

DISCIPLE



BECOMING DISCIPLES THROUGH BIBLE STUDY

Study Manual • Second Edition

DISCIPLE

As You Begin DISCIPLE

You are committing yourself to at least three to four hours a week of independent study and preparation, plus two and one-half hours each week for thirty-four weeks in the weekly group meeting.

To establish a disciplined pattern of study, choose and stick to a particular time and location for daily reading and writing, study, reflection, and prayer.

Choosing a Bible

This study manual is based on the New Revised Standard Version. We recommend *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. Other excellent study Bibles and translations are available. Keep one or two handy for comparing difficult verses or passages.

Study Manual Format

This study manual is a discipline. It is a plan to guide your private study and preparation for the weekly group meeting.

Common elements appear throughout the lessons. The theme word, Scripture verse(s), and title at the beginning of each lesson suggest the subject and direction of the lesson. Together, they can help you remember the sequence of the biblical story.

“Our Human Condition” expresses a common human experience and provides a perspective from which to read and listen to Scripture.

Daily Bible reading assignments are listed in the “Assignment” section, and space is provided on the second page of each lesson for making notes about the Scripture—key ideas, persons, events, new insights, geographic or historic information, the meaning of particular words, questions you have about the Scripture that you want to raise in the group meeting. Daily assignments also indicate when to read and respond to “The Bible Teaching” and “Marks of Discipleship” sections of the lesson. The day on which you do this work will vary depending on the content of the lesson. “Marks of Discipleship” identifies particular characteristics of disciples and invites you to think about ways your life and the life of your congregation reflect those characteristics. Don't rush through this part of your work. It will be a valuable source of insight and discussion for you and members of the group.

“If You Want to Know More” suggests additional individual reading and study and the occasional

preparation of a report to the group. The additional study resources suggested below will be helpful here.

As you begin your daily study, use the prayer psalm from the “Prayer” section. Write down concerns about which you will pray during the week.

Additional Study Resources

Though you need only the Bible and this study manual for successful study of DISCIPLE, these reference books will help you go deeper into study of the Scriptures:

The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, Revised Edition, edited by Paul J. Achtemeier with the Society of Biblical Literature (HarperCollins Publishers, San Francisco, 1996).

The NRSV Concordance, edited by John R. Kohlenberger III (Zondervan Publishing House, 1991).

Oxford Bible Atlas, Third Edition, edited by Herbert G. May (Oxford University Press, 1984).

How to Get the Most From Reading Scripture

- Read with curiosity. Ask the questions *who? what? where? when? how? and why?* as you read.
- Learn as much as you can about the passage you are studying. It will help you hear God speak to you through the Scripture. Try to discover what the writer was saying for the time in which the passage was written. Read the surrounding verses and chapters to establish the setting or situation in which the action or teaching took place.

Pay attention to the form of the passage, because meaning exists not only in what is said but in the form in which it is said. How you read and understand poetry or a parable will differ from how you read and understand historical narrative.

Don't force your interpretation on the biblical text. Let the Scripture speak for itself.

- Question the Scripture, but also learn to read Scripture so you find answers to your questions in the Scripture itself. The biblical text itself will solve some of the problems you have with a particular passage. Some problems additional reference material will solve, and some will remain a mystery.

- Come to the Bible with an eagerness to listen to Scripture as the Word of God and a willingness to hear and obey it. Trust the Holy Spirit to instruct you and to empower you through Scripture.

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“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him.”

—Matthew 9:9

18 Radical Discipleship

OUR HUMAN CONDITION

We are anxious, tied up in the status quo. We conform to our culture, knowing all the while that it is sick and riddled with brokenness and confusion. We walk in spiritual blindness.

ASSIGNMENT

We will study Matthew for two weeks, reading it twice with different emphases: (1) the call to radical discipleship and (2) the mounting tension that led to the Crucifixion.

Between the birth introduction and the Passion conclusion, Matthew develops five well-defined sections, or “books,” to correspond to the five books of Torah. Each of these sections has two elements: first, *Jesus in action*; then *Jesus teaching* or interpreting his actions. Watch for the phrase, “when Jesus had finished.” Those words signal the beginning of a new section.

- Day 1 Matthew 1–2 (birth narrative); 3–7 (Section 1: radical discipleship)
- Day 2 Matthew 8–10 (Section 2: the mission)
- Day 3 Matthew 11:1–13:52 (Section 3: secrets of the Kingdom)
- Day 4 Matthew 13:53–18:35 (Section 4: life and leadership in the church)
- Day 5 Matthew 19–25 (Section 5: being ready for the Judgment)
- Day 6 Read and respond to “The Bible Teaching” and “Marks of Discipleship.”
- Day 7 Rest.

PRAYER

Pray daily before study:

“Give me the desire to obey your laws rather than to get rich.

Keep me from paying attention to what is worthless;

be good to me, as you have promised.

Keep your promise to me, your servant—the promise you make to those who obey you” (Psalm 119:36-38, TEV).

Prayer concerns for this week:

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Day 1 Matthew 1–2 (birth narrative); 3–7 (radical discipleship)

Day 4 Matthew 13:53–18:35 (life and leadership in the church)

Day 2 Matthew 8–10 (the mission)

Day 5 Matthew 19–25 (being ready for the Judgment)

Day 3 Matthew 11:1–13:52 (secrets of the Kingdom)

Day 6 “The Bible Teaching” and “Marks of Discipleship”

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THE BIBLE TEACHING

From the opening words of Matthew's Gospel, Matthew is making a statement: Jesus, the Son of David, has come to be the Savior for all humankind. His name was Jesus, a derivative of *Joshua*, meaning literally, "Yahweh is salvation."

Matthew arranged the genealogy into three groups of fourteen names each (Matthew 1:17). He omitted a few kings in order to achieve this neatness. But why three groups?

Because Jewish history had three great stages: Abraham to David, David to exile in Babylon, and exile in Babylon to Jesus Christ. And women's names are included—most unusual in an ancient Jewish genealogy. Notice: The genealogy does not start with Jesus and work its way back as the genealogy in Luke does; rather, it starts with Abraham and comes forward (1:2). Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is the Messiah, the culmination and climax of salvation history. The genealogy is Joseph's, since the usual legal way to trace a person's lineage was through the paternal side.

Matthew wanted his Jewish readers to understand that Jesus came first of all to his own people, the Jews. However, the wise men, who are thought to have been Gentiles "from the East," show that Jesus came to save Gentiles also.

The Call to Radical Discipleship

Jesus made an absolute demand. When he said, "Follow me," he meant leaving something or someone or some place behind. To obey meant to walk into the unknown unencumbered—ready to listen, to learn, to witness, to serve. The word *disciple* means "learner."

Simon and Andrew, James and John left their fishing nets and relatives. Matthew, also called Levi, left his tax office.

Jesus offered other persons radical discipleship, but they would not break loose from the things that held them. Jesus warned a scribe, a prospective disciple, that he would often be sleeping on the ground. We hear no more of the man (Matthew 8:19-20). Another wanted to wait until his elderly father died. "Follow *now*," said Jesus, and that man also faded (8:21-22). Still later a rich man considered discipleship. "Go, sell your possessions . . . ; then come." But the man "went away grieving, for he had many possessions" (19:16-22). Even family members cannot stand in the way of discipleship (10:34-39). The Christian must have a single eye, seeking first God's kingdom and God's righteousness (6:33; read again 13:44-46).

The Sermon on the Mount (5-7) distills some of Jesus' most demanding statements:

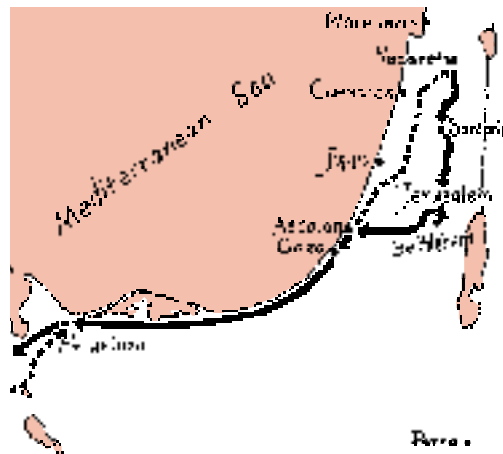
Speak only the truth.

Do not lust even in your hearts.

Root out rage from your emotions.

Forgive without measure.

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS



The visit of the wise men, the dream warning to Joseph, the flight of the holy family into Egypt, and the slaughter of Bethlehem's children are recorded only in Matthew 2. Though traveling through the desert might have been a surer way to escape Herod, they took the safer, shorter route along the seacoast from Ascalon to the border of Egypt and apparently returned the same way.

Love your enemies.
Pray privately.
Wash your face when you fast so no one will know.
Give without getting credit.
Avoid being judgmental.
Work for peace.

Jesus' concern for righteousness permeates the Sermon on the Mount. These Kingdom people will be a peculiar people. They will live lives of quiet gratitude, simply asking for daily bread, just like the Israelites receiving manna in the wilderness. If persecution comes, they should be grateful. Without doubt, these new disciples are expected to live a righteousness that "exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees" (5:20).

The first word in Jesus' ministry was the word *repent* (4:17). Repent means not only to confess and be sorry for your sins but also, and more importantly, to turn around. Repentance means to change directions, have a new way of thinking and living, lead a new life.

What is the new righteousness? It is a life characterized by repentance, a life wrenched away from worldly living, now pointed in a fresh Kingdom direction.

Self-righteousness, sometimes depicted by Matthew in certain religious leaders, is living without light. We will not find God until we know we need God. In Matthew 23, the scathing criticism is directed not just at the Pharisees; it is directed at all hypocrisy in every generation. Religious hypocrisy is the worst kind.

People asked for a sign. "No sign," said Jesus, "will be given . . . except the sign of Jonah" (16:1-4). What did he mean? Jonah preaching repentance and Nineveh, hated capital of Assyria, repenting in sackcloth and ashes.

Jesus told a story (21:28-32). A father asked his two sons to go to work in the vineyard. One said no; the other said yes. Every parent who heard the story smiled knowingly. But the boy who said yes never went. And later, the boy who said no changed his mind and went. Which of them did as the father wished? Repentance brings a changed attitude, a new direction, and a new relationship.

Receiving forgiveness and new direction, disciples then extend forgiveness to others daily (as in the Lord's Prayer) and forever (as in seventy-seven times). So repentance speaks of new beginnings and of continually fresh commitments to the ways of God.

The Mission

The disciples are not just "to be." They are called "to do." The community of faith is thrust into mission. A leper cried out and was healed (Matthew 8:2-4). A Roman officer, a centurion in charge of one hundred soldiers, asked help for a paralyzed servant. Amazed at the faith of the Gentile soldier, Jesus remarked, "Many will come from east and west and

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"No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead he puts it on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:15-16, TEV).

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will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (8:5-13). The servant was healed.

After Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law, Matthew quotes the suffering servant passage from Isaiah 53:4: “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Matthew 8:17). The prophet Isaiah wanted a reclaimed and recommitted Israel to be in mission. Jesus Christ activates that mission. Keep in mind that Jesus not only heals, cleanses, forgives, but guides and trains the disciples to follow his lead.

Notice that the two demoniacs Jesus healed knew who Jesus was and called him “Son of God” (8:28-34).

Next Jesus did what only God can do—forgive sins. The paralytic was healed. Then, he called Matthew the tax collector to be a disciple. At Matthew’s dinner party, amid criticism for eating with the tax collectors who were ceremonially unclean and were hated because they collected Roman taxes, Jesus was still claiming people: “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (9:13).

A girl is raised from the dead (9:18-19, 23-25); a hemorrhaging woman is healed (9:20-22); two blind men receive sight (9:27-30); a speechless man can talk (9:32-33). What is happening? Jesus the Anointed One has come to bring the mission of God into the people’s experience. The Kingdom is breaking in.

Now watch: The work of the Kingdom is designed to explode in magnitude. Jesus said to the disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (9:37-38). Jesus actually expected the disciples to do the same things he had been doing! At first they are to go only to the Jews. Later they will go to the whole world. “As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons” (10:7-8).

Imagine yourself one of the twelve disciples receiving those orders. Describe how you might have felt.

Secrets of the Kingdom

Now Jesus is ready to take the Twelve deeper into spiritual understanding. He knows secrets they must learn. So much is hidden from their eyes. They must be taught.

Notice in Matthew 11 that Jesus acts and then explains. John the Baptist sent messengers from his prison to ask, “Are you the one who is to come?” Read carefully Jesus’ answer (Matthew 11:4-6). Many people expected a different kind of Messiah. Jesus is interpreting the kind of Messiah he is.

What do you understand from the image of children play-

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

ing wedding music and singing funeral songs (11:16-17)? Jesus was happy; John was grim. Most people did not respond to either one.

Rabbis used the term *yoke* in reference to the Law. What did Jesus mean by “Take *my yoke* upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (11:29, italics added)?

If Jesus calls us to radical discipleship, in what sense is his yoke easy and his burden light (11:30)?

In 12:24-50, Jesus redefines his family and that of his followers. God’s demands, God’s will must come first for those who are Jesus’ family.

The Kingdom parables are mysterious yet life-changing. Generally a parable, heard in its entirety, carries one essential meaning. When Jesus told a parable, it was a teaching device, a story to be told over and over by the community of faith. He used everyday images, good people and bad, food, flowers, clothing, mountains, and tax collectors, always to make a point. When you read a parable, try to discern the essential meaning.

What essential meaning does the parable of the sower point to (13:3-9)?

What essential meaning does the parable of the mustard seed point to (13:31-32)?

