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CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# Looking Ahead - 4.06.2025 - Angry Jesus

April 6, 2025

Bitterness can creep into our hearts quietly, often unnoticed, like a root growing deep beneath the surface. When we allow hurt, anger, or unforgiveness to take root, it can poison our relationships and peace.

## **Hebrews 12:15**

*Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.*

God's grace is overflowing, and because of this, we have an opportunity to extend that grace, even when we feel wronged or hurt. To do this, we must keep our hearts open to his healing, allowing his love to replace the bitterness that tries to take root. It's a reminder that holding onto unforgiveness doesn't just hurt us; it impacts others, too.

Today, take a moment to examine your heart. Is there any bitterness that needs to be rooted out? Ask God for the strength to forgive and to allow his grace to flow freely in your life and relationships.

## **Discussion Questions:**

Ice breaker: Share a time when you noticed bitterness beginning to take root. What steps did you take to release that bitterness?

What practical ways can we support one another in our community to help ensure no one becomes "poisoned" by bitterness?

Read James 4: Reflecting on verses 1-2, how can our unresolved desires or inner conflicts affect our relationships with others and our connection to God? What does this passage teach us about surrendering our desires to God?

What role do you think forgiveness plays in softening a hardened heart?

Reflect and journal: What emotions or experiences have caused you to harden your heart toward God or others? Pray and ask God to soften and heal those areas.

**Prayer:**

*Lord, search my heart and reveal any bitterness I need to surrender to you. Help me receive your abundant grace and extend it to others. Thank you for the healing you bring and the peace that follows when I let go of the bitterness spreading poison in my relationships. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**Series Theme Verse:****Hebrews 4:15**

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.

*This post was written by Lori Tuckerman, Director of Content for the LivingItOut Devotional.*

# Matthew 21 - Cleaning the House - Matthew Reading Plan

April 7, 2025

**New Testament Reading Plan: Matthew 21**

If you're anything like me, after reading Matthew 21, you may have wondered how Jesus got away with throwing the money changers and animal sellers out of the Temple.

It happened only a few days before Passover, so the place would have been packed with people changing money to pay their temple taxes and buying and selling animals for sacrifice. We know from other places in Scripture that there would have been Temple guards present when Jesus knocked over the tables and chairs, threw everyone out, and probably shouted:

*<sup>13</sup> ..."The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!"*

Where were the guards when all the people, animals, birds, and shekels were removed?

Were the priests speechless after Jesus' statement, contemplating just how far they had allowed this Holy Place to be desecrated?

...Because as far as we know, nothing happened after that blowup.

Bible commentators say the lack of consequences for Jesus' actions that day is as much a miracle as the healings that followed:

*<sup>14</sup> The blind and the lame came to him in the Temple, and he healed them. <sup>15</sup> The leading priests and the teachers of religious law saw these wonderful miracles and heard even the children in the Temple shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David..."*

It was only after Jesus started to perform miraculous healings that the leaders found their voices. Jesus' actions challenged *their* power and authority, but they spoke out under the guise of being offended for God:

*<sup>15</sup> ...But the leaders were indignant. <sup>16</sup> They asked Jesus, "Do you hear what these children are saying?"*

*"Yes," Jesus replied. "Haven't you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, 'You have taught children and infants to give you praise.'"*

Admittedly, I can get defensive and behave like the priests when my position is threatened, but Jesus never does that. He was only jealous for his Father's glory. He didn't have to explain himself, since he is perfect, but he did. He called out the priests, whose behavior dishonored God, and the children, who recognized and praised God.

We may never know everything that happened at the Temple that day, but one thing we can all agree on: Jesus was telling us to put aside distractions to focus on the most important thing—praising God and building a relationship with him.

### **Questions:**

What distracts you in your journey with Jesus?

What do you need to clear from your house to make room so that you can bring your focus back to Jesus?

### **Next Steps:**

Look at your calendar and set aside time each day to spend it with Jesus. This may mean cleaning out a space in your home so there are no distractions. If this is hard for you, consider taking a walk or starting with a small amount of time first.

### **Prayer:**

*My sweet Jesus, help me focus on you and you alone—the one thing. I want you to be my guiding light, the lamp unto my feet. Please show me the way I should go, for my life is in your hands. Help me to honor you every day, in my heart, my thoughts, my words, and my actions. To you be the glory, honor, and praise, forever, amen.*

### **Series Theme Verse:**

#### **Hebrews 4:15**

*This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.*

*This post was written by Lauri White, an Oregon attendee, and a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.*

## **Matthew 22 - Appearance - Matthew Reading Plan**

### **New Testament Reading Plan: Matthew 22**

After washing my hands, I glanced in the mirror of the ladies' restroom. A blue-eyed girl in a very business-like, black, knee-length dress with blue ruffles looked back. I hadn't even considered that I looked more like I was going to a business meeting than a casual dance party until one of my coworkers turned on the faucet next to me and said, "You're dressed better than us."

*Better*—like my sophisticated dress made me appear morally superior. That was certainly not my intent. I didn't realize that I hadn't dressed according to the party's standards.

Our appearance often reflects what we care most about—because we put more effort into what we wear for things that are important to us. This is true in the “Parable of the Great Feast” when the king confronted a man at his son’s wedding in improper clothing:

*<sup>11</sup> “But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn’t wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. <sup>12</sup> ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?’ But the man had no reply.”*

The king interpreted the man's appearance to be a sign of disrespect for himself, his kingdom, and the celebration of his son’s wedding. After all, being invited to a celebration with the king is a great honor; therefore, it is important how the guests show up.

This parable isn’t really about fashion, but our appearance definitely matters.

*<sup>14</sup> “For many are called, but few are chosen.”*

Louie Giglio said it best, “God's grace is an extension of his invitation into his Kingdom, while mandating requirements for entrance.” God invites us all into his Kingdom, but it matters how we show up. The *chosen* accept his invitation—according to his terms. They humbly embrace God’s grace and use their time to prepare for the moment he returns to this earth or calls them home.

Only Jesus’ sacrifice made it possible for us to accept God’s invitation. It is out of love and deference that we repent, turning away from our old ways and toward God. We are reborn in his image. To the outside world, our new appearance is an outward reflection of what our hearts hold most important. Through our words and actions we celebrate our One True King, and point others to him.

Have you accepted your invitation? Are you ready to meet The King?

**Questions:**

What is something you need to repent from?

How have you been showing up in God's Kingdom? Do your words and actions reflect what you hold most important?

## **Next Steps:**

Intentionally turn away from something that is not from God.

Celebrate the next time you see God working, whether in your own life or in the life of someone else.

Take your next step to prepare for the King. Maybe it's baptism, attending church in person, taking GrowthTrack, or tithing. Ask a trusted friend or Group member to help hold you accountable.

## **Prayer:**

*God, today I want to celebrate the ways that you are working in people's lives. You graciously allow me to be a part of your Kingdom, but that does not mean I keep showing up in the same way. I pray you would reveal the ways I have not been respecting you as King over my life. Help me turn away from things that are not from you, God. I want my words and actions to celebrate your Kingdom and point people to you. Amen.*

## **Series Theme Verse:**

### **Hebrews 4:15**

*This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.*

*This post was written by Becca Roberts, a West attendee, and a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.*

# **Matthew 23 - Becoming a Humble Servant - Matthew Reading Plan**

**April 9, 2025**

## **New Testament Reading Plan: Matthew 23**

Has there ever been a time when someone made you feel small or unworthy?

Maybe it was someone of a higher spiritual or worldly status. I have experienced this on several occasions, and sometimes, it made me feel hopeless or *less than*.

What does the Bible say about this issue? In Matthew 23:11-12, Jesus teaches us that the humble in this world will be first in the Kingdom of Heaven:

<sup>11</sup> *“The greatest among you must be a servant. <sup>12</sup> But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

Before Jesus made this statement, he had criticized the Pharisees, the highly respected teachers of Jewish law. In fact, Jesus spent much of Matthew 23 humbling the Pharisees for placing impossible and legalistic religious demands on the Jewish people, even when they were not following God’s law themselves. The Pharisees believed themselves to be superior to everyone else. They were the very definition of hypocrites!

Then again, who among us hasn’t judged others for their sin while refusing to acknowledge our own?

...Just like the Pharisees.

Sometimes, pride gets the best of us, and we forget that those who go through struggles and trials will be placed first in the Kingdom of Heaven. Humbling ourselves before others does not mean that we shouldn’t consider ourselves and fulfill our own needs. Rather, it means that we are to make serving others a priority instead of viewing them as less than.

We forget that we are all sinners who desperately need Jesus. All of us—those of high status, those who go to church every Sunday, those new to their faith, and those who are far from God.

### **Matthew 23:8**

*“...all of you are equal as brothers and sisters.”*

The sum of God’s law is love—loving God with everything we have and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). As Jesus followers, we are called to humble ourselves before others, letting go of our pride and showing everyone God’s love and grace.

As you go about your days, always remember that to love and serve others is to love and serve God (Matthew 25:40)... And those who humble themselves today will be exalted in God’s Kingdom forever.



**Questions:**

What are some ways that you can humble yourself before others?

How can you use your unique spiritual gifts to serve others?

**Next Steps:**

Participate in GrowthTrack to discover your spiritual gifts and find opportunities where you can use them to serve others.

This week, find a way that you can humble yourself and serve someone in need of God's love.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, thanks for sending Jesus into the world to save me from my sins and be the perfect example of how to live my life. Give me opportunities to serve others who need your love and to see them as you do. Remind me that when I humble myself, I am rewarded in your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Series Theme Verse:****Hebrews 4:15**

*This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.*

*This post was written by Isabelle Billnitzer, a Perrysburg attendee and regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# Matthew 24 - Watch and Be Ready! - Matthew Reading Plan

April 10, 2025

## New Testament Reading Plan: Matthew 24

Matthew 24 is called the “Olivet Discourse” or the “Little Apocalypse” because Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, using apocalyptic language as he prophesied to his disciples. He foretold of the destruction of the temple, signs of the end times, his return, perseverance, and spiritual readiness. It is one of the most important chapters in the Bible.

<sup>35</sup> *“Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.*

<sup>36</sup> *However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.”*

When we think about heaven and earth, they seem unchangeable and indestructible. However, God created them, and he can destroy them! Revelation 21:1 tells us that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. And in Matthew 24:35, we discover that the old heaven and earth will disappear, but the word of Jesus will remain. Jesus’ word is unchanging and permanent. This is one of his strongest claims that he is an eternal being.

Jesus was present when heaven and earth began, and he will be the ultimate authority and ruler over the restored creation. But he did not reveal when he would return. In fact, Jesus told his disciples that he didn’t even know—*“only the Father knows.”*

The timing of the end cannot be known or predicted by anyone, period! Just as Jesus is waiting for God to send him, he warns us to keep watch.

<sup>42</sup> *“So you, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know what day your Lord is coming. <sup>42</sup> Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. <sup>44</sup> You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.*

We don't know when Christ will return, and these verses remind us not to lose sight of the reality that judgement day could be any day. When the signs that are described in Matthew 24:15 and Matthew 24:29-30 appear, everyone will know the end is here.

As Christ followers, this isn't something we need to worry about. Instead, we should remain vigilant, introducing as many people as we can to Jesus, as we eagerly await his return to heal our broken world.

### **Questions:**

Why do you think God is the only one who knows when Jesus will return? Are you ready for Jesus to come back?

What is your EROI (Eternal Return On Investment)? Have you been a wise servant or a foolish one? What can you do to be wiser?

### **Next Steps:**

Check out [The End](#), a series CedarCreek published in August 2024. In [Week 3](#), there's a powerful message on Matthew 24 and the end of the world. If you've already seen this series, consider rewatching week 3.

Pray for direction if there are places in your life you can adjust to be more vigilant as you eagerly await Jesus' return.

