

The Main Thing Is Keeping the Main Thing, the Main Thing!

Discipline has never come easy for me. I was the first in my family to enter a four-year degree-granting institution and never considered myself an academic. By the first mid-term semester of my freshman year I had a .075 GPA. I suddenly woke to the reality that unless I made some drastic improvements I was going to be a college dropout. How important was it that I attend college? Learning and making the grade had to become a greater priority if I was ever going to make it.

Obviously things had to be different. At the time I was working a part-time job and living off campus with my brother and his wife who, were not yet relocated to the area. Basically, I was living alone with few boundaries or accountability. I was also busy making new friends and becoming more and more involved with a charming young female freshman. However, after the startling GPA, I assessed my priorities and decided that I did feel called to ministry and that I wanted to pursue a college degree that would lead into full-time service for Christ. So I found a stable balanced roommate, moved into the dorm, quit my job, and actually stopped seeing the girl friend – for a while anyway.

Jesus said we have to know our priorities. On many occasions, he reminded the Disciples that the Kingdom of God was the most important thing of all. In Luke 14, Jesus emphasized the cost of being a disciple. He never made discipleship seem easy, just full of grace. In Luke 9, he talked about gaining the whole world while losing our soul. He said the Kingdom was the greatest priority, that it was like finding treasure hidden in a field and that upon discovery a person must be prepared to sell all they have to own the field and the treasure in it. Or he compared the Kingdom to someone in search of fine pearls, after finding the precious pearl sells everything to own it. The emphasis is on selling *all* because the treasure or pearl is worth more than all we now possess.

Journeying Together:

- 1). What was your most prized childhood possession? Why did it mean so much to you?
- 2). What would you find hardest to part with in your life right now?

Road Map: Matthew 19:16-30

1. What did the rich man have? What did the young man want? Why was he coming to Jesus? What did Jesus have that he wanted?

2. Why did Jesus quiz the man about goodness and refer him back to the Law? Why did he question him about calling him “good?” What was the young man assuming about Jesus?
3. Did Jesus turn this man away? Why didn't the man recognize the greatness of Jesus' Kingdom? What keeps people from selling all for the Kingdom today?
4. Why were the Disciples fearful of losing out on the Kingdom? How will it take to obtain the Kingdom?
5. Who are you most like in this story: The Rich Man, Jesus, or the Disciples, and why?
6. What is the main priority in your life?
7. How can this group pray for you?

My Journey: For further study read Matthew 6:33.

Note: *Have you ever wanted someone or something so badly that you went to bed and woke up thinking about them. You can't get them out of your mind. You imagine what it would be like to be with that person or to have that thing. Maybe it's a new car, a new outfit, or a special person you are falling in love with. Jesus likens the Kingdom to our most prized possession – the greatest dream or desire we could have for ourselves. In Matthew, he advises us – no commands us -- to seek the Kingdom first, and in finding it we will find everything else. So, you see, the Kingdom is not a replacement of our basic needs. It is the key to them and all that we need. When we possess the Kingdom, we become a king, and the king lacks for nothing. In giving us the Kingdom, Jesus is reinstating us with the dominion lost in Adam's Fall and enabling God's rule our lives again in Jesus' name.*

1. Where have you seen evidence of God's Kingdom this week?
2. In what way has the Kingdom become the main thing in your life?
3. What is your greatest distraction in seeking first the Kingdom?
4. How do you see yourself advancing the Kingdom among your friends, at work, or at home?
5. How has God used the *Journey* in your life over the past few months?

Backstory: We have come a long way since the start of our journey with Jesus. The invitation to “come and see” has taken us on quite a ride. One of the most impressive things about Jesus is how sure he is of himself. He is so confident of who he is and certain of his mission that he is completely comfortable with us seeing for ourselves and coming to our own conclusions. Besides, he seems to know us better than we know ourselves.

