

## Curriculum

# Meant for More

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### Overview

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## Week 1 - From Inside to Outside

### Main Idea

If we want a more meaningful faith and a more meaningful life, we must leave behind the kingdom of “me” and step into the larger Kingdom of God.

### Introductory Video

#### Scripture - Matthew 10:34-39

“Don’t think that I’ve come to bring peace to the earth. I haven’t come to bring peace but a sword. I’ve come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. People’s enemies are members of their own households.

“Those who love father or mother more than me aren’t worthy of me. Those who love son or daughter more than me aren’t worthy of me. Those who don’t pick up their crosses and follow me aren’t worthy of me. **Those who find their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives because of me will find them.**”

**Unpack It!** To understand the challenging words Jesus has here, it is important to know that Matthew’s Gospel is written for Jewish people to convince them of Christ as Messiah. In writing this Gospel, the author knew that Jewish Christians would face persecution from family members, and so Jesus encourages his disciples in this Gospel to stay true to their faith even if it means sacrificing important relationships.

### Discussing the Text

Jesus describes himself as someone who disturbs our lives. When has God disturbed your life for good?

Jesus’ words are challenging, but what he’s really trying to address is that sometimes we have to choose between our faith and other people/things that are important to us. When is the last time you had to choose to between your faith and something or someone else?

Jesus says that we must pick up our cross to follow him? In what ways is life in God’s kingdom more difficult than life in the kingdom of “me?”



## Questions for Deeper Faith

If you had a box today and could put the most important things in your life inside it, what would that be? (Family, career, selfish desires, etc.)

Do you enjoy being in control? Why is it hard to give up control?

How important is security to you? Is the idea of trusting God with important parts of your life hard to stomach? Why or why not?

When is it hard to step outside the kingdom of “me?”

What do you think your life would look like if you moved from the kingdom of “me” to the kingdom of God? How would you live differently?

## Closing Prayer

Gracious God, You have invited us time and again to live a richer life in your kingdom, and too often we remain content inside our own broken boxes. Remind us this week that we are designed for more than that, remind us that we were made to live life abundantly by walking in the way of your son, Jesus Christ. If we have fears, meet us in them, and make your presence known to us as take steps to live further in your Kingdom, relying less upon ourselves and more upon your grace. All of this we ask in the name of the one who welcomes us through the gate, your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.



## Week 2 - From Me to We

### Main Idea

A shallow faith treats Christ like a consultant or a paramedic, but a fuller faith invites Christ into every moment of our lives.

### Introductory Video

### Scripture - Ephesians 3:16-19

I ask that he will strengthen you in your inner selves from the riches of his glory through the Spirit. I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you'll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge **so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.**

**Unpack It!** Paul's Letter to the Church in Ephesus is marked with pleas for unity and perseverance through difficult times. Paul knew better than most that church could get messy and people would naturally grow divisive over time. He also knew the best remedy for this was a reminder that it is Christ's work in us that makes anything good ever happen.

### Discussing the Text

Paul's words are a fantastic reminder for a church that knows Jesus, but forgets to live faithfully 24/7. Have you ever noticed your faith begin to disappear in little moments between Sundays? Give an example.

Paul talks about being strengthened in our inner selves. Why is that important? Why are our outward actions or appearances not enough?

### Questions for Deeper Faith

When is the last time you remember really asking God for guidance in your life? Was it a big moment or a little one? Share, if you can.

In general, do you turn to God more often in moments of crisis? Why do you think that is?

Think about your weekly life. Is there any part of it that comes to mind that you think your faith should play a bigger role in? (Work, home, relationships, etc.)



How can we keep our relationship with Christ on our mind between Sundays? What are some practices that have worked for you in the past?

## **Closing Prayer**

Emmanuel, God With Us, you desire a relationship deep within our hearts, and yet, for many reasons, we fail to invite you in. Maybe we keep you at arm's length because we're afraid of how you'll ask us to change. Maybe we ignore you even when we hear your voice. Maybe we simply forget you are there unless we're sitting in church. Whatever our reason, wake us up this week, remind us that you desire to be closer to us than we know, and that we'll only truly understand your love when we begin to invite you into the smaller moments of our lives. In the name of the one who walks beside in all seasons, Jesus the Christ, Amen.

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## Week 3 - From Giving to Returning

### Main Idea

A shallow faith views finances as something we give to those less fortunate than us. A fuller faith views all our possessions as stuff we return to God to be used for the building of His kingdom.

### Introductory Video

#### Scripture - Malachi 3:8-10

Should a person deceive God?

Yet you deceive me.

But you say,

“How have we deceived you?”

With your tenth-part gifts and offerings.

You are being cursed with a curse,

and you, the entire nation, are robbing me.

Bring the whole tenth-part to the storage house so there might be food in my house.

Please test me in this,

says the Lord of heavenly forces.

See whether I do not open all the windows of the heavens for you

and empty out a blessing until there is enough.

