

RiverTown Church

Believe, Belong,
Become

A Devotional Study on Spiritual Transformation

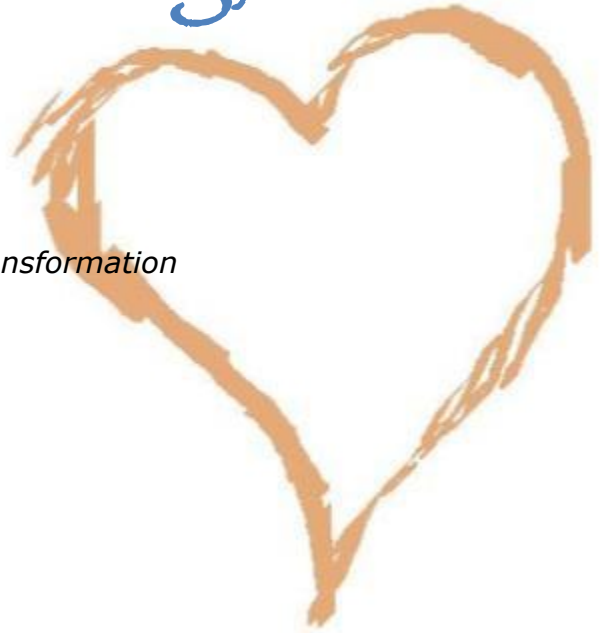


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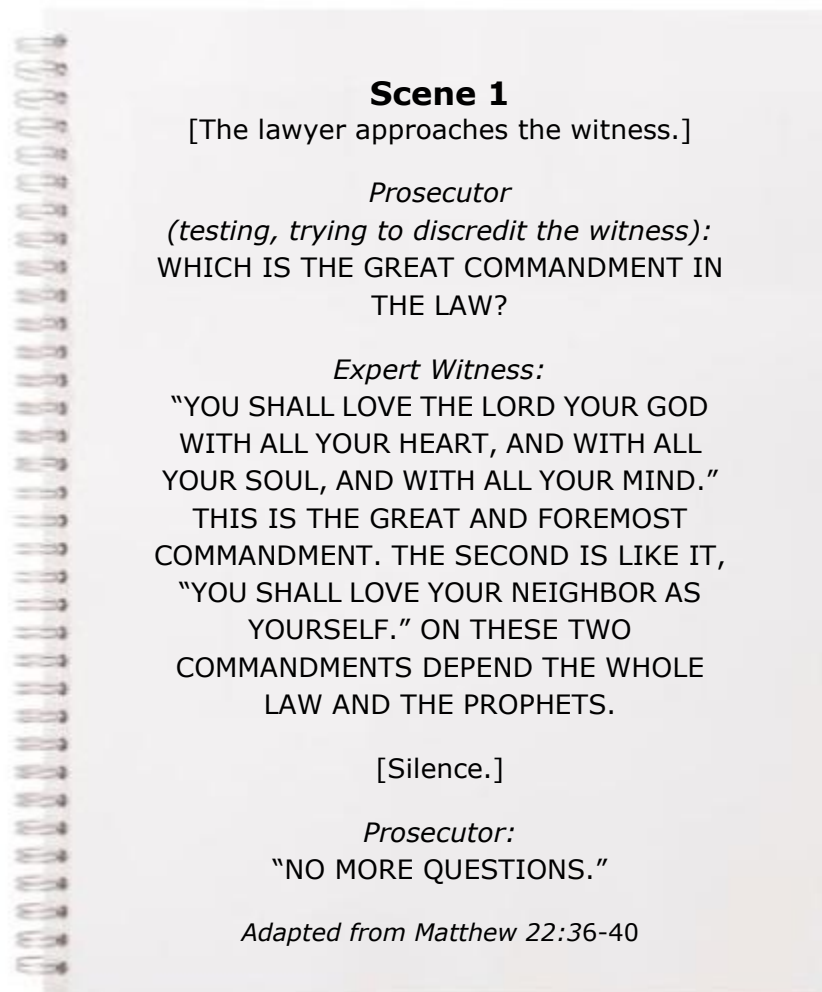
RiverTown Church

A Believer's Heart for God

B1: Believe Devotional Study



The story in Mathew 22:36-40 begins simply enough.



