

# “Matthew”

## Fall Series 1

### Lesson 1

## “Introduction, Background, Direction”

**Objective:** To understand the message that Matthew meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context, in light of the message it contains. We will place special emphasis upon application.

**Materials:** I will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Matthew, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, various modern translations, and any other sources relevant to the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. I will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding, help us make application to our current situation.

#### Procedures

1. We will begin by examining the text from the Greek text.
2. We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural, and social settings, in order to understand the message Matthew intended and that God still intends for us.
3. From here, we will seek to find out how to best apply the words of Matthew, for the early disciples, then to our modern contextual framework as disciples of Jesus.
4. We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes and thoughts in order to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.


# Lesson

Matthew's Gospel, according to the citations that have been found recorded in the writings of early Christian writers, was used more than any of the other Gospels in those writings.<sup>1</sup> Matthew is today, and always has been, an extremely important writing for those seeking to follow in the footsteps of Jesus as His disciples. Just reading this text, or studying this text, in some detached or purely academic manner, is not a sufficient use of time and effort for the person who seeks to follow Jesus: More is required, considerably more. We are called to "understand" the message of this account. "Understanding can be expressed in two ways: (1) by restating, paraphrasing, or describing; and (2) by acting in a particular way or doing something."<sup>2</sup> While it is the case that restatement is something that is certainly desirable. It is only desirable for the disciple of Jesus Christ as an initial step toward the application of the words of Matthew's Gospel. Applying the words in such a manner that a person is transformed in their actions, in their thoughts, and in their attitudes and responses to

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Warren Carter, *Matthew Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), p. 1.



become more like Jesus is the actual objective. The goal of a disciple is to be like their master. In this instance, the desired goal is to be more like Jesus, in every way. Any study of Matthew should always aim to challenge, empower, and enable those seeking to follow Jesus to be more fully able to become participants in the mission and the goals of Jesus Christ. His mission is the continuing mission of His followers. We are “called” upon to continue what He began. We are “called” to continually answer His calling to join Him in the expansion and progression of God’s plan to redeem all things to God; to seek, and to save, the lost.<sup>3</sup>

No one is exempt from this calling. The challenge is, will we individually and as a community answer this calling? The reason that the Gospel of Matthew has been preserved down through the centuries is because people of faith saw in it the message of their Lord. This is a document meant to be read and shared in a faith community, as a communal experience. It is a book that challenges each of us to respond and participate. As in the account of Exodus 3, when Moses saw the “burning bush,” and he

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 19:10.


heard the “good news from YHWH:” **Then the LORD said, “I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. 8 I’ve come down to rescue them from the Egyptians in order to take them out of that land and bring them to a good and broad land, a land that’s full of milk and honey, a place where the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites all live. 9 Now the Israelites’ cries of injustice have reached me. I’ve seen just how much the Egyptians have oppressed them.”**<sup>4</sup>

This was the good news proclaimed to Moses on that mountaintop, but this is not all that God had to say. Certainly, it is the case that God intended to rescue His people from their oppression and suffering, but the part that Moses may have been surprised to hear was that he was to be instrumental in God’s plan of rescue. YHWH called Moses to be a part of His rescue plans.

Moses was to be sent by God, as His special agent, to participate in the redemption and the release of Israel from slavery (**Hebrew - שלח - *shalach* - Greek - ἀποστέλλω - *apostello***).

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<sup>4</sup> Exodus 3:7-9 CEB.



The word used of those that are sent by God, in Greek, is the word from which we get our English word “apostle.” “The biblical conceptuality of both prophets and apostles is that they are humans whose words and deeds in some way mediate God’s prior initiative—which is reflected not only in the biblical documents associated with them (which are normative for faith) but also in people who continue to respond faithfully to the divine call.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus called, and continues to call, His followers to act as agents on behalf of His mission to rescue the lost just as Moses was called to be a participant in God’s rescue of Israel from Egypt so too are the disciples of Jesus called. They, the apostles of Jesus, are in a way reminiscent of Moses and they are sent as agents of God’s redemption and reconciliation. As Jesus directly called the eleven disciples in His day, so too that call continues to echo through the halls of time and all who would become disciples of Jesus are indeed challenged and called to act on His behalf, to become His agents. They are called to be agents that participate in God’s rescue and redemption of all people, in all times. Each of us, like Moses, is called and sent.