**Unpack It!** Malachi is one of the “Minor Prophets” of the Old Testament. The Minor Prophets were responsible for calling Israel’s attention to the reasons why they were sent into exile and endured being conquered by foreign powers. Malachi, like the other prophets, points out the social injustices that have deteriorated their relationship with God, and calls the nation back to further dependence upon God as their deliverer and provider. We must remember that in the Old Testament, Israel owes its very existence to God’s provision, so the idea that they would withhold money from God’s temple is (in hindsight) incredibly short-sighted and foolish.

### Discussing the Text

Malachi talks about withholding the tithe from God as “robbing” him. That’s strong language, what is your reaction to hearing language like this?



As Malachi calls Israel to resume their tithe, he challenges them to trust more in God to provide their needs, rather than withholding their money out of fear. Is it hard for you to trust that God will provide even as you give up your finances?

**Note for Class Leader:** Be careful in this discussion to not allow anyone to feel ashamed if they are not in a financial position to give a tithe. Also, we do not promote “seed faith” theology, which states that we give money as “seeds” so that God will bless us with financial harvests later in life. The Bible says God loves a cheerful giver, which means if we’re giving out of compulsion, fear, or in an effort to manipulate God, we have forgotten the reason for giving.

## **Questions for Deeper Faith**

Why do you think giving up finances is so difficult, even for faithful Christians?

Do you feel like God has provided for you in this life? What do you give thanks to God for?

The foundational sin of Israel was forgetting that ultimately, they belonged to God. How would it change the way you live if you saw your life and everything in it as belonging to God?

The tithe (one-tenth of personal income) is the traditional understanding of what we’re asked to give to church, but modern statistics suggest very few Christians actually tithe. How do we grow deeper in our financial trust of God, like the Israelites, if we’re not ready to leap into a tithe?

The title of this week is “From Giving to Returning.” If we begin to view our finances as something we “return” to God rather than something we give to church, does it change our views on generosity or giving? How so?

## **Closing Prayer**

God of Abundant Grace, your’s is a love of plenty, and a will to provide. So often we adopt a mindset of scarcity and survival, when the truth is we have more than we need. This week, as we live our daily lives, allow us to see the ways in which you have provided abundance for us. Fix our eyes on the fact that all we are and all we have is yours, and when we give, we are simply returning a portion of your abundance back to you. Release us of fears over finances, and allow the way we give to grow us in a faithful dependence on you and you alone. In the name of the one who frees us and asks simply to serve as free children of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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## Week 4 - From Closed to Open

### Main Idea

A shallow faith is built upon a spirituality “between me and God.” A fuller faith understands that faith in isolation is not as strong as faith in community, messy as that may be.

### Introductory Video

#### Scripture - Matthew 18:15-20

“If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you’ve won over your brother or sister. But if they won’t listen, take with you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. But if they still won’t pay attention, report it to the church. If they won’t pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven. Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I’m there with them.”

**Unpack It!** Remember in week one, when we said Matthew’s Gospel was written with Jewish Christians in mind? Here’s another example of that in action. The author understood that if Jewish Christians were going to live under the authority of Christ rather than the authority of the temple and its priests, they would need a new way of resolving conflict in their community. Considering his audience, this was a radically organic model of conflict resolution, but it is still applicable today!

### Discussing the Text

Jesus lays out an orderly, focused way to resolve conflict in the community of faith. When have you seen conflict resolved poorly in your life? When have you seen conflict resolved in healthy ways?

Jesus says that if two or more of us agree about anything on earth, than God the Father will do it for us. What kinds of things is he talking about? If two of us agree that we need a million dollars, should we expect the check in the mail?



Jesus teaches about the faith community while discussing conflict resolution. If church is going to be another place where we find conflict in life, why is it important to be involved? Shouldn't we avoid it if we're trying to live a more peaceful life?

## **Questions for Deeper Faith**

Being in community is great for extroverts, but what about those of us who are more introverted? Why is it important for us to be in community, too?

Do you think it is possible to have a life of faith built only on a personal relationship with God? Are there any limitations to a faith like that?

When people talk about not liking "organized religion," usually that is born out of cynicism or damaging memories in their past from their life in church. But as we continue to participate in the life of the church, we will see things and experience things that could hurt us, too. How do we stay involved in the life of the church even when we know it will get messy at times?

Is it easy or difficult for you to be transparent in a small group setting? What makes it easier to be vulnerable?

When is the last time you had to hold someone accountable? When is the last time someone held you accountable?

What is our responsibility to one another as members of the same community of faith?

## **Closing Prayer**

God of All Peoples, you bind us together when we might rather pull ourselves apart. Open our eyes to the beauty of a life lived in community. When we'd rather stay silent, help us to pick up the phone. When we'd rather stay home, help us to make our way to our faith community, either in worship, service, or fellowship. Most importantly, you help us to see your image in the people around us, and you encourage reconciliation where conflict or strife take root. This week, open us up to the strength of community, allow us to be vulnerable to those who care for us, and give us the strength to hold others accountable when we must. In the name of the one who loves us, firmly and completely, Jesus Christ, Amen.

