger of getting murdered after he was born.

I never remember that there is a slaughter of young boys in Bethlehem as Herod is searching for Jesus, leaving mothers without children and leaving communities in mourning. It seems as if God gave us the most perfect gift, then it was quickly surrounded in fear, death, loss, grief, and confusion. Seems kinda messed up, right? Well, it definitely would be... if this story ended there.

Part of the Christmas story is that Jesus would be named "*Immanuel*" or "*God with us*". And as the sorrow and the evil of King Herod took place, God didn't abandon us - He was still at work. He never left. He called Joseph to lead his family out of harm's way (v.13-14, and 19-22), and in doing so kept Jesus safe and free to grow and minister until it was time for him to be sacrificed so that we would be able to be with Him again (because, again: He wants to be with us). He shows us many times in just the one Christmas story we are meant to be with Him and that He's creating opportunities for that to happen - even when the world tries to tear us away.



I don't know about you, but I can definitely think of recent times where I felt fear, sorrow, and hurt - and what I failed to remember during those times is that God is ALWAYS with us and WANTS to be with us. While He isn't the cause, nor does He want the bad moments to happen, He surely will be with us when they do. He's here to offer us safety, hope, rescue, and strength.

② Where can you see God working to be with you in a challenging, negative moment in your life?



## THURSDAY (2/18/21)

Howdy, my name is Jack Swope, I'm a member of the Walatka's Marquette Home Group. I've been married to Laura 10 years and work at Memorial Hospital as a Materials Analyst.

☞ My text to reflect on is **Matthew 3**, please take a moment to read this.

In particular we will be reflecting on Matt. 3:2, 3:8 & 3:11, which all speak about repentance.

Matt. 3:2—Repentance is an action, which means we have to actively turn away from sin, make a lifestyle change to go from sin to obedience in trusting God. In the Old Testament, Israel is to return to faithfulness to the covenant. Jesus' first sermon (Matt. 4:17) begins the same.


Matt. 3:8 speaks of the fruit that comes from repentance, to show inner righteousness, not just outer conformity.

Matt. 3:11—John baptizes with water to repentance for cleaning as opposed to Jesus who will baptize with the Holy Spirit & Fire (judgment for the unrepentant).

❓ Take some time to reflect—are there areas of your life that need you to repent?

## FRIDAY (2/19/21)

I am Laura Maddux. I am from Texas, but moved here to teach sign language interpreting at Bethel in 2019. I'll be married to Adam Polhemus (this month!) and what will soon be our house frequently has three teenage girls and 2 crazy dogs around. I've been attending Riverside since October of 2019, and enjoy the Marquette Home Group and the tight relationships I've formed with many other believers here.

 Pause to read **Matthew 4:1-11**.

After 40 days without food, Jesus had to be physically weak. However, all the time in focused meditation and prayer had left him spiritually strong to withstand the devil's temptations. He responded to every temptation he faced with a scripture.

- ② What is a temptation in your life and what is a scripture you can use to combat you are tempted?
  
- ② The devil also used scripture in a false way to try to convince Jesus (verse 6). Are there any scriptures you think have been twisted into lies in this way in your life? What are verses you can use to combat those lies?
  
- ② What ways are you tempted to worship the idols of this life instead of God?
  
- 🔍 Have you ever fasted for even 24 hours as you pray and seek God on a topic? Why not pick a day in the next week where you can abstain from food and focus on where the Lord is leading you. If you're interested in how to go about this practice, reach out to someone on the elder team or pastoral staff for guidance.

## SATURDAY (2/20/21)

Hello I'm Evan Good, I've been at Riverside for 3-ish years I think and I'm in the Marquette Home Group led by Keith and Shelley. If you've heard a loud boisterous (possibly obnoxious) laugh sometime during service or after, it was probably me!

**+** Today's passage is **Matthew 4:12-25**.

There's a few different things that jumped out at me from today's reading. The first is the part of the prophecy in verse 16 "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light", and it made me think about how much effort God puts into going to those in darkness. He consistently chases the "hopeless".

The other part that struck me was the disciples' response to Jesus calling them to join Him. They just up and left, in an instant. I'm deeply challenged by the commitment that took, no planning, no talking to those they were working with to see if it was ok, no tying up loose ends—they just left. In fact this challenged me so much that I checked the account in the other gospels trying to find if they really went that immediately. The different accounts of the disciples have varying details around the circumstances but they all show the disciples leaving to follow Jesus immediately. If you want to check them for yourself look at Mark 1:16-19, Luke 5:1-11, and John 1:15-51 (don't worry, John has short verses).

In light of that, the questions I'm now wrestling with and encourage you to consider are:

- ② Is there someone in your life who's sitting in darkness that you can be a great light to?
  
- ② What might Jesus be calling you to leave behind in order to follow Him?



# WEEK 2

## SUNDAY (2/21/21)


Each Sunday through Lent, we are going to observe our predictable routine of slowness.

In the introduction, I observed, “the shared rhythms of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost root us in the redeeming story of Christ, and live into the Biblical wisdom of the teacher that “there is a time for everything” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Built into these annual rhythms are the wide spectrum of our life with Christ: anticipation and fulfillment, proclamation and response, lament and joy.

- ② Today, spend some time reflecting on a season of life that was characterized by Advent like waiting. Are you still waiting? What are you waiting and longing for?
- ① Spend some time reflecting about this to the Lord - He wants to hear your thoughts, fears, and dreams.

## MONDAY (2/22/21)


This is from David Phillips. I am from Plymouth originally and work at Notre Dame. If you know me at church, it is probably as the tall guy chasing after two little boys. I am in the home group that meets at the Encks’ house near Keller Park (Near Northwest) during normal times. Our home group has spent most of the last year studying the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, so we are going to lead the devotionals for this part.

 For today, first take some time to read through **Matthew 5:1-26**.

This start of the Sermon on the Mount surprises me. Jesus has been healing people and calling disciples, gathering a crowd, but we haven't heard much from Jesus directly yet. Then, he starts off with these unusual statements. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "blessed are those who mourn," and so on. I've heard it summarized as "lucky are the unlucky." It is just so different from what I am used to and what I naturally pursue in the world; it is so upside-down. And yet it is the center of Jesus's teaching. It is the first thing Jesus shares with this big crowd. When I read it, I have to force myself to take it at face value, because it is just so different.

These upside down statements have helped me in the midst of the COVID pandemic, when the world has been turned upside down. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" has been particularly meaningful to me, a verse that I have said multiple times each day over the past months. This statement is a promise of eternity to me, of what is to come: people dying in a pandemic, political division, and isolation are not the end; God and good will eventually win. But what has been most important to me is that Jesus's words are also true now. Life is hard right now, but that death and mourning over it is somehow creating space for resurrection.

When I mourn now over the daily struggles of working from a windowless room in my basement, the effects of my own sin, or even very literally mourn people who are dying, I am learning how to follow the Jesus who came and conquered by dying.

 What is God trying to do in you in this time of mourning?


## TUESDAY (2/23/21)

Hello, I'm Janelle Phillips and I participate in the Near Northwest Home Group. I'm married to David and my two boys Jonah (6) and Theodore (3) help keep me busy and curious about the world. I also teach at a local nature-based Montessori preschool where I love exploring the wonders of God's creation with little people. I've been even more thankful than usual for outdoor spaces this past year!

 Today we're reading **Matthew 5:27-48**.

In verse 44 Jesus says to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” In my life right now I'm not being actively persecuted and I try not to have any enemies. But the past year has brought many polarizing events and opinions and it can be hard for me to continue to extend love to someone who in word or deed seems to stand directly counter to my own beliefs and values.

I might wonder, in disbelief or dismissal, “How could they do that? How could they think that?” Even if I do not say or do anything in response to the other person I know the attitude of my heart and the thoughts of my mind matter to God and need to be more aligned with His Kingdom.

