

## UNIT TWO: LEARNING MISSION FROM MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

### WELCOME TO A NEW PART OF YOUR STUDY



With this unit we begin our investigation of the gospel writings. The faith community Matthew is addressing is being forced to face the challenge of faith in a new age. It is a post-resurrection faith community no longer grounded in the physical temple in Jerusalem. It is a faith community that was forced to flee Jerusalem during the warring days of the destruction of the temple. In their exile, this Jewish community finds itself ministering side by side with the very people they had been taught to distrust and to hate. The exile created major change and they find their faith community filled with the very people who not long ago would have been seen as “unclean” and as “sinners.” This radical change caused all kinds of questions to arise...

- Who or what is a Christian?
- How are disciples made, what do they do and who qualifies to be a disciple?
- Can we trust the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of non-Jews?
- Did Jesus want us to minister to ourselves and shore up the kingdom or has the death and resurrection of Jesus ushered in a new sense of kingdom?
- What does it mean to find Christ present in the lives of the “least of these?”

In Matthew, the church faced the challenge that many of us face today...who is included and who is excluded?

**Enjoy learning from Matthew, your mission instructor for this month.**

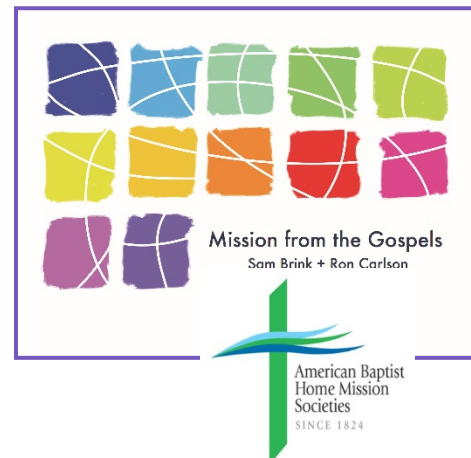
#### **Week One: Mission Among the Least of These – Learning Mission *from* Matthew 25:31-46**

Study a familiar but pivotal passage in the gospel that is often used to look at the future but which has major implications for mission in the present.

#### **Week Two: How do You Read the Gospel? – Learning Mission *from* Matthew 28:16-20**

*Sometimes* it helps to read the instructions first, but others prefer to look at the outcome before doing so. This week we will challenge you to look at the big missional picture of Matthew before looking at its parts. We call this “reading the gospel through missional lenses.”

**Weeks Three & Four: Who’s In and Who’s Out?** Wrestle with an age old question of the church and religious groups. “Who’s in and who’s out?” which leads us to the question, “Who do we include and exclude from the mission?”



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### Week One: Mission Among the Least of These -- Learning Mission *from* Matthew 25:31-46



Matthew 25:31-46 is a pivotal passage in this gospel. It stands between the accounts of Jesus' mission to the "lost sheep of Israel" and the accounts of his arrest, crucifixion and resurrection. It is a passage in which Jesus speaks of the future —*our future*— and of the mission of Jesus and his followers *after* the resurrection. Though the passage speaks of a future judgment, this passage summarizes the primary mission activities expected by Jesus of his true followers (disciples).



#### Begin class with prayer

Share one word or phrase that comes into your mind and heart as you start this study in Matthew's Gospel.



#### Let's investigate a Matthew 25 assignment

Invite someone to read Matthew 25:31-46.

Briefly share your reaction to this passage of scripture.

What in this passage upsets you?

What gives you comfort?

What challenges you to live your life in a certain way?

After you have shared your reaction to the passage, take a look at the list below, which includes many mission opportunities spoken of in Matthew 25. Look over the list and think of your neighboring community; then answer the questions below keeping your neighboring community in mind.

