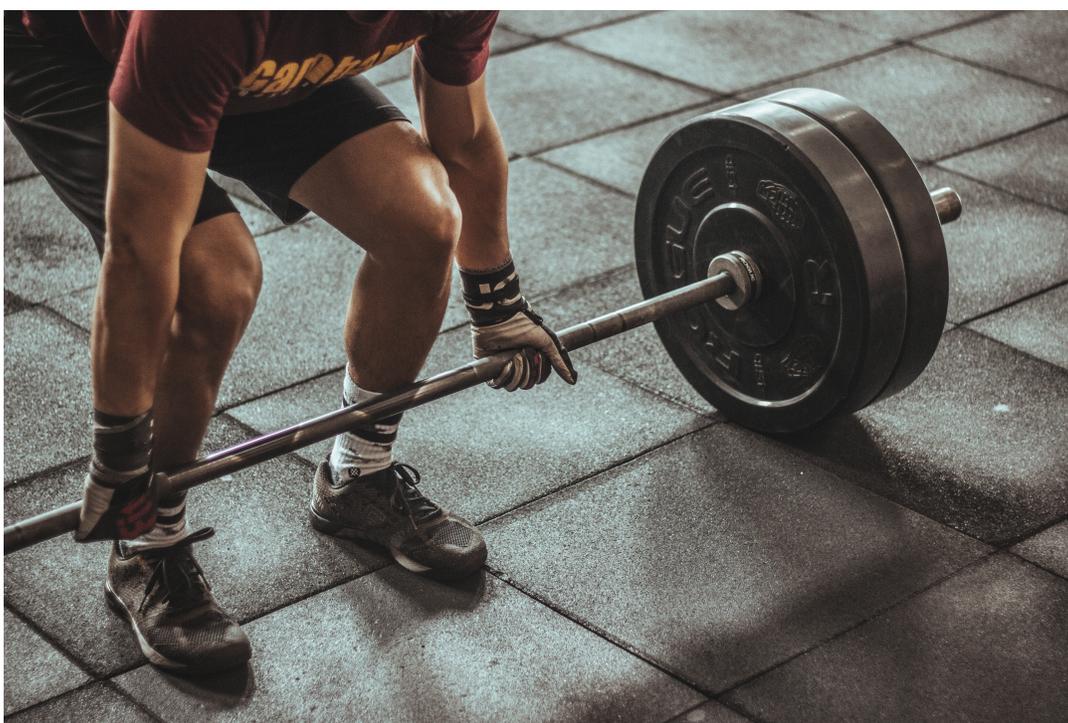

LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 8:1-9:9

To understand the difficulty of following Jesus, the Healer of the broken and wounded.

The Long, Hard Road of Discipleship

I have been involved in the fitness community for some time now, and it amazes me how much fitness and faith have in common. So often, we see people come into the gym ready and eager to lose weight, get into better shape, and start to see their body shape take form. They show up the first day excited and on fire.



Then a week passes. Then another week passes. By the numbers, only a small percentage continue after that. Why? Because the full picture of how difficult that fitness journey is becomes more clear. Achieving fitness goals requires determination, discipline, and sacrifice. It requires a consistent fitness program, it requires a clean and structured diet, and it takes *time*. The process of shaping one's physique takes *time*.

“But Jesus said to him, ‘Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.’” (Matt. 8:22)

As it turns out, shaping one's spiritual physique takes time too. It requires determination, discipline, and sacrifice. It requires going all in and leaving everything behind. Jesus begins a string of healings in the beginning of chapter 8 and along the way, there are two instances in which He engages with potential followers, and He reveals something about the nature of following Him. It isn't easy, it requires lots of sacrifice, and it requires a calling by God.

The Healing Ministry

The eighth chapter of Matthew uncovers several instances of Jesus healing someone. Below is a breakdown of these instances with some notable details.