 Who is God asking you to extend love to today, even if it's hard?



## WEDNESDAY (2/24/21)

Hey there! I'm Nicole Forgette. I'm originally from Minnesota but have lived in South Bend for the past three years. I love adventure, especially the infinite adventure in knowing God through Christ in His Word. I serve in the ministry of Revive Our Hearts in the Spanish division and am part of the wonderful Near Northwest Home Group through Riverside.

📖 Let's read **Matthew 6:1-18**. You probably have a section of this memorized without even knowing it!

The Lord's Prayer! It's one many of us learn as children or hear in movies or at Christian events. So easily it can become a repetition that we may not realize what we're actually praying for. So let's pick it apart a bit and take a closer look!

Notice the first two verses have to do with God. So easily we can start our prayer with talking about ourselves. *Let us put our first focus in prayer on Him!*


- “Your Kingdom Come”—When we ask for the Kingdom to come, *do we know what we're asking for?* Do we know what God's Kingdom is?
- “Give us this day”—*God meets our daily needs*. So quick we are to worry about tomorrow, but God tells us to not worry about tomorrow. Let us focus on today!
- “Lead us not into temptation”—Often it seems like we lead ourselves into temptation and then ask Christ to deliver us.
- “For Yours is...”—The doxology, *finishing the prayer in praise!* May we both start and end our prayers in praise to Christ our Lord.

This prayer isn't one we're supposed to constantly repeat but it is a pattern/example of how we should pattern our prayers.

❓ What other lines of this pattern prayer seem confusing?

## THURSDAY (2/25/21)

“Hallo”, my name is Lea Barthuly and we have been going to Riverside since moving to South Bend over 3 years ago. I grew up in Germany and have worked/lived all over the place, from Texas to China to Florida. Now, my husband Josh and I live in the Near-Northwest-Neighborhood. We love going to our NNN home group and connecting with international students on Notre Dame’s campus.

 Today’s reading is **Matthew 6:19-34**.

This winter, as I watch the sparrows devour the bird seeds outside my window, I am often reminded of verse 26: “...they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” These little birds go about their days without worry and God provides all they need. Even during a South Bend winter! Verse 26 also asks “Are you not of more value than they?” Yes, you are.

As God’s son or daughter, we are called not to worry about tomorrow and the day to day but to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Why? Because we have a heavenly father who already knows about all our daily needs - who deeply cares about them.

I like to think of it as a daily adventure. If He is my father and has told me He will provide, then how will He do it today? I can pray for an open parking spot, a difficult meeting, or for the food that I burned to still taste good... and then watch Him in action! What happens next is sometimes truly miraculous. And sometimes seemingly “less” miraculous. The response to my prayer comes as a lesson in patience or a reminder that even after failures, His grace is still sufficient for me.

Daily adventures are our training ground. When we entrust our heavenly father to take care of the “small” things and see that He keeps His word, we can also trust Him with tomorrow’s “big” things and stay focused on His kingdom.

② Do you believe that God truly cares about your daily needs and troubles?

② What “small” thing will you pray about today? At the end of the day, make a note about the outcome.

🎵 Sing/read the song out loud: “What a Friend we have in Jesus”

*What a friend we have in Jesus  
All our sins and griefs to bear  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit  
Oh, what needless pain we bear  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer*

## FRIDAY (2/26/21)

Hello! I am Sarah Enck, and I am a member of the Near Northwest Home Group. I am a mom to twin boys, wife to Ryan for nine years, and a School Counselor at Saint Joe High School. I am passionate about story and the most fulfilling thing is to sit with someone while they share their story with me.

☒ Today we continue to think of our own story as it relates to our relationship with others and with Christ. Let's continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount with **Matthew 7:1-14**. Read this passage now - thoughtfully - thinking through each verse.

**Judging others.** I don't know what first comes to mind when you read the first six verses in this chapter, but I always feel defensive - *I'm not a judgmental person*. As I've studied this idea further, I've had to really evaluate what judgment means and what Christ is commanding of his followers. *Should I always give my friends unconditional approval or just judge their actions?* According to this passage, judgment should be fair and not hypocritical. I cannot approach someone in love without being open to them coming to me to talk through the areas in which I fall short. In whatever those conversations look like, they should be measured with justice, mercy, and love.

**Ask. Seek. Knock.** I have read these next verses so many times, and I think this is the first time I have thoughtfully considered seek and knock in relation to the rest of the passage. Typically, I stop at ask and settle on the idea that if I ask God to grant my requests he will follow through. Thankfully, I have grown in my view of God and no longer see God as just a magic genie who grants my wishes. Instead, I see that asking requires believers to come to God with a spirit of humility - acknowledging that we cannot do anything apart from the help He provides. Beyond that, we

are to seek him in our requests and prayers with care and application. As we ask in humility and seek his presence, we continue to knock - approaching him with earnestness and perseverance. We need to implement each of these steps in our relationship with the Lord because we need help from him in order to live out what is he commanding us in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

*Reflection: Think of a current situation that you can implement ASK, SEEK, KNOCK this week. Pray about this and ask for his guidance. Seek Him as you meditate on his Word and reflect on what He is telling you. Continue to knock and wait on Him as he reveals His plan for you.*

## SATURDAY (2/27/21)

Hi, my name is Malia Marshall. I am a member of the Near Northwest Home Group through Riverside! I am a senior at the University of Notre Dame, and I am originally from Portland, Oregon. I have been attending Riverside since my freshman year at Notre Dame, and I am also a Young Life leader at Jefferson Intermediate in South Bend.

 Take a moment to stop and read **Matthew 7:15-28**.

When I read this passage, I am struck by Jesus's warnings against following false prophets who "come to you in sheep's clothing" but are "ferocious wolves" on the inside. He goes on to say that we will recognize whether someone is worthy of our trust by the fruit they produce. What I think is interesting about this metaphor is that the false prophets (the "wolves") who mislead people and should not be trusted by followers of Jesus, disguise themselves as harmless sheep who seem very nice and very trustworthy. Jesus then says that to tell what someone is really like, we should not pay attention to their appealing words, but instead, pay attention to whether they live their lives in a way honoring to God.

This part of the passage stuck out to me because I am discouraged when I see and read about Christian leaders who misuse Christianity and their power in ways that harm people and that do not reflect the life and teachings of Jesus. Some examples of this include Christian leaders who use their influences in ways that demean groups of people, abuse women, promote violence, or seek personal wealth/glory.

While we are all imperfect people deserving of grace, sometimes actions of Christian leaders come to light that are so egregiously against the vision of Christ, and I find it difficult to understand in the aftermath how other Christians didn't see the warning signs or chose to look the other way when they did. The end of the Sermon on the Mount reminds me that the actions of Christian leaders (their "fruit") really do matter and

should be evaluated. This doesn't mean expecting perfection from people, but it does mean it is important to hold people, especially leaders, accountable for acting in a godly and loving way. I pray that while remembering to treat all with grace, I would also have the wisdom and discernment to know and not dismiss when a Christian leader produces bad fruit in their lives.

② What kind of fruit would a “false prophet” produce? What fruits do you believe are important for Christians to show in their lives? (See Galatians 5:22-23).




# WEEK 3

## SUNDAY (2/28/21)

Good morning Sunday! Our predictable time to spend relaxing with the Father.

We again remember that the shared rhythms of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost root us in the redeeming story of Christ, and live into the Biblical wisdom of the teacher that “there is a time for everything” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Built into these annual rhythms are the wide spectrum of our life with Christ: anticipation and fulfillment, proclamation and response, lament and joy.

 Today we are reflecting, in the spirit of remembering Christmas, on the gift of Jesus as you’ve been reading through His life. Spend some time thanking the Father for the ways that Jesus has been a gift to you or those around you.



