

# Life Group Questions

October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Blood and Water** – Pastor Vinh Doan – [Matthew 12:46-50](#)

To the Life Group leader: thank you for your ministry leading this Life Group. **Take time to review the questions, selecting those you believe will be most helpful for your group study.** You will not have time to use all the questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you lead, as you select questions, and as you guide the discussion.

## Reconnect

Come together with these preliminary questions:

- How has God gifted you to serve Him?
- How will you serve Him this fall at Willingdon Church?
- Where has God placed you in the city? What is your role there?

## Open in Prayer

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the text, the questions, and each other.

## Message Recap Questions

**Review the message using these questions**

1. What stood out to you most in this week's message?
2. What was the most meaningful thing you heard in the message? Why?
3. What questions are still lingering?

## Questions

1. What are some interesting things about your family (immediate and extended)? (If you do not have extended family – Who do you consider family? Why do you consider them family?)
2. What are strengths and weaknesses when it comes to Canadian families? What do Canadian families do well? What can Canadian families improve on?
3. Who came to see Jesus and what did they want (Matthew 12:46)?
4. Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21 record the same event but with different details. What are the differences? Why would each author record the same event slightly differently? Do the differences change the main idea of the passage? Why or why not?
5. In Matthew 12:49, it is recorded that Jesus stretches out his hand, Who does Jesus stretch out his hand to? Why would this be significant?

6. What do you have to 'DO' to be in the family of God (Matthew 12:50)?
7. Who is invited into the family of God (Matthew 12:50)?
8. What would it look like for the church if we put Jesus first? What would it look like for you if Jesus was first?

## Choose Your Next Step

**What next step will you commit to for the upcoming week (and beyond)?**

## Closing Prayer

A closing prayer is an effective way to point people back to our Loving Father as they seek to apply their new learnings throughout the week. Ask group members to share what they sense God calling them to. Pray for each other and commit to continue to do so during the week as people step out in obedience to God's leading.

# Commentary

## Introduction:

THE CONFRONTATIONS WITH the religious establishment have brought to light the incontrovertible differences between Jesus' proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom and the expectations of the crowds and the religious establishment of Israel. As he brings the law to its fulfillment as the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8), he releases those who respond to him from an oppressive slavery to the burdens of Pharisaic legalism and the oppression of Satan's demonic kingdom. But there are other forces at work that may attempt to deter Jesus and his followers. This passage prepares for one of the most significant transitions in Jesus' ministry by declaring clearly the distinguishing signature of Jesus' own life and ministry as well as that of his followers: obeying the will of the Father (Matthew 12:50).

The expression "while Jesus was still talking to the crowd" transitions the narrative from the preceding section that focused on those outside (i.e., the crowds and the Pharisees) to those within (i.e., the disciples). Matthew's narrative has maintained a striking contrast between three groups: the disciples, the crowds, and the religious establishment of Israel. Disciples are those who have responded positively to Jesus' invitation to the gospel of the kingdom. The crowds are those who are interested in Jesus' message and ministry but who have not yet made a decision to enter the kingdom and become Jesus' disciples. The religious leaders are those who consistently oppose Jesus' message and ministry.

1. What are some interesting things about your family (immediate and extended)? (If you do not have extended family – Who do you consider family? Why do you consider them family?)
2. What are strengths and weaknesses when it comes to Canadian families? What do Canadian families do well? What can Canadian families improve on?
3. Who came to see Jesus and what did they want (Matthew 12:46)?

The omission of "father" may indicate that Joseph has died by this time. Matthew gives no reason for why his family wishes to speak to him, but Mark indicates that earlier his family apparently went out from Nazareth to Capernaum because they heard reports of the commotion that Jesus' ministry was causing. They wanted to take control of Jesus and alter his ministry, because they thought that he was out of his mind, considering the claims he was making and his disruption of the religious status quo (Mark 3:21; John 7:5). Along with this, it may be that they intend to bring Jesus to his senses as the eldest son, the one responsible to care for his mother and younger brothers and sisters after the death of Joseph.

Matthew creates the opening link: 'while he was still speaking to the crowds' (Matthew 9:18; Matthew 17:5). This is not actually what the Matthean Jesus has been specifically doing since the last mention of the crowds in Matthew 12:23, but they are presumed to be present throughout and retrospectively can be seen as the audience for Matthew 12:33–37 and Matthew 12:43–45 (the latter especially after the movement of focus from the Pharisees to 'this generation' in Matthew 12:38–42).

Nothing in Matthew prepares for the arrival of Jesus' family (contrast Mark 3:21); he simply marks the surprising development with an emphatic ἰδοῦ (lit. 'behold'). Given the careful repetitions that will mark Matthew's account, a single 'his' rather than the two occurrences found in Mark 3:31 must be to match the single 'my' in Matthew 12:50. Even after their arrival the family is not integrated into the narrative: their bid to speak to Jesus is left hanging in the air, being treated as nothing more than an opportunity for Jesus to make his point.

Jesus' mother has been identified and has played a role in the infancy materials (Matthew 1–2), but we know nothing of brothers (and sisters) thus far (Matthew 13:55 will offer more. The matter is of no importance to Matthew. The absence of Joseph may imply his prior death, but it need not.

ἔξω ('outside') can be given no proper sense in Matthew; it is left over from the house setting of the Markan account (Mark 3:20), which Matthew fails to mention. (Having slipped inarticulately into a house setting here, Matthew carries the setting forward into Matthew 13:1, where at the point of transition Jesus is said to leave the house.)

Matthew drops the sending in of a messenger from Mark. 3:31 (this allows for a close parallelism between Matthew 12:46 and 47) and switches from a seeking of Jesus to a desire to speak with him (probably intended as a more positive posture, but not making use of what is specifically part of Matthew's language of discipleship).

4. Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21 record the same event but with different details. What are the differences? Why would each author record the same event slightly differently? Do the differences change the main idea of the passage? Why or why not?
5. In Matthew 12:49, it is recorded that Jesus stretches out his hand, Who does Jesus Stretch out his hand to? Why would this be significant?

'Stretching out his hand' is a Matthean touch, here a rhetorical gesture more than a means of action as elsewhere in Matthew. Mark's 'those seated in a circle around him' becomes 'the disciples'. Linked with Matthew's introduction of 'the crowds' in v. 46, this change sets up already the contrast between the disciples and the crowds which is important in Matthew 13. Despite representing the disciples sometimes as people of little faith and often as in need of correction, and despite the collapse of their discipleship as the cross approaches, for the most part Matthew sees the disciples as those who have positively taken up the challenge of Jesus and joined themselves with him. The loyalties and bonds of the natural family are relativized by the claim of God (Matthew 8:21; Matthew 10:34–37) made tangible in the link with Jesus.

It is unclear whether Matthew intends his readers to deduce from the (shared) family relationship with Jesus a family relationship of disciples with one another. Certainly in Matthew 18:15, 21, 35 (Matthew 23:8) the members of the church are viewed as brothers and sisters together, something which takes up and adapts a Jewish understanding of membership in the community of God's people.

Mary and Jesus' brothers arrive at the place where Jesus is speaking in order to escort him back to Nazareth. Someone tells Jesus, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." But Jesus will not be deterred from his messianic mission, even if it means disruption of biological loyalties. " 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers.' " Jesus has already accentuated to his disciples the inevitable separation that will occur between family members because of a commitment to him (Matthew 10:34–39; Matthew 8:21–22). He has not come to abolish the family, for later he upholds the law that demands children honor their parents and rebukes those who develop traditions that allow them to circumvent such care (Matthew 15:3–9). And we will see that after the Parable Discourse, Jesus does return to Nazareth, where his family is still living, to preach in the synagogue (Matthew 13:54–58). But Jesus is here demonstrating the preeminence of commitment to him and the kingdom of heaven, which places people in a new spiritual family.

#### 6. What do you have to 'DO' to be in the family of God (Matthew 12:50)?

The present verse clarifies the basis on which Jesus has identified his disciples as family, but it also opens up this possibility to others. Mark's 'will of God' becomes 'will of my Father in heaven', echoing the language of Matthew 7:21 and perhaps thereby implicitly reintroducing reference to the kingdom. Jesus is here indicating that, at least in a derivative way, the sense of family relationship in which, according to Matthew 11:27, he is linked to the Father extends to others as well. The presence of mother in the list indicates, however, that Matthew does not think in terms of a pattern in which being a sibling of Jesus means sharing his relationship to God as Father. Nonetheless, the absence of a father from the list of family members not only follows from the composition of the family group that came to speak with Jesus, but is likely to reserve the position of father for God alone (Matthew 23:9). In the language of extravagance used by Jesus the person is not a brother, sister, or mother (whichever is appropriate to age and gender), but all three at once. The point is that those who do the will of the Father are 'everything' to Jesus. The inverted order, with 'mother' at the end, creates a minor chiasm to frame the pericope.

#### 7. Who is invited into the family of God (Matthew 12:50)?

Jesus specifies the central feature that creates and characterizes this spiritual family: "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." The theme of doing the will of the heavenly Father is a motif that runs throughout Matthew's Gospel and reflects deep Jewish roots (Matthew. 6:10; 7:21; 18:14; 21:31; 26:42). The will of the Father means obedience to the call to the kingdom of heaven that will result in true righteousness. A person's genealogical relationship to Israel does not guarantee a place in the kingdom of heaven, nor does a person's family relationship. Each individual must respond to the will of the Father and obey Jesus' call to the kingdom and become his disciple. Jesus is the ultimate example of the will of the Father revealed and obeyed (Matthew 11:27; 26:42), so to follow his example in discipleship and become like him will enable his disciples to do the Father's will on a daily basis.

Jesus intentionally broadens the gender references to include women as his disciples by not only referring to mother and brother but also by bringing in “sister.” His message and ministry initiate a unique form of discipleship. Within Judaism at that time, especially among the rabbis, only men could become a disciple of a rabbi and study the Torah. But with Jesus, any person—woman or man, young or old, Gentile or Jew—who responds to the gospel of the kingdom and believes on him for eternal life is his disciple. In other words, discipleship to Jesus is not defined by rabbinic models but by relationship to Jesus, which means obedience to the will of the Father. The Old Testament prepared for this concept by stressing the importance of both the nation and the individual walking in the ways of God, which is now fulfilled in a discipleship to Jesus that creates a new family of God.

This form of discipleship culminates in Jesus’ final Great Commission, where the central imperative is to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). This includes both men and women, which the book of Acts confirms. In the earliest days of the church, “disciple” refers to men and women (Acts 6:1–7; 9:10, 36; 16:1), called “believers” (Acts 5:14), or the “church” (Acts 8:3). All disciples are to be taught to obey all that Jesus commands (Matt. 28:19–20), which ultimately leads to obeying the Father’s will on a moment-by-moment, day-by-day basis.

8. What would it look like for the church if we put Jesus first? What would it look like for you if Jesus was first?