

Matthew 25 Bible Study (Participant Handout)

1. Introduction

The Matthew 25 vision calls for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) — from members to mid councils---to be actively engaged in their communities by working toward:

- building congregational vitality
- dismantling structural racism
- eradicating systemic poverty

To be a Matthew 25 church, mid council or agency simply means that you are committed to pouring love, energy and action into one or more of these three focuses. These urgent tasks are a direct response to the good news of Jesus and a faithful expression of what it means to be Christ's disciples in this time and place. The Matthew 25 vision grew out of the work of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) and the 223rd General Assembly (2018) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It represents a call to congregations, presbyteries, synods and other entities of the denomination to strengthen the collective work and witness of the PC(USA) to the gospel of Jesus Christ...

May the life of the resurrected Jesus guide us, may the presence of the Holy Spirit inspire us, and may the strong word of God direct us as the Matthew 25 vision guides us in actively engaging our world for the sake of the gospel....For more information, go to pcusa.org/matthew25.

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The Matthew 25 vision of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) focuses on building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty. Go to pcusa.org/matthew25 for more information about these three missional priorities for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

2. Setting Matthew 25 in the context of the Gospel of Matthew

Five discourses. The Gospel of Matthew is structured around five major discourses. These are long passages of Jesus' teaching. These five discourses echo the first five books of the Bible, called the Torah. There is some disagreement about exactly where some of the five begin, but it is clear that there are five and that they shape the Gospel.

The five discourses

A. The first discourse is the Sermon on the Mount.

Read **Matthew 5:1–3** (the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount) .

What is the situation in which Jesus teaches? Who is present to be a learner?

Read **Matthew 7:28**, which marks the end of the Sermon.

Identify some of the topics covered in the Sermon.

B. The second discourse is Jesus' instructions to the disciples when he sends them out on mission, in Matthew 10.

Read **Matthew 10:5**.

What is the situation in which Jesus teaches? Who is present to be a learner? Read **Matthew 11:1**, which marks the end of the instructions.

Compare Matthew 7:28 with 11:1. Identify some of the topics

C. The third discourse is a discourse of parables, in Matthew 13.

Read **Matthew 13:1–3**.

What is the situation in which Jesus teaches? Who is present to be a learner? *Identify where the parables discourse ends.*

Read **Matthew 13:53**. *Compare Matthew 13:53 with 7:28 and 11:1. Ask the group to identify some of the topics covered in the parables discourse.*

D. The fourth discourse is teaching about the church.

Read **Matthew 18:1**. What is the situation in which Jesus teaches? Who is present to be a learner? *Identify where this discourse ends.*

Read **Matthew 19:1**. Ask the group to *compare this verse with Matthew 7:28, 11:1, and 13:53. Identify some of the topics covered in the teachings about the church.*

E. The fifth discourse is Jesus' teachings about the end of all things, the final judgment.
This is a way of thinking about what really matters, ultimately.

Read **Matthew 24:3**. What is the situation in which Jesus teaches? Who is present to be a learner? *Identify where this discourse ends.*

Read **Matthew 26:1**. *Note the similarity of this verse with Matthew 7:28, 11:1, 13:53 and 19:1.* The similarities in these verses mean that the Gospel writer has put them in place as a distinct marker. *Identify some of the topics covered in the teachings about the end of all things. Identify what happens in the story of Jesus after chapter 25.* Note that what comes next in the Gospel tells about Jesus' death and resurrection. His teaching in the fifth discourse is his last before his death.

3. Engaging Matthew 25: the two parables

Matthew 25 is made up of three parts. Verses 1–13 and 14–30 are two parables. Verses 31–46 give us a saying of Jesus, in the form of a story about the final judgment of all people.

A. The first parable: the ten bridesmaids.

Read **Matthew 25:1–13**.

- Who are the characters in this parable (story)?
- What is their relationship to one another?

This parable presents a situation with a problem.

- What is the problem?
- Who responds to the problem in the right way?
- What is the mistake made by those who respond in the wrong way?

Often our impulse when we read the parables is to identify one of the characters with God.

- Is there a character who fulfills the role of God in this parable?
- What is it about that character and what that character does that is like God?

B. The second parable: the talents, the master and the servants.

Read **Matthew 25:14–30**.

Respond to the same set of questions provided above (concerning characters, the problem and the role of God).

4. Engaging Matthew 25: Jesus' judgment

The third part of Matthew 25 gives a saying of Jesus about the final judgment of all people.

A. Read **Matthew 25:31–46**.

- Who are the characters in this parable (story)?
- What is their relationship to one another?

This parable presents a situation with a problem.

- What is the problem?
- Who responds to the problem in the right way?
- What is the mistake made by those who respond in the wrong way?

Often our impulse when we read the parables is to identify one of the characters with God.

- Is there a character who fulfills the role of God in this parable?
- What is it about that character and what that character does that is like God?

B. Focus on “the nations” (Matthew 25:32) Who are these nations? When we have nations, we have structures that go beyond the individual. These structures and the systems they form are present from early in the Bible until its very end (**read Genesis 10:5, 20, 31–32 and Revelation 21:24–26**).

C. Focus on “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40, 45) Who are “the least of these” in the story? Who are “the least of these” today?

5. Matthew 25 and the PC(USA) Matthew 25 Vision

A. The three focuses of the Matthew 25 vision.

As part of our Matthew 25 commitment, we will pledge to embrace one or more of these three areas of focus:

- **Building congregational vitality** by deepening and energizing our faith and growing as joyful leaders and disciples actively engaged with our community as we share the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed
- **Dismantling structural racism** by fearlessly applying our faith to advocate and break down the systems, practices and thinking that underlie discrimination, bias, prejudice and oppression of people of color
- **Eradicating systemic poverty** by acting on our beliefs and working to change laws, policies, plans and structures in our society that perpetuate economic exploitation of people who are poor.

B. How do the three focuses identify “the least of these” in our time and place? How do the three focuses identify who is called to be God’s presence in working for fullness of life for the least of these? What opportunities are open for our congregation, to join the Matthew 25 vision and seek fullness of life for the least of these?

C. Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Shepherd and Savior, you come to us in unexpected ways. Help us to recognize your presence in the faces of our neighbors in need, so that we may love and serve you as we love and serve one another; in your holy name we pray. **Amen.**

Resources

Matthew 25 Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sH2wTVvsvM>

Piano with images: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4YLjpK4Vpg>