## MONDAY (3/1/21)

Hi, our names are Tom & Ramona Langhofer. We are in the West of Westside Home Group led by Wade Stoller and Phil Lubensky. We have been married for almost 11 years and we have 3 kids: Boston, Jacob and Titus.

📖 Take a moment to stop and read **Matthew 8:1-13**.

We love the leper's faith, he recognized that Jesus was the only one able to heal him and believed that He could! This man lost everything and everyone dear to Him and it humbled him to recognize that only God can heal him if that was His will!

Also, the centurion's faith made Jesus marvel! The centurion probably heard the story of the leper being healed and he believed that Jesus had the power to command the servant to be healed from the distance.

Our faith pleases God and we must approach Him like the leper and the centurion, believing Him and that He is a rewarder to those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Every time we go to visit Romania, my faith (Ramona) grows stronger because every problem and difficulty is an opportunity to draw closer to Him, recognizing that only God can fix the problem if it is His will. He draws nearer to us when we are brokenhearted and I have seen Him work in amazing ways through hard times!

*May we always come to Him with the same faith as the leper's and centurion's and tell Him: "If it is Your will, You can do it!"*


## TUESDAY (3/2/21)

Hi, my name is Wade Stoller and I am part of the West of Westside Home Group. With a bit of a push, I retired in August 2019. After working for 50 years, I am trying to determine what I want to be when I grow up. Through the confusion of this transition, God has been faithfully directing my path.

 Please pause here and read **Matthew 9:1-13**.

The story of the paralytic and the story of Matthew's calling by Jesus seem like an odd pairing. On the surface the paralytic needed physical healing while Matthew needed social healing. What they had in common is that both of them needed their sins forgiven. With the paralytic, Jesus challenges him and the religious leaders present by telling him his sins are forgiven. Then to silence the scoffers, HE tells the paralytic to rise up and go home, which he joyfully does. After Matthew is called by Jesus, he called together his colleagues and hosted a dinner party for Jesus. When the religious leaders condemn Jesus for eating with sinners, Jesus points out it is the sick that need a physician, not the healthy. The sickness HE is referring to is sin. Both men are healed by responding in obedience and faith to Jesus. Any other decision would have left them in their former condition.

Just like Matthew and the paralytic, our greatest need is God's forgiveness of our sins. There may be sin in our life of which we are not aware, or we may be actively ignoring God's call to repent.

 *As you meditate on the life and crucifixion of Jesus, ask the Holy Spirit to examine your life. Ask HIM to reveal any areas of sin that HE finds and then lead you into sincere confession and repentance before the Father's throne of grace. You will find God's grace is sufficient.*

## WEDNESDAY (3/3/21)

Hi, my name is Wade Stoller. I am one of the leaders of the West of Westside home group. We meet on Thursday evenings as a very diverse group that are learning to live life together while growing in our faith.

📖 Stop here and read **Matthew 9:18-25**.

This reading brings together two uniquely different people who are bound with a common need, the healing power of Jesus. At potential damage to his reputation and employment, as a synagogue official, this man personally comes to Jesus asking HIM to come raise his daughter from death. During the journey to his home, a woman with a twelve-year illness secretly reaches for the hem of Jesus' garment for her own healing. The official works in the synagogue while the woman was not allowed into the synagogue because her illness made her unclean. Both of them know only Jesus can bring the healing they seek and come to him in simple faith. The official comes publicly, knowing only Jesus can bring his daughter back from the dead. The woman in secret because she felt shame and was an outcast in their society. Jesus healed the woman and acknowledged her faith, fully restoring her. Jesus also brought the daughter back to life, restoring her to her family. I wonder if the woman and the official ever met in the synagogue after these events.

Jesus does not respect one person over another, as this story reveals. The healing both of them desired was possible by their faith in Jesus. Experience had shown both of them there was no other way. Today we are almost overwhelmed by disease, civil unrest, and confusion.

🔍 *As you search for answers I encourage you to mirror these two people. Come to Jesus in simple faith knowing HE can bring the healing we seek.*

## THURSDAY (3/4/21)

Hello, my Name is Dan Weinkauf. I'm in the West of Westside Home Group led by Wade Stoller and Phil Lubensky. In April I will be celebrating 10 years of marriage to my beautiful wife Pam. I've been in the engineering field for 37 years.

📖 Take a few minutes and read **Matthew 10:1-42** (the entire chapter).

This chapter is quite the pep talk, right? Verses 28-31 really speak to me. I'm an introvert and easily stumble with my words. Afraid to appear stupid or too arrogant.

But I've learned you can be a good witness without speaking a word. Start simple: hold a door open for someone, smile and be friendly to people, help someone cross a parking lot or street. God will embolden you to speak and give you the words when the time comes.

❓ What small gesture or act can you do to start on your path to be a good witness?

## FRIDAY (3/5/21)

Hi, my name is Scott Leiter. I'm in the West of Westside Home Group with Wade. I've been married to Kate for 27 years. We've been at Riverside since near the beginning and helped transform an old bowling alley into a community center. It's been awesome to see what God has been doing through the Beacon over the years.

📖 Take some time and read **Matthew 11:1-19**.

Whenever I read this passage I wonder at John's question. Paraphrasing "Is this what the Kingdom of God is supposed to look like?" to "are you the Messiah?" After all, John is the one who baptized Jesus and heard the witness of the Father and saw the witness of the Holy Spirit (Matt 3: 16-17). John is alone and in prison. Jesus doesn't condemn his question but rather directs him to look at the evidence of God's Kingdom breaking through. Jesus asks him again to look at what is seen and heard, the healings, resurrections, and good news being preached. Jesus ends his message with a blessing for John in verse 6.

Jesus follows this by reminding his followers that they went to see John looking to see the Kingdom of Heaven advancing, and that all the prophets of the past were looking forward to the day that He would be revealed.

When Kate and I got married we moved to a small church in the thumb of Michigan, knowing that there was a call to ministry. We served three years and then I became a carpenter. I often say I got it backwards, but God has been faithful. I am always on the lookout for what God is doing. Looking to see and hear the kingdom of heaven advancing and helping when able.

🔍 As you reflect on today's passage be looking and listening for God's kingdom advancing. It may not look like what you expect, but ask Holy Spirit to give you his eyes and ears. Ask Christ to reveal his move to you as well as move in your heart that his kingdom would show through you every day.

## SATURDAY (3/6/21)

Hello, my name is Phil Lubensky. My wife Jodi and I have been part of Riverside for about 10 years. We are also part of the West of Westside Home Group. We have lived in this area for over 20 years, but grew up in the Pittsburgh area of Western PA.

✚ Please take a few minutes to read through **Matthew 12:1-21**.

In this passage, we see that the Pharisees are at it again! Here they confront 'The Lord of the Sabbath' and criticize He and His disciples for what they did on the Sabbath. They misunderstood that God never intended for the 5th commandment to apply to the service of God, deeds of necessity or deeds of mercy. God truly desired for the Nation of Israel to cease from work on the 7th day and to act mercifully toward others and 'Do Good'.

For Christians, the distinctive day of the week is the first day, Sunday. The Lord Jesus arose to life on that day! However, if I'm not careful (and I'm far from perfect, as my Home Group can attest), I can treat the Lord's Day just like any other day.

There's joy in the fact that Jesus freed us from all the false rules and regulations of the Pharisees. For me/us, the Lord's Day should be a day of privilege and freedom... 'To do good'!

- ② How well do you honor/celebrate our day of privilege?
- ② Another way to ask this question is: In how many different ways do you worship God on Sundays?
- ② What are some ways you can keep Sunday 'special'...by showing mercy...by doing good to/for others?





# WEEK 4

## SUNDAY (3/7/21)

Ahhh, our predictable routine or rest and reflection with the Father.