THE LEPER (8:1-4)

The first scenario Matthew presents is the healing of the leper. Notice, Jesus is coming down from the mountain where the subsequent Sermon on the Mount was preached. The leper demonstrates a couple of notable actions. For one, he kneels, an act that shows extreme reverence towards one in authority during this time. Not only that, but he calls Jesus, “Lord.” The title, “Lord” (Gk. κύριος) is an established way of recognizing Jesus as the Messiah in Matthew’s Gospel. He says, “If you willing.” This echoes the prayer Jesus taught the people to pray in the Sermon on the Mount: “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10). The least likely figure demonstrates faith in a powerful way, and Jesus heals him instantly.

THE CENTURION’S SERVANT (8:5-13)

The next scenario is a more powerful, but still unlikeable character among the Jewish people. A Roman centurion was a man of authority in an empire that had dominated the Jewish people for many years. And yet, here again, an unlikely figure demonstrates saving faith. The centurion knows and declares that Jesus need not visit the servant in question, but that He only need to speak a word to heal Him. Once again, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” echoes here (Matt. 6:10). In verses 10 through 13, Jesus makes a couple of remarkable statements. For one, He observes the greatest of faith He has seen; from a Gentile! Secondly, He in one statement says that it’s the Gentiles and those from all over the earth who will come to the table with the patriarch of the Jewish faith, but that the actual Jews will be left out. Jesus is foreshadowing the stubbornness and the hardness of the Jewish people’s hearts, the people of God who chose to murder their own Messiah.

PETER’S MOTHER-IN-LAW AND COMPANY (8:14-17)

This is a unique passage in Matthew’s Gospel, as it is the only time Jesus heals someone without a request. He sees her, simply has compassion on her and heals her. This shows the love Jesus had for people, and people He was close to in particular. Peter was one of the so-called, “inner three.” This is also another example of Matthew’s connecting Jesus to the Old Testament. In this passage, Matthew attests that Jesus has fulfilled Isaiah 53:4. It’s an interesting connection because the context of Isaiah 53:4 is almost certainly about being cleansed of sin, not physical infirmities. It still remains, however, that the Messiah was connected to physical healing as seen in Isaiah 29:19 and 32:3-4.

THE WEATHER (8:23-27)

The healing moves from people to the weather starting in verse 23. Once again, the theme of the Lord’s Prayer carries over: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). It was not within God’s original intended plan for the creation to operate the way it does in its fallen state. God said to Adam, “Cursed the ground because of you,” when he ate the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:17). The world does not operate the way it is supposed to but it will be restored in the end. Beyond that, the demonstration of authority over the weather is an undeniable sign of the Divinity in Christ.

DEMON POSSESSED MEN (8:28-34)

Jesus comes upon two demon-possessed men that are hanging out around the tombs, and are apparently so violent that no one can pass by. Notice, however, how they recognize Jesus. Not as a teacher, not as the Messiah, not as a prophet. They call Him, “Son of God.” In their twisted minds they have no common ground with Jesus, and they query Him: “Have you come to torment us before the appointed time?” The reality is,

there is a time coming when Jesus will wage a final destruction on Satan. In Revelation 12:11, John writes, “But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” The devil is no stranger to his eventual demise, and apparently, nor are his minions.

THE PARALYTIC (9:2-8)

This is the last exchange, and it is not short of drama. Jesus first forgives the paralytic man of his sin, and it raises the immediate ire of the scribes. However, in order to demonstrate His authority, He heals the paralytic. This is no small feat. It’s one thing to heal disease. A skeptic might begin to question whether or not the person was sick. The healing of a paralytic would have been visibly spectacular. The bone degeneration and muscle atrophy would have been easy to identify and in order for a paralytic to get up and walk, those things would have had to regenerate. No skeptic could deny this. The crowds were amazed, and at first it seems like maybe they got it. “They glorified God,” as a result of this. But notice the last prepositional phrase in verse 8, “to men.” While they marveled at God’s power, they did not see Jesus as the Son of God, but rather a human being working in the Father’s power.

The Three Candidates

This passage also includes three potential candidates to follow Jesus as a disciple. The first two miss the mark, while the third candidate gets it.