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<sup>5</sup> R.W.L. Moberly, *The God of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2020), p. 58.

As Walter Moberly wrote, “God acts, and this action is realized in and through the actions and words of those humans whom He calls to His service. Humans are given the dignity and privilege of implementing the purposes of God on earth, which are best realized insofar as people become consciously open and responsive to God.”<sup>6</sup> This is the call of the good news that was announced so clearly and powerfully by Jesus not only in His words, but also in His actions. Jesus was totally open and responsive to the Father in a way that still challenges and calls us to follow into discipleship. To be a disciple is to be open to change, to be open to continual, monumental change, and in that change we are constantly being transformed into the same image, the image of Christ.<sup>7</sup> We are transformed more and more into the likeness of the one who called us, and deeper and deeper into the mission of God. In some sense, we are all apostles, prophets, we are all in some sense Moses. That is, if we are faithful to the voice of God, calling us to our destiny.

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<sup>6</sup> R.W.L. Moberly, *The God of the Old Testament*, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18 - **All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.** CEB.

As we learn of Jesus from this written account of His life, of His ministry and teachings, examine, and come to understand more from Matthew's Gospel it will become very much apparent that the message of Jesus is more than merely information. The words of the Gospel reflect the revealing of God's rescue plan for His people, those that are enslaved and oppressed by the power of sin and the fear of death. In this plan, God calls His creation, especially human beings, to join with Him in redeeming, recreating, and reconciling, the universe back to Himself. I hope that as we examine this ancient text we will be inspired, challenged, and transformed more fully into the image of Christ. As we walk this journey together, as the church, all things are possible, because we walk, not in our own power and nor in our own strength, but in the power and strength of God, who created all things, and calls all things back to Himself.<sup>8</sup>

With all of this introduction given let us begin by examining some background and details on Matthew's Gospel that may assist us in our process of interpretation and application. Matthew is more concise in the narrative sections in his Gospel than is Mark.

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<sup>8</sup> cf. Colossians 1:19-20 - **Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him, 20 and he reconciled all things to himself through him—whether things on earth or in the heavens. He brought peace through the blood of his cross.** CEB.

Matthew also quotes from the Old Testament on many occasions. He demonstrates a tremendous focus upon Old Testament predictions which were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> A part of the reason for this focus on the Old Testament, in Matthew, is reflected in how he seeks to exhibit the divine presence. There is a tremendous emphasis in this Gospel upon Isaiah's Emmanuel (*God with us*) prophecy and a very pointed emphasis on the special character of the presence of Jesus. "Jesus comes as the Emmanuel Messiah - 'God with us' (1:23), his presence is the focus of his people's gatherings (18:20); he dies, reappears, and commissions them to a powerful authoritative mission undergirded by his presence (28.16ff.).<sup>10</sup>

This theme, of the presence of God amongst His people, is powerful, and it is a central matter within the context of this Gospel. This is important for a number of reasons. One of those reasons is that this emphasis indicates God's desire to have relationship, close relationship, with His people.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, there

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<sup>9</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> cf. Genesis 3:8-9 - **During that day's cool evening breeze, they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God in the middle of the garden's trees. 9 The LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"** CEB.



is the clear indication that God is never very far away. As those that follow Jesus travel through their life, and encounter much difficulty, they can be assured that God is always near to them. The true follower of God is never walking alone. This is concept that is reflected in the , now famous, poem entitled,

*Footprints in the Sand:*

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed  
he was walking along the beach with the LORD.  
Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.  
For each scene he noticed two sets of  
footprints in the sand: one belonging  
to him, and the other to the LORD.  
When the last scene of his life flashed before him,  
he looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
He noticed that many times along the path of  
his life there was only one set of footprints.  
He also noticed that it happened at the very  
lowest and saddest times in his life.  
This really bothered him and he  
questioned the LORD about it:  
"LORD, you said that once I decided to follow  
you, you'd walk with me all the way.  
But I have noticed that during the most  
troublesome times in my life,  
there is only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why when  
I needed you most you would leave me."  
The LORD replied:  
"My son, my precious child,  
I love you and I would never leave you.  
During your times of trial and suffering,  
when you see only one set of footprints,  
it was then that I carried you."