We again remember that the shared rhythms of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost root us in the redeeming story of Christ, and live into the Biblical wisdom of the teacher that “there is a time for everything” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Built into these annual rhythms are the wide spectrum of our life with Christ: anticipation and fulfillment, proclamation and response, lament and joy.

 Today we are going to reflect on discovery. The season of Epiphany begins when the Magi discover the baby Jesus and fall to worship.

 In this past week as you’ve read the beginning of Matthew, what are you discovering about Jesus? Share with the Father what you are loving about Him as you discover.



## MONDAY (3/8/21)

Hi, I'm Andrew Gates, the "In" Pastor of Riverside Church where, among other things, I get the privilege of overseeing our home group ministry, and am part of the new Unnamed Home Group at Riverside. I would be extremely shocked if any of our five kids grow to be taller than me (6' 9") or shorter than their mom, my wife Marcie (5' 1").

Please take the next 7:09 to watch the **BibleProject** video "Overview: Matthew 14-28."

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGCF3OPWN14>



Soren Kierkegaard's profound line "life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards;" certainly applies to our lives, but there's another layer to Jesus' story, where it seems clear throughout that Jesus is the only one who understands what is happening in the moment, and with two millenia of hindsight we are still struggling to unravel the full significance of the greatest story ever told.

Even if you've read all of Matthew several times throughout your life, you may not have noticed or considered many of the elements of the narrative so clearly outlined in this video.

## ...MONDAY CONTINUED (3/8/21)

As you watch the video, please reflect on and wrestle with some of these thoughts and questions:

- Q The Gentile crowd seemed ready to receive Jesus as Messiah after he fed them, whereas the Jewish crowd, who had strong biblical and historical expectations for their Messiah, had lots of objections. *As you read Matthew 14-28 in the coming weeks, notice how people's expectations and assumptions get in the way of seeing and understanding what Jesus is doing.*
  
- ❓ Peter declares "You are the Messiah!" and he is correct! *In what way does Jesus challenge their expectations for the Messiah? (hint: see Isaiah 53)*
  
- ❓ Matthew's gospel begins and ends with "God with us" in the person of Jesus Christ. *Remind yourself regularly today that God is with you. How does that attentiveness to Christ's presence make a difference throughout your day?*

## TUESDAY (3/9/21)

Greetings, Riverside Church family. I'm Tony Fuller. I've been attending Riverside for over 4 years with my wife Jessica and our kids, Anna, Zane, and Ty. We've been meeting (mostly virtually) with the Unnamed Home Group. I work as a Video Producer/Editor in the Marketing Communications Dept. at Notre Dame and South Bend has been home for a number of years.

☞ Our passage today is from **Matthew 13:1-23**. Please take a few moments to read the Parable of the Sower.

As someone who's spent many years working in the field of visual media for a living, I'm quick to notice that Jesus was a master storyteller. His use of clear and distinct imagery always accompanies a deeply profound and urgent message. His parables are typically short and easily digestible, but they are very rich and multi-layered if we allow ourselves to look inward and be examined by them.

For this parable, I could focus on any number of things. The seed fell in different areas. As someone who claims to follow Jesus, it is easy to want to convince myself that I'm planted in the good and fertile soil. Upon further, honest reflection that is an assumption I should not be so easily willing to accept. In verse 22 Jesus reveals that the seed that fell among the thorns is choked out by the cares and worries of this life. The lure of wealth and earthly pleasures cancel out what is intended to be fruit for the kingdom. Upon further self-examination, I must confess that there have been many times that I've allowed and continue to allow these things to take a hold of me.

*...Continued on the next page*



My preoccupations with politics, social media, and my sports teams are easy distractions for me. I can also be a professional worrier as well (just ask Jessica). It doesn't take long before these earthly cares and desires get the upper hand and choke out the Word in my life.

❓ If Jesus were to try to speak to me, would I hear Him?

During this season of Lent, I want to be especially aware of the Word and how Jesus may want to reach me. Jesus has a much better place for me in the rich and fertile soil which will in turn produce fruit for His kingdom.

## WEDNESDAY (3/10/21)

I, Mike Houghtaling, am writing the devotional thought today. My wife Amy and I lead the Beacon Home Group which does not, as the name implies, meet at the Beacon but rather at our house in Marquette Park. I work as the spiritual life director at Hope Ministries. I am originally from Ohio and during my high school years Shawn and Susan Titus were my youth group leaders.

God's people experience difficulties on a regular basis. *If God is powerful and good, why do you think bad things happen?*

📖 Our passages today are **Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43**. Please read them before going any further.

Let's be honest, Jesus' explanation of his parable can be downright frightening. But think about it from the perspective of someone who is a victim of the evil deeds of another person(s). For a victim this is good news because we learn that God has a plan to deal with evil. And for evil doers, this is not only a warning and an invitation to turn from evil and turn to God. (Who ever has ears, let them hear.) But that's not where I want to camp out on today.

*If Jesus attributes this evil to the devil and NOT God, why are we some of us so quick to assume that God is behind evil things that happen?*

I know that the Bible is a big book and we cannot begin to answer all our questions about why bad things happen. The Bible says that God controls the universe. But the Bible also says that humans have free choices. And, in this passage we read today, Jesus attributes evil to the devil. Let's be careful in pointing the finger at God. Let's be careful in telling ourselves or others that 'everything happens for a reason' as if all evil is part of God's purposes. Instead, can we follow the example of Jesus here and attribute evil things to the devil and to the people who belong to 'the evil one'? If we allow ourselves to get frustrated by 'weeds', or if we shake our fists at God over their presence in our lives, we probably need to allow Jesus to speak to us through this parable.

## THURSDAY (3/11/21)

Mike Houghtaling writing again today, representing the Beacon Home Group. You probably have heard what we are about to read today. Jesus walks on water and Peter does, kind of.

📖 Please take a minute and please read **Matthew 14:22-36** AND as you do think: *What is the point of this story?*

This story is often called “Peter’s walking on the water.” The take home is often something like this: You can walk on water – and not sink! – if you keep your eyes on Jesus. But I read an interesting take on this story as I was studying this passage a few months ago:

What if the message of this text were “If [Peter] had enough faith, he would have believed the word of Jesus (Verse 37, “Take courage. I am here.”) that came to him in the boat as [providing] the presence and reality of God”? Faith is not being able to walk on water – only God can do that – but daring to believe, in the face of all the evidence, that God is with us in the boat, made real in the community of faith as it makes its way through the storm, [despite the fight of the heavy waves].”

If the above take is correct, then this story is NOT about the courage to get out of the boat (even though courage is important), nor is it about keeping our eyes on Jesus (even though we do need to stay focused on Jesus). The importance is taking Jesus at his word that he is with us in the boat, that is whatever situation we find ourselves in. After all, Jesus being “God with us” is a dominant theme in the Gospel of Matthew from beginning (Matthew 1:23) to end (Matthew 28:20).

❓ So what situation do you find yourself in that you find it hard to trust that Jesus – and therefore God – is with you? And as we ask at Hope Ministries: What would trusting God look like in your situation?

## FRIDAY (3/12/21)

Hi, it's Susan, but not bringing the announcements.

Some random things about me: I love tea, I love routine, alleys, and tall tables to sit at. I love visual aides (our house is littered with pictures of God's faithful shepherding of us). I'm a 2 on the Enneagram and understanding this has been an interesting study for me. I've spent a lot of time the past couple years seeing the ways that shame has been used by satan in my life, and am thankful for the ways that Jesus has made Himself real to me.

📖 Stop and read **Matthew 15: 21-28**.

This story always makes me shake my head and then smile. I shake my head at Jesus' response about the crumbs and the dogs, and then smile as he acknowledges the faith of this woman that was not esteemed by most Israelites. Jesus has just left a heated conversation with the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law where He calls them hypocrites and blind guides. He heads straight into a territory filled with mostly Gentiles (any one not Jewish), and is approached by this woman.

