



BIBLE STUDY

# JESUS & THE MULTITUDE

Lessons in Dealing With The Crowd

This series we're looking at how Jesus dealt with the multitudes – the throngs of people that bombarded him daily looking for one thing or another. We all face different types of pressures daily yet Jesus in spite of the magnitude of what he had to deal with was never hurried or stressed out. How did he cope with the pressures? What was his attitude towards the crowds and their demands? How do we learn from him in dealing with the different multitudes of pressures and challenges in our own lives?

I pray this study blesses you, positively impacts every aspect of your life and stirs up a hunger for God in you.



## Day 1 The People Strategy

“Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.”  
“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”” Matthew 4:12, 17

There was nothing haphazard about Jesus - everything about him had been foretold in the Bible and he moved according to God’s plan for him. As soon as the time was right, he began his ministry. A critical part of the ministry of Jesus was the people he surrounded himself with. He didn’t attempt to walk alone and he had different sets of people that worked with him.

First there were the 12 key people that walked closely with him – ‘He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. ’ Mark 3:14-15. The twelve are all listed in Matthew 10:2-4.

Within these twelve people there were 3 who were very close to him – his inner circle made up of Peter, James and John.

There were also the 72 – ‘After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. ’ Luke 10:1

Then there were the multitude “Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.” Matthew 4:25

Did they all follow Jesus? Yes, to varying extents and Jesus had a different strategy for dealing with each of these groups, based on their proximity to him. There were those that were with him at his most private moments, those he taught and shared with regularly, those that went with him on assignments and those that followed him at a distance.

**Reflect:** As we go through this series, ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify your own people groupings. Ask Him also to locate where you are in this grouping in your relationship with Jesus – are you walking closely or following from a distance? Ask the Holy Spirit to draw you nearer daily.

## Day 2

### Why the Multitude?

'Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.' Matthew 4:24-25

It may be easy to think that all Jesus needed to function were the disciples, but the multitude played a great role in his ministry as well. It was through the multitude that Jesus' fame spread. It was also through interactions with the multitude that Jesus taught his disciples lessons about the kingdom of heaven in several ways:

- Through the parables which he later broke down to them in more detail: We regularly see where Jesus would speak to the multitude and then break the teaching down to the disciples so they would understand.
- Through the miracles he worked for the multitude: healing, deliverance, miraculous feeding, etc. There are so many examples in the gospels of the miracles Jesus worked which would have boosted the disciples' faith and the faith of others, leading them to want to learn more about Jesus.
- Through the compassion and love Jesus showed them, reflecting God's heart for all mankind: 'And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.' Matthew 14:14
- Through self-denial and putting the needs of other first: 'Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ' Mark 3:20

These are just very few of many examples in the Bible. The disciples also needed the multitude to get an understanding of what God was doing through them and through Jesus. If Jesus had limited himself to just teaching the 12 or the 72, his ministry would not have had the impact it did within its very short time frame.

**Question:** How do you respond to the multitude in your life, meaning those who may not be close to you? Are you selfless and welcoming? Or do you keep them at a distance? God still wants to use you to reach them in a way only you can. Ask Him to show you how.

## Day 3

### The Multitude Mindset

Jesus regularly spoke to the multitudes that came to him for one miracle or another, there's no record of him turning anyone away. However, a lot of people eliminated themselves from following Jesus. Probably because their intention was largely to get something from him rather than get to know who he was.

Many people liked the demonstration of power, the miracles, the hype that followed Jesus, but very few wanted to go through any of the discomfort or self-denial that was required to walk with him.

'Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Matthew 8:19-20

Interestingly there's no record of the scribe saying he would follow Jesus regardless. The scribe could also have asked Jesus, "these men that follow you, where do they sleep?"

What is being drawn out here is that the level of depth of our relationship with Jesus lies with us. Had the scribe followed Jesus, Jesus wouldn't have rejected him. Jesus simply let the scribe know that there was an unglamorous part to walking with him and the scribe showed that he wasn't willing to probe deeper.

**Question:** How about you? Beyond getting answers to your prayers, are you willing to get to know Jesus for who he is, not just what he can give you? Are you willing to pay the price in the place of prayer and Bible study? The depth of your relationship with Jesus lies with you. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. (Revelations 3:20)

## Day 4

### The Attention Getter

Jesus was busy everyday with an incredibly hectic schedule, surrounded by a huge multitude either following him, waiting for him or both. Yet, the Bible notes that there were those who managed to get the attention of Jesus despite the pressure of the crowds.

- Blind Bartimaeus persistently called Jesus as loudly as he could until Jesus asked that Bartimaeus be brought to him and he received his sight back (Mark 10:46-52).
- The woman with the issue of blood got close enough to Jesus to touch the hem of his garment because she believed that her healing would come from doing this (Luke 8:43-48)
- The Syrophenician woman wasn't even from Israel, yet she obtained healing for her daughter through her faith (Matthew 15:21-28)
- The centurion who sought healing for his servant and requested that Jesus only speak the word for the healing, causing Jesus to marvel at his faith (Matthew 8: 5-13),

These are just a few examples of people who caused Jesus to pause and attend to them while he was on his way to an assignment. All were very different people, with very different issues but they all had one thing in common – Faith that Jesus would heal them.

It's possible to be around Jesus and not draw anything out of him if we don't come by faith. Hebrews 11:6 tells us clearly, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.."

**Reflect:** When you approach Jesus with a challenge, do you go to him really believing he will hear you and resolve the matter? Look at the examples we discussed, if their faith could get the attention of Jesus, yours can too.

## Day 5

### Messages for the Multitude

“And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” Matthew 13:10-11

Jesus was surrounded by great multitudes everyday who saw him do amazing things. He spoke to them regularly, teaching them many things using parables. But note that he always taught the disciples the meaning of the parables. Why? The multitudes were content with hearing a general message, while the disciples probed deeper, going back to him and asking for the meaning of what he had said.