It begins simply enough. But in this case the prosecutor is a religious lawyer and the expert witness is none other than Jesus.

Jesus' response is quick and pointed: "*You want to know what the most important thing in life is? Here it is: Love God with your whole being. Oh, and love others, too, while you're at it.*" The fact that it's Jesus speaking makes you stop and listen. He ought to know what He's talking about.

How do you love God? When push comes to shove, when you turn off the TV set, when you walk away from reading the Bible, when you close the computer or stop playing the video game, what does it look like to love God and others?

And then there's the question, *how* do you love someone like God? It isn't like He needs anything from you. So what does love for God feel like? What does it sound like? What does it look like? How do you get your arms around Him?



Reflect

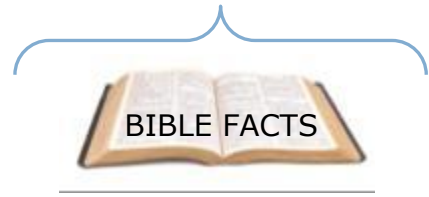
Look up Matthew 22:37,38 in your Bible.

How many times do you see the word *all*? _____

How would you explain to someone what it means to love God? _____

If you're honest, how much of your heart, soul and mind is involved in loving God?

A LITTLE — SOME — A LOT — ALL



If you look up the word **love** on BibleGateway.com, the search returns 20 pages of results—a total of 484 verses in the New American Standard Bible.

In Matthew 22:37,39 Jesus uses a form of the Greek word *agape*, "**love**." *Agape* love is a selfless, self-sacrificial love poured out from God to human beings, then poured back from us to God and others.

I. How does believing empower me to love God?

To love God, you need to believe that He exists, that He is telling you the truth, and that He has your best interests at heart. (See Hebrews 11:6) Only then will you move beyond *saying* that you believe Him to truly *believing* Him. Only then will you trust Him enough to love Him with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.



Reflect

Do you believe that God exists and that He is telling you the truth in the Bible? YES NO

Do you believe Jesus has your best interests at heart? YES NO

What keeps you from trusting God? Confess it by writing it down here: _____

● People who Believed

From Abraham to the men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, scripture is filled with stories of people who dared to believe God.



Choose one of the following people and read their story in the Bible:

- The first time the word believe is used, it refers to Abraham's faith that God would do what He promised. Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-6
- Consider Rahab, the prostitute whose courageous act saved her and her family; she is listed in the genealogy of Jesus. Joshua 2:1-21; Matthew 1:5
- How about Mary, an unwed, pregnant teenager whom God used to bring Jesus into the world? Luke 1:26-38
- A desperate father believes that Jesus can make a difference in his son's life. Mark 9:15-27
- An uneducated fisherman named Peter was transformed by following Jesus. Matthew 4:18-20; Acts 4:1-13
- Saul, the persecutor of Christians, had a dramatic encounter with Jesus and became Paul, completely sold-out to Jesus Christ. Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-22

In Proverbs, we are warned that it is not wise to **believe** everything. *The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.* Proverbs 14:15

Believing in Jesus is talked about 160 times throughout the New Testament as the way into relationship with God. In the book of John alone, it is used over 90 times in 21 chapters.

The word **believe** or *believing* occurs in 273 verses in the New American Standard Bible.

The word **trust** occurs in 149 verses in the New American Standard Bible.



Reflect

Whose story did you read? _____

What is it about their life story that encourages you to believe God? _____

What story would you like your life to tell? _____

Believing God allows us to build a trusting, loving relationship with Him, and leads to spiritual transformation.

II. What does believing in this way look like?

In John 15, Jesus explains how we can stay intimately connected with Him even though He is not physically with us. This concept is called abiding.

1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ... 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

John 15:1-7,9-11



Reflect

Who is the vine? _____ The vinedresser? _____ The branches? _____

How many times does Jesus use the word *abide*? _____ **Circle** it every time you find it.