### **Prayer:**

*Almighty Father, I admit that I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. Thank you for the promise of a new heaven and earth, one where I will see Jesus face-to-face. Keep my eyes focused on Jesus and his Word. Give me strength to resist the temptation to live like life on earth is all that there is and there is no eternity. Grant me the power of the Holy Spirit and let me be a wise servant and introduce others to Jesus. It's in his name that I pray, amen.*

### **Series Theme Verse:**

#### **Hebrews 4:15**

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.

*This post was written by Jenn Macke, a Findlay attendee, and a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.*

# Matthew 25 - Invest Your Talents - Matthew Reading Plan

April 11, 2025

## New Testament Reading Plan: Matthew 25

In the “Parable of the Three Servants,” the man returns from his trip and meets with his servants to see how they had used the money (called “talents” in Roman times) he had entrusted to each of them while he was gone. One servant took the money and buried it, but the other two took the money gifted to them and multiplied it. To each of the latter servants, the man praised, “Well done, my good and faithful servant (Matthew 25:20-23).”

Those are words I long to hear! After all, I am a people pleaser. I want someone to recognize that I’m doing my best. Unfortunately, as an adult, I don’t get to hear this often, and sometimes, I start to doubt my own worth. Maybe you can relate.

We didn’t have much growing up, and I watched what little my mom and dad had taken from them through bankruptcy. Did that mean we weren’t good people? Was my family wicked or lazy (Matthew 25:26)?

I really struggled with this for a long time. Then I came to realize that bad things happen to even the best of people and God doesn’t value the same things earthlings do.

I know that God loves me the way I am. If there is any change to be made in me, God is going to do it, because I don’t have the tenacity to do it through my own will. This is probably why I find today’s reading so difficult.

### **Matthew 25:29**

*“To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.”*

When I took GrowthTrack, I discovered my talents—the special abilities God gives each of us to help grow his Kingdom. Some people are blessed with artistic gifts, speech, teaching, leadership, money, and more. (No surprise, mine wasn’t money!)

## **1 Peter 4:10**

*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.*

God has uniquely wired us all with gifts and talents. There are limitless ways to discover, develop, and use them. Like the parable suggests, we are entrusted not to hide what we've been given, but rather, to wisely use our gifts and talents to grow God's Kingdom.

### **Questions:**

Are you using the gifts and talents God gave you to grow his Kingdom? Do you know what your spiritual gifts are?

### **Next Steps:**

Sign up for GrowthTrack or look back at your workbook and familiarize yourself with your spiritual gifts and talents. Get out and start investing in them!

### **Prayer:**

*Father, thank you for reminding me of my worth! Help me to find ways to use the talents and gifts you've given me for your good and not my own. When I want to be selfish, remind me of the sacrifice you made so I could have a relationship with you and the Father. Fill me with confidence and move me to conviction. In Jesus' name, amen!*

### **Series Theme Verse:**

## **Hebrews 4:15**

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.

*This post was written by Julie Estep, a Perrysburg attendee and regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# **Reflections - 4.12.2025 - Angry Jesus**

**April 12, 2025**

This week we continued with the series, Angry Jesus. Throughout this series, we have been looking at times when Jesus was angry and what he did with it. Jesus experienced all the human emotions we do, so exploring the stories

where he gets angry helps us better understand how he navigated anger without sinning.

### **Hebrews 4:15**

*This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.*

It says it right there: *he faced ALL of the same tests*. A correct view of Jesus can offer you a clear view of your life.

Hebrews 4:15 is the Angry Jesus series theme verse.

However, if you have not memorized this verse, write it down, say it aloud a few times, or do whatever works best for you to commit it to memory.

### **Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to walk among us and experience the full range of human emotions. I know you understand my weaknesses. I ask for your forgiveness today for the areas, or testings, I've faced that have hardened my heart, made me angry, and led me to sin. Help me remember that in all things, you provide the strength to overcome. Plant the truth of Your Word in my heart so it can guide me to reflect Jesus in my thoughts, actions, and relationships. In Jesus' name, I pray, amen.*

### **Series Theme Verse:**

### **Hebrews 4:15**

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.