Did the multitudes journey with Jesus? Did they wait hours on end to listen to him? Yes, they did all this. But what would really have made a difference and turned someone from being one of the from multitudes to a disciple is what the person chose to do after Jesus sent them away.

In today’s context, we can liken this to a person hearing a message and being satisfied with just hearing and not going back to the Bible to probe the scriptures quoted in the message and praying for revelation as to what the message really means and how it can be applied in daily living. And most importantly, then doing what you’ve learned.

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.” James 1:22-25

**Reflect:** How much of what you have heard have you put into action? And how consistent have you been? Ask for grace become a consistent doer not just a hearer of the Word.

## Day 6

### Caring for the Multitude

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus had compassion for the multitude, the thousands of people that followed him on a regular basis. Rather than be overwhelmed by being surrounded by such a huge crowd of people, Jesus showed care for them, thinking of their welfare. How easy it would have been to be distant to the people, after all he didn't ask them to follow him and they wanted something from him anyway, so understandably he shouldn't be held responsible for their welfare. But Jesus has a different mindset. Let's look at two examples:

"I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance." (Matthew 8:2-3)

They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matthew 14:20-21)

Jesus looked at the people and had compassion for them, which led to miracles that showed God's glory both to the disciples and the multitude. Jesus never stopped at just feeling, he always backed things up with action.

**Action Step:** What acts of compassion can you undertake, either for those close to you or the multitude around you? You may not have to feed them, but there are tangible things you can do to make your environment better – without looking to be rewarded for it. Commit to doing something.



## Day 7

### Dealing with Overwhelm

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35)

Imagine being in Jesus' shoes – everyday throngs of people surrounding you clamouring for one thing or the other. Being so busy going from place to place that you barely have time to eat not to talk of rest. Yet nowhere do we see Jesus snapping at people or complaining of being burnt out. That's because he knew something powerful – the key to a successful day was starting in the presence of God.

Yet He frequently withdrew to the wilderness to pray. (Luke 5:16)

Jesus took his prayer life very seriously. He knew he couldn't function effectively without it. By being in God's presence he received direction, instruction, strength and so much more that equipped him for the work he had to do.

The need for a consistent prayer life isn't limited to Jesus alone, the psalmist says in Psalm 5:3, "LORD, in the morning you will hear my voice; in the morning I will pray to you, and I will watch for your answer." Psalm 59:16 says, "But I will sing of Your strength and proclaim Your loving devotion in the morning. For You are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble." Psalm 88:13, "But to You, O LORD, I cry for help; in the morning my prayer comes before You."

We certainly can pray at any point in time during the day, but there's something about starting your day with prayer that helps to set your day in order and equips you for the challenges the day may bring. Not just bringing your plans before God and asking Him to approve but submitting the day into His hands and asking Him to reveal to you His plans for the day. When you do so, He takes charge of the day and provides direction – "Your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left," (Isaiah 30:21).

**Action Step:** Commit to spending at least 15 minutes a day in prayer first thing in the morning, asking God to lead you through the day as only He can.



## Day 8

### Fairweather Folks

Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “*Hosanna* to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ *Hosanna* in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9)

‘But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.’ (Matthew 27:20)

When Jesus came before Pontius Pilate and he gave the Jews an option of who could be released, the multitude chose the notorious Barabbas over Jesus. The same Jesus who had walked with them, healed many, looked after the welfare of many was now the one being chosen for crucifixion. Because of the envy of the priests and more importantly because of God’s plan.

Jesus knew why he came to the earth and that He was going to be crucified in order for God’s plan to redeem us to be completed. But rather than treat the multitude with disdain, he cared for them and at the last minute asked God to forgive them.

What would have happened if Jesus had staked his success on his popularity with the multitude? It’s fair to assume that some of the people whom he had healed, counselled, fed, etc were part of those asking that he be crucified. The same people who applaud today can criticise and destroy tomorrow.

We need to be careful when we place our security in what people are saying about us, rather than what God is saying and what He has asked us to do. Even those closest to us can disappoint us – deliberately or otherwise. Jesus knew his mission, he kept his eyes fixed on God and not on people.

**Reflect:** Whose approval are you living for – the people or God? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you keep your eyes fixed on God as He’s the only one that can sustain you through challenging times.

## Day 9

### Staying Power

'Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.' John 6:60,66

Jesus had a lot to deal with, fulfilling his ministry on earth among people who didn't really know who he was. In a way it may have been easier to deal with the multitude because their relationship with him was largely transactional. It was more challenging dealing with the disciples – those who had indicated that they wanted to learn more about him and the ways of the Kingdom.

It was fine when they were sent out to work miracles and they saw the results, but some of the disciples left Jesus because they found what he was saying too hard to comprehend. Sometimes we can also be like that. It's okay to receive from God and serve in ways that are convenient for us. However, when we feel that God is asking too much of us, we back down. For instance, it may be okay to serve on Sunday, but if God calls us to give up something we're not ready to let go of, we may begin to start backing away from spending time in prayer, because we don't want to be reminded of what we haven't done or don't want to do.

'...“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.’ (Luke 22:42-43)

What do you do in this case? Be honest with God. Go to Him in prayer and tell him the truth. “Lord you're asking me to do this/stop this and I really don't want to. I need your help”. If you pray this sincerely, the Holy Spirit will help you. We're not designed to do things in our own strength. And if Jesus himself had to pray for the grace to do what he willingly came to do how much more us?

**Reflect:** Don't be discouraged when you're not immediately willing to do certain things God has asked you to do. The same God who's asked you to do it will equip you with the grace you need.



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