Author: Carolyn Joyce Carty<sup>12</sup>

God never leaves His children. He promises to stay with His followers always, “to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). In this Gospel account, He breathes no Spirit upon the apostles, and He promises no **παράκλητος - parakletos** (Paraclete). This particular predilection (tendency and focus) in Matthew is what Kupp calls Matthew’s *presence motif*. Here is a list of some major “presence” texts - 1:23,<sup>13</sup> 18:20,<sup>14</sup> and 28:20.<sup>15,16</sup> A big part of what Matthew seeks to convey in his account of Jesus is the “presence” of God. God is not far away, distant, or absent. This is crucial for those that seek to follow Jesus to understand. This is especially the case as they face backlash and persecution from family, from the Romans, and from their culture in general. Living in a way that focuses on distinctive loyalty and allegiance to one God was not a popular belief in the ancient world and perhaps it is still not

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.scrapbook.com/poems/doc/38987.html>.

<sup>13</sup> **Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
And they will call him, Emmanuel.  
(Emmanuel means “God with us.”).** CEB.

<sup>14</sup> **For where two or three are gathered in my name, I’m there with them.”** CEB.

<sup>15</sup> **“...teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”** CEB.

<sup>16</sup> David D. Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel Divine Presence and God’s People in the First Gospel*, p. 3.

popular today either. Believing that you are following the truth when others say something different has seldom been popular amongst those that hold a different view. The calling of Christ will challenge the disciples to stand in difficult and dangerous places. Matthew wants his readers to know they do not stand alone. He stands with them and alongside them all the way and all of the time.

Who wrote the Gospel we call Matthew? Often today, we simply take for granted that Matthew wrote this Gospel account, but on what basis? The earliest statement regarding this Gospel account is found in the writings of Papias (A.D. 60-130).<sup>17</sup> The work of Papias is dated to about A.D. 95-110. The information of Papias regarding the Gospel of Matthew is passed down to us by Eusebius (Born 260-265, Died 339-340).<sup>18</sup> There is much that is highly controversial about the words of Papias, not the least of which is the claim that the Gospel was originally written in Hebrew.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, in the Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 33A (Waco TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1993), p. xliii.

<sup>18</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papias\\_of\\_Hierapolis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papias_of_Hierapolis). "Therefore Matthew put the *logia* in an ordered arrangement in the Hebrew language, but each person interpreted them as best he could."

<sup>19</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 33-38.


Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202) wrote, “Now Matthew published also a book of the Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the Church.”<sup>20</sup> This is an additional very early witness to the fact that this Gospel accounted was credited to the Apostle, Matthew. A third witness, Pantaenus, is (died around A.D. 200), also according to Eusebius, says that he found that the Gospel according to Matthew had preceded him to India and was preserved in Hebrew letters, having been left there by Bartholomew. The fourth ancient witness is Origen (A.D. 184-253) who also bears testimony to the fact that Matthew composed a Gospel in Hebrew letters. All of this evidence points to an unbroken tradition that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew. Any theory which disagrees with this tradition must suggest an adequate explanation in order to counter so consistent a tradition.<sup>21</sup> There is no objective evidence for disputing these ancient traditional sources.