1. *I was hungry and you gave me food.*
2. *I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.*
3. *I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*
4. *I was naked and you gave me clothing.*
5. *I was sick and you took care of me.*
6. *I was in prison and you visited me.*

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### Discussion questions:

1. Identify the Matthew 25 type issues you have observed in your community.
2. Discuss with each other how you think your faith community is addressing the issues you identified in question number one.
3. Of the issues identified in your community, which one issue speaks most to your heart? Explain why.
4. As a group, which issue speaks most to your group's heart? Did you find a common interest from the list?
5. Described below is a missional activity called "The Found Money Exercise." Invite someone to read to the group the description below and then pick one of the heartfelt issues you have talked about and create a "Found Money" experience.

### FOUND MONEY EXERCISE

One day my family and I came out of a local restaurant and as we walked toward home, my oldest daughter saw a twenty dollar bill laying on the ground at the bus stop. We looked around but no one was to be found. We all assumed that someone waiting for the bus reached into their pocket, pulled out their bus pass or whatever and the twenty dollar bill fell out onto the ground and they did not know it. Our problem was we had no idea who it belonged to or how to let someone know that we found it. So we played a game and this is the experiment that I want to challenge you to do — "The Found Money Exercise." The question we asked each other was, "How can we best use this \$20 for the Kingdom of God?" We created and carried out a \$20 mission-outreach!

**Here is the challenge to your class:** First, find some money! (It's simple to do, just check what is in your billfold/purse/pockets.) Then, as a group, pull together your "found money" and determine how to use it for the Kingdom of God. (You may only find \$10, \$20, or even more.) But here's the catch! Whatever money you find you cannot put into some form of mission offering. The found money is to be used in a "hands on" mission outreach. Remember, whatever money you find, is the amount you have to carry out a mission project around the need your class identified in the Matthew 25 assignment.

Have fun finding money and planning to make a difference in your community.

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### **A prayerful reflection**

Close today's gathering by taking time to remember in prayer, "the least of these..." that you have thought of and talked about during the class today.



### **During the week**

Carry out your "Found Money" exercise. If the whole class is not involved then be prepared to report back to class what you discovered when doing the exercise.

### **Preparing for next week**

If you have not had a chance to finish reading the Gospel according to Matthew, please try to finish it during the week.

Read over next week's lesson.

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### Week Two: How do You Read the Gospel? -- Learning from Matthew 28:16-20



#### Welcome Back!

How do you read a set of instructions? Sometimes it helps to read the instructions first, but others prefer to look at the outcome before doing so. This week we will challenge you to look at the big missional picture of Matthew before looking at its parts. We call this “reading the gospel through missional lenses.”



#### Begin class with prayer

Begin by sharing with the group the experience of the “found money” exercise:

- What did you learn about yourself by doing the exercise?
- Was it fun? Why or why not?
- How do you think this exercise responds to the issue of “not having any money in the budget for a new mission outreach?”

As a prayer, give God thanks for “found” money and remember those who God had placed on your heart for the found money exercise.



#### Let's investigate

Have some fun as a class by taking three surveys using the survey questions below: How Do You Read a Book? How Do You Read an Instruction Sheet? How Do You Read the Gospels? Have a bit of fun as a group investigating various ways your group members tend to do their reading.

#### Class survey A: How do you read a book?

- If you read a book or magazine from beginning to end, raise your hand.
- If you begin reading a book from the front but then, after a while, go to the end to see how it ends, raise your hand.
- If you usually start at the end of a book to see how it ends before reading the beginning first, raise your hand.

Discuss the advantages/disadvantages of the way you read a book.

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### Class Survey B: How do you read an instruction manual?

If you make a purchase that comes with the warning, “*Some assembly required!*” how do you begin?

- If you start assembling before reading instructions, raise your hand.
- If you look at the picture of the finished product, then start assembly without reading the instructions, raise your hand.
- If you read the instructions before beginning to assemble the item, raise your hand.

Discuss the advantages/disadvantages of the way you read an instruction manual.