What does Jesus say about the importance of abiding in Him? _____

How do Scripture, prayer and obedience relate to abiding in Jesus? _____

What emotion does Jesus say will characterize the person who abides in Him? _____

Memorize John 15:5 as a way of letting Jesus' words abide in you.

● *Practical Steps to Abiding in Christ*

Abiding in Christ empowers you to live the Great Commandment in your relationship with God. To abide in Christ, you need to develop personal spiritual practices to stay intimately connected to Jesus. Two practices are essential:

The practice of Private worship:

1. **SOLITUDE:** *Make time each day to be alone with God. Find the times, ways and places that help you experience God's presence.*
2. **SCRIPTURE READING & PRAYER:** *Read, listen to, and meditate on the Bible. Talk with God about your life and relationship with Him.*
3. **OBEDIENCE:** *Respond obediently and faithfully.*

The practice of Public worship:

1. *Come to HONOR GOD for who He is and how He works.*
2. *Come to be CHALLENGED and ENCOURAGED by His Word.*
3. *Leave to LOVE HIM with all your heart, soul, and mind.*



Reflect

Main Idea	<i>I am transformed when I believe what God wants me to believe.</i>
Memory Verse	<i>I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:5</i>

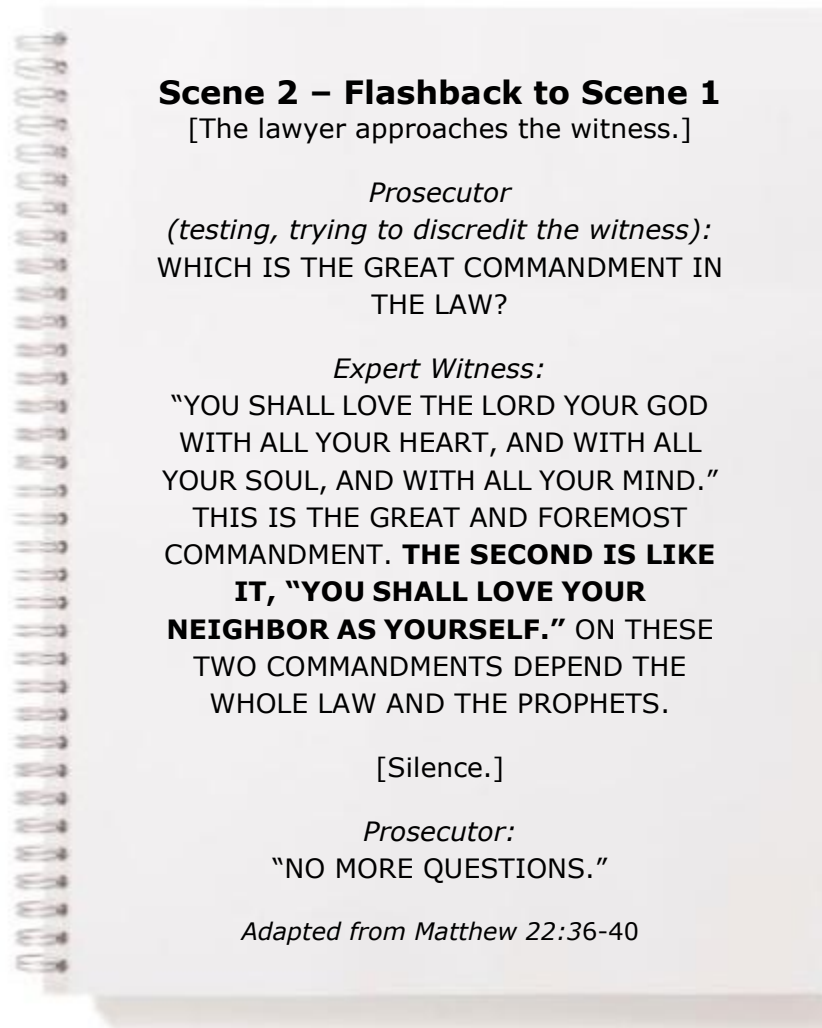
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A Belonging Heart for People

B2: Belong Devotional Study



Flashback.