The probable date for the writing of Matthew was A.D. 80-100. There is no general agreement on dating Matthew more

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<sup>20</sup> *Adv. Haer. iii. I. I*, cited by Eusebius, *HE*, v. 8.2. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 39.



precisely. Even though these ancient sources speak of Matthew as originally being composed in Hebrew, during the period of its writing this will have actually meant what we would call today, Aramaic. There is a great deal of controversy and speculation regarding this Gospel having been originally composed in Hebrew/Aramaic. Most scholars do not today accept that it was originally composed in Aramaic, but this is a very complex matter and it has little or no real bearing on our understanding or comprehension of the Gospel. The fact remains that Jesus will have taught His lessons, in Aramaic and so there is always an element of translation involved in His teachings.<sup>22</sup> This fact would significantly challenge the views that consider it to have been Greek as opposed to the dialect of the Hebrews.

Who was the original audience for this Gospel account? An additional question might be how did the author, Matthew intend for his Gospel to be read and understood? These questions present considerable obstacles to us and speculation will naturally come into our answers to these questions. Whole books have been written to tackle such questions, which are beyond the scope

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<sup>22</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 45-47.

of our efforts in this study.<sup>23</sup> Matthew definitely wrote his Gospel from a certain standpoint. He intends to show that the major events in the life of Jesus took place in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. This feature alone would seem to give an indication that he was writing to a Jewish audience and that he was in fact Jewish. The interest in the genealogy to demonstrate direct descent from Abraham also gives a clear indication of the author's intent.<sup>24</sup>

However much there is a Jewish emphasis in this Gospel, his main target is to show that Christianity is much more comprehensive than is Judaism. He goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Jesus and His ministry represent the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the widest possible sense. There is definitely an apologetic intent behind what is written as Matthew answers many questions about Jesus which will have been raised against him by adversaries.<sup>25</sup> There is insufficient data to determine, with any degree of certainty, the destination for this letter. The traditional view is that the letter originated in

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<sup>23</sup> Warren Carter, *Matthew Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, Revised ed. (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 25-26.

Palestine. Some conjecture that the Gospel was written in Phoenicia or Antioch, but these are nothing more than conjecture. If indeed one gives credence to the idea of an Aramaic original Jerusalem then seems the most likely candidate for its origin and likely also its original audience.<sup>26</sup>

Matthew is more carefully designed in its structure than are any of the other Gospels. It is composed with five great discourse sections. One of the most obvious features of Matthew's structure is the alteration of large blocks of the teaching material of Jesus with the narrative sections. In the gospel there is an initial narrative section, which includes the infancy stories, the preparations for the ministry of Jesus by John the Baptist, and the first incidents of Jesus' preaching. Then comes the sermon on the mount. It is not possible for us to know if all the teaching that we find in the teaching settings was actually given on a single occasion, or this is simply a part of the presentation technique used by Matthew. Matthew appears to highly value giving a continuous group of teachings in each of these sections.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>27</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 29-30.

After the first section, there is another narrative section that consists of a number of miracles that is once again followed by the second discourse section. This sequence then continues throughout the Gospel account. This is not some accidental structure. Some have suggested that the fivefold pattern of Matthew is an attempt at emulating the structure of the Torah, the Pentateuch, the five-fold books of Moses. This suggestion is not without merit, but in truth is totally speculative in nature. Certainly, it is the case that in the Sermon on the Mount there are many specific references to the superiority of the teachings of Jesus over the teachings of the Mosaic Law. Despite all of this speculation it is more likely that there is no symbolic significance to the fivefold nature of Matthew's Gospel.<sup>28</sup>

### **Contents**

- I. The Infancy Narratives (1:1-2:23)
- II. The Preparation for the Ministry (3:1-4:11)
- III. The Galilean Ministry (4:12-25)
- IV. The First Discourse Section (5:1-7:29)
- V. Narrative (8:1-9:34)

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<sup>28</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 30-31.