### Class Survey C: How do you read the Gospels?

- Raise your hand if you just wait for the movie to come out!
- Raise your hand if you have read all four gospels in their entirety.
- Raise your hand if you primarily or only read the gospels at Christmas and Easter.
- Do you have a favorite gospel? If so, which one?



### Let's investigate Matthew by beginning at the end of Matthew!

Have someone from the class read Matthew 28:16-20 aloud. After hearing the passage read, answer the following questions:

1. If you were to view Matthew 28:16-20 as a picture of the end product of Matthew's instruction manual, what might mission look like in a faith community?
2. Matthew makes this observation about the followers of Jesus: “...they worship him; but some doubted...” How do you respond to this observation? Do find it confusing? Do you think “worship” and “doubt” can exist together?
3. What do you think Matthew means by quoting Jesus' instruction to “...make disciples of all nations...”? Is this strictly about “foreign missions?” Or, does this command apply to the faith community's own setting? Or both?
4. Jesus tells his followers, then as well as now, “...remember I am with you always...” What does that mean for you? How would you explain to someone that Jesus is always with us?

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### READING MATTHEW THROUGH THE LENS OF MISSION

If you read Matthew's Gospel through the lens of mission, you are reading this Gospel as an instruction manual. Unlike some instruction manuals, however, there are no clear diagrams for a step-by-step procedure. There are, however, a number of picture stories which help illustrate the nature of the mission and what God's mission might look like. There are also some "big picture" overviews of God's mission that help the reader discover the work of God and how to participate in God's mission.

Matthew's Gospel, like an instruction manual, is a book that can be read from the beginning to the end or from the end first and then going to the beginning. Either way you read Matthew, one thing is clear — Matthew's ending is intended to be the primary reference point for understanding the contents of the gospel's story. The ending shows us a big picture of the intended outcome of learning mission from Matthew's Gospel!



#### Prayerful reflection

Celebrate the fact that Jesus is always with us and that we carry this hope with us as we seek to fulfill God's mission to all nations. Perhaps take a moment of silence and listen for how God is calling you to be part of the mission and lift your call up to God by sharing your thoughts with your group.



#### During the week

Perhaps you want to continue to do "found money" missions. Is there another group in the congregation that you can share the idea with and help them reach out into the community?

The "found money" exercise can also become a whole faith community exercise of a church or organization. You could approach the faith community leaders and suggest that they pick a meeting time to do the "found money" exercise among those present. After receiving the offering of "found money," invite anyone who is interested in helping decide how to use the money in your community to gather after the meeting. You could help them by leading a discussion around what community needs God has placed on their hearts. Help the group pick a project and become God's servants in the community. Be sure to provide an opportunity for the group to report back to the larger gathering what everyone decided to do with the "found money" and to share what experiences they had in being Christ's presence in the community. Find a way to celebrate the mission you shared with the larger faith community.

#### Preparing for next week

Read through the lesson for next week on Who's In and Who's Out?

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### Week Three: Who's In and Who's Out? Part One



#### Giving Thought to Inclusion

Throughout church history, Christians have struggled with questions of inclusion and exclusion in God's mission. Matthew's gospel indicates that the question of who is in and who is out was a concern in the life and ministry of Jesus and the disciples. In fact, Matthew's own faith community seems to be struggling with questions of inclusion and exclusion of people who are similar and dissimilar from themselves.

As we stated in the beginning of this unit, the faith community Matthew is addressing is a community forced to face the challenge of faith in a new age. It is now a post-resurrection faith community that is no longer grounded in the temple in Jerusalem. Having been forced to flee Jerusalem during the warring days of the destruction of the temple, this new faith community finds itself ministering side by side with the very people they had been taught to distrust and exclude from their life of faith! Now they find their faith community filled with the very people who not long ago would have been seen as "unclean" and as "sinners"! Out of this new reality all kinds of questions arise such as:

- Who or what is a Christian?
- How are disciples made and what do disciples do? Who qualifies to be one?
- Can we trust the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of a non-Jew?
- Did Jesus want us to minister to ourselves and shore up the kingdom or has the death and resurrection of Jesus ushered in a new sense of kingdom?
- What does it mean to find Christ present in the lives of the "least of these?"

Today's study of Matthew is intended to help us see some of the groups the early faith community had difficulty including.



#### Begin class with prayer

You may wish to begin your class session with a prayerful group activity that goes something like this...

Following are a number of incomplete sentences about your experiences since the last time we met. Have someone read each of the incomplete sentences one at a time. After each incomplete sentence is read, allow time for group members to complete the

sentence from their own life experiences.

- I encountered God this past week when...
- I became aware of "found money" for mission this past week when...
- I saw or responded to a mission opportunity this past week when...



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### Class Question

Today and in our next lesson we talk about who's in and who's out – the issue of inclusion/exclusion. Most likely all of us, as we have grown up, have had experiences of being included or excluded from a group or activity. Share an experience when you were either included in or excluded from a group. Be sure to share how the experience made you feel then and what you think of it now.

### Alternate question

If time permits, discuss this question: Do you think our faith community shows a preference to whom it includes and whom it excludes from its life?



### Investigating Matthew's thoughts on inclusion/exclusion

One of the dangers in reading the gospels in a piecemeal fashion is the danger of drawing conclusions without viewing the big picture of what each gospel writer is intending to teach his faith community. Today's study is intended to be an exercise that helps us view three passages from Matthew's gospel that were intended to help move a faith community toward becoming more inclusive of those whom they may have previously excluded.

Divide your group into three "investigation teams." (If your class is small it may be done as a total group exercise.) Each team will be assigned a passage from Matthew's gospel. Your team's task will be to read your assigned passage **as if it were the only piece of mission instructions that you have**. After you read your assigned passage, answer the questions that go with it.

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### CONSIDER THESE TEXTS

#### Investigation Team 1

##### The Lost Household of Israel

Read Matthew 10:5-15, the account of Jesus sending the twelve disciples on their first mission. In a couple of sentences, answer each of the following questions about this text.

1. What is the mission?
2. Who is engaged in the mission?
3. Who are the recipients of the mission?

*These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 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. You received without payment, give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff, for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment for that town.*

#### Investigation Team 2

##### The On-looking Gentile Outsiders

Read Matthew 15:21-28, "The Canaanite Woman." In a couple of sentences, answer each of the following questions about this text.

1. Who does Jesus say his mission is to?
2. In spite of the answer above, who are/is the recipient(s) of the mission in this story?
3. What does this say about mission?

*Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying "Lord help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dog's eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.*

#### Investigation Team 3

##### The Sheep, Goats and Least of These

Read Matthew 25:31-46, "The Judgment of the Nations." In a couple of sentences, answer each of the following questions about this text.

1. What is the mission?
2. Who is/are engaged in the mission?
3. Who is/are the recipient(s) of the mission?

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was in prison and you visited me.'*

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### When your investigation teams reconvene

Debrief your teams' investigations of the three passages by reporting their findings and discussing what they defined as "mission" from their passage. Each team should select a spokesperson.

After the report-out time, discuss the following questions as a group:

- Does Matthew's Gospel show a progression of inclusion of people-groups from a smaller circle of inclusion in God's mission to a larger circle of inclusion in mission? If so, what progression do you notice?
- In your reading of the three passages, how do you explain the seeming exclusiveness in the Matthew 10:5-15 and Matthew 15:21-28 passages as compared to Matthew 25:31-46?
- What might we learn about inclusion and exclusion in our faith community from this progression?



### Prayerful reflection

Close your time together today by giving thanks to God for a love that welcomes all people and encourage each other to be witnesses to inclusion.