THE SCRIBE AND THE FOLLOWER (8:18-22)

The crowd at this point is large and two figures appear from it to talk with Jesus. The first is a scribe, someone who would have had incredible command of the Law. Normally, for Matthew, the “scribe” is an opponent of Jesus, but we have to be careful to not impose that immediately here. The scribe asks what he must do to, “follow” (Gk. ἀκολουθέω) the word that is operative in becoming a disciple of Jesus. Even in Jesus’ response, He is leaving open the possibility that the scribe will follow. Jesus’ response seems puzzling, but is actually very straightforward. If you want to follow Jesus, beware! He has no home! To be a disciple means we are not of this world any longer, but exiles, awaiting our heavenly abode (1 Pet. 1:1). The second man wants to follow Jesus but first wants to go and bury his apparently recently deceased father. Jesus’ answer reveals the radical faith required to follow Him. The kingdom of God is always a priority for the disciple. Nothing is indicated that either of these candidates actually followed Jesus.

MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR (9:9)

While the first two candidates to follow Jesus are faced with very real and still applicable truths, that following Jesus is difficult and must be a priority, they both lack something that the third candidate has. Calling! Jesus calls Matthew to follow Him. Apart from the calling of God, one cannot will his way into the kingdom (Eph. 2:8-9). This is the only of the three synoptic Gospels that uses the name, “Matthew.” Both Mark and Luke call him Levi. It’s common for men to have two names at this time, (e.g. Simon and Peter). Why Matthew chose to use, “Matthew” might be that he came to be known more by that name in his later ministry when he wrote His Gospel account. Either way, the author of this Gospel is called to follow Jesus here, and he obeys.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Matthew 8:1-4. Why do you think Jesus commanded the leper to be silent? What did He mean by the, “offering that Moses commanded?” Now, read Leviticus 14:1-32. What is the offering? Why?
2. Read Matthew 8:5-13. Write in your own words what this passage is teaching. What about this makes Jesus, “marvel?” Think about Genesis 1. What does this have in common with the creation narrative?

Day Two

1. Read Matthew 8:14-17. What is unique about this healing story? Read Isaiah 53:4. What is the context in Isaiah? How does Matthew connect it to Jesus' actions?
2. Read Matthew 8:18-22. Put yourself in the shoes of one of these two disciples and write how you would feel upon hearing Jesus' response to your question.

Day Three

1. Read Matthew 8:23-27. Compare the actions of the disciples with the actions of Jesus. How do they respond to the storm? How does Jesus? What is their response to Jesus' ability to calm the storms?
2. Read Matthew 8:28-34. How do the demoniacs recognize Jesus? Why is this significant? What do they mean by, "the time" in verse 29 (Hint: Read Revelation 12:11)?

Day Four

1. Read Matthew 9:1-8. Write down the ways Jesus exercises His Divine authority. What does He do that indicates He is truly God in the flesh?
2. Read Matthew 9:9. Why is this passage included? How does this passage apply to you following Jesus?

Week 12 Discussion: The Struggle is Real

How many times have you begun a Bible reading plan, a book study, or a workbook of some kind, only to not finish it? It's easy to get excited about something, and much more challenging to remain excited for something over the course of time. Following Jesus is a life-long journey, and there are ups and downs that believers need to be prepared for. The way we persevere reveals the true nature of our heart towards Jesus. Discuss with your group the challenges of following the Lord.

1. Icebreaker: In your opinion, what's the hardest thing about following Jesus?
2. What areas in your Christian walk are you the most consistent with? Why do you think that is? What makes you more successful in those areas than the ones you struggle with?
3. Do you feel like Jesus "called" you to follow Him, or was it a decision you just made? Share with the class what that was like.
4. How important is discipleship? Or even better, what is discipleship? Use Scripture to answer these.
5. What things have you had to give up or sacrifice in order to follow Jesus? Why?

Takeaways:

1. Following Jesus involves sacrifice, making difficult decisions, and being called by Him to do so.
2. Jesus' healing on both individuals and creation demonstrates not only His Divine power but His mission to see the will of the Father be done on earth as it is in heaven.

PRAYER REQUESTS: