

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for “the big question.”*

Read Matthew 14:12-21 aloud.

1. What had happened in verse 12?

How do you think Jesus felt? Why would this have been difficult for him? *John was a relative and co-worker, probably one of the few people who understood Jesus and his mission.*

Why do you think Jesus took a boat ride by himself? *Handwritten Greek did not have a bold feature, so authors would emphasize a point by repetition. What is Matthew saying by using the words withdrew... privately... solitary?*

Where do you go when you need to be alone with God?

2. How did Jesus respond when the crowds interrupted his solitude?

How does this illustrate Jim’s point from the sermon – dying on the cross matched the self-sacrificing way he lived?

How would you have responded if your solitude was interrupted?

3. When the apostles realized they were unable to feed the crowd, what did they propose to do (15)?

How did Jesus respond?

What was Jesus teaching the apostles about God and the way he provides? *Where God guides, God provides.*

How might this apply to our lives? *Even when our problems feel too big, God gives us the strength to survive and even thrive. Especially true when we put him first.*

4. Two weeks from today (August 5), the elders will ask each household to return a card indicating our commitment to help with the Last Mile of the Journey of Faith.

How have you been involved in the Journey of Faith campaign so far?

Hand out Journey of Faith commitment cards. What questions do you have about this card? *On Freedom Sunday, August 5, the offering will go toward Journey of Faith, and everyone will be asked to return a commitment card stating what they intend to give by January 13.*

What questions do you have about the Journey of Faith campaign? *Answer questions with the enclosed materials. If you get stumped, let me know and we’ll answer it during next week’s LG.*

What ideas from Matthew 14 guide us as we decide about our commitment?

- *Like a lot of us, Jesus wanted to be left alone. But when presented with a need he helped anyway.*
- *God has given us the resources to carry out his will in our lives. The question is whether we will do our part.*
- *When you give your best to God, you get back more than you put in. “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*
- *Even if our church does not give \$2M in the next six months, God will continue to provide for us, to work on us, and to work through us. He always gives us what is right.*

† **The big question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It’s okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

How has the Journey of Faith campaign affected you? What does that tell you about your spiritual life?

III. Other resources

The point – When God puts a need in front of you, give it your best effort to serve unselfishly. Be like Jesus.

Prayer ideas

Pray for God to guide everyone's heart as we decide about our commitment to Journey of Faith.

Ask God to work through the Journey of Faith to show us how we could grow to be more like Jesus.

Thank God for Jesus' self-emptying and the blessings we enjoy as a result.

Ask God to guide our congregation through the process of discerning whom he has prepared to preach at College Hills.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Read Matthew 14:12-14 aloud.

What had happened in verse 12?

Why do you think Jesus took a boat ride by himself?

How did Jesus respond when the crowds interrupted his solitude?

What is a job you might like to do someday? Adults can answer too.

What are some ways this job might involve putting others first?

How is Jesus a good example of putting others first?

Who are some people who serve us?



July 22, 2007

LIFE Group Guide

Matthew 14 – Unselfish living

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme: Emptying ourselves like Jesus did.

“Jesus lived the way he died and he died the way he lived.” Jim Woodroof

This week's LG guide considers an example of Jesus emptying himself. It would have been more convenient to ignore the crowds or send them away hungry. Instead, he chose to help with the challenges.

Our elders have presented us with a challenge - the debt at College Hills - and that is part of this study guide. Like the problems Jesus faced in Matthew 14, it is not convenient to face, but it is important.

I hope you will feel comfortable leading this discussion. Members have mixed feelings about debt reduction. For me, once it became a priority of the elders, it became a priority for me. Because I believe God called them and works through them, I will give sacrificially over the next few months. That's how it works in a family.

What better place to discuss our feelings than a LIFE group? Let people talk and pray, and then assure them that we are going to love each other, whatever the financial situation.

Leadership tip: Let's go to lunch! I love to visit with LIFE group leaders to learn about what's working and not working. It increases my effectiveness and yours, plus it is fun.

I. Relate *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone's spiritual pulse, and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

- ❖ Where do you go when you need to be alone with God?
- ❖ If our church had an extra \$100,000, how would you like to see the leaders use it?
- ❖ What is something you appreciate about our church?

What is the financial picture of the congregation?