Movie flashbacks provide greater understanding by taking us back to earlier points in the story. In the same way, revisiting familiar scripture passages increases spiritual insight. With repeated reading, God's truth becomes three dimensional, changing and shaping us to be like Jesus.

Revisiting Matthew 22:36-40 reveals that loving God is not an end in and of itself. Loving God becomes the stepping off point for loving others. Just as *believing* helps to transform our relationship with God, *belonging* to God transforms our relationship with people.

God couldn't love us from a distance. "*For God so **loved** the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...*" (John 3:16) Jesus, Immanuel, came to be "God with us." God became one of us, lived with us, and gave Himself for us. *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)



Reflect

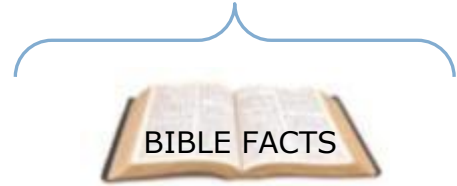
Read Psalm 139:13,14.

How much does God know and love you? _____

How would you explain to someone what it means to love others "as you love yourself"? _____

If you're honest, do you love others "as you love yourself"?

NO — A LITTLE — SOME — A LOT



The first thing that God called "not good" was Adam's aloneness in Genesis 2:18. Adam wasn't complete without Eve. God designed us for **relationship**—with Himself and with others—to bless us and complete us, not to frustrate us.

Jesus uses a form of the Greek word *agape*, "**love**," to describe the way we are to love others in Matthew 22:39. He says our love for them is to be selfless and self-sacrificial. *The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'*

I. What does belonging God's way look like?

Jesus invites us to experience true belonging in our relationship with Him. As we experience a healthy relationship with God through Jesus, we are transformed in our relationships with others.

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me...This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. John 15:4,12,13



Reflect

Why do you think Jesus makes loving others a command? _____

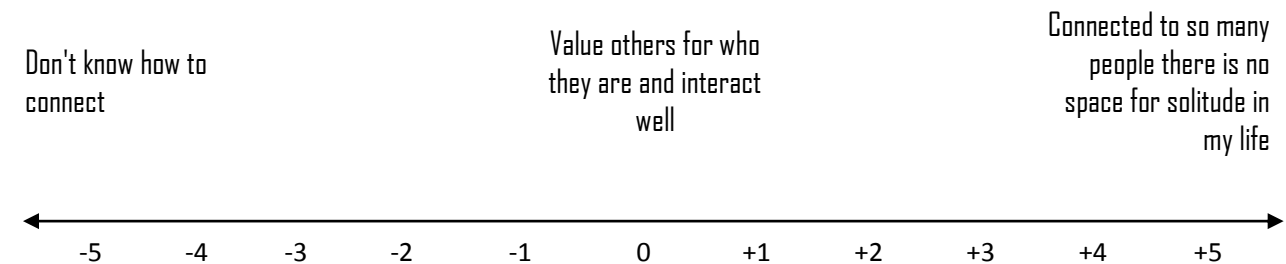
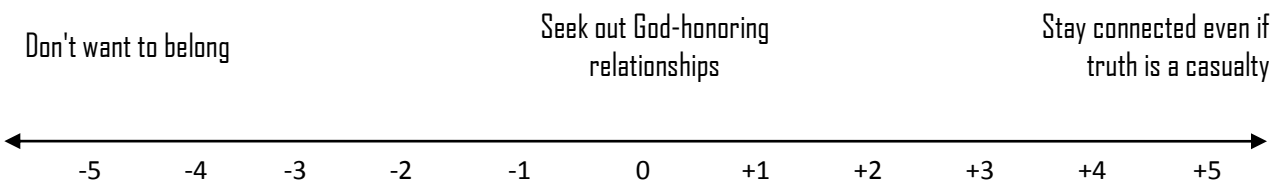
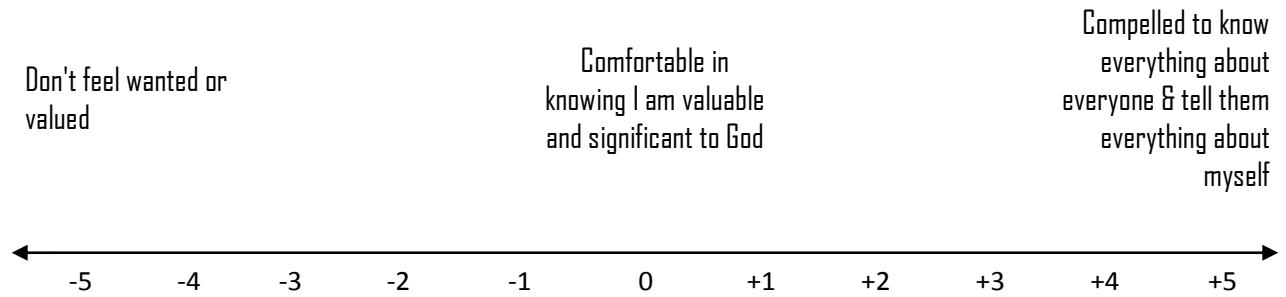
How are you following Jesus' example of laying down your life for your friends? _____