- ❓ Why do you think Jesus first makes no reply, and then replies so cryptically?
- ❓ How does Jesus' answer acknowledge that He knew He had a mission to accomplish while He was here on earth?
- ❓ How does the woman's response demonstrate faith?
- ❓ Why do you think Jesus is so pleased with her faith?
- ❓ In what situation are you being challenged to respond in faith today?

## SATURDAY (3/13/21)

### Read Matthew 16:13-28

My name is Amy Houghtaling, otherwise known as Josephine's mom. My husband Mike and I have been married six years and adopted Josephine as an embryo. We lead the Beacon Home Group (which is one of the only ones NOT meeting in the Beacon right now...oops). Mike is the chaplain at Hope Ministries and I worked there until Josephine was born in Feb. 2019.

Mike and I were both older when we got married--almost 40. In regards to that long dry season before marriage, I often think about a line from a Rich Mullins song, 'It's ok to be lonely as long as you're free.' My single years were lonely, but they were full of adventure. At one point I found myself living in Jordan for a couple of months and decided to hop on over to Israel for a week with another American girl I'd met there. A cousin of mine happened to be in the country at the same time and I hitched a ride on her tour bus the day they went to Caesarea Philipi. This region was known for its temples in Jesus' time - one to the Roman god, Pan, another to Caesar Augustus (a human worshiped as a god), and others. It's no coincidence Matthew makes sure to include location name in his account.

Even as Peter was making his confession, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,' pilgrims were streaming in to worship at these temples.

Today, the pilgrims there may have never heard of Pan or Caesar Augustus. They are only interested in Jesus. '...On this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.' Pan, Augustus and others have come and gone, but the faith of Peter and the Church he built remain, and the gates of Hades will never overpower it.






- ② The disciples had been following Jesus for a while at this point. Why do you think Jesus had not told them He was the Christ? Why did He ask them what others thought before asking what they thought? Why did He ask them and not simply tell them?
  
- ② What attitude should we have towards ourselves and others knowing that this knowledge is not revealed to us by flesh and blood but by God the Father?
  
- ② Why do you think Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ? How does this contrast with His commands in Matt 28:19 and Acts 1:8?
  
- ② How do vs. 24 & 25 contrast with our American sense of rights? How might our American expectations be similar to expectations Peter held that inspired him to rebuke Jesus?

# WEEK 5

## SUNDAY (3/14/21)

Sunday again brings us some relaxing conversation with our heavenly Father.

We've been reflecting on how the shared rhythms of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost root us in the redeeming story of Christ, and live into the Biblical wisdom of the teacher that "there is a time for everything" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Built into these annual rhythms are the wide spectrum of our life with Christ: anticipation and fulfillment, proclamation and response, lament and joy.

-  This Sunday we will reflect on Lent, a season of seeking repentance and a season of self-denial with the purpose of seeking a deeper connection to God.
-  Spend some time reflecting on how you have seen your connection to the Father grow these past weeks.
-  Also, spend some time confessing to the Father this morning. Sit quietly and ask the Holy Spirit to show you areas, or specific sin that you can confess and rejoice in His forgiveness.

## MONDAY (3/15/21)

Hey all, Greg and Meg Colvin here. We lead the Potato Creek Home Group with Benji and Ila Woolet. Our group loves to laugh, eat, go down endless rabbit trails, engage in great discussion, read scripture, cry together, drink coffee & tea, and just hang out with one another! We truly love this small community within our Riverside family body and are so grateful for fellow believers to walk with through this life.

☞ Take a few minutes and read **Matthew 17:1-13** (and then read it again because it's THAT good!)

This passage is about Jesus' transfiguration. When Jesus asks Peter, James and John to go with him on a walk, I wonder if they knew something special was going to happen? The scripture says that Jesus' appearance changed and his face shown like the sun and his clothes became white like light. Jesus was radiating from within. What was showing on His outside is the Glory that was within Him. They were witness to their friend, teacher, mentor, transform or metamorphose into a glorious being and then at the same time got to watch Him talk to Elijah and Moses! Incredible.


I, (Greg) am a lot like Peter. Peter wanted to do something to mark this moment as special. In that instant it wasn't time to get distracted from the significance of what was going on. *Sometimes we need to keep quiet, take it all in and learn from it.* God spoke letting them know that Jesus was the focus here. His son who brings Him great joy. *Listen to Him.*

We are both moved every time we read this momentous occasion in history. Although Peter, James and John in this part of the story didn't know the full significance of the moment and what was to come, Christ's work on the cross, we do. *When we fully surrender to God, and yield to the Holy Spirit, we will be transformed and be made more like Him.*




## TUESDAY (3/16/21)

Hello, we're David and Jenna Beebe. We're part of the Potato Creek Home Group, led by Greg & Megan Colvin. We've been married for 17 years and have four kids, ages 16-9 yrs. David is an electrician with KW Services and Jenna is a stay at home mom and homeschools one of our kids.

 Take a moment to stop and read **Matthew 18:1-14**.

I love how Jesus compares us to children in this passage, and how you can really see his love for children. Jesus calls us to “change and become like little children” (His child), and he tells us right here how to do it. Lowering ourselves to the “position” of a child. He wants to guide us on the safe path to live with him eternally. He sees this world we live in for what it is and knows it's not always easy. We face many trials and temptations. I feel like he's so clear in this passage on how we need to turn from sin and temptation, and how violently we need to cut it from our lives.

Sometimes our sins seem small and sometimes they seem so huge that it's hard to believe God would still want us. The devil would sure like us to believe that lie. And it is a lie, straight from the devil—don't believe it! God's word tells us that he will always leave the 99 following him to chase down the 1 that has fallen away from him. That is how important each person on this earth is to him, that is how important YOU are to him. Every single one of us, no matter our faults or sins. If we will be humble and turn from sin, God will welcome us with joyful, loving arms.

 Do you feel like it's easy or challenging to humble yourself before God?

## WEDNESDAY (3/17/21)

Hi, we are Denny and Jen Shay. We have been attending Riverside for the past two years since we moved here from Pennsylvania. We have 3 teenage boys and we belong to the Potato Creek Home Group.

 Please read **Matthew 18:15-35**.

In verses 15-20, we see that as sinners, we will offend one another, and Jesus acknowledges that it will be hard and it will be a process to work through. In verses 21-23, Peter (so like us) thinks that we are good and merciful to forgive a repeat offense. Jesus takes it so much further. He points to the forgiveness we've received—an immeasurable grace. We are tempted to nurse an offense and we want to be paid back in some way for the offenses we've received. In verse 35 Jesus makes it clear that, as His followers, we are commanded to forgive and to be merciful. *As difficult as it is when we are sinned against, we are called to forgive as Christ forgave us.* As we work through these things, we can take comfort in the mercy He's shown to us.

♥ Take the time to pray and search your heart. Is there anyone from whom you have been withholding forgiveness?

## THURSDAY (3/18/21)

Hey Riverside Family! Benji and Ila are joining you today from the Potato Creek Home Group—if you don't know, we are a group with lots of married couples and lots of children! Benji and I went to Navarre Middle and Washington High School just a year apart. We became close friends toward the last years of high school and got married smack-dab in the middle of college. By the grace of God, we now have 4 daughters and over 17 years of doing this life as best friends. By now in this little story, some of you may be feeling warm and fuzzy while others may feel uncomfortable, sad, or be rolling their eyes. Yep, I know marriage and “love stories” are complex, emotional topics to talk about.

Oh, marriage. It's difficult to say or think about this word without emotions attached. People can romanticize or demonize marriage, try to save or escape from marriage, shun it purposefully or celebrate it joyfully, and grieve losing it or never attaining it. Today's passage just so happens to give us one of Jesus' most direct recorded conversations on marriage. Let's dive in to how Jesus responds when the Pharisees come to test him about the complicated realms of marriage, divorce, and sexuality.