As you read 13:52, recall that Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. The people of the Kingdom will draw upon old and new, the law of Moses and the teachings of Jesus. The old is not thrown away.

Life and Leadership in the Church

The kingdom of God, like Israel, is not a place of isolation. Bible religion is not solitary, between you and God only. Bible salvation is corporate. We live out our faith in community, not all by ourselves.

Jesus wanted his disciples to be more concerned about moral law than ceremonial law. Some Jewish teachers, building on oral tradition, were “majoring in minors.” Some rabbis taught that people should wash their hands ritualistically seven times before and after a meal. Jesus focused on spiritual matters, “For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:19). Jesus also was establishing community with

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all kinds of people whom the food ceremonies cut off. He ate with Jews who didn't wash their hands properly. He asked water from the hands of a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42). Relationships are more important than rituals. The holiness of the new community would be a holiness that would break down barriers rather than build up barriers between people.

Now Jesus moved the disciples to an even deeper level. The Messiah is going to suffer. The Christian community will suffer as well. But look at what happened. When Jesus said that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer, Peter protested. Jesus rebuked him severely (Matthew 16:22-23). Why? Because Jesus was walking the way of the cross. We will walk it also. The cross of Jesus will be the standard for the Christian community. We will be saved by that cross. We will live by that cross. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (16:24). We are beginning to see what membership in the Kingdom means and what leadership in the church means.

Being Ready for the Judgment

The Christian community, with the leadership of the Anointed One, is both experiencing a foretaste of the Kingdom and awaiting the Kingdom's complete fulfillment.

So, as we wait and watch, we are to be faithful to our spouses (Matthew 19:3-9) or single for Kingdom work (19:10-12), gentle and loving with children (19:13-15), and unconcerned about getting rich (19:23-30). All will get the same salvation whether early in life or at the eleventh hour, for salvation is not earned. It is given us out of the grace of God (20:1-16). Leaders in the church are those who serve most humbly and most faithfully (20:20-28).

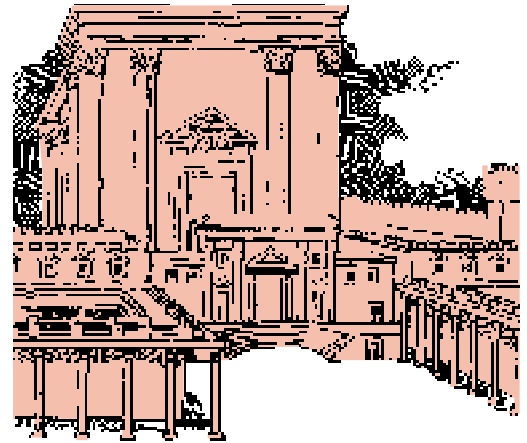
Do you recall the many prophetic references to Israel as God's vineyard? The leaders of Israel are the tenants of God's vineyard (21:33-43). What is Jesus' point? That the Kingdom will be taken from Israel and put into the hands of people who produce "the fruits of the kingdom."

Many Christians have been brought up on "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." They are dumbfounded to read Matthew 23, which sounds like Amos or Isaiah. But the subtleties of religion, the subtleties of ceremony, can be "like whitewashed tombs," clean and pure on the outside, but on the inside "full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth" (23:27).

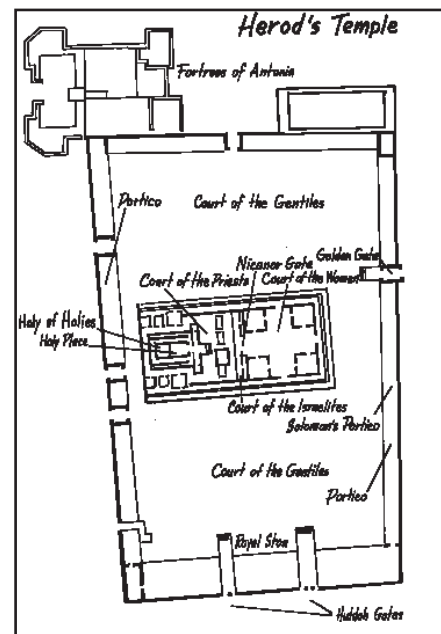
Jesus, teaching in the courtyard of the Temple, could have been looking across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives, watching the sun bounce off the Jewish tombs. They were freshly whitewashed so that Passover pilgrims would not accidentally touch a tomb and become ceremonially unclean for Temple worship.

