



SESSION 5

LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

▶ **The Point**

Loving Jesus means personally helping those in need.

▶ **The Passage**

Matthew 25:34-40

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Has your town made the list? A variety of companies and websites keep updated lists of the best cities to live in, the best neighborhoods for bringing up children, the best business-friendly towns, and so on. The criteria vary from list to list, and their choices can be highly subjective—especially if your community didn't make the cut!

One word that might be used to describe the foundation of these lists is “treatment.” How do we treat tourists and other visitors to our area? How do teachers and administrators treat our kids? How well do local governments treat businesses in the area? In short, we can tell a lot about a community by how it treats others.

In a similar way, disciples of Jesus reveal much about our identities in the way we treat others. That's because how we treat others—how we love and respond to their needs—is directly connected to our love for God and our relationship with Him. As we turn to the Gospel of Matthew, we'll find a powerful message from Jesus on how our identity as His disciples must be lived out in our communities.

▶ **The Setting**

Jesus had been teaching His disciples about signs related to His second coming (see Matt. 24:3-51). He then told two parables to help them prepare for that day. The first was the parable of the 10 virgins (see 25:1-13); the second was the parable of the talents (see vv. 14-30). Jesus also described a day when He would reward His children for their attention to helping people in need (see vv. 31-40).

What does the Bible say?

King (v. 34)—Authority figures present in Jesus' parables are often meant to represent God the Father. In this parable, the King represents Jesus Himself.

Matthew 25:34-40

³⁴ **Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**

³⁵ **"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in;**

³⁶ **I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.'**

³⁷ **"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?**

³⁸ **When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you?**

³⁹ **When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?'**

⁴⁰ **"And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"**



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Matthew 25:34-36

34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.'

RECAP: Introduce Jesus' parable by reading the second paragraph on page 115 of the PSG:

To help us live out our identity as His followers, Jesus told a parable that takes us to the end of history. It's a picture of His second coming, with all the nations gathered before His throne (see 25:31-32).

READ: Matthew 25:34-36 on page 115 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 115 of the PSG: **"What modern circumstances come to mind when you read these verses?"**

Note: The first paragraph on page 145 of this Leader Guide offers a number of suggestions for modern situations where people often find themselves in need of help.

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 12, "The Least of These," to give group members an opportunity to identify different ways your church is working to meet the needs of people in your community.

Note: This activity asks group members to identify ways your church is currently meeting the needs of others. Your group's conversation here will set up Question #5 at the end of this session, which will push group members to identify different ways they can pitch in to meet the needs of others.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What keeps us from reaching out to those who need our help?



Matthew 25:34-36 Commentary

We are surrounded by opportunities to meet basic human needs.

[Verse 34] Homeless people often need food and shelter. Single mothers may need encouragement and support. Elderly adults appreciate home visits or a friendly “hello” from someone on the telephone. Some retirees need financial assistance, or perhaps they need someone to mow the lawn. Hospital patients often face uncertain times and appreciate someone stopping by to pray with them. Many youth lack a father or mother in their homes and need someone to fill that gap. Elementary children may need after-school tutoring to help them succeed in school. One need not look too far in a community to see many needs, and God’s people are often in a position to meet many of them.

From verses 31 and 34, we know the **King** is the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. During His earthly ministry, Jesus regularly used the term “Son of Man” to describe Himself (see Matt. 16:28; Mark 10:45). In Revelation 19:16, however, the apostle John described Jesus at His second coming, calling Him “King of kings and Lord of lords.” All the nations would see His glory and splendor (see Rev. 1:7).

Verse 33 mentions Jesus’ placing the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Verse 34 then describes the words Jesus would **say to those on his right**. In biblical times, the right hand was the position of favor. Even today, we use the expression “right-hand man” to describe someone important to us.

The word **come** is a command, but also a special exhortation or invitation. It’s the same word Jesus used when He invited the disciples to come follow Him (see Mark 1:17) and for the disciples to come and eat (see John 21:12). The King described His sheep as **“you who are blessed by my Father.”** To have the Father’s blessing meant one had the Son’s blessing as well; Jesus often spoke of His oneness with the Father, both in nature and in purpose (see John 5:17; 10:30). In fact, the oneness of purpose in the persons of the Trinity may be seen clearly in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. The Father planned our salvation (see Eph. 1:3-6), the Son provided it by His death (see v. 7), and the Holy Spirit applies it to our lives (see vv. 13-14).

The word translated **inherit** signifies the sheep were heirs to the great blessing they were about to receive. Typically an inheritance went to someone in the family, so the term also suggests a close relationship. The word **kingdom** normally denotes God’s rule or reign. During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He often spoke of God’s kingdom having come (see Matt. 4:17; Luke 17:20-21). Here, the term describes the place where God’s rule is brought to its ultimate fulfillment.

This glorious kingdom was **prepared** for God’s children **from the foundation of the world**. God’s children were in His mind from the beginning of creation! This truth is intended to bring us assurance; God will stop at nothing to see His salvation come to pass for His children. Jesus assured His followers that one day, He, the coming King, would say these precious words to them. What greater words could there be than the invitation from the Son of God to spend eternity with Him?



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Matthew 25:34-36 (Continued)

³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' ³⁵ "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.'

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read through the bullet list on pages 115-116 of the PSG to see the different needs mentioned in the passage.

RECAP: Read aloud the paragraph after the bullet list on page 116 of the PSG.