### Read Matthew 19:1-12

- ② What was Jesus doing when the Pharisees came to test him? (v. 2)
- ② The Pharisees ask Jesus if divorce is okay in what situations under the law? (v.3)
- ② How does Jesus respond about the nature of marriage and divorce? (v. 6 & 8)
- ② The disciples recognize that committing to marriage is hard and even comment that it's better not to marry if divorce is so against God's will. How does Jesus respond to choosing singleness? (v. 10-12)


## FRIDAY (3/19/21)

Hey, my name is Ben Colvin. I hang out and play games with the kids at the Potato Creek Home Group led by my parents, Greg & Meg, and our family friends, Mr. Benji & Ms. Ila. I've enjoyed spending time with all the kids in Junior High and having conversations about Jesus with them. It's been really cool getting to know all of them and what they think!

 Let's read **Matthew 19:16-30**.

When Jesus is teaching the disciples, He clearly states that it is impossible for a wealthy man to enter the kingdom of heaven, but it is not impossible with God. Now, I don't think God's telling me to go sell all my belongings, but what I do feel Him telling me is to follow Him. What I've really learned from this passage is: no matter what I have on this earth, whether it be a big house, an awesome sports car, or money, *if those things are something that draws me away from Christ or distracts me from Him, then I need to get rid of them.* I want to walk alongside Jesus the way His disciples did, and I want to keep His commandments.

God has promised us something so much better than anything on this earth. In fact, it's way better. He has promised us eternity with Him in heaven when we choose to accept Him in our hearts.

 What distracts you the most from God?

## SATURDAY (3/20/21)

Hello, we are David and Nikki Stillson. We are in the Potato Creek Home group. We have two wonderful girls and have been married for 13 years.

 Take a moment to stop and read **Matthew 20:1-16**.

In our discussion of this parable, we pondered over many different facets. It hits on how we need to not be envious of others who we feel get something they don't deserve or that we feel they haven't earned. It speaks about how God is generous with His love no matter how much time or action has been given.

 Have you ever felt jealous over someone's faith?







# WEEK 6

## SUNDAY (3/21/21)

Each Sunday through Lent, we are going to observe our predictable routine of slowness.

In the introduction, I observed, “the shared rhythms of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost root us in the redeeming story of Christ, and live into the Biblical wisdom of the teacher that “there is a time for everything” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Built into these annual rhythms are the wide spectrum of our life with Christ: anticipation and fulfillment, proclamation and response, lament and joy.

 Since we are celebrating Easter in a couple weeks, we are going to reflect today on Pentecost. Pentecost is celebrated to remember the giving of the Holy Spirit to the believers as seen in Acts chapter 2.

 Spend some time thanking the Father for His gift of the Spirit and how He is at work in your life.

## MONDAY (3/22/21)

My name is Cathy Parker. My husband Dave and I started attending Riverside in December of 2019. What an odd time to be new in a church. Yet jumping into the welcome of a home group really encouraged us. As of this January we are in a newly formed group led by Dale and Cathy Shreve, the North by Northwest Home Group. We are parents of three kids who are grown, married and all live nearby. Seven grandchildren have been born and welcomed into the family over the last seven years.


☞ Today we will read **Matthew 21:1-17**.

In these verses we pop in and out of three stories about Jesus. In each of them I'm struck by how Jesus shows up in ways that surprise me. If I were planning a triumphal entry, I don't think a borrowed donkey would be the logical choice. In each of these stories, Jesus' ability to draw a line from the immediate situation back to the old Testament prophecy in real time is powerful. If you have time today, look at the three passages that he uses to answer questions in this passage (Psalm 118: 25-26, Isaiah 56:7, Psalm 8:2). I'm struck especially by his answer with Psalm 8:2 when questioned about the children shouting praise "*Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger*". It's not what I picture for a stronghold. My takeaway is gratitude that Jesus has established and reigns in a Kingdom that is far beyond what I can understand. He chooses to open my eyes to recognize Him as King Jesus. May I be among the children singing praise.

❓ How do these verses challenge your mind and heart about what it means to follow King Jesus?

## TUESDAY (3/23/21)

Greetings! My name is Cathy Shreve. My husband Dale and I are the parents of three adult sons, and grandparents to seven grandchildren ages 9 through 25 (yep we are that old!) We have called Riverside home since it started about 11 years ago, and we lead the new North by Northwest Home Group.



 Please stop and read today's passage **Matthew 22:1-14**.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like... We can read multiple parables that Jesus told, giving us glimpses of what heaven is like. Most were not what the religious leaders of the day expected.

How do you feel when you receive an invitation to a wedding? I know that I feel honored to be included as the family looks forward to the special day. My calendar is marked, the invitation accepted, and I look at my schedule to see what arrangements I need to make, knowing that planning and preparation by the couple has already started before the invitation has even arrived.

To ignore an invitation from anyone is rude. To reject an invitation from a king seems really surprising. In this passage not only were the multiple invitations rejected or ignored, the king's servants were mistreated and even killed. Sadly, one man in the story failed to wear the garments provided by the king, with grave consequences.

This passage makes me think about Revelation 19:9.

-  Have you responded to the invitation of the King?
-  Take some time to consider what it means that many are invited but few are chosen.

## WEDNESDAY (3/24/21)

Hello my name is Dale Shreve. My wife Cathy and I have been married for 46 years and have 3 sons and 7 grandchildren. We are part of the North by Northwest home group that recently started meeting on Friday nights. What a blessing being part of a home group has been for us over the years. To have a group of friends to laugh with, cry with, and to dig into scripture with is truly what community is all about.

⊕ Today we will read **Matthew 24:36-51**.

As I think about these verses I wonder would I be living my life and serving the Lord differently if I knew the exact date and time of his return. If I knew the Lord was returning this year would I be more intentional with loving my neighbors? Would I be more generous with my time and possessions? Would I be more consistent in giving God the glory in everything I say and do?

In verses 45-47 we find the description of the faithful and wise servant. Is he called faithful and wise because of some extraordinary thing that he did? No he was commended by his master because he did exactly what the master expected of him. He was charged to serve the servants of the household their food at the expected time and that is what he did. How often do I fall short of what the master expects of me?

⌚ Take some time to reflect on how these passages speak to you. Is there anything you would change if you knew the time and date of our Lord's return?

## THURSDAY (3/25/21)

Hi, my name is Donna Ring. I'm in the North by Northwest Home Group led by Dale and Cathy Shreve. I have lived in South Bend for 24 years in the same house on the West side—doesn't seem possible it's been that long. I have worked in various jobs and lived in various places over the years. I am now retired and loving it.

 Read **Matthew 25:1-13**.

Every generation says Jesus is coming soon. So many generations have said this that it is easy to not take it seriously. Yes, we know He's coming back, but probably not now. We've gotten kind of drowsy.

That's what He's saying in these parables: We don't know! So...

Today's passage helps us see what we are to be doing: waiting with purpose; waiting prepared; waiting with clear vision. I was curious why the bit about the wick was included here. Why trim your wick? Come to find out a trimmed wick keeps soot from forming on the inside of the lantern and so keeps the lantern light burning bright.

Some questions to help you meditate on this passage:

- ② Why are the 10 virgins waiting? What were they expecting? What did they have with them? Why? Who were they responsible for at the time of the bridegroom's coming?
- ② What is Jesus' instruction in v. 13? What does that look like for us in 2021?
- ② This might be really spiritualizing, but I pray we all keep our wicks trimmed so that our light is not dimmed and so that we can see our way clearly as we wait and watch. Walk in His light this day.

## FRIDAY (3/26/21)

My name is Marty McGinn. My wife Corey and I are in the Friday night North by Northwest Home Group. We are new to Riverside and live in Niles, Michigan with our four children ages 9-17.

