

GROWTHguide

FOR THE WEEK OF APRIL 17, 2016

"Did Jesus Really Say That?"



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 5:5-10, Matthew 10, Matthew 25:31-46, Matthew 26:52

REFLECTION AND STUDY

DAY 1

As children we learn about Jesus as a loving, kind, gentle, merciful and forgiving Lord. Our favorite verses from scripture are often verses that speak to these qualities. We sing songs like "Jesus loves Me" or "What a Friend We have in Jesus." As we mature, our perception of Jesus must mature as well. Some of Christ's words challenge us to do more, to be more, to sacrifice more, and to make hard choices. **Read Matthew Chapter 10 today.** This is called the Missionary Discourse. It teaches us about the cost of discipleship and what Jesus expects of his disciples.

- How has your perception of God changed as you've grown older?
- What does it mean when Jesus says "whoever finds their life, will lose it"?

Pray and thank God for the courage to make difficult choices. Give thanks for the privilege to follow Him.

DAY 2

During the first century, the Jewish culture put a huge emphasis on seeking honor and avoiding disgrace. Frequently the family members that followed Jesus were persecuted and rejected by their Jewish communities. Jesus knew that his followers would be faced with hard choices and He encouraged them to take drastic measures and follow Him. Often that required cutting ties with friends and family. Even though persecution in America looks different than it does in other countries, the truth is that following Christ can be lonely. There may be times God asks you to leave your family, friends, job, or city to follow Him.

- Have you ever faced persecution because of your faith?
- What has it cost you to follow Christ?

Pray for our Christian brothers and sisters facing persecution around the world.

DAY 3

When Jesus calls us to follow him, we are called to put the Lord before everything else including our own self-interest, our family, nation, politics and wealth. What then does Jesus mean when he says, "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"? (Matthew 10:37) Jesus is not telling us we should not love our family. Instead he is making it clear that as important as family is, what Jesus represents is even more important. Our duty as a disciple and love of the Lord comes first—it is more important than the people we love, more important than life itself.

- How much do you love Jesus? How do you live out that love through discipleship?

Pray and ask God to help you deepen your love for Him and make Him central to your life.

DAY 4

We learned on Sunday that there is a difference in “bearing” your cross and choosing to “take up” your cross. We bear our crosses during illnesses and trials when we are forced to. *Taking up your cross means we are making a choice to pick it up in the face of adversity. As John Wesley explained, “We take up our cross when we voluntarily suffer what is in our power to avoid. We take up our cross when we willingly embrace the God’s will, although it is contrary to our own wills.”* It is when we **choose** what is painful because it is the will of our wise and gracious Creator, that we are taking up our cross.

- What crosses have you chosen to take up in your life?
- Are there any crosses you have not picked up that God is asking you to carry?

Pray that God would help you embrace His will and reveal any crosses you have ignored. Thank Him for His strength and wisdom.

DAY 5

Read Matthew 5:5-10. The Sermon on the Mount talks about the blessings that will come to those who are merciful, peacemakers and poor in spirit; but it also warns us that we may be persecuted for righteousness when we follow Christ and proclaim his word. Persecution is very real and very deadly for people who live in other parts of the world but is here in America it may come in the form of rejection or ridicule. We may be tempted to deny our faith to fit in with friends or to please family members, to avoid being judged, or to keep from sparking an argument.

- Have you ever been tempted to deny your faith?
- What are the consequences of denying your faith?

Pray and ask God to give you the courage to proclaim his word with confidence.

DAY 6

Have you ignored the hard edges of Christ’s teaching? Our Apostle’s Creed reminds us that Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father and will come again to judge the quick and the dead. That judgement will separate those who follow faithfully from those who don’t. The cost of discipleship is high, but the peace with God that it brings is always worth the price. We are called to set priorities, to choose, to take up our crosses and to follow Christ not according to our will, but according to the will of God. When we do these things we experience the peace that surpasses all understanding. Not peace with other people, but peace with God.

- How can you have peace with God, even when you aren’t at peace with other people?
- What choices can we make that will lead to peace with God?

Pray for peace with God. Ask God to help you set your priorities according to His will. Thank God for calling you into relationship with Him and ask Him to help you be a true and obedient disciple.

DAY 7

Today is your "Sabbath" and a time for reflection. How has God been speaking to you over the week? Use what the Lord has said to you to remold and reshape your life. If you are having trouble hearing God’s voice, slow down or even stop what you are doing so that the busyness of life’s demands do not squelch the whispers of God’s language of love upon your heart.