Another surprising thing is how much of his teaching and preaching center around the main theme of reestablishing God’s rule on earth. The mission of our personal salvation is secondary to the broader purpose of overcoming evil and victory over sin and the Devil. Personal salvation is almost a by-product to this larger mission and message of Jesus. Jesus’ vision for the world and humanity in general is breathtaking. He will stop at nothing less than a complete and total submission to his Father and the triumph of his Father’s glory. Jesus is committed to the Kingdom of God because Jesus is committed to God. He knows that only complete surrender to God’s will and purpose will effect the change and transformation needed in the world. He is committed to the point of Roman crucifixion to accomplish this mission.

Following Jesus and surrendering our lives to him will mean the end of our own will and way. Embracing the Kingdom of God involves a cross of our own. It means that nothing will keep us from the mission and message of Jesus. It is our last and final hope for ourselves and the world. It means that, like Jesus, we will lay down our lives in his death and resurrection to embrace God’s vision for ourselves and the world. We want nothing less than what Jesus wants. We aspire to the same hopes and dreams that Jesus has. We long and pray for the glory of God on earth, for God’s love in our hearts, and for unity between ourselves, God, and one another. It means that we have embraced the forgiveness of Jesus for ourselves and for others. We seek his justice for the oppressed and we claim the authority of God that has already been given to him. In fact, we live our lives under this new authority announcing the end of the present evil age in the freedom and victory of the Cross of Christ. Jesus has brought about a new world order and we are a part of this new thing that God is doing through him.

The victory of Jesus over death gives us a whole new perspective of the world and for everyone in it. We now know that no one is beyond the hope that springs from Jesus’ resurrection life. Paul reflects on this in his second letter to the Corinthians,

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.”

2 Cor. 5:14-16

In Jesus’ victory and his vision of the world, we see endless possibilities. No one is beyond hope. We are limited only by our own confidence in Jesus’ victory over sin and death. We know without a doubt that God is for us and because of Jesus nothing will be able to separate us from God’s infinite love for us. Even death itself is not strong enough to keep us apart from God, since Jesus broke the chains of death. Through Jesus’ life we

live in a whole new paradigm of God’s forgiving grace. We live in the truth of eternal life. We live in the power of God’s authority over every power and dominion. There is no sin he has not forgiven. No weakness he has not overcome. No sickness he has not cured. No fear he has not vanquished. No death he has not restored to life. This is the greatest message of hope and life the world will ever know, and we have the privilege of not only swimming in it but also of drinking it in ourselves. We have the joy of proclaiming it to others. Paul’s delight continues in 2 Corinthians 5:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Cor. 5:17-21

The challenge in this final week of *Journey* is to clarify what we have seen in our journey with Jesus. These backstory’s here will help you, the leader, along with others, to reflect again on all we have seen and heard in our journey and to see what they have seen and to embrace what they have embraced. But it is important to draw out the observations and lessons that each one has gained in their own discovery of Jesus’ mission and message. Here is where the five S’s -- *Seek, Soak, Script, Sign, and Share* -- will be most important. Have participants take time to look over what they have written in their own journey with Jesus to reflect on how God has used *Journey* in their own lives. The closing questions of lesson 12 will be most important to draw out the message of God to each one.

In the end, *Invitation* is a precursor to an even deeper walk of discipleship with Jesus. *Invitation* only asks us to come and see, and to make up our own minds about what we have seen and heard. The next step that Jesus invited those too who understood his mission and message was to follow. *Greater Things* Bible study, the next lesson in the *Journey* Bible Study Series is a lesson on discipleship from the Gospel of Matthew that invites us to a whole new level of relationship and commitment to Jesus. For those who understand the mission and message of Jesus and want to follow him, you are invited to pick up your Cross and follow Jesus in the new life of discipleship, where we learn in the words of Eugene Petersen, how to do life with Jesus as “*learning the unforced rhythms of grace*” (Matt. 11:28).

We have come so far with Jesus. We have seen too much to ever to be happy with the world again outside of Jesus’ own vision and purpose for it and ourselves. We can identify with the Disciples in John 6 when many of those in the crowd who had been following him turned and walked away. “*You do not want to leave too, do you?*” Jesus asked the Twelve. But, Simon Peter answered him, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God!*” (John 6: 67-69).

We, too, have come to see and know that he is the Christ – the Savior of the world. The

only thing left to do, like Peter and the rest of the Twelve, is to follow!