⊕ Today's reading is **Matthew 25:14-30**, where Jesus is teaching his disciples about the kingdom of heaven using terms which his disciples could understand.

Interestingly, a talent in this context is referring to a weight of money. According to Wikipedia, a talent was worth about 6,000 denarii. Since a denarius was the usual payment for a day's labor, then one talent was worth 16 years of work—hundreds of thousands of dollars in today's money! The word talent today usually refers to having a special ability. That is also related to this passage, because God is the source of our abilities. He gives, and He also holds us accountable.

Jesus is investing in us and with us. He does not give everyone the same thing. I love how his response to the man with 5 talents is the same as the one with 2 talents. Both were faithful to invest what He had entrusted to them, and both were praised and entrusted with more. Then a man who was only entrusted with one talent (which is still plenty of money) just buried it in the ground.

② What has God entrusted to you that is of value? See 1 Peter 1:7.

② Have you been faithful to use what He has entrusted to you for His glory?

## SATURDAY (3/27/21)

Hi, brothers and sisters! My name is Diedra Barrett, and I enjoy the fellowship of the North by Northwest Home Group; being a part of Riverside is a great blessing. I moved to South Bend three years ago to help my daughter and grandchildren, although this is not my first time residing in Indiana; I originally moved to Granger with my family in 1999, living in the area for 10 years! As my social media profile states, [I'm] "Always growing, always learning. Love God, my family, and most people (haha). Most happy when being loved, loving others, and creating."

📖 In today's devotional we're completing Matthew 25. Please read **Matthew 25:31-46** with me about Sheep and Goats.

This passage, for me, has both glorious and terrible aspects. First, Jesus, as King of Kings, coming in magnificent glory to sit on His throne with (what I think will be) millions of angels! Can you imagine it?! At last! We will see Him, not as a humble baby in a manger or our precious Savior dying on the cross of suffering and shame; but what we have longed to see—our King, the King of Kings, in all His holy glory! I can see it all in my mind. Truly glorious and breathtaking! However, this particular throne is one of everlasting judgment—and this is where the terrible comes in. Just as a shepherd separates his flock into two groups, sheep and goats, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, will divide every person on earth into His two groups: those who have accepted Him as Savior (sheep), thereby growing good fruit i.e. good works, such as caring for the poor and needy (verses 35-40); and, those who have not accepted Him as Savior (goats), thereby, growing zero fruit (verses 42-45). Group 1 will enjoy everlasting life with Him, and Group 2 will be cursed, put into eternal fire and punishment without Him (verses 41-46).



As Matthew Henry comments, “These are things of awful consideration, because of everlasting concern to every one of us (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/matthew/25.html>).

Consequently, the Holy Spirit compels me: 1) to produce more fruit by loving others who cannot care for themselves (verse 40), and, 2) to be a brighter light for Christ to the lost who do not know Him. It especially grieves my heart to think of loved ones who have not yet accepted Jesus; I want them with me in Group 1, saved from eternal fire and punishment and ready for everlasting life with Christ!

Life Application Questions:

- ② How am I living my love for Jesus (fruit/good works) by my readiness to do good (James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ② How am I shining Christ’s light into the world, especially to those to whom I’m closest (Matthew 5:16)?



# WEEK 7 - HOLY WEEK

## PALM SUNDAY (3/28/21)

Hi! I am Preethi Mathew and I am a part of the Roeders' Farmington Square Home Group. I am from South India, and I am in the third year of my PhD program at Notre Dame. I have been coming to Riverside for about two years now.

📖 The passage we'll look at today is Matthew 26 :1-16.

I have always found it hard to believe that Judas could betray Jesus after walking with him for 3.5 years. It is interesting how Matthew mentions this right after talking about what the woman did for Jesus (the woman is thought to be Mary—Martha, and Lazarus' sister). She came to the house of Simon the leper, who would have been considered unclean by the Jews and she spent a lot of money in getting oil for Jesus. Judas was concerned about what he will get by giving Jesus over to the high priests. Short term, it seemed like the woman suffered a loss while Judas made a profit. But we know from the rest of the story that what seemed like profit to Judas, ended up taking his life.

❓ Are we like the woman, ready to give everything to Jesus or are we like Judas, concerned about what profit Jesus will make for us?

## MONDAY (3/29/21)

Hi, my name is Val Hernley and part of the Farmington Square Home Group. I'm a grad student in aerospace engineering at Notre Dame. I love to cook and believe food has a special way of bringing people together. (I can't wait until we can share meals in community again!).

✚ Today we read about a special meal Jesus had with his disciples – the Last Supper. It's found in **Matthew 26:17-30**. Take a moment to read and reflect on the scripture.

It's interesting to me that Jesus didn't beat around the bush, but rather brings up the hard conversation that one of his closest friends is going to betray him. If I were Jesus, I would have been tempted to just avoid the hard stuff and enjoy my final meal with the disciples.

② Are there hard things in your life that you are avoiding rather than approaching them with grace and truth as Jesus did? Where might God be calling you to have a hard conversation or take action?

Directly after this conversation of betrayal, Jesus gives his disciples a tangible reminder of his outrageous grace. By breaking the bread (which is his body) and pouring the wine (which is his blood poured out for our sins), he prophesies of his death and the atoning power of his blood. Note that even Judas partakes of the meal – God's grace is extended to everyone, even the worst of sinners. Sadly, Judas chose not to receive this amazing gift. Just as we have been forgiven, God also calls us to extend forgiveness those around us (see Ephesians 4:32).

② In what ways are you withholding grace/forgiveness from others? Or are there areas of your own life where you need to receive more of God's grace?

Take a moment to rest in the amazing grace of God and praise him that Jesus's blood covers all our sins!

## TUESDAY (3/30/21)

What are some familiar sounds in your daily life? Perhaps a notification sound effect on your cell phone, a dog barking, or the hourly chime of a household clock. For most of us, a rooster's crow is not a familiar sound of daily life, but it would have been for Peter just as it still is today for many people living in less developed or more rural places than South Bend, Indiana. I (Ryan Roeder, Farmington Square Home Group) grew up on a farm not far from South Bend, but I've only heard the morning crows of a rooster when visiting third world countries or once while staying at a vacation rental. The loud rooster's crow was disruptive and annoying, waking me up too early and ruining my relaxation. But for Peter, a rooster's crow carried much more significance.

 Please read Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75.

Every time Peter would hear a rooster crow, *for the rest of his life*, he would be reminded of his greatest failure. He denied Jesus, whom he rightly proclaimed to be “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16.15). He lied to Jesus about his loyalty, and then hours later he lied to bystanders about his relationship with Jesus. He relied on the feeble strength of his flesh rather than the divine power of the Almighty God.

Imagine if your cell phone notification dinging, a dog barking, or a clock chiming reminded you of your greatest failure and sin? To have this daily reminder of failure sounds awful, and it probably was for Peter. But judging from the rest of Peter's life (e.g., see Acts 4.1-20), maybe it was actually a great blessing to be given a daily, even hourly, reminder of the weakness of your flesh and your need rely instead upon divine power (see 2 Peter 1.3). Consider what sounds, words, memories, or images can serve for you as reminders of your need for the power of God through his Spirit and the forgiveness of Christ.

Linked below is the song *Rooster Crow*, written by a pastor and blues-rock musician from Chicago named Glenn Kaiser. Even if the music is not to your personal liking, allow raw intensity of the blues melody and the discomfoting lyrics (below) to provide a taste of what Peter might have felt. May we also have a greater sense of urgency in our own identification with Christ.