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## Week 5 - From Full to Empty

### Main Idea

A shallow faith views service as something we do. A fuller faith views servanthood as a way we live.

### Introductory Video

### Scripture - 1 John 3:16-18

This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. But if a person has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need and that person doesn't care—how can the love of God remain in him?

Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth.

**Unpack It!** 1 John is one of the letters in the New Testament written by someone other than the Apostle Paul. Written by the same author as the Gospel of John, and around the year 100 CE, it was meant to combat a rising theology in that day called docetism, which held that Christ did not really come in the flesh, but only in spirit. John's commitment to a God made flesh impacted his view of what it meant to live a life of faith. He concludes that a faith that is simply about thinking and feeling, but not about doing, is razor thin. To be truly faithful Christians, we must love not only in our beliefs and words, but in our actions as well.

### Discussing the Text

What do you think about John's remark that if we see someone in need and don't help, then we don't really love God? Is setting a standard that is too high? Are we supposed to help literally everyone around us who asks for help?

John also says to love with action and truth instead of words and speech. Are words and speech not important?

In your own life, when has it been easy to say something, but difficult to do something?

**Note for Class Leader:** At some point in this discussion, it may be good to offer a theological clarification that we are saved by faith and not by works. Our actions of service in the world are not what save us in the end, only Jesus' sacrifice does that. But it is our belief in Jesus that



should compel us to serve the world around us. Simply put: if we don't volunteer as Sunday School Teacher, we're not going to hell, but if our faith never leads us to serve sacrificially, maybe we don't have the faith we think we do.

## **Questions for Deeper Faith**

Is there a certain person or cause that God has put on your heart? What is it? How have you gotten involved in that passion in the past? How could you grow in your support?

What do you think it means to “live a life of service?” Is there anything that keeps you from living this way?

It's not always easy to be mindful of the needs around us. What are some ways we can stay “tuned in” to what the people around us need?

What is something you believe that you think needs to be turned into action? Put another way, what's something you are tired of thinking about and ready to do?

## **Closing Prayer**

God of all Strength, you humbled yourself in the form of Jesus Christ to show us a better way to live. You served your people when we ought to serve you, you loved those whom we ignored, you proved your love through the gift of your life on the cross. In our daily lives, help us to be mindful of the needs felt every day in the world around us. Allow us to have compassion and care for those whom you already know and love. Make us vehicles of your love in our homes, our workplaces, and our communities. Challenge us to make our lives devoted to service and love in your name, the one who serves and loves us, Jesus the Christ, Amen.

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## Week 6 - From Next to Now

### Main Idea

A shallow faith dwells on the past and worries over the future. A fuller faith finds contentment, peace, and power in the present.

### Introductory Video

#### Scripture - James 4:13-15

Pay attention, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such-and-such a town. We will stay there a year, buying and selling, and making a profit.” You don’t really know about tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for only a short while before it vanishes. Here’s what you ought to say: “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

**Unpack It!** James is a complicated letter in the New Testament, in fact at one point, Martin Luther wanted it removed from the canonized Bible during the Reformation. James is a divisive text because he leans heavily on the idea of turning faith into action, along the same lines of John, like we read last week. Here, we see James’ view on the Christian faith taking him to the extreme of living in the moment and doing whatever it is God calls him to do whenever God calls him to do it.

### Discussing the Text

James says we don’t really know what tomorrow holds, and suggests we simply forget about it. Is the Bible saying to stop planning anything in life? Go deeper, what do you think James is trying to say?

James describes us as mist that quickly vanishes. Does this mean our lives are meaningless? Again, James uses strong language, what is he trying to say with this metaphor?

James suggests we live life at the will of the Lord. Easier said than done, right? When is it easiest to trust God in the moment? When is it the hardest?

### Questions for Deeper Faith

Is there a time when you had a hard time letting something go? What was it? Share, if you can.



What do you spend most of your time worrying about? Is it something you feel like you could trust God with? Why or why not?

How would living more in the moment change your life? What are some concrete examples of things you might do differently?

What would it take for you to move on from the past or to let go of the future? How can we be in prayer for you as a small group to help you with this change?

## **Closing Prayer**

Eternal God, you find us exactly where we are. You meet us in precisely this moment. And yet, most moments, we miss you entirely. We look backwards or forwards and forget to find you here and now. This week, simply remind us of the power of the present, remind us that the past is in the past, and our worries over the future are fruitless. Call us to the radical present, the moment that we have now and will never have again, so that we may live as your faithful children exactly as you would lead us. Let the peace that passes all understanding find us here. In the name of the one who was and is and is to come, Jesus Christ, Amen.