VI. The Second Discourse Section: The Mission Discourse

(9:35-10:42)

VII. Narrative (11:1-12:50)

VIII. The Third Kingdom Discourse Section: The Kingdom

Parables (13:1-52)

IX. Narrative (13:53-17:27)

X. The Fourth Discourse Section: Various Sayings (18:1-35)

XI. Narrative: The Judean Period (19:1-22:46)

XII. The Fifth Discourse Section: Teaching on Eschatology

(23:1-25:46)

XIII. The Passion and Resurrection Narratives (26:1-28:20)<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 48-50.

# Synopsis

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The Gospel of Matthew is attested by many citations in early Christian writings. It is the most widely quoted of all of the Gospel accounts in these sources. The reason that this Gospel has been preserved down through the centuries is because people believed the message they found recorded there and that message challenged them in the ways they viewed the world and in the ways they sought to live their lives. This is an account that calls people to follow Jesus as His disciples. It challenges them to be transformed in their thinking in the ways that they act, and in ways that treat others. The words recorded here, challenge its readers to hear the calling of Jesus to participate in His mission of redemption and restoration of God's creation.

A strong emphasis in this Gospel is the focus on the "presence" of God among His people. This focus is expressed powerfully throughout the Gospel. This Gospel does contain passages that focus on the Holy Spirit, or the Comforter. The challenge is given to know that the disciples of Jesus never stand alone. He is always with them.

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Ancient sources indicate that the Apostle Matthew is the author of this Gospel and that it was originally written in the Hebrew dialect. There are clear indications in the account that it was indeed written for Jews by a person of Jewish descent. It was likely written between A.D. 80 and 100.

This Gospel contains a carefully constructed structure that alternates between narrative and teachings. There are five clear sections.

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# Main Points


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- To seek to understand the message of the Gospel.
  - The Calling of God.
  - Revealing of God's Rescue Plan.
  - Background of the Gospel.
  - The Structure of the Gospel.
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# Questions

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1. What is your purpose in reading a Gospel account?
2. How does your reading of the Bible change the way you live your life and perceive of the world in which you live?
3. What are some ways that you express your understanding of the Gospel of Matthew?
4. How do you see understanding and application to be connected?
5. What are some things that you consider to be the calling of the Gospel for the life of a Christian?
6. What do you understand to be the meaning of the word “apostle?”
7. What is the difference between a “disciple” and an “apostle?”  
What is the same?
8. What are some ways that “apostles” and Moses are similar?
9. How are the actions of humans related to God’s redeeming of creation?
10. What are some way that disciples are called today to be agents of God?
11. What are some ways that the acts and actions of God are realized through human beings?
12. Why do you think Matthew wrote his Gospel account?
13. How does God being present among His people provide strength and comfort?

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14. Why do you think it is important to know who wrote the Gospel account?
  15. What are some ways that you see a Jewish emphasis in this Gospel?
  16. How does understanding the structure of Matthew's Gospel aid in the process of interpretation?
  17. What are some ways that you believe that Matthew challenges his readers to live in a different way in today's world?
  18. What are some ways that you think Jesus expected His disciples to be different from others in the world?

# To Take Home

## **What is Important to know?**

It is important to know that the Gospel was not written simply as an academic exercise or as a merely historical document. The words of Matthew are meant to convey the message of the Good News of God that He is redeeming creation and He is calling humanity to participate in the plan of reconciliation. Understanding of a Gospel entails more than a cognitive grappling with the words, it entails transformation of life, thoughts, and actions. What are some ways that you think God is calling human beings into His mission through this Gospel?

## **Where is God in these words?**

God is in these words promising hope, salvation, redemption, calling, and mission. True comprehension entails more than some cognitive exercise it entails a change. When Jesus came into the world there was the clear expectation among the Jewish people that things would be different from the way they were before His coming. What do you think is the most shocking way that Jesus challenges people today?

## **What does any of this mean for how I live my life?**

If we are to read Matthew's Gospel the way it was intended to be read then reading it can never leave its reader unchanged. This account calls people into a different understanding of the way things work, the way God thinks, the way God acts, and the way God expects those that would be His children will think and act. What do you think is the most challenging and significant change that you find Jesus calling His disciples to make?

## **What is the word of God calling us to do?**

The Word of God is calling for people to come near to God. Just as the burning bush called Moses to step nearer to God, to step onto holy ground, the Gospel of Matthew calls His followers to enter into the plans, the dreams, the hopes, of God. Those who would follow Jesus are called to leave behind their old way of life, their old values, and to be transformed into something different. What are some of the ways that you think Christians should be different?