🎵 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4m\\_hClgEJc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4m_hClgEJc)



### **Rooster Crow by Glenn Kaiser (2001)**

*What did you say? What did you do?  
When they asked you, "Who are you?"  
Did you tell 'em, who you know  
Did you hear that rooster crow  
How will you answer? And where will you go?  
Did you hear that rooster crow?  
In the alley, in the street  
In the school yard, do you take the heat?  
Did you hide it? Who do you know?  
Did you hear that rooster crow?  
You say you're walking that Calvary road  
But are you letting everybody know?  
Does your light shine? Does it show?  
Or do you hear that rooster crow?*

## WEDNESDAY (3/31/21)

I'm Valerie Friedline, and I'm part of the Farmington Square Home Group.

 Please read Matthew 26:36-56.

As I read these words recounting the interactions of Jesus with his disciples and with those betraying him, one thought came to mind: of all the people present, it seemed there was only one who understood what was happening. Tell me if I am wrong:

*Who knew* what it would take for the Kingdom of God to break into humanity for all eternity?

From the breaking of the bread to agonized prayers beneath the olive trees of Gethsemane, *who knew what it would cost?*

*Who knew* that his friends were not supporting him as he wept and wrestled with his will and his mission?

*Who knew* who was betraying him and why?

*Who knew* how events must fall into place to fulfill the prophecies of Scripture, stopping the sword at the first injury?

*Who knew* his disciples would be the first to flee?

*Who knew* where he was going?

For Reflection:

- ② Is there anything that Jesus has not endured for me?
- ② What am I holding back from him, or forgetting to bring to his feet?
- ② If God could bring such life and light out of the deep betrayals Jesus faced, what could come to life in me and others if I surrendered all the betrayals I have suffered to him?

## MAUNDY THURSDAY (4/1/21)

Hi, my name is Katie Comeau and I've been attending Riverside since I first moved to South Bend in 2014 for graduate school. I now live back in MA and consider myself as part of the Farmington Square Home Group and Riverside's extended family.

✚ First, take a moment to read the passage from **Matthew 27:11-26**.

I have always wondered what it was like to be in Pilate's shoes during this time. Pilate was essentially the governor of the region and hated by the Jews. While Pilate probably deserved much of the Jews' anger, there are other reasons I am disappointed in him and also troubled by the account in the gospels. In this passage (and also in John 19), we read several opportunities for Pilate to make the right choice. He evidently knew that Jesus was innocent. However, not even the warning from his wife prevented him from abdicating his responsibility and washing himself of Jesus' blood. Initially, he tried to get Herod Antipas to take over the case. When that didn't work, he turned to the crowd to have them decide Jesus' fate. I am disappointed, but also troubled because I know God gives me many opportunities to do good towards others and I let others take on that responsibility. Here are some questions to ponder:

- ② In what ways have I been avoiding the responsibility of doing good despite the power to do so?
- ② In what ways has the American church been avoiding the responsibility to do good?
- ② Where do I sense God's promptings to listen to him? Do I need to create more space in my life to listen to God?

## GOOD FRIDAY (4/2/21)

Hi, I'm Andrew Gates, one of the pastors at Riverside, and part of the new Unnamed Home Group. I love goofing off with my family, drinking coffee, watching music, movies, tv, NBA basketball, Chicago professional sports teams, and connecting with all kinds of people.

✚ Please pause and slowly read today's passage, **Matthew 27:32-44**.

The events of Good Friday are at the center of our faith, and in fact, Good Friday's primary symbol, the cross, is the literal and figurative central focus of most of Christian worship spaces. And of course it is—the cross is the sign of our salvation, where God's upside-down Kingdom is on full display for all the world to see and where Jesus' perfect obedience and submission takes away the sin of the world.

I wonder if in celebrating the victory of the cross, we sometimes forget or downplay how downright disturbing the act of Jesus' crucifixion was—the bitter wine, the crass dividing of Jesus' clothes while he hangs before them, the relentless insults and mockery from the rebels, chief priests, teachers, and elders? It is a tragedy for Jesus' followers to lose the connection between Christ's suffering and people who continue to suffer in much the same way. As theologian James Cone writes: "The cross is the great symbol of the Christian narrative of salvation. Unfortunately, during the course of 2,000 years of Christian history, this symbol of salvation has been detached from any reference to the ongoing suffering and oppression of human beings...The cross has been transformed into a harmless, non-offensive ornament that Christians wear around their necks."

- ② Jesus is heckled and told multiple times to "come down from the cross" to prove he is the Son of God. *How is remaining on the cross a greater testimony to his identity than coming down from the cross would have been?*
  
- ② *Who endures "ongoing suffering and oppression" today, and how might the cross, in a unique way, give them hope?*



## HOLY SATURDAY (4/3/21)

I'm Marcie and I'm part of the new Unnamed Home Group. I recently moved to South Bend from Michigan when my husband Andrew joined the staff at Riverside.

📖 The passage you are going to read today is **Matthew 27: 45-61**.

I have not invested much of my time in superhero movies, but I live in a house with several fans. Recently, after viewing a newer release and showing some interest, my family then showed me several older movies, fast forwarding to each of the pivotal scenes of each movie in an attempt to get me caught up on the background knowledge that would help me understand what was happening in the newest release. As I sat on the couch watching action packed, climatic scenes, my youngest son sat at my side, reciting the lines of the heroes. He had memorized all the important lines; words that were changing the course of the fate of the world as heroes and villains battled it out in front of us on screen.

Reading today's passage reminds me of my recent crash course in superheroes. If you were giving someone a crash course in the good news of the Gospel story, this would be one of the passages you would fast forward to, the pivotal scene, the place where the audience, new to the story, would hold their breath and bow their head at their hero's defeat. Emotions running in overdrive as those present at the death of Jesus begin to understand what they have witnessed. Confusion, sadness, some were even terrified at the realization that Jesus was, "truly the Son of God".

That night I sat in our living room watching the important scenes in Marvel history, my son kept whispering in my ear, "Don't worry Mom, Ironman is going to snap and save them all."

*Continued on the next page...*



## ...HOLY SATURDAY CONTINUED (4/3/21)

With each, twist and turn, when it looked like the end for the heroes, my son reminded me that Ironman would come through in the end.

We are a people who, like my son, know the story! We know what happens next. We can be the people who whisper in the ears of others, “Don’t worry, He will rise again!” But our knowledge is sweeter because we know the whole story, and today we reflect on that hard part. Do not fast forward though this part of the story. The death. The deflated expectations of the disciples. The hurting hearts of those there witnessing Jesus’ last breath. The service of Joseph and the women who took care of Jesus’ broken body. We sit in the tension that grief and our expected joy need to mingle together in these days.

As you reflect on today’s reading ask yourself the following questions:

- ② What are you grieving today? How is Jesus showing up in your grief?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ② What joy are you holding onto today? How is Jesus showing up in that joy?

## EASTER SUNDAY (4/4/21)

My name is Justin Romine and I am with the new Unnamed Home Group.

### Read Matthew 28.

I have always found verse 17 to be somewhat peculiar, but also interesting. The Great Commission (vs. 18-20), is one of the most popular passages throughout the entire Bible, and it is prefaced with, “they worshiped him; but some doubted.” At first, I was astonished that the eleven disciples on that mountain had witnessed so much of Jesus’ life (i.e. miracles, healings, teachings, crucifixion, and now His resurrection), yet some still doubted. Even so, Jesus still commissioned all of them to “Go and make disciples.”

Today, I can relate, as I too have “tasted and seen” the goodness of the Lord, yet I often wrestle with doubt. Too often I live according to my flesh and not by faith. Nonetheless, the Great Commission still applies to my life, as a disciple of Christ. Even in days (or seasons) of doubt, I am called to “make disciples of all nations” trusting that Jesus himself will be with me always, “to the very end of the age” (vs. 20).

Reflection: *Do you wrestle with doubt? If so, what does that look like? Does your doubt revolve more around God’s character or capabilities, or your own character or capabilities?*

Application: *Does doubt prevent you from Jesus’ call to “Go and make disciples”? What does it mean or look like to “make disciples”?*



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**Know. Be. Do...** *Together*

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