● *Balanced Belonging*

If you don't experience belonging at home, you may never experience belonging at church. Or you may overcompensate and attempt to *hyper*-belong. God wants you to find your balance in relationship with Him so that you are not off-level in your relationships with others.



Draw a stick figure on the following scales to indicate where you find yourself in each aspect of the Belonging Continuum.



● *Loving One Another*

Jesus said that our love for one another would be our identifying mark as His followers. (John 13:35) The New Testament gives many specifics on how we can love one another. Circle the examples you find in the following passages.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.

Romans 12:10

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

Romans 14:13

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Romans 14:19

Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Romans 15:7

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Galatians 5:13

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:32

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3,4

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Colossians 3:16



Reflect

Who has shown any of the above qualities to you? _____

How does it affect you to have someone treat you in this way? _____

What opportunities will you have to reflect these qualities to others today? _____

II. How does God help us belong to one another?

When we come to Christ and receive the gift of new life, we still carry with us the life experience of living in a world characterized by brokenness and sin. God sees and accepts us as we are. But He doesn't step in and zap us into Christ's image. Instead, He gives us His Spirit, and urges us to learn to live in step with the Spirit.

Galatians 5:19-24 lists the qualities of the natural person, controlled by the flesh, in contrast to the qualities of a person who is being shaped by the Spirit:

19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

*22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who **belong** to Christ Jesus have nailed passions and desires of their sinful nature to the cross and crucified them there.*
Galatians 5:19-24 NLT [emphasis added]



Reflect

Which of the qualities in verses 19-21 describe you? _____

How do the qualities in verses 19-21 impact your ability to form loving relationships? _____

How do the qualities in verses 22-23 help you form loving relationships? _____

Which of these qualities describe you? _____

- Memorize verses 22,23. Spend this week asking God to develop these qualities in you.

● *Practical Steps When I have Trouble Belonging*

Our culture is filled with broken models of relating to one another. Two practices will make all the difference in your relationships:

Personal self-examination – Read Matthew 7:1-5.

1. STOP JUDGING *others*. Confess your tendency to judge or blame to God.
2. JUDGE YOURSELF. Confess your role in the problem to God.
3. PRAY and SEEK WISE COUNSEL: Seek God's guidance. Talk confidentially with a mature Christian to discern your next steps and to pray for you.

Biblical peacemaking – Read Matthew 18:15-20.