- College Hills is in great shape! God has blessed us with wonderful facilities, effective ministries, and generous members who always respond to needs.
- In 2006, the regular offering was \$1.1 million, and total giving was over \$1.6 million.
- In 2007, the congregation has responded well to a challenging weekly budget of \$25,525. Through the first six months of the year, we were averaging nearly \$25,000 per week, putting us on track for regular offering of more than \$1.2 million.

What is the status of our loan?

- We owe nearly \$2 million on our loan.
- In 2006 interest cost us \$160,000. Imagine what could have happened if that money went to ministry!
- The bank has given us a great interest rate, but it is adjustable. Our rate goes up when the prime rate goes up.
- In January 2008 a \$450,000 payment will be due.
- For the last five years (2003-2007), proceeds from the College Street property enabled us to pay the loan each January. We received the last income from that sale in 2007, so it will be a challenge to make the 2008 payment. The leaders do not want to sacrifice ministries in order to pay the note.
- Final payment on the loan is due in May 2009.

How did we get to this point?

- Before we broke ground in 1998, our church family generously paid off 40 acres of land at a cost of \$386,000.
- From 1998-2006, members gave nearly \$5 million to the Journey of Faith campaign.
- God blessed us with the sale of the College Street property for \$2,150,000.

What will it take to pay off the debt?

- We can pay off the note if each household will give \$3300.
- Not everybody can give \$3300 because they are on limited incomes. Several people will need to give significantly larger gifts.
- If everybody gives sacrificially, we can pay off the note. Not equal amounts, but equal sacrifices (II Corinthians 8:1-7).

About Journey of Faith – the Last Mile

- Lee Gessner, Ronnie Doak, and Kay Dudley have given countless hours to lead this effort.
- We are trying to make this a short-term commitment rather than dragging it out for years. We would like everyone to complete their commitment by January 13, 2008, but we would accept donations after that date.
- There have been several great events for Journey of Faith this summer – Fund Run, Work Day, Parents' Night Out, Yard Sale and Auction. Hundreds of people, including Hispanic children who attend Bible class at College Hills, have participated.
- The next event will be Freedom Sunday on August 5.

What will happen on Freedom Sunday, August 5?

- On Freedom Sunday, August 5, the offering will go toward Journey of Faith.
- Along with their offering, each household will be asked to return a commitment card stating what they intend to give by January 13, 2008. Even if you have already given, please return a card.
- Journey of Faith commitments should be in addition to your regular offering.
- At the end of the service, we will announce how much was collected through special events, how much was given that day, and how much has been committed.

Alternative ways to give?

Talk to Ronnie Doak or Lee Gessner about donating appreciated assets like stock, real estate, or personal property.

Other questions that might be asked.

1. Couldn't we just finance the balance of the loan?

Yes, we could. Assuming we finance \$1.5 million over 10 years, it would cost us about \$209,000 a year in interest and principle. Our church could make such a mortgage payment, but it would mean \$200,000 less in ministry each year. With our current arrangement, ministries have to limit their plans due to lack of funds.

2. What would the extra money be used for?

Nothing has been decided, but there are several exciting possibilities...

Expanding current ministries

Adult classrooms or fellowship space

Ball fields

Picnic pavilion

Transportation – our buses are aging and not reliable for long trips

Additional ministers (we're adding a new salary when new preacher arrives, plus church growth experts would say a 1000-member church should have 7 full-time ministers – 1 minister per 150 attendees)

Additional missionaries

Increased outreach to Hispanic community

Increased community service – Habitat, school store, etc.

Greater support for good works like Healing Hands

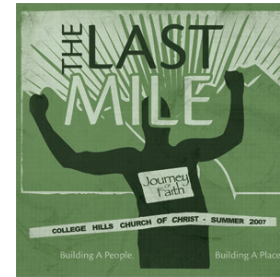
Assist Hearthside and its residents

Re-seal the parking lot – Costs approximately \$35,000 and needs to be done

3. What is John Grant's favorite candy?

M & M's, Heath, Crunch – most anything chocolate, but no coconuts, please.

My birthday is March 6, but don't wait until then. I'll accept candy any day of the year!



Information about Journey of Faith – the Last Mile

For LIFE group leaders

by John Grant, July 2007¹

¹ Disclaimer – This is my understanding of the situation, and I'm probably off on a point or two. For exact figures, contact Lee Gessner or Wendy Beck.