What's interesting about this list of needs is that anyone can respond to them. There are no special skills or additional education required to feed someone who is hungry, to clothe someone who is naked, to care for the sick, and to help those in prison.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 116 of the PSG: **"What emotions do you experience when you encounter someone in need?"**

Note: Group members may be tempted to offer "church answers" to this question—meaning, answers that are safe, that present what group members think they are supposed to say, and that limit someone from being perceived negatively. You can combat this tendency toward church answers by reinforcing that your group is a safe place to share honestly with one another, and also by leading out in sharing honestly yourself.

TRANSITION: Read aloud the final paragraph on page 116 of the PSG to move group members toward verses 37-40:

We're surrounded by needs: people hurting, people doing without basic necessities, people who can't provide for their families, and more. We can't meet every need, but we can do something—and we can do it in Jesus' name.

Matthew 25:34-36 Commentary (Continued)

[Verse 35] Verses 35-36 describe various contexts in which the children of God served Jesus. First, Jesus said, **“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.”** Jesus affirmed them for providing food to meet a basic need. They shared what they had with Him, thus putting His need ahead of their own.

Second, Jesus said, **“I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.”** In Bible times, as today, water was a precious resource. People did not enjoy running water in their homes; rather, they counted on springs, wells, or cisterns for water. From mid-April to at least September, no significant rain falls in Israel; consequently, water can become very scarce in late summer and early autumn. Jesus commended His followers for sharing water with Him when He thirsted.

Third, Jesus said, **“I was a stranger and you took me in.”** In the ancient world, hospitality was an important virtue and a natural expression of brotherly love (see Heb. 13:1-2; 1 Pet. 4:8-9). People counted on the hospitality of family members, friends, or even strangers to care for them and provide for their basic needs as they traveled (see Gen. 24:31-32; Luke 19:5-6). Hotels or motels were not common. Furthermore, some people might host fellow Israelites, but some might feel hesitant to host strangers, especially foreigners. Israelites might also feel hesitant to stay in a stranger’s home (see Judg. 19:11-12). Jesus commended those who showed gracious hospitality toward Him when He needed it.

[Verse 36] Jesus continued His commendation to His children with the words **“I was naked and you clothed me.”** “Naked” can mean without clothes, as we often understand this verse, but it also can mean the person was poorly dressed (see Jas. 2:15, “without clothes”) or lacked an outer garment (see John 21:7, “had taken it [outer garment] off”). Such a person would not normally appear in public this way, and would suffer from the cold in winter. Again, God’s people sought to meet Jesus’ need and provided clothing for Him.

Jesus’ words **“I was sick and you took care of me”** described yet another basic human need His people had met. People beset with various illnesses or diseases often have difficulty caring for themselves. Caring for sick people and attending to their needs—including the need for companionship—can provide encouragement to them during this time of difficulty.

Finally, Jesus mentioned one more need: **“I was in prison and you visited me.”** Imprisoned people were cut off from earning a living and often faced difficult if not miserable conditions in prison. During the apostle Paul’s imprisonment, he drew great comfort from those who visited him (see 2 Tim. 1:16-17; 4:11). He asked those to whom he wrote to remember to pray for him (see Col. 4:3-4,18).

Matthew 25:37-40 Commentary

Serving others is serving Jesus.

[Verse 37] **Righteous** describes a positive quality of life. God calls Christians to display the righteousness of Christ (see Rom. 6:13). These righteous had displayed their inner character with external deeds of ministry. Nonetheless, they were bewildered. They addressed Him as **Lord**, a title He clearly would deserve on that day! Their question **“When did we see you hungry and feed you?”** indicated their lack of understanding. As far as they knew, Jesus had never presented Himself to them with a need for food. Nor could they recall having seen Jesus **thirsty** and given Him **something to drink**.

[Verse 38] Those at Jesus’ right hand continued their questions: **“When did we see you a stranger and take you in?”** They practiced hospitality, but they certainly could not remember hosting Jesus! They also could not recall having seen Jesus **without clothes** (same word as in v. 36) and taken the time to **clothe** Him. Again, it does not necessarily describe nakedness as we understand it, but perhaps denotes someone in serious need of better or warmer clothes (see Jas. 2:15).

[Verse 39] The righteous had as many questions for Jesus as He had commendations for them. They asked, **“when did we see you sick?”** They did not know of a time they had ministered to Him in this manner, much less **in prison**. Perhaps one reason they could not remember their service to Jesus is because service to others becomes second-nature to believers. Did the righteous regularly meet the needs of others in the ways Jesus described? One has to believe they did, without stopping to think of all the good deeds they were doing.

[Verse 40] Jesus said He, **the King**, would then answer His puzzled children. The words **truly I tell you** include the Greek word *amen*. The word comes from Hebrew and means “to confirm or support.” Many translations render it “verily” (KJV). Jesus’ assurance leaves no doubt as to the truth of what He communicated to His disciples.

Jesus assured His followers: **whatever you did**, He had seen and blessed. Their service was not spectacular nor performed on behalf of someone great. Rather, Jesus described those they served as **one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine**. *Least of these* or similar expressions often characterize believers (see Matt. 10:42; 18:6,10,14). Some interpreters believe the term might describe hurting or downtrodden people lacking in basic human needs. The righteous had served them without regard to their status or to any reward they might receive.

Jesus’ words **“you did for me”** again would have surprised His hearers. They had merely seen people in need and taken steps to meet those needs. They ministered freely out of what they had, sharing those resources, meager or plentiful, with others less fortunate than they were. As they did, they ministered to their Lord, who saw everything they did. He noticed when no one else did, and one day, He will provide them their reward—their eternal reward. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urged people to serve God without thought of reward, for God saw everything and would reward them at the appropriate time (see 6:2-4).