1. Love them enough to bring up the problem PERSONALLY and PRIVATELY. (v.15)
2. Love them enough to GET HELP. (v.16)
3. Love them enough to BROADEN THE CIRCLE of intervention. (v.17)
4. Love them enough to NEVER GIVE UP on them. (v.18-20)



Reflect

Main Idea	<i>I am transformed when I BELONG in the relationships God wants me to belong.</i>
Memory Verse	<i>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Ephesians 5:22,23</i>

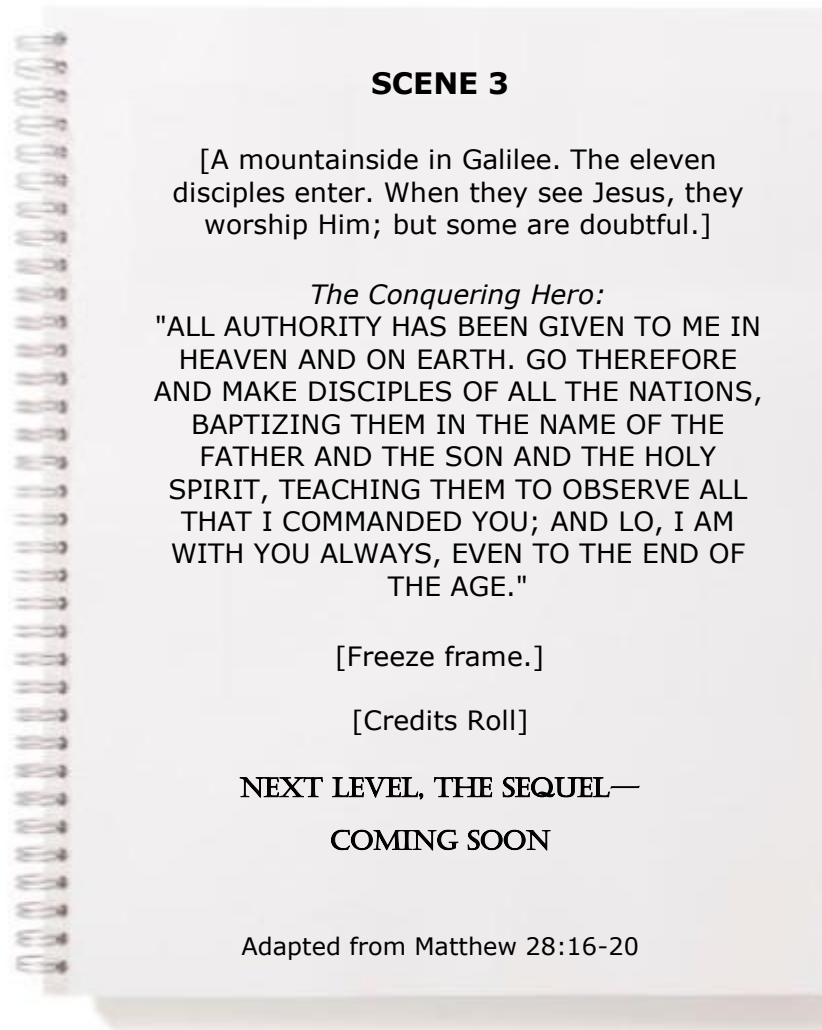
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Becoming Like Christ with a Heart for Ministry

B3: Become Devotional Study



You know the scene. The one that lets you know to expect a sequel.



In that instant you know. In that one scene. The stirring words. The sense that the future holds more. You know that this is more than a one-time event. You know that there is more to come. You know that you will see these characters again. You know the adventure has only begun. As the credits roll, you are already wondering when the next film will be released.

The eleven disciples became the witnesses to Jesus' life and message. They took His life to the next level. One man empowered by the Holy Spirit became eleven, became 3000, became a movement. Jesus' stirring words to disciples ring out to us today.

We are the sequel.



Reflect

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

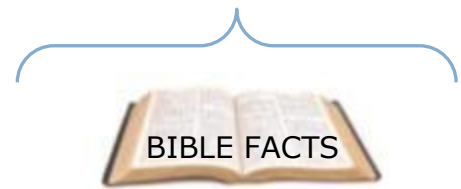
What two things does Jesus promise His disciples?

What does He call them to do? _____

How would you explain to someone what it means to make disciples? _____

How clearly do these three things mark your life?