### During the week

So much of what we learn from the gospels is that Jesus stressed relationships. Jesus was not a "drive-by" evangelist. He took time, even if it was brief, to interact with people. How much time do you spend interacting with people you do not know? How do you think we will help build up the kingdom if we do not interact with people we do not know? Here is an easy way to begin building a new relationship:

Think of someone you encounter on a weekly if not daily basis – a clerk at the grocery store; the person behind the counter at the gas station; your coffee barista; a bank teller; the crossing guard at your child's school. These are just a few examples of people you might encounter on a regular basis. This week you are asked to practice a "**free attention giveaway.**" It is simple but it is a beginning to building a new relationship with someone you do not know.

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“Free attention giveaway” is done this way: Pick a person you encounter on a regular basis. When you encounter them this week, simply ask them a simple question like: “How are you today?” or make note of something you observed them doing well and comment on it. And then you simply listen – really listen. You pay attention to what they say and respond. When you walk away from the encounter, remember the person in silent prayer. You have now begun to form a relationship. Each time you encounter this person, continue to build on this beginning.

The “free attention giveaway” exercise in this week’s session is an adaptation of an everyday evangelism program called Ordinary Attempts. For additional examples of relationship building, go to: [www.churchleaders.com/outreach.missions-how-tos/139560-ordinary-attempts.html](http://www.churchleaders.com/outreach.missions-how-tos/139560-ordinary-attempts.html)

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### Unit Two, Week Four: Who's In and Who's Out? Part 2



This week we return to the theme that is so important to Matthew's community – who's in and who's out? This week we look at the issue of inclusion/exclusion through a tool called a case study. The case study is based on a very common experience for a growing number of our American faith communities. While you may read this case study and think you know the faith community we are talking about, you do not. It is made from a composite of real themes that we have encountered in a variety of faith communities. The study is an example of the complicated nature of the inclusion/exclusion discussion. Clearly a case of "what would Jesus do?"



#### **Begin class with prayer**

Share your "free attention giveaway" stories and remember the people you met this week in prayer.



#### **It Seemed Like an Answer to Prayer: A Case Study on Inclusion/Exclusion**

Ask for a volunteer to read to the class the case study from today's lesson. After listening to the case study, the class will discuss the "Case Study Interaction Questions" found after the case study below.

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### IT SEEMED LIKE AN ANSWER TO PRAYER

#### A Case Study in Inclusion/Exclusion

It seemed, at first, an answer to their prayers. The church council and a number of the long-time members of Urban Baptist Church had been watching their congregation steadily decline over the past decade. They were becoming concerned about UBC's future:

"How will we meet budget?

Where's the youth?

Most of our members are retired. Who will fill our slate of officers?

Not many children in Sunday School anymore!"

Some members reminisced about better days for UBC and wondered out loud if they could go back to the future;

"Remember when we had fifty kids in our youth group! Maybe we could find a youth pastor like Pastor Dan was.

Our Vacation Bible School and Sunday school were filled to capacity. Maybe we're not using the right curriculum.

There were Sundays when we had to put up extra seats in the back of the sanctuary just to accommodate everyone in worship. It would be nice to see the parking lot and pews filled again. Maybe we need a better praise band, like Mega-Methodist Church has."

Then, one Sunday a year ago, the members of Urban Baptist Church, witnessed what some called a miracle! At least *then* they labeled it such. Members came to church and discovered several unfamiliar vehicles in the parking lot. They had strange looking bumper stickers, with some kind of foreign flag or symbol on them. When UBC members entered the church sanctuary they noticed about ten or fifteen unfamiliar people, some of whom were wearing foreign looking attire. Deacon Smith complained that one visiting family was sitting in his favorite pew; "But," he quipped, "at least there are more people in our pews this Sunday than last!"

Happy to see new faces, the more gregarious members of Urban Baptist introduced themselves and greeted these visitors. They felt a little awkward doing so, since drop-in visitors had become rare over the past decade. And they felt even more awkward when they discovered that the English speaking skills of these visitors were limited.

"We are refugees," said one spokesman for the group, "from Burma. Some are Baptist, just like you."

