

They Will Let Just About Anyone In Here

A devotional journey through Matthew 9:9-26, exploring the mercy of Jesus Christ who calls the unlikely, heals the suffering, and welcomes all to his table. Each day offers a key verse, a short devotional reflection, questions for personal study, and a closing prayer. This study is designed for individual or small group use and is rooted in the conviction that God's name is mercy.



The Unlikely Call

KEY VERSE

"As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax collection station. And he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him." — Matthew 9:9

Devotional

There is no candidate less likely than Matthew. He was a tax collector, which in first-century Judea meant he was a traitor to his own people, a collaborator with the Roman Empire, and someone who routinely enriched himself at the expense of his neighbors. If you were drawing up a guest list for the kingdom of God, Matthew would not have made the cut. Not by a long shot.

And yet Jesus walks past the tax booth, looks at Matthew, and says two words: "Follow me." There is no qualifying exam. No prerequisite spiritual maturity. No promise demanded that Matthew will get his life in order first. Jesus simply calls, and Matthew simply follows. The call comes before any transformation is visible.

This is how grace works. It does not wait for us to become worthy. It does not hold off until we have proven ourselves. It arrives first, before we are ready, before we are cleaned up, before we have figured out all our doubts. The call of Jesus to Matthew is the same call that comes to each of us: not because we have earned it, but because Jesus desires mercy over sacrifice. You do not have to qualify. You simply have to get up and follow.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever felt unqualified or unworthy to follow Jesus? What made you feel that way?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus called Matthew before any change in Matthew's life was visible?
3. Is there an area of your life where you are waiting to "get it together" before fully trusting God? What would it look like to follow anyway?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that your call arrives before our worthiness does. You do not wait for us to clean ourselves up before you invite us to follow. Help us to rise from wherever we are sitting today and to walk with you, trusting that your grace is enough. When we feel disqualified, remind us of Matthew. When we feel too far gone, remind us that you seek sinners. We are yours. Amen.

Mercy, Not Sacrifice

KEY VERSE

"When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' But when he heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" — Matthew 9:11-13

Devotional

The Pharisees were deeply religious, highly disciplined, and committed to the law of God. They had built an entire system for determining who was clean and who was unclean, who belonged and who did not. And from inside that system, the dinner party at Matthew's house looked like a scandal. Sinners at the table. Wrong people in the room.

But Jesus answers their complaint with a startling word from the prophet Hosea: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." He is not dismissing the importance of faithfulness. He is exposing a pattern that appears throughout Scripture and throughout human history: the tendency to protect the boundaries of religion rather than extend the reach of love. The Pharisees had become experts at sacrifice. They knew the rules. Jesus desired something else entirely.

Mercy is not soft or passive. Mercy moves toward people who cannot repay it. Mercy sits at tables that respectable people avoid. Mercy asks not "Does this person belong?" but "What does this person need?" When we honestly examine our own hearts, we can find the Pharisee there too, quietly wondering whether certain people belong at the table. The invitation of Jesus is to go and learn what mercy means, not just as an idea, but as a practice we carry into every room we enter.

Reflection Questions

1. Where in your life do you find it easiest to judge who belongs and who does not? What drives that judgment?
2. How does Jesus' definition of mercy challenge the way you think about your faith community?
3. What is one practical way you can practice mercy this week toward someone you might otherwise avoid?

Prayer

Merciful God, forgive us for the times we have been more concerned with who does not belong than with how we might love those standing in front of us. Teach us the mercy of Jesus, the kind that moves toward the sick, the struggling, and the excluded. Help us to go and learn what mercy means, not only in our minds but in our hands and feet. Make us people who welcome rather than gatekeep. Amen.

Holy Interruptions

KEY VERSE

"Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak. For she was saying to herself, 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.'" — Matthew 9:20-21

Devotional

Jesus is already on his way somewhere urgent. A leader of the synagogue has fallen at his feet and begged him to come quickly. His daughter has died. This is a pressing emergency. And yet, on the road to that emergency, something unexpected happens. A woman who has suffered for twelve years edges through the crowd and reaches for the fringe of his cloak.

Twelve years is a long time to suffer. Twelve years is long enough to stop hoping. By the laws of her day, this woman was ceremonially unclean, which meant she had been living in isolation, cut off from the community, from worship, from the ordinary rhythms of belonging. She does not ask permission. She does not make a speech. She simply reaches, with whatever thin thread of faith she has left.

And Jesus stops. He turns. In the middle of what seemed like a more important errand, he pauses for this woman. He does not treat her as an interruption to his ministry. She is his ministry. This is what mercy looks like in real time. It is present to the person in front of it, even when other things are pressing. The holy interruptions in our own lives, the unexpected needs that break into our carefully planned days, are often the very places where Jesus is already at work, inviting us to stop and pay attention.

Reflection Questions

1. Think of a time when you were interrupted by someone else's need. How did you respond? How do you wish you had responded?
2. What does it tell you about Jesus that he noticed a single suffering woman in the middle of a pressing crowd?
3. Who in your life right now might be reaching out quietly, hoping to be noticed? How might you turn toward them this week?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you notice the ones the world overlooks. Give us eyes to see the holy interruptions in our daily lives as invitations rather than inconveniences. Help us to be present to the people in front of us with the same attentive mercy you showed to the woman in the crowd. May we not be so busy going somewhere that we miss the person who is reaching for grace. Amen.

Daughter

KEY VERSE

"Jesus turned, and seeing her, he said, 'Take heart, daughter. Your faith has made you well.' And the woman was made well from that moment." —
Matthew 9:22

Devotional

Pay close attention to the word Jesus uses. He does not call her "woman." He does not call her "sick one" or "unclean one" or "stranger." He calls her daughter. Before he heals her body, he restores her identity. Before he addresses the physical wound, he speaks to the deeper wound: the isolation, the shame, the twelve years of being told she did not belong.

In a single word, Jesus undoes what years of suffering and exclusion had done. Daughter. It is a word of belonging. It is a word of family. It is a word that says: you are not an outsider here. You are not a problem to be managed. You are not defined by your condition or your years of suffering. You are mine, and you belong.

This is the character of the God we worship. Before anything else is restored, God restores identity. In Holy Baptism, before we have done anything to earn it, we are named and claimed. We are called beloved and child of God. When Jesus looks at the broken, the suffering, and the excluded, he does not see their condition first. He sees a person who belongs to him. And what he speaks over them is not a diagnosis but a name. Whatever you have carried, whatever has left you feeling like an outsider, hear the word Jesus speaks over you today: Take heart. You are his daughter. You are his son. You belong.

Reflection Questions

1. What labels has the world placed on you that have made you feel like you do not belong? How does it feel to hear Jesus call you daughter or son instead?
2. Why do you think Jesus restored the woman's identity before healing her body? What does this say about what God values?
3. Is there someone in your life who needs to be called by their true name rather than their wound or failure? How might you reflect that mercy toward them?

Prayer

Gracious God, you know the names others have called us and the names we have called ourselves. You know how shame and suffering can strip away our sense of belonging. Speak your word over us today. Before we are healed, before we are restored, before we have done anything to earn it, remind us that we are yours. Call us daughter. Call us son. Help us to take heart and live from that identity rather than from our wounds. Amen.

A Place at the Table

KEY VERSE

"But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread through all of that district." — Matthew 9:25

Devotional

The mourners laughed at Jesus. Death had already won, as far as they were concerned. The funeral had effectively begun. But Jesus put the crowd outside, entered the room, took the girl by the hand, and she rose. The one everyone had written off was lifted up. The report spread through the entire district.

This is where the whole passage lands. Week after week, Jesus walks into rooms full of what seem like all the wrong people. He sits at tables where no one thinks he should be. He calls tax collectors, heals bleeding women, and raises little girls from the dead. In every single story, notice who acts first: Jesus. Matthew does not achieve a spiritual awakening on his own. The bleeding woman reaches out in faith, but it is Jesus who turns to her and speaks. The dead girl contributes nothing to her own resurrection. She simply receives a power that death cannot hold back.

And this is the good news that shapes every Sunday gathering. Christ still does this. Week after week, he forgives sinners, heals wounds, comforts the grieving, and raises the dead to new life through Holy Baptism and the Word. Week after week, he takes bread in his hands and feeds his people at this table. The next time you wonder whether you belong in the room, remember: Jesus still sits with tax collectors and sinners. He still makes a place for all the wrong people. And that means there is a place for you. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Questions

1. In all three stories in Matthew 9, Jesus acts first. How does this change the way you think about your own faith and effort?
2. When have you felt like one of the "wrong people" in a room? How does this passage speak to that feeling?
3. As you close this five-day study, what is one truth about God's mercy that you want to carry with you into your week?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that your mercy always moves first. Thank you that you do not wait for us to be worthy, cleaned up, or certain before you call us, heal us, and raise us. As we go from this study, send us out as people of mercy, those who extend to others the same welcome we have received. May we never be too proud to sit with sinners, knowing that is exactly where you are. Amen.