NOT MUCH — A LITTLE — SOME — A LOT



The word **disciple** in the New Testament comes from the Greek word *mathetes*, meaning "a learner." Disciples committed themselves to following their teacher, learning, with the intent of becoming imitators of their teacher.

Authority marked Jesus' life and ministry. The crowds were continually amazed at the God-given authority of His teaching and miracles. He trained His disciples in using spiritual authority. Now, as the risen Christ (Romans 1:4), He commissions His disciples in the power of His authority to carry out His mission.

1. How can I know for sure that I'm becoming who God designed me to become?

Keeping in step with Jesus is vital to finding our life's purpose, the purpose for which we were created.



*5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing...8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples...
16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*
John 15:5,8,16



Reflect

What are disciples chosen and appointed to do? _____

What are the results of bearing much fruit? _____

● *Lasting Fruit that Glorifies God*

Jesus described three qualities of fruit: much fruit, fruit that glorifies God, fruit that remains. In B2: *A Belonging Heart for People* you looked at the inner qualities called the fruit of the Spirit, qualities that reveal God's presence in your life.

What else do you learn about spiritual fruit in these passages?

Matthew 28:19,20 _____

Acts 1:8 _____

Ephesians 2:10 _____

Ephesians 3:20,21 _____

Hebrews 13:15 _____



Psalm 1:2,3 speaks of being like a tree, planted and nourished by streams of water, yielding **fruit** in its season.

Psalm 92:13-15 speaks of being like trees that continue to bear **fruit** in old age.

Jesus speaks of **fruit** being the outward evidence of inner life, using common examples of trees being known by their fruit. Matthew 7:15-23; 12:33-37.



Reflect

What kind of fruit has abiding in Jesus produced in your life so far? _____

● *Unique Design*

God created you to be a unique reflection of His love and grace. He wants to bring you to life, to transform you from 2D into 3D, from black-and-white into full color. Then He places you in contact with people who need a living example of God's love.



Reflect

Who are you in contact with on a daily basis? _____

What do you enjoy doing? _____

What do you want Him to do through you? _____

II. What does becoming like Christ with a heart for ministry look like?

Abiding with Christ leads to becoming like Him. And Jesus was a servant. He came from heaven to serve us, to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, to give us life, and show us how to live it. Through His life He brought us salvation and brought glory to God. He calls us to do the same.



One of the most memorable passages on **servanthood** is found in John 13. On the night before His death, Jesus washes His disciples' feet, even the feet of the one who would betray Him. When He is done, He tells His disciples that following His example of servanthood is the path of **blessing**. John 13:1-17

"...whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Mark 10:42-45

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8



Reflect

How can you follow Jesus' example? _____

What opportunities do you have to serve others?

At home	At work	At church	In your community

● *Faithfulness = Risk*

God's definitions are often different than our own. Greatness equals making yourself the least, not promoting yourself. Faithfulness equals risk, not playing it safe. Jesus calls us to risk what we've been given to make a difference for God.

20"The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' 21His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Matthew 25:20,210



Reflect

What talents has Jesus given you? _____

What risk is Jesus calling you to take with those talents? _____

What are you going to do about it? _____

● *Practical Steps for Making Disciples*

Becoming empowers me to live the Great Commission in my relationship to the world. Becoming a servant is the ultimate step in Christ-likeness. Taking God-sized risks allows me to experience God at work in my life and in the lives of others.

Tips for living as a servant:

1. *Place yourself at God's disposal.*
2. *Get involved and find out where you're most effective.*
3. *Discover your unique abilities and gifts.*
4. *Depend on God's power: Keep abiding in Him.*

Tips for living a risk-taking lifestyle:

1. *Trust God to do more than you think possible.*
2. *Use whatever He gives you to make a difference.*
3. *Ask Him for opportunities to serve Him.*
4. *Step out in faith and trust Him for the results.*



Reflect

Main Idea	<i>I am transformed when I BECOME the person God wants me to become.</i>
Memory Verse	<i>For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Mark 10:45</i>