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"Wonderful!" UBC members replied. "We are so glad you came. We would love to see you again. Come again and bring your friends and family!"

And so they did! One year later Urban Baptist Church's Sunday school rooms were filled with children, pre-school on up! And though they didn't have a youth program, middle school and high school age youth once again filled a front section of the sanctuary during worship. On any given Sunday, cars and vans, most bearing the same bumper stickers, filled previously empty parking spaces. And Deacon Smith wasn't the only long-term member who had been displaced from his favorite pew! In fact, nearly one half of the sanctuary space was filled with these colorfully dressed people.

That was a little over a year ago. And indeed, it did seem like an answer to prayer... at first. But now some long-term members were heard saying, "We should have been more careful what we prayed for! Whether we like it or not, we may have gotten just what we asked for!"

That wasn't all that was verbalized and complained about in committee and board meetings, at informal gatherings around coffee, or on the telephone during the week. In fact some Urban Baptist Church members didn't show up on Sunday anymore. And it was rumored that they were attending Mega-Methodist Church where there were "more of their own kind of people."

Deacon Smith complained; "Why do we still have to read the scripture in two languages on Sunday! And this idea of having an interpreter for Pastor Jill's sermons makes them twice as long! You would think they should understand English by now!"

"If you think that's bad, you should try teaching Sunday school!" volunteered someone else. "Those kids are climbing over everything! And most of them can't read English, much less listen to a lesson! Some of our own families have quit bringing their grandchildren to Sunday school. There's just too many of them!"

"It's getting bad when you come here and can't even have a decent Bible study or a worshipful experience anymore."

"Not only that! Our budget has been stressed to the max! Every last penny has been drained from our Helping Hand fund! There's no food left in the pantry, and almost everything we have been collecting for the big garage sale is gone! Given away! And that's our big World Missions Day fundraising event! I don't think we can even have one this year!"

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"Pastor Jill just needs to understand that we can't be expected to feed and clothe that many people!"

"Feed and clothe!" someone was heard to say. "Now they're asking for help in housing also! Guess some families have been asked to leave their apartments because they have too many children for two bedrooms."

"There's no way we are going to get into real estate! Can't they find some shelter? This is getting out of control! Isn't there someone who can help them?"

"What about the Crawford family? They seem friendly enough with these people. Didn't Mrs. Crawford say she was willing to head up a church refugee housing committee?"

"She can't."

"Why not?"

"She's not a member. Constitution won't allow it! In fact, you have to be a member in good standing for two years before you can either lead or serve on a board or committee."

"Why isn't she a member?"

"I don't think she's a Christian, even. In fact, I think she once said she was Buddhist or New Age or something like that."

"Well, I hate to tell you this," quipped a distant relative of Deacon Smith, "but we aren't making budget! And some of our giving units have left and others are talking about leaving soon unless something changes. This just isn't our church anymore."



### CASE STUDY INTERACTION QUESTIONS

As a group answer and discuss the following:

1. What are you feeling after hearing this case study?
2. If this happened in your congregation, how do you think people would respond?
3. What challenges did Urban Baptist Church face before and after "their answer to prayer?"
4. Considering the challenges you have identified in this case study, how might you proceed as a member of Urban Baptist Church
5. If you have an immigrant or refugee group in your congregation, what challenges are you facing?
6. What insights from your study of Matthew's gospel might help Urban Baptist Church?



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### Prayerful reflection

This session concludes our study of Matthew's Gospel. Take a moment to reflect over the past four sessions. Share with the group one key or primary lesson you have learned about God's mission from your study.



### During the week

Next week you begin your study of the Gospel According to Mark. Find time this week to read Mark's Gospel entirely in one sitting. You will need about 45 minutes to do so. You might find it helpful to make a list of missional insights that you gain from your reading.

As you go through your week, continue to build the relationship(s) that you started forming last week with people you come into contact with on a regular basis. Mission and kingdom work is about building relationships.