As you read Matthew 23, don't think so much about Pharisees who were trying so hard to keep the oral tradition and the ritual observances; think about all forms of pretense and

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Herod's Temple incorporated and restored what was left of the Second Temple. It was still under construction in the time of Jesus, and the entire complex was not finished until A.D. 62-64. This is the Temple to which Jesus came.



sham that pervade civil and religious life. In what ways do we allow ceremony to crush compassion? When do we clean up the outside and leave the inside dirty?

Matthew 24–25 is important. We believe that ultimately God will win the victory. We believe that Christ will come again. But no one knows when. Not even Jesus. And while we wait, we are to guard against those who will lead astray with signs and omens. Jesus clearly warned against such false messiahs and false prophets (24:3-5, 24, 36).

So what are we to do? We are to be like the five wise bridesmaids who were ready at all times (25:1-13). We are to be like the slaves who used their talents for the master’s gain (25:14-30). We are to be continually treating our neighbor—hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, in prison—as if that neighbor were Jesus himself (25:31-46). We are to bring such people into our fellowship—until he comes again.

MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Can you see how often the church makes discipleship seem too easy? “Accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior” is so true but often superficial, lacking the radical demands, the total commitment of discipleship: Give up everything and follow Jesus.

Describe where you are in your discipleship. Have you responded to Christ’s call, “Follow me”? Is anything or anyone holding you back?

How is radical discipleship the answer to our need to conform to culture and the status quo?

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) contains some of the highest ethical insights ever proclaimed. Study it carefully. The Beatitudes (5:3-12) are the “essence of the essence.” Paraphrase the eight Beatitudes in your own words.

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

Disciples accept Christ’s call to radical discipleship.

Chart of Biblical History

4 B.C.

Jesus’ birth

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BECOMING DISCIPLES THROUGH BIBLE STUDY

Teacher Helps
Second Edition



18 Radical Discipleship

GATHERING AND PRAYER

(5 minutes)

VIDEO SEGMENT 18

(20 minutes)

Presenter: Michael J. Brown

Prepare to View Video

Listen for the major themes of Matthew and how these themes speak to its call for radical discipleship.

View Video

Summary of video content:

Five major themes in Matthew's portrait of Jesus:

- Jesus is a teacher. There is an emphasis on teaching throughout the Gospel and in the Great Commission
- Less emphasis is placed on miracles. Miracle stories introduce questions about discipleship.
- Jesus is the Jewish messiah, sent by a Jewish God, in fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures.
- Emphasis is placed on a different kind of righteousness. A disciple's righteousness must be better, greater, more effective than the law requires.
- The Gospel's universal mission is found and cultivated in particular contexts.

Matthew's teaching calls for radical discipleship.

Discuss After Viewing Video

What are the major themes of Matthew? How does Matthew use these themes in its call for radical discipleship?

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

(50 minutes)

Establish the nature and purpose of the Gospel of Matthew by using information gathered in daily reading and from the introduction to Matthew in the Bible. Work in groups of three or four to answer these questions: Who wrote the book? When was it written? To whom? What are the major themes in the book? What point was the writer wanting to make about Jesus?

Call attention to the brief chart of dates on page 189 of the manual to get in mind the historical setting of the New Testament. Read dates and events in unison. Call out the dates and ask the group to respond with the events. Reverse the process.

An important question for this lesson is, What is radical or distinctive about the discipleship Jesus called for? Form four groups and assign a portion of the Sermon on the Mount to each group to begin answering the question: (1) Matthew 5:1-26; (2) Matthew 5:27-6:4; (3) Matthew 6:5-34; (4) Matthew 7:1-28. In the groups, work individually first, then together. Then hear a one-sentence summary from each group.

Work through daily notes with these questions: What do the notes say about radical discipleship? What does radical discipleship involve?

BREAK

(10 minutes)

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

(40 minutes)

Scripture selection: Matthew 20:1-16

Read Matthew 20:1-16 aloud while others follow in their Bibles. Ask everyone to read the passage silently. Work individually on these questions: What does this passage tell us about God? What does this passage tell us about human beings? What does this passage tell us about the relationship between God and human beings? Then discuss the questions in groups of three. (See theological Bible study, pages 40-44 of *Teaching the Bible to Adults and Youth*.)

MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

(20 minutes)

Disciples accept Christ's call to radical discipleship.

Share responses in this section to the extent persons are comfortable talking about where they are in their own discipleship. Discuss this question: Why does the church often settle for making church members instead of making disciples? The second question in this section of the study manual ties to "Our Human Condition." Read that statement aloud together and then respond to the question.

CLOSING AND PRAYER

(5 minutes)

Turn to Lesson 19 and write down prayer concerns. The assignment is a rereading of Matthew. Call attention to the special assignment on page 